Original Paper

Presentation of China's National Image in Foreign News Media

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Abstract

The article aimed to analyze the presentation of China's national image through China related reports in BBC news website in the UK and CNN news website in the USA. The research utilized descriptive and qualitative approaches that used thematic, stylistic and content analyses to analyze the themes, content, and emotional tone in foreign news reports on China. Results of the data analysis showed that the common themes were on economic, healthcare, politics, sports and social issues. Stylistic devices like lexical, rhetorical, and syntactic strategies were used dominantly by journalist. A rising China, a cooperative China, a competitive China and a mysterious China were presented in foreign news media. Nonetheless, the emotion tone about China tends to be more negative than neutral or positive. Results would serve as a reference to better understand the international community's perceptions of China, and ultimately cultivate awareness of international understanding through cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

BBC and CNN news, China, emotional tone, lexical, rhetorical and syntactic strategies, national image

1. Introduction

A national image is the expression and way of existence of a country's objective situation. The "existence" involves a specific country's history and current situation, national behavior, and activities whereas the "expression" suggests impression and evaluation in the minds of the international community and domestic people (Ye, 2012). Therefore, national image is not only a channel to wield the national power of a country, but also an important resource of national power. In the era of globalization, national image has become an important variable in the game between countries (Lu, 2015).

Many literature that addressed the national image of China mainly focused on two opposite sides: the positive and negative image of China. The global survey conducted by Center for International Communication of China in 2018 generated a very comprehensive picture and optimistic view on China's overall image, China's image in economy, politics, and culture. Other surveys strengthened this image by stating four national images of China: a solidarity and bravery China; duty-shouldering and challenge-

facing China; China that respect human lives and rights; and dedicated and committed China (Wu, 2021), and there is significant difference in the improving image of China before and after the international students' visit of China (Zhao et al., 2022).

However, the research on the national image of China is not always objective (Wang, 2021; Yan, 2019; Zhang, 2022), sometimes is very unfavorable by foreign media (Charles, 2016). Whether the national image of China is presented positively, neutrally, or negatively by media of other countries, is largely because of the economic, cultural, and other concerns of the country (Chen & Lee, 2023).

On the one hand, many objective, subjective, and specific factors can contribute to the national building of China (Zhu & Zhang, 2022). On the other hand, the national image of China has great influence on many sectors of its economy (Fan, 2019; Hien et al., 2020; and Woo, 2019).

However, despite the diversity and complexity of these related literature and contemporary studies on the national image of China, the researcher identified the following gaps or deficiencies:

First, the current research on the image of the Chinese state in media world mostly starts from the perspective of Chinese media, lacking analysis of foreign media coverage related to China over a successively long period of time. Second, the existing discourse analyses of national image reports are mostly from the perspective of communication studies theory, focusing on the characteristics, functions, and strategies of communication studies. There is relatively little research on analyzing the national image from a linguistic perspective, especially from Burke's terministic screen perspective on China's national image. Besides, there are few studies on the national image of China both from the sources of CNN and BBC news media.

The proposed study aimed to analyze the construction of China's national image through China related reports in BBC news website in the UK and CNN news website in the USA, mainly exploring the frequently presented types of news, themes, stylistic devices used, emotional tendency presented, macro and micro selection strategies, and other possible factors and paradigms hidden behind the news presentation of China. Results of the present study would serve as a reference to better understand the international community's views and perceptions of China, and ultimately cultivate awareness of international understanding through cross-cultural communication.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive research approach, employing thematic, stylistic and content analyses. The researcher conducted thematic analysis to group news headlines into economy, politics, culture and other social themes. Besides, stylistic analysis was employed to discuss the stylistic devices of the news articles. In addition, the researcher adopted content analysis to classify the emotion tones in the extracted news and analyze the construction of China's national image.

