

“China’s Foreign Aid” and “China’s National Image” in the Eyes of Foreign Media: A Corpus-Based Discourse-Historical Analysis

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Abstract

China’s foreign aid implements the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind and promotes the common progress of China and developing countries. News about China’s foreign aid released by foreign media is quite significant for overseas audiences to perceive China’s image. This study adopts Ruth Wodak’s discourse-historical approach and corpus-based method to interpret foreign news reports on China’s foreign aid. The macro-level news themes, meso-level discourse strategies and national images, as well as micro-level discourse features are explained with examples. Research shows that news themes reveal the objects, fields and methods of China’s foreign aid. Foreign media widely adopt discourse strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, intensification and mitigation to shape China as a friendly international donor. A few characteristics of news discourse indicate that several media misunderstand or smear China’s foreign aid, which has a negative impact on China’s international public opinion environment. Therefore, building an effective external voice platform to convey China’s international responsibilities and contributions is necessary, which helps establish a favorable international public opinion environment for China’s development and call on other countries to make efforts to reduce human poverty.

Keywords: discourse-historical approach, foreign aid, corpus, national image

1. Introduction

Upholding the concept of South-South cooperation and a community with a shared future for mankind, China has been actively shouldering international responsibilities and exploring ways of mutual assistance and cooperation with other developing countries for common prosperity. China’s foreign aid is committed to carrying out personnel training, experience sharing, and friendly cooperation in developing countries and low-income countries to help them improve their capacity for independent development. In 2021, The State Council of China issues a document “China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era”, stating that China’s international cooperation adheres to the stance of mutual respect, helping developing countries reduce poverty, improve people’s livelihood, and share development opportunities and fruits (Note 1). National image is the international public’s overall perception and impression of a country, which can enhance national cohesion and strengthen international influence (Jin & Xu, 2010). China’s foreign aid has effectively promoted the economic development of relevant countries and become a bright business card showing China’s image.

Media pursue factual reporting and convey more diverse voices to a great extent. Therefore, media reports can more comprehensively reflect the evaluation of China’s foreign aid by others and China’s image. A series of news reports of China’s foreign aid have aroused people’s discussion and debate, making China enter the complex arena of global public opinion. International public opinion is quite significant for a country to safeguard national interests, participate in competition, and contribute wisdom to international affairs. As a product of political practice, news media are also influenced by political power inevitably (Cook, 2006). While media apply discourse to construct a positive image of China, there is also a tendency to denigrate China. Disparaging news about China has a negative impact on China’s image and international public opinion environment. Faced with the practical need to spread China’s voice well and enhance China’s international power of discourse, it is quite valuable to study the construction of China’s image by foreign media. Media reports have the characteristics of fast dissemination and strong influence, making media discourse an important research topic in linguistics. Many scholars study news discourse from the perspectives of multimodal discourse analysis, cognitive metaphor, and

pragmatics.

2. Theoretical Basis

Language as a social behavior constructs society and culture, while critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to expose the implicit power relations and ideological factors in discourse and provide solutions for solving social problems (Fairclough et al., 1997). The research frameworks proposed by three representative critical discourse scholars, Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and Norman Fairclough, have their own focus. Fairclough (2013) proposes a three-dimensional framework of text, discourse practice and social practice, which has become the most widely used theory in CDA. Van Dijk studies CDA from a cognitive perspective, focusing on the impact of cognition, psychology, contextual factors on discourse and society, which has more theoretical studies than applied studies. Ruth Wodak (2001), a professor of linguistics at Lancaster University, proposes “discourse-historical approach (DHA)”, which is inspired by the Frankfurt School, Habermas’s critical theory, and Foucault’s poststructural theory (Yang & Wang, 2019), focusing on power, ideologies, and identities presented by discourse. DHA generally combines the political, historical, and cultural contexts of event to analyze the discourse, adopting an interdisciplinary thinking method to solve problems. The discourse strategies proposed by DHA are nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification and mitigation (Wodak & Reisigl, 2009). DHA proposes a three-dimensional analysis framework, that is, first determining discourse themes, then explaining discourse strategies, and finally analyzing language features (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

DHA is widely employed by domestic and foreign scholars in the study of media discourse, political discourse, and business discourse. Yang Min and Fu Xiaoli (2018) study American media’s coverage of “Hillary Clinton’s email controversy”, revealing the political stance and values in news discourse. Zeng Ruirui (2023) interprets the themes, intertextuality, discourse strategies and the image of China as a “responsible major country” constructed by President Xi’s external speeches. Ofori-Parku and Koomson (2023) find that an oil company attempts to achieve hegemony with business discourse related to sustainable development. Eranfeno et al. (2024) point out that news in a pluralistic society should combine fair and non-offensive discourse to promote public consensus. Most previous studies have focused on the speeches of national leaders, official documents, and diplomatic discourse to interpret the “self-presentation” of the national image. A few studies on national image shaped by organizations outside the group analyze documentaries, news reports, and short videos, lacking reliable data support. Language is a tool to implement social behavior and influence social cognition, so the analysis of discourse should be combined with social and historical background. News discourse contains values, political tendencies, cultural context of different media, which conforms to the focus of discourse-historical approach. Therefore, DHA has certain explanatory power and applicability to explain news discourse. This paper applies DHA to study substantial news corpus, improving the persuasiveness of the research results and enriching the application of the theory.

3. Research Method

Applying corpus research tools to conduct critical discourse analysis can reduce the impact of the researcher’s existing concepts and make research conclusions more objective (Baker, 2008). Therefore, corpus-based method is applied here to derive keyword lists and word co-occurrences, and then examples are selected for qualitative analysis. A total of 50 names of foreign aid projects are collected from the website of China’s Ministry of Commerce (Note 2), and then LexisNexis database is applied to search the English names of China’s foreign aid projects from March 2020 to March 2024. After removing the less relevant news from the results, 45 valid news are obtained. They are mainly released by well-known media such as *The Africa Report*, *Pakistan Today*, *BBC News*, *Voice of America*, etc. Unnecessary dates, categories, websites in corpus are deleted and finally a small corpus with a total of 27,473 words is established, with 27,567 tokens and 4,433 types.

CorpusWordParser software is employed to segment words and assign part-of-speech codes to corpus for further retrieval, and then corpus software Antconc is applied to import a stop word list to filter unnecessary function words, so as to improve the accuracy of research results. BNC (British National Corpus) is utilized as the reference corpus, aiming to obtain a list of keywords that appear significantly more frequently than the reference corpus. Finally, the writer applies Antconc’s concordance and collocates function to conduct word frequency statistics and search for verbs, adjectives and nouns co-occurring with China’s foreign aid. This paper aims to answer the following two questions:

- (1) What are the main themes presented in foreign news reports on China’s foreign aid?
- (2) What discourse strategies are adopted by foreign news reports on China’s foreign aid and what kind of images of China is constructed?

4. Themes of Foreign News Reports on China's Foreign Aid

The general situation of China's foreign aid will be presented through themes in foreign news. Themes are the words that appear significantly more frequently in the corpus of China's foreign aid news than in the reference corpus. Antconc shows that there are a total of 581 themes with different frequencies, which are dominated by nouns and verbs. After ranking them in frequency ascending order, the top 20 themes are displayed in Table 1 for analysis.