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2.2 Corpus of the Study

The data used for analysis in this study contain 20 pieces of digital news articles that were randomly selected by relevance to two keys words: China and Chinese from the BBC news website and CNN news website, as is shown in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. 10 News Articles from BBC News

No.	BBC News Articles	Date
BBC 1	Yinchuan: China restaurant gas explosion kills 31	22 June 2023
BBC 2	China's New Iron Rice Bowl	23 September 2012
BBC 3	China: A New World Order	29 August 2019
BBC 4	Fifa Women's World Cup Day nine: Argentina v South Africa, England v Denmark, China v Haiti	27 July 2023
BBC 5	World Business Report: Will China's new central banker fix the crisis?	26 July 2023
BBC 6	Italy joining China's Belt and Road Initiative was atrocious move, defense minister says	30 July 2023
BBC 7	China's Old Age Challenge	11 December 2016
BBC 8	China and America: Harmony and Hostility	15 September 2013
BBC 9	Our World: China's Zero-Covid Trap	30 September 2022
BBC 10	ChatGPT: Can China overtake the US in the AI marathon?	23 May 2023

Table 1 shows the 10 news articles that were randomly selected from BBC news media website by utilizing China and Chinese as the searching keywords. The date of the news articles is from September 23, 2012 to July 30, 2023.

Table 2. 10 News Articles from CNN News

No.	CNN News Articles	Date
CNN 1	China + math Olympiad = rare U.S. victory	5 August 2015
CNN 2	China leads its citizens to snow ahead of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games	25 February 2018
CNN 3	China devalues its currency: What you need to know	12 August 2015
CNN 4	China launches third, most advanced aircraft carrier named 'Fujian'	17 June 2022
CNN 5	China approves world's first inhaled Covid vaccine for emergency use	7 September 2022

CNN 6	Top Chinese bank targets Europe	16 September 2012
CNN 7	China celebrates growth in wealth, power – and height	11 October 2021
CNN 8	China to reduce abortions for 'non-medical purposes'	27 September 2021
CNN 9	Weibo IPO leads Chinese stock invasion	17 April 2014
CNN 10	Ancient teeth found in China challenge modern human migration theory	15 October 2015

Table 2 presents the 10 news articles that were randomly selected from CNN news media website by utilizing China and Chinese as the searching keywords. The date of the news articles is from September 16, 2012 to September 7, 2022.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 Themes Frequency Viewed in Foreign News Report about China

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Themes in Foreign News Media about China

Types of Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Economy	7	35.00
Healthcare	4	20.00
Politics	3	15.00
Sports	2	10.00
Culture	1	5.00
Education	1	5.00
Technology	1	5.00
Social Life	1	5.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of different themes based on the 20 sample articles. Economic themed news accounts for the largest proportion, reaching 35%, followed by health themed news at 20%, political themed news at 15% and then sports news at 10%. Other themes include culture, education, technology, and social life, each with 5%.

As Gómez (1994) pointed out, the writer's perspective on what they will say or write is shown by their themes (p. 296). The frequency and percentage of the above themes from the data could suggest the general perspective and interest from BBC news media and CNN news media. The theme regarding economy is the hottest issue and makes up the biggest proportion (35%) in the collected data.

The result could be supported by the study from Kantar (2018) and Basu (2024). Kantar (2018) believed that China's economic influence gets more recognition and is going to be the biggest trading partner with

more and more countries. Another reason is probably that economic news is closely related to citizens' life and influences the citizens' perception of the governments (Basu, 2024). Therefore, economy-themed issues are more likely to be reported in news media.

The percentage of healthcare theme (20%) is only second to economic issues, partly because The COVID -19 pandemic, as a global health emergency, has attracted a great deal of attention from the international community. The results also support the results of previous study by Liu et al. (2020), who found that the top three most popular themes in the fields of healthcare include prevention and control procedures, medical treatment, and research, and global or local social and economic influences. China's lockdown policy in the combat against COVID-19 (S9) and China's first inhaled COVID vaccine (S15) demonstrate the prevention and medical research from the Chinese government during the epidemic period.

What ranked after the health issue is the political theme, with 15% in news media. This could be easily explained when considering the global survey by Center for International Communication of China (2018) that China's overall image is continuously improving in the world, with its influence in international affairs ranked only next to the United States. Therefore, political issues concerning China and US relation would be one of the top concerns in foreign news media. The headlines of "China and America: Harmony and Hostility" (BBC 8) and "China launches third, most advanced aircraft carrier named "Fujian" " (CNN 4) are typical examples of this type of theme.

3.2 Stylistic Devices Used in Foreign News Report about China

3.2.1 Lexical Strategy

Lexical strategy generally refers to vocabulary choice and grammar in a text, like abbreviation, shortening, compound words, fuzzy words, and other special words. In the data, BBC and CNN nationalists utilize specific words selection in the news reports, including double negation, modal verb, linking verb and compound word.

Journalists and reporters choose specific term or word choices in news reportage to convey their attitude and emotion (Hamborg et al., 2019; Spinde et al., 2022; Rodrigo-Ginés, 2023). Data shows that the lexical strategies adopted in BBC and CNN news artifacts, including double negation, modal verb, linking verb and compound word.

LS1: Double Negation

Double negation is a grammatical structure that contains two negations. The tone of the double negative sentence is stronger than that of the affirmative sentence, strengthening the affirmative effect. This structure is usually used to strengthen tone or express strong emotions. The following are examples of three negations to express affirmative ideas in news coverage.

(1)

It is our final, we **can't look any further ahead** than that game because everything else doesn't matter. (BBC 4 para.12) [Emphasis added.]

(2)

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This is **not without** political risk, especially in the run-up to the twice-a-decade Communist Party Congress. (BBC 9 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

(3)

"They live in a world where speed is essential, copying is an accepted practice, and competitors will stop at nothing to win a new market," wrote Mr. Lee, a prominent figure in Beijing's internet sector and the former head of Google China. (BBC 10 para.19) [Emphasis added.]

In the example of "can't look any further ahead" (BBC 4 para.12), double negations "can't" and "any" are used to emphasize South Africa's priority on the present, indicating the efforts and determination of their preparation for the final game.

In the structure "not without political risk" (BBC 9 para.1), "without" first negates the following "political risk", and then "not" negates "without political risk' twice, thus expressing affirmative semantics through the negation of negation. It is used to emphasize the political problem that is likely to arise when the Communist Party Congress firmly carried out the coronavirus lockdown "zero-COVID" policy. This lexical strategy indicates BBC's doubt on the effectiveness of zero clearing policy in China, which may influence the Chinese government's image in its ability to handle public affairs.

Similarly, "stop at nothing" (BBC 10 para.19) means "to do anything to reach the goal". However, "to do anything" is just a straightforward statement compared with "stop at nothing", in which "nothing" negates itself first, then "stop" negates "nothing" again, forming a stronger sense of affirmation on China to take extremely improper means in the fierce global market, which implies China's image of being over-competitive in the fierce technological competition between China and the United States.

LS2: Modal Verb

Modal verb represents possibility and commonly used expressions include can, could, may and might. These modal verbs are used to express the probability or likelihood of something happening, usually in uncertain situations. Here are some examples of how modal verbs are used in news article.

(4)

But China **could** catch up, according to analysts, as AI solutions take years to be perfected. (BBC 10 para.4)[Emphasis added.]

(5)

...it **would** be difficult for China to prevent big swings in the yuan's value.(CNN 3 para.18)

(6)

"But if they are talking about investing in a listed entity, it **may** look interesting from a long-term perspective because the asking price must be reasonable now." (CNN 6 para.17) [Emphasis added.]

For example, in BBC news report on the AI race between China and the US, "could" (example 4) implies the possibility that China may be comparable to the US in the future. Likewise, "would" (example 5) indicates the possible big fluctuation in the value of Chinese currency, and "may" (example 6) suggests that China are likely to conduct an international acquisition in the future. All these possibility suggests a rising China is likely to compete economically with Western powers in the future.

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LS3: Linking verb

The linking verb itself does not perform an action, but it is still a verb because it is part of a dynamic process. It is just a marker or representation of the state or property of the subject in this process. The following examples demonstrate how linking verbs help mark the uncertain condition.

(7)

How that message will affect the future of China's AI industry **remains to be seen**. (BBC 10 para.37) [Emphasis added.]

(8)

...and many in the world's most populous nation **seem** happy about it. (CNN 1 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

(9)

The trend **appears** consistent with what Chinese researchers have found in their own studies. (CNN 7 para.3) [Emphasis added.]