Table 1. Keyword list of news reports on China's foreign aid

Rank	Themes	Frequency	Rank	Themes	Frequency
1	China/Chinese	794	11	energy	76
2	Africa	237	12	health	74
3	Pakistan	235	13	agricultural	66
4	countries	131	14	government	66
5	development	108	15	construction	63
6	aid	102	16	international	59
7	projects	96	17	people	55
8	cooperation	92	18	support	53
9	economic	81	19	investment	43
10	infrastructure	79	20	president	40

Themes can only roughly reflect media reports on China's foreign aid, and detailed content requires in-depth analysis of discourse strategies, which is also in line with the research path of discourse-historical analysis mentioned before. The frequency of themes shows that foreign news tends to adopt "China, Chinese" to highlight China's subjectivity in foreign aid, and explicit regional designations such as "Africa, Pakistan" and vague designations like "countries" are applied to reflect the recipients of aid. The rest of the themes are generally divided into aid fields, aid subjects, and aid methods. Regarding aid fields, themes such as "infrastructure, health, energy, agricultural, development, economic" indicate that China's foreign aid covers many fields related to the vital interests of the people of recipient countries. Regarding aid measures, themes such as "cooperation, investment, aid, support, construction", show that China has largely adopted friendly and cooperative methods to help the economic development of recipients. Investment and participation in local construction projects are important forms of China's foreign aid. Regarding aid subjects, themes such as "government, president, people, international", indicate that China's foreign aid is mostly initiated and led by the government, attracting the attention of international community, leaders and people of various countries. At the same time, themes show that foreign media mainly report on China's foreign aid from the macro level, and rarely involve specific aid areas and projects at the micro level.

5. Discourse Strategies and China's Images Presented in Foreign News

Discourse strategy is the way for speakers to express the content of discourse, and the appropriateness of strategy choice is closely related to meaning generation and readers' understanding. According to discourse-historical approach, we conclude that foreign news reports adopt discourse strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, intensification and mitigation comprehensively to describe and evaluate China's foreign aid. On the whole, foreign media have shaped a positive image of China as a "friendly donor", showing China's responsibility and contribution to international affairs. However, several negative words in the news indicate media's tendency to misinterpret and smear China's foreign aid as a "conspiracy". Media hold different opinions on China's foreign aid, so their discourse expressions and value factors are worthy of in-depth study. The concepts of the discourse strategies are explained first. Then 17 examples of China's foreign aid news (see Appendix A) are selected to illustrate foreign media's attitude and the national images of China constructed by them, which conforms to scientific ethics because the news is publicly available.

5.1 Nomination Strategy

Nomination strategy refers to the application of language by the speaker to refer to a person, object, event, and phenomenon, generally through nouns or pronouns. Nomination is usually a concise phrase, but it implies rich meanings and the media's attitudes toward object. Common discourse methods of it include metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The utilization of personal pronouns is also a significant way of nomination, in which the frequency of third-person pronouns (192 times) and first-person pronouns (59 times) is much higher than that of second-person pronouns (7 times). The reason for the difference is that media mainly

reports their own or others' views on events, while the second-person pronoun generally refers to the potential audience group that does not need to be specifically mentioned.

In addition to applying explicit references, such as “China, Chinese + government departments”, media also adopt “the most important infrastructure builder, a key trading/developmental partner, a significant ally, a valued partner/friend, the biggest foreign investor, contributor of aid, trade and investment partner” to refer to China. These references indicate that a number of media have utilized the nomination strategy of “positive adjectives + identities” to shape China’s national image of “infrastructure builder, trading friend, investment contributor, etc.”, demonstrating that China’s foreign aid is based on equality, respect, friendliness and has significant effect to a certain extent. When referring to “China’s foreign aid”, media mainly employ “China’s +foreign aid, international aid, humanitarian aid, relief materials/supplies”. These nominations show that China has provided practical assistance full of humanitarian concern to the recipient countries, especially emergency relief materials for some countries facing disasters. There are a wide range of participants in China’s foreign aid. The referential terms employed by foreign media regarding China’s foreign aid subjects are “China’s+companies, enterprises, rescuers, workers, engineers, medical personnel”, or explicit Chinese company names such as “China’s BYD, China Three Gorges Corporation, China Road and Bridge Corporation”, showing that Chinese enterprises have made certain achievements in “going global”. Under the guidance of the China’s government, individuals, enterprises and institutions are widely involved in foreign aid affairs. Foreign media often refer to the recipients of aid by country or city names, such as “Rwanda, Pakistan, Senegal,” and occasionally by more affectionate names, such as “iron brother, good neighbors, Pakistani friends”, implying that China’s foreign aid covers many countries and follows a good-neighborly and friendly attitude.