In the first example, BBC journalist takes Zhao Weibo's corruption case as a hint and then concludes that its influence on China's AI industry "remains to be seen" (example 7) in a doubtful and uncertain tone. While reporting on China's first failure to win the world math championship in 20 years, CNN journalist adopts "seem happy about it" (example 8) to describe the possible mentality of some Chinese people towards the result.

In example (9), CNN journalist reports that China saw the largest male height increase between 1985 and 2019. Nevertheless, reporter of CNN does not confirm the fact directly but selects "appear" to indicate the trend with a doubtful and uncertain tone. All these linking verbs in the news show their concern and doubts on China as a rising power.

LS4: Compound Word

Compound word in linguistics refers to a word composed of two or more words. They can create new concepts or expressions by combining different vocabulary, making language expression richer and specific. Here are two typical examples of compound word in BBC news report.

(10)

In recent weeks, tens of millions of people in China have again been confined to their homes in coronavirus lockdowns. This is not without political risk, especially in the run-up to the **twice-a-decade** Communist Party Congress. BBC China Correspondent Stephen McDonell travels across the country and meets people struggling to stay afloat, with their country showing no signs of abandoning its 'zero-covid' policy. (BBC 9 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

(11)

"This **rough-and-tumble** environment makes a strong contrast to Silicon Valley, where copying is stigmatized, and many companies are allowed to coast on the basis of one original idea or lucky break." (BBC 10 para.20) [Emphasis added.]

(12)

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Last week, as China celebrated the 72nd anniversary of Communist Party rule with a **week-long** public holiday, **state-run** media cranked up the patriotism to hail the country's economic rise, military achievements, political clout – and even the height of its men. (CNN 7 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

In example (10), "twice-a-decade" combines three words into one by using two hyphens. Compared to "twice a decade", there are no pauses between the words, so the semantic connection is closer, and the pronunciation time is shorter. It not only accurately expresses the specific time frequency, but also conveys a sense of urgency in terms of the tone of reporting.

In example (11), "rough-and-tumble" is composed of three individual words, connected by two hyphens. The individual word "rough" means "not smooth, not gentle, not pleasant" while "tumble" refers to falling down. BBC reporter puts the two words together to be "rough-and-tumble", creating a sense of chaotic and disordered atmosphere and leading the audience's focus to the unfavorable side of China's AI progress.

However, in example (12), "week-long" is utilized to describe the special and long Chinese holiday, whereas "state-run media" suggests the attributes and possible position of the Chinese media in reporting. Though specific way of words combination, the journalists could tailor news content to target audiences' cognitive and guide their emotional preferences to hold either a positive or negative view towards the image of China (MolekKozakowska & Wilk, 2021).

3.2.2 Rhetorical Strategy

Rhetoric is a technique used to modify language, which increases the presentation effect of language through the organization and processing of words and sentences. It mainly includes metaphor, idiom, personification, parallelism, and comparison. The use of rhetoric makes sentences more vivid and also conceal the true intentions of news reporters (Wang, 2021).

RS1: Metaphor

Metaphor is the act of secretly comparing one thing to another (Wang, 2021), and is used to make an abstract experience more concrete by describing this experience in terms of a journey, a disease, magic, war, or as a physical force (Anisa, 2022), as is shown in the following examples.

(13)

So Rana goes to visit a young Chinese PR executive and keen online shopper in her smart central Beijing flat - and discovers that she has only **clambered onto** the **housing ladder** with the aid of years of parental saving. (BBC 2 para.3)

(14)

So the math competitions become another **bitter pill** to swallow along the cutthroat road to success. (CNN 1 para.10) [Emphasis added.]

One Chinese commentator, Wei Wei, compared math Olympiads to **"gutter oil,"** a reference to an infamous type of distilled sewage used by some restaurants to cut costs. (CNN 1 para.11) [Emphasis added.]

(15)

This has fueled talk of a **currency war** (CNN 3 para.5) [Emphasis added.]

In example (13), BBC journalist compares China's rising housing price to a ladder to show the difficult life of the Chinese people when facing the market reform to encourage people to consume rather than to save.

Similarly, when reporting on China's first failure to gain the math championship in 20 years, CNN reporter introduces and comments on the negative effect of math competition on Chinese students and their parents. The reporter adopts metaphor through comparing a regular math competition to "bitter pill" and "gutter oil" (example 14), with the former indicating the unpleasant experience and the latter harmful to the body.

By presenting the fierce math competition as two metaphors with negative connotations - "bitter pill" and "gutter oil", the journalists indicate the drawbacks of education in China and lead the reader to have an visual understanding of the negative effects of Chinese mathematics competitions.

In example 15, CNN journalist utilizes the war metaphor for China's monetary reduction policy. Such metaphor magnifies the impact of Chinese monetary policy on the world and implies the negative consequence that China may bring to other countries.

RS2: Idiom

Idioms are fixed phrases gradually formed in the long-term development of language. Idioms originate from literary classics, historical stories, fables, life practices, and other aspects, and are well-known to people in general. Idioms are a treasure of language and culture (Sun, 2023), and the correct use of idioms in news can add lustre to articles and enrich the language and reasoning characteristics of news (Zhang, 2018). The following phrases are two typical Chinese idioms used in BBC and CNN news report.

(16)

For decades, Beijing followed a policy of **hide your strength and bide your time**, but since Xi's accession that has changed, creating alarm in the West over China's growing influence. (BBC 3 para.2) [Emphasis added.]

(17)

Beijing's focus on certain industries can bring financial incentives and loosen **red tape**, but it may also mean greater scrutiny, and more fear and uncertainty. (BBC 10 para.35)

(18)

"Primarily this is a liberalization attempt," he says. "But it's a clever move by China as it allows them to **kill two birds with one stone**." (CNN 3 para.14) [Emphasis added.]

Seen from the above examples, the phrase "hide your strength and bide your time" (example 16) is the translation of the Chinese idiom 韬光养晦 (tāo guāng yǎng huì). This idiom originates from the story of Li Chen in the Tang Dynasty of China, who had hidden his talents for many years, retreated deep into the mountains to avoid the annihilation of his own clan, and finally took advantage of the opportunity to seize power and become the emperor. The BBC journalist uses this idiom vividly to describe the previous Chinese government's development strategy-hiding talent and seeking self-development. By

constructing a contrast with President Xi's new political policy, BBC journalist may pose worry and concern to western audience about China's growing influence.

Another idiom "red tape" (example 17) refers to a large number of redundant and rigid regulations that can hinder action or decision-making. The first person to use red ribbons is generally believed to be King Charles V of Spain in the early 16th century. He used red ribbons to bind important documents that needed to be discussed in the national parliament during the modernization of national management, distinguishing them from other documents processed through ordinary administrative procedures. Therefore, BBC journalist uses "red tape" to imply China's rambling long work efficiency in the past.

The third idiom "kill two birds with one stone" (example 18) is equivalent to the Chinese idiom 一箭双雕 (yī jiàn shuāng diāo), which originates from Chang Sunsheng in the ancient Northern Zhou Dynasty in China. While accompanying the Turkic king on a hunting trip, Chang Sun sheng saw two large eagles vying for a piece of meat in the sky. He shot an arrow while the two eagles were flying in a line due to the competition and killed the two eagles at once. CNN news journalist uses the idiom to describe how Bank of China addresses the issue of currency depreciation to achieve various purposes.

The three idioms used to report news events about China not only arouse the interest of Western readers, but also better express that the policies adopted by China follow many tradition, thus successfully enrich the language and reasoning characteristics of news (Zhang, 2018).

RS3: Personification

Personification refers to imbuing lifeless objects with human like emotions, giving them life, or endowing other animals and plants in nature with qualities, behaviours, attitudes, and feelings that only belong to humans (Yang, 2022). The following examples exemplify how personification is utilized in BBC and CNN news report.

(19)

It is the **birthplace** of **technology giants** such as Google, Apple and Intel. (BBC 10 para.6) [Emphasis added.]

(20)

But to some, losing the Olympiad offers hope that **painful, nightmarish years** spent studying for the contest could finally be over.(CNN 1 para.3) [Emphasis added.]