Example 1: China Three Gorges Corporation has worked in full swing to ensure the safety of project operation while providing donations to facilitate the country’s reconstruction following the floods.

Example 2: China has been a valued friend and developmental partner of South Africa throughout the course of rebuilding South Africa from the “ruins of apartheid”.

Example 3: Zimbabwe is one of the 14 countries China considers an all-weather friend.

Example 4: She said, “we are deeply grateful to our Chinese brethren for standing with us during this time of woe”.

Analysis: In example (1), the news adopts a clear company name “China Three Gorges Corporation” to refer to the donor, narrating that the enterprise has built the Karot Hydropower Station in Pakistan and donated materials for its post-disaster reconstruction. The effort of “China Three Gorges Corporation” alleviates the power shortage in local area to a certain extent and brings clean energy to Pakistan, making important contributions to local sustainable development. Metaphor is realized by describing “A is B directly” without using figurative words, which makes the description of things more affirmative and intuitive. Metaphor occurs in example (2), in which news refers to China as “a valued friend and developmental partner”, indicating that China’s donation of anti-epidemic materials, emergency equipment and energy support to South Africa is conducive to improving the people’s livelihood and their economic conditions. Here, the media report actually adopts personification rhetoric to portray China as “a friend and partner”, endowing the inanimate country designation with the attribute of an affectionate friend, which shows the supportive attitude of the media. Some media also adopt synecdoche by applying China’s capital city “Beijing” to refer to the “China” as a whole.

In example (3), the media utilize “an all-weather friend” to refer to the aid recipient country “Zimbabwe”, while explicitly mentioning the sender of the aid “China”, indicating the profound partnership between the two countries. In Example (4), the third-person singular pronoun “she” refers to the government spokesperson, while the first-person plural pronoun “we” refers to the group to which she belongs, and “our Chinese brethren” refers to China. In particular, the word “our” reflects the speaker’s intention to build an in-group identity for China and portray China as “a friendly fellow nation”. The nomination strategy shows that China takes the initiative to assume international responsibilities and contribute to global poverty reduction. Most of the nomination expressions are conducive to establishing a just, friendly, and kind-hearted image of China in the recipient countries and the international community.

5.2 Predication Strategy

Predication strategy means that the speaker applies verbs, positive or negative evaluative adjectives or nouns to give certain attributes to social actors, phenomena, events, and processes. It intuitively demonstrates the media’s supportive, neutral, and opposing attitudes toward China’s foreign aid through words, clauses, participle structure, etc. In the following, the writer analyzes media’s positive and negative evaluations of China’s foreign aid with

examples.

Research shows that verbs and phrases frequently co-occur with China's foreign aid can be divided into measure category and effect category. The measure category verbs are "repair, cooperate, finance, support, dedicate, encourage, invest, build, construct, help, provide, share, donate, etc." The effect category verbs include "accelerate, facilitate, promote, enrich, enhance, contribute, praise, benefit from, play a large/pivotal role, etc." These verbs reflect that China's foreign aid has effectively promoted the development of recipient countries with practical actions and win-win cooperation. Positive evaluative nouns and phrases that frequently co-occur with China's foreign aid include "a wonderful gift, noble spirit, innovations, gratitude, benefactor, innovator in energy, paradigm for modern development, robust achievements".

Positive evaluative adjectives in foreign news reports can be divided into effect description category like "active, remarkable, successful, effective, fruitful, important, significant, beneficial, renewable, and emotion expression category, such as "sincere, appreciated, grateful". The above positive evaluations indicate that China's foreign aid has been approved and supported by most media because it brings practical benefits to recipient countries.