(21)

...it's a "revolutionary move" and will **allow** the market **a greater hand** in determining the yuan's value.(CNN 3 para.11)

(22)

When it comes to phones, competitor WeChat seems to be **eating Weibo's lunch**. (CNN 9 para.11) [Emphasis added.]

In example (19), BBC journalist refer to Google, Apple and Intel as "technology giants" to give life to these companies. Since these companies were originally established in Silicon Valley, the journalist therefore calls this place as the "birthplace" of these giants.

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When reporting about China's first failure in the world math championship in the example (20), CNN journalist describes the time of preparation for the contest as "painful" and "nightmarish" years. This strategy gives life to the year, but it reflects more the suffering of Chinese mathematics competitors.

Example (21) is a report on China's policy change in devaluation that may influence other countries. CNN journalist quotes comments from Singapore strategist by saying that the market may behave like a human being with "a greater hand" in making decision and action on Chinese Yuan's value.

In example (22), the use of personification suggests the fierce competition between media companies even within China. CNN journalist utilizes "eating Weibo's lunch", personification to endow the fierce network platform competition with human characteristics. CNN journalist reports Weibo, one of China's media platforms, lost internet users before its way to initial public offering because more and more Chinese users are switching to mobile devices, which are controlled by WeChat. By imbuing Wechat Company with life as if it were a person, CNN journalist visualizes the conflict of interests between the two media platforms.

RS4: Parallelism

Parallelism is a rhetorical device that emphasizes meaning through grammatical symmetry, including identical or similar words, phrases, or clauses. When reasoning, parallelism makes the argument more organized and logically clear, making it easier for readers to understand and accept (Fu, 2009). The following example (BBC 2 para.5) shows how parallelism structure helps enhance the reasoning effect.

(23)

So-**if** young people's elderly relatives are looked after, **if** urban migrants are integrated into the welfare system, **if** healthcare and housing provision improves, **perhaps** such reforms will help grow the new nation of consumers the Government want to see. Or **perhaps**, as some of those Rana meets contend, it would be better simply to raise ordinary people's wages. (BBC 2 para.5) [Emphasis added.]

As shown, three "if" and two "perhaps" (example 23) are used as parallel structures when BBC journalist reports on China's welfare system. Three "if" indicate three possible conditions and challenges that China may have to face. Then, the journalist chooses two "perhaps" to suggest that the challenges being discussed may have two possible solutions but there is still no clear evidence or guarantee. By using this rhetorical technique, BBC journalist is able to convincingly guide the audience to doubt China's welfare system.

Here is another example of parallelism structure used in news report.

(24)

Nearly everyone in the country uses the super app WeChat, for example. It is used for almost everything from **sending** text messages, to **booking** doctor's appointments and **filing** taxes. (BBC 10 para.15) [Emphasis added.]

In this report, BBC journalist utilizes three parallel verbs - "sending", "booking" and "filing" to describe the enormous functions of WeChat. Such a strategy not only enhances the persuasiveness of language, but also implies China's potential advantage in the AI competition.

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In the following example (25), three parallel adjective words - "amazing", "wild" and "variable" (CNN 10 para.19) are used to describe the new discovery in China, which reflects the astonishment and surprise of CNN journalist in commenting on the big discovery in China. It may also arouse curiosity among the potential reader.

(25)

"I think that Asia is an **unknown** land," she said. "The samples are **amazing**, they are **wild**, they are **variable** and I think in the next few years we are going to have surprises because they have a lot to say not only about Asian study but about the main stories that we have been talking about (regarding) human evolution." (CNN 10 para.19) [Emphasis added.]

In short, the parallelism structure not only strengthens the news content from a logical and structural perspective, but also guides the target readers to reflect on China's welfare system and its ancient and mysterious history.

RS5: Comparison

Comparison is usually the comparison of two things that have opposing or contradictory relationships. In foreign media reports on China, contrastive rhetoric is a commonly used technique to express true intentions. By comparing two related or unrelated events, it secretly presents their attitude tendencies (Wang, 2021). Here are some typical examples below:

(26)

Meanwhile, new variants of the coronavirus have impacted the protection offered by first-generation vaccines around the world, including China's homegrown vaccines that provide less robust antibody protection **compared with** mRNA vaccines developed in the West. (CNN 5 para.9) [Emphasis added.]

(27)

China is seeking to continue their record of making it to the knockout stage of every Women's World Cup they've played in, **while** Haiti is searching for their first goal at a World Cup. (BBC 4 para.31) [Emphasis added.]

In the above examples, whenever reporting on one issue in China, the journalist always makes a comparison with its counterpart from west countries. For instance, CNN journalist compares China's homegrown vaccines with that developed in the West (example 26), making it more prominent that China's vaccine has less robust antibody protection. Similarly, through comparison, there is a stark contrast between China's pursuit of knockout rounds and Haiti's pursuit of world championships (example 27).

Here are more examples from samples of the report of China's aircraft carrier "Fujian":

(28)

Those two carriers used the ski-jump launching system, where planes would simply take off from a slight ramp, **while** US carriers use a more advanced catapult system to launch their aircraft. (CNN 4 para.16) [Emphasis added.]

All US aircraft carriers are also nuclear-powered, **while** the Fujian is believed to run on conventional steam propulsion, which Funaiole said would limit its reach. (CNN 4 para.19) [Emphasis added.]

Seen from sample (28), though the focus of the report is on China's most advanced aircraft carrier "Fujian", CNN journalist again compares it with its counterpart in the US in terms of the different "launching system" and power mechanism, highlighting the advanced and powerful capabilities of US aircraft carriers. As a consequence, CNN journalist indirectly presents their attitude (Wang, 2021) to lead readers to have a preference of the aircraft carriers from the United States, implying China's potential competitiveness and current shortcomings in politics.

3.2.3 Syntactic Strategy

Agu (2015) defined syntax as "the arrangement of words in a sentence or the grammatical arrangement of the various elements of a sentence" (p.25). It includes the various ways of using grammar and sentence structures, like use of phrases, use of clauses and use of sentences.

SS1: Transition of "but" Structure

The transition structure of "But" is commonly used in sentences to convey contrast and contradiction between two statements or ideas. The word "but" could be used as a preposition, adverb, or conjunction to guide some clauses. When "but" is used as a coordinate conjunction, it connects the components that indicate a transitional relationship before and after (Gu, 2011).

The following examples show how the word "but" is used within a sentence in news report to make a transition of ideas and stance in different contexts.

(29)

Brown-Finnis' prediction: China looked well organised against Denmark, **but** they don't seem to have much in attack. (BBC 4 para.33) [Emphasis added.]

(30)

Beijing's focus on certain industries can bring financial incentives and loosen red tape, **but** it may also mean greater scrutiny, and more fear and uncertainty. (BBC 10 para.35) [Emphasis added.]

(31)

In a country like China with lots of ambition **but** little in the way of an established winter sports industry, there's a lot of potential. (CNN 2 para.19) [Emphasis added.]

From the above examples, it can be observed that the cluster of words or clauses before "but" is to praise while those after it is to belittle, thus making a sharp contrast of ideas. For instance, when reporting on sports event (example 29), after praising the organizational ability of Chinese team, "but" is used by BBC journalist to doubt the attacking ability of the Chinese team. Likewise, in the report of AI technology (example 30), BBC journalist first affirms the positive role of the Chinese government's economic policies before "but", and then begins to state that the strict monitoring system in China will lead to corresponding negative effects.

Also, in the report on China's preparation for 2022 Beijing Winter Games (example 31), CNN journalist first affirms China's sufficient preparation for the competition, then uses the transition word "but" to point out that China does not have a mature mechanism to support it.

These are typical BBC's and CNN's strategy of using "but" to praise the advantages or efforts of China before belittling the possible negative effects, which successfully makes a transition in the tone and leads the reader to focus more on the negative presentation of China.

Besides, "but" is also applied between sentences or paragraphs to make a great transition in ideas. Here is a typical example.