Example 5: China has donated millions of vaccines, assisted in the construction of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, trained thousands of African medical personnel, dispatched hundreds of Chinese medical experts to Africa.

Example 6: South Africa deeply appreciates China's support in addressing our current energy challenges.

Example 7: China is Zimbabwe's biggest foreign investor, controlling 90% of its mining industry.

Example 8: "If the Chinese continue with their unfair investments, Africa will lose resources and we will end up in a debt trap".

Analysis: The interpretation of predication strategy suggests that most media employ positive evaluative words in China's foreign aid news to establish an image of "responsible aid practitioner" for China. Expressions with positive semantic rhyme show the recognition and praise of China's foreign aid by foreign media. In particular, the actual aid cases mentioned in the news can stimulate the empathy effect of the audience. Discourse-historical analysis advocates that research should pay attention to historical background of the event. In terms of social and historical context, the global Covid-19 epidemic and energy crisis have brought great pressure on low-income countries, so effective assistance can mitigate the impact of the crisis and help relevant countries overcome difficulties. In Example (5), the verbs "has donated, assisted, trained, dispatched" are utilized to illustrate that China has made important contributions to African countries' medical and health care by providing vaccines, health workers, medical supplies during the Covid-19 epidemic, portraying China as a "donor of anti-epidemic supplies". In example (6), the evaluative verb "appreciates" combined with the intensifier "deeply" expresses South Africa's gratitude and praise to China for helping it develop clean energy to promote low-carbon environmental protection, shaping China as "a leader of clean energy".

However, the language features at the micro level indicate that some media take a suspicious and derogatory attitude toward China's foreign aid. For example, the present participle "controlling" in example (7) implies that China dominates or manipulates the mineral resources of the assisted country. Particularly, the word "control" implies a strong connotation of coercion and exploitation, which is completely different from the concept of non-interference in the affairs of other countries advocated by China. In Example (8), the media report evaluates China's foreign aid as "unfair" and describes it as a "debt trap", which implies that China's foreign aid has unreasonable conditions or even is a sham. In particular, some media have repeatedly criticized China's foreign aid by citing Sri Lanka's debt crisis as an example, building China as a "debt creator". Similar expressions with negative semantic rhymes about China's foreign aid include "isolate, monopolize, captured, exploitation, looting, imperialism, colonialists", and expressions more impolite and offensive are not listed here. To a large extent, these terms attempt to express that China's foreign aid is predatory and will undermine the legitimate rights and interests of the recipient countries.

Language can reflect people's inner world feelings and opinions about external events, while individual thoughts are also influenced by certain values. Actually, some media may be influenced by certain political groups, so their malicious slander is the manifestation of some western countries' efforts to contain China's rise as a major country. Currently, China's international discourse power and influence is relatively weak. Some media have led public opinions about China in a negative direction, which can easily cause an unfavorable international public opinion environment for China. In the all-media era, media discourse forms a stronger influence, and the multi-faceted national images it constructs require readers to adopt an objective attitude in judgment. At present, in the face of the reality that poverty still exists in many areas, more countries can learn and discuss China's foreign aid deeply.

It is also a noble cause for more countries to help the economic development of the less developed countries fairly and equitably in their own way.

5.3 Argumentation Strategy

Argumentation strategy refers to the application of topoi and fallacy to justify or question the validity of positive or negative assessments of an event (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Topoi means following the principles of relevance, rationality, logic, etc., and applying sufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, while fallacy is the unreasonable violation of argumentation principles (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). In terms of the arguments in news about China's foreign aid, the media mainly utilize number topoi, fact topoi, and history topoi to strengthen the persuasiveness of their opinion.

Example 9: Pakistani government data indicates that CPEC has created 200,000 jobs, built more than 1,400 kilometers of highways and roads, and added thousands of megawatts of electricity...

Example 10: In the history of international exchanges, it is so because China and Africa rather treat each other with sincerity, ensuring a common future.

Example 11: China's position as a leading nation in innovation and technology makes it a critical partner in Rwanda's ambitions to become a regional hub for technological innovation.

Analysis: Example (9) adopts fact topoi and number topoi to prove that China's foreign aid has improved people's livelihood in the recipient country. According to the fact topoi "Pakistani government data indicates", the argument of media is derived from real official government data that is highly authoritative. Then, the media adopt number topoi, that is, numbers or quantifiers such as "200000, 1400, thousands of", to present the number of jobs, miles of highway, and electricity provided by China, which enhances the credibility and persuasiveness of China's foreign aid. Example (10) utilizes historical topoi, faced with some bad speculation about the purpose of China's foreign aid, Chinese government official employs the historical tradition of sincere treatment between China and Africa to explain the rationality of China's aid to Africa. Example (11) adopts the advantages topoi to prove that China's aid to Rwanda is beneficial to their development. The argument held by the media is "China's position as a leading nation in innovation and technology", and the conclusion is "China is a critical partner for Rwanda to become a regional hub for technological innovation". The argument and the conclusion held by the media conform to the principles of relevancy, rationality, and logic, which can persuade the audience to a great extent.

5.4 Perspectivation Strategy

Perspectivation strategy refers to the positioning of the speaker's point of view through direct quotation or indirect quotation, which reflects the speaker's involvement or detachment from the topic (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Media mainly employs words such as "reiterated, added, noted, indicated, stated, claimed, said, announced, expressed, and pointed out that" to show the views of groups and individuals on China's foreign aid. The proportion of direct quotations employed by foreign media is significantly higher than indirect quotations. Media mainly quote the opinions of government staff, official agencies, scholars, and residents, presenting views on China's foreign aid through diverse voices.

Example 12: "It is wrong to describe BRI financing as a 'debt trap'; it is rather an essential tool for helping countries in achieving comprehensive development of their peoples," Kakar asserted.

Example 13: Seitz says the geological conditions pose a challenge due to their various strata, including imported fill and tidal silt in the upper layers and fine sand and clay in the lower layers.

Example 14: "We want to thank you for the donation and the arrival of additional medical team members to help boost our health sector," said Dr. Dennis.

Analysis: In example (12), the media directly quote the opinion of a Pakistan government official to demonstrate the authority and refute the view that investment supported by The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China is a "debt trap". Here, the official's statement can be seen as an advantageous argumentation, in which he refutes the malicious speculation that China's foreign aid is a debt trap by stating that it brings practical benefits to the recipient country. Example (13) indirectly quotes Seitz, an engineer involved in Maputo Bridge construction, who said that complex geological conditions are not conducive to bridge construction. However, China Road and Bridge Corporation has made every effort to overcome technical challenges and successfully built the bridge. The narration of the construction participant illustrates the harsh geological conditions of the local area, reflecting the perseverance and responsible spirit of Chinese enterprises in facing difficulties in foreign aid. In example (14), media directly quote the words of Dr. Dennis, the head of a medical center in Liberia, who expressed gratitude to China's kind donations, materials and medical staff because they are beneficial to promote local medical and health

undertakings. Narrating from a third-party perspective reduces personal subjective involvement and increases the objectivity of description. Moreover, when some media express negative views on China's foreign aid, they tend to quote the speech of vague speakers, such as "an analyst, a scholar, some people," which indirectly implies that their views lack basis and authenticity.

5.5 Intensification and Mitigation Strategies

Intensification and mitigation strategies mean that the speaker applies modal words, fuzzy words, tone, and intensifiers to weaken or strengthen the illocutionary meaning of the utterance, which can change or affect the listener's understanding of the topic (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Media adopt intensifiers to emphasize that what they are saying is true or likely to happen. Frequently occurring intensifiers include "completely, totally, definitely, firmly, vitally, considerably, fully, highly, particularly". According to Halliday's (2004) classification of modal words, this study finds that the proportion of low-value modal words is significantly higher than that of high-value modal words. The low-value modal words adopted by media include "can, may, could, might", and the fuzzy words are "several, some, certain, a few, various", which reduces the certainty of media's opinions and enhances the objectivity of narration. High-value modal words are too vivid in emotion transmission and usually express a quite firm attitude. However, media need to report events objectively and neutrally, leaving the right of evaluation to readers, so the frequency of high-value modal words is relatively low.

Example 15: These investments have significantly transformed the lifestyle within Baluchistan, particularly in previously neglected areas where electricity was a rare sight in those times.

Example 16: China-Pakistan water cooperation can help Pakistan cope with climate change and its derived disasters.

Example 17: China's increasing involvement in Africa: Progressive or retrogressive?

Analysis: In Example (15), the media utilize the intensifier "significantly" to increase the degree of affirmation of the topic. The intensifier "particularly" reminds the key points of the opinion and attracts readers to pay attention to important information, namely, "local areas that were previously short of electricity". The two intensifiers further confirm that China's investment in Baluchistan has a practical effect in alleviating its electricity shortage. In example (16), the low-value modal word "can" shows that the role of China-Pakistan water cooperation in Pakistan's response to climate change and its derived disasters remains to be proved. The application of the word "can" with less affirmative mood conforms to the modesty and objective features of news, and this euphemistic expression is easier to accept by the audience. In Example (17), the media adopt a questioning tone to emphasize their doubts and uncertain stance about China's foreign aid, implying later that China's foreign aid has predatory purposes. The interrogative tone has the characteristic of attracting the listener to participate in interaction, which is often adopted by media to guide the listener's thinking and association. In particular, the word "involvement" is adopted here instead of "cooperation", "assistance", etc., which implies intervention meaning, showing the negative guiding tendency of the media. China's foreign aid should be viewed fairly and objectively combined with political and reality context. Here, the media clearly attempts to interfere with audiences' thinking and belittle China's foreign aid. It shows that China's external voice ability needs to be strengthened to deal with malicious slander by individual media.

6. Discussion

The research gives a relatively adequate and reasonable answer to the research questions raised in the previous content, that is, the themes of foreign media reports on China's foreign aid and the discourse strategies employed by them. This study follows the research path advocated by discourse-historical approach, that is, determining the main topics of the corpus, then exploring the discourse strategies, and finally analyzing discourse features. At the same time, according to the requirements of the theory, news discourse is analyzed in combination with relevant political, social, and ideological factors. First of all, 20 high-frequency keywords are selected and classified, showing the focus of foreign media reporting on China's foreign aid, such as aid measures, aid fields, etc. Secondly, the writer illustrates the concepts and language forms of five discourse strategies with examples. Nomination strategy reflects the in-group or out-group identity shaped by media for aid subject, aid participant, and aid recipient. Predication strategy is realized by various language forms, intuitively showing media's support, opposition, neutral attitude to China's foreign aid. Argumentation strategy means that media utilize topoi or fallacy to confirm the rationality or irrationality of China's foreign aid. Perspectivation strategy demonstrates that media directly or indirectly quote a third party's words to express emotions or facts about China's foreign aid. Intensification and mitigation can change the level of affirmation, subtly conveying speaker's thoughts and affecting listener's understanding.

The image of China constructed by media is a significant focus of this study. Through in-depth analysis of discourse characteristics, it is found that most media adopt discourse strategies to state facts and express opinions to China's foreign aid objectively. A large number of positive expressions construct China as a "friendly international aid donor", "infrastructure builder", etc., reflecting media's approval of China's foreign aid. However, individual media are influenced by the ideology of their political groups and their reporting language also has quite subtle features. This kind of media explicitly or implicitly portrays China as negative images like "an oppressor of the recipient country", showing the media's prejudice and misunderstanding of China.

7. Conclusion, Limitation, and Suggestions

This paper enriches the critical discourse analysis research with the help of corpus tools, which is conducive to improving the objectivity of research results. It demonstrates the applicability of discourse-historical approach to the interpretation of foreign media reports on China's foreign aid. In particular, the interpretation of argumentation strategy and perspectivation strategy illustrates the media's paths to legitimize their views. This study has aroused people's attention to relevant research on foreign aid and national image, providing some references for improving China's external voice ability.

National images are the result of the contest between "self-presentation" and "others-presentation" (Huang Keyao, 2019). Foreign news reports on China's foreign aid are an important carrier of shaping China's image in the eyes of foreigners. Creating a positive national image can provide a favorable public opinion environment for China's participation in international affairs. In the face of malicious smearing by some foreign media, it is urgent to enhance the dissemination and influence of China's discourse. If China wants more recognition of its foreign aid policy, the government can release official policy documents in various languages so that people all over the world can have access to transparent and adequate information about China's foreign aid. These documents should include important information such as the recipient countries, aid projects, lead department, forms of aid, amount of funds, etc. Moreover, China's external publicity agencies should adopt rich content and forms as well as effective platforms to make China's foreign aid gain more international recognition and support. More importantly, effectively publicizing China's foreign aid is a necessary channel to attract and call on more countries to participate in foreign aid, which is quite significant to promote the steady progress of global poverty reduction.

The limitation of this study lies in the weak representativeness of the research corpus and the lack of comparative study. In further research, news on China's foreign aid from mainstream media of recipient countries and other western countries will be collected to build comparative corpus, which is beneficial to presenting the differences in media reports more clearly and highlighting the reasons behind them. For different types of negative news reports, more reasonable suggestions will be offered to enhance China's national capacity to speak out to the outside world.

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Appendix A

The following are typical examples of foreign media reports on China's foreign aid that are adopted to analyze discourse strategies.

Example 1: China Three Gorges Corporation has worked in full swing to ensure the safety of project operation while providing donations to facilitate the country's reconstruction following the floods.

Example 2: China has been a valued friend and developmental partner of South Africa throughout the course of rebuilding South Africa from the "ruins of apartheid".

Example 3: Zimbabwe is one of the 14 countries China considers an all-weather friend.

Example 4: She said, "we are deeply grateful to our Chinese brethren for standing with us during this time of woe".

Example 5: China has donated millions of vaccines, assisted in the construction of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, trained thousands of African medical personnel, dispatched hundreds of Chinese medical experts to Africa.

Example 6: South Africa deeply appreciates China's support in addressing our current energy challenges.

Example 7: China is Zimbabwe's biggest foreign investor, controlling 90% of its mining industry.

Example 8: "If the Chinese continue with their unfair investments, Africa will lose resources and we will end up in a debt trap".

Example 9: Pakistani government data indicates that CPEC has created 200,000 jobs, built more than 1,400 kilometers of highways and roads, and added thousands of megawatts of electricity...

Example 10: In the history of international exchanges, it is so because China and Africa rather treat each other with sincerity, ensuring a common future.

Example 11: China's position as a leading nation in innovation and technology makes it a critical partner in Rwanda's ambitions to become a regional hub for technological innovation.

Example 12: "It is wrong to describe BRI financing as a 'debt trap'; it is rather an essential tool for helping countries in achieving comprehensive development of their peoples," Kakar asserted.

Example 13: Seitz says the geological conditions pose a challenge due to their various strata, including imported fill and tidal silt in the upper layers and fine sand and clay in the lower layers.

Example 14: "We want to thank you for the donation and the arrival of additional medical team members to help boost our health sector," said Dr. Dennis.

Example 15: These investments have significantly transformed the lifestyle within Baluchistan, particularly in previously neglected areas where electricity was a rare sight in those times.

Example 16: China-Pakistan water cooperation can help Pakistan cope with climate change and its derived disasters.

Example 17: China's increasing involvement in Africa: Progressive or retrogressive?

Notes

Note 1. <https://english.www.gov.cn/>

Note 2. <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/>

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