(32)

As the yuan is used more frequently to execute international transactions and payments, many predict that it will one day rival the dollar, euro and yen. (CNN 3 para.19)

But it's unlikely to take its place alongside the world's most traded currencies quite yet, as China is still reluctant to enact many of the reforms that would make the yuan freely convertible. (CNN 3 para.20) [Emphasis added.]

As shown in the sample above, report in CNN 3 para.19 is an affirmation of the competitiveness of the RMB currency, which may confront the dollar, euro and yen. Nevertheless, CNN journalist puts "But" at the beginning of para.20 to indicate a change in the tone. "It's unlikely to take place" further negates the previous competitiveness, reflecting the journalist's syntactic strategy of first promoting and then suppressing in news reporting to construct a rising China yet with quite a lot of problems in the field of economy.

SS2: Adverbial Clause of Concession

In sentences containing concessive adverbial clauses，the main clause and subordinate clause often have opposite meanings. The meaning of the subordinate clause is "retreat", while the meaning of the main clause is "advance" (Wang, 2005). Obviously, the main clause has the upper hand in meaning. Here are a few typical examples below.

(33)

While Chinese tech companies certainly have unique advantages, the full impact of Beijing's authoritarianism is still unclear. (BBC 10 para.24) [Emphasis added.]

(34)

But **although** China's two initial aircraft carriers increased its naval power, their capability was still far behind the US, which has a total of 11 of the vessels in service. (CNN 4 para. 15)[Emphasis added.]

(35)

And **though** rates of stunting and undernutrition have dropped dramatically around the country, they still remain common in poor rural areas, according to the 2014 study. (CNN 7 para.19) [Emphasis added.]

(36)

Weibo claims to have 130 million active users, **although** one academic study suggests that most of the site's content is generated by a small minority of users. (CNN 9 para.6) [Emphasis added.]

It can be seen from the above examples that "while", "although" and "though" are used to connect concessive adverbial clauses. In example (33), the subordinate clause confirms China's special advantage in AI technology, but the main clause ends with "unclear", reflecting BBC journalist intention in prioritizing the latter. In example (34), the subordinate clause affirms the improvement in naval power of China's aircraft carrier, then the main clause moves to the capacity "still far behind the US", highlighting the insufficient aspect stated in the main sentence.

The same syntactic strategy is also applied in example (35). The subordinate clause states the decline in undernutrition problem; however, the main clause points out such a problem "still remain common in poor rural area", leading the reader to believe more in the problems in the rural countryside. Similarly, in example (36), the subordinate clause suggests that only a small group of users are producing the Weibo content, whereas the main clause presents a large number of active users, emphasizing Weibo's capacity to attract users.

This usage of adverbial clause of concession indicates that in reporting on China's advantage and development, journalists tend to focus on the problems that exist in China.

SS3: Rhetorical Question

Rhetorical question is a question that ends in a question mark and is posed more for effect than to elicit a response. In news reporting, rhetorical questions are usually used to attract the audience's attention and strengthen the tone. At the same time, the form of questioning without answering also leaves room for imagination for the audience (Wang, 2021).

There are two types of rhetorical question. One is affirmative rhetorical question, and the other is negative rhetorical question. Here are a few typical examples of affirmative rhetorical question from the data.

(37)

Will the huge affordable housing programme change how much they feel able to spend**?** (BBC 2 para.3) [Emphasis added.]

(38)

As Xi faces his greatest test yet - a confrontation in Hong Kong - **how will** the newly resurgent China react? (BBC 3 para.2) [Emphasis added.]

(39)

China's elderly population is exploding. By 2050, forty percent of the country will be aged over 60. **Will they** be able to cope**?** (BBC 7 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

(40)

There are questions, for instance, about whether censorship would affect development of Chinese AI chatbots. **Will they** be able to answer sensitive questions about President Xi Jinping? (BBC 10 para.25) [Emphasis added.]

It can be observed from the above examples that affirmative rhetorical questions are posed by "Will" "how will" "Will they". In example (37), after providing examples of people who have to face high housing prices but get limited support from the state, BBC journalist uses rhetorical question to address

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housing programme and spending willingness, partly indicating the doubt on the effectiveness of China's Government's new policy to improve healthcare and housing.

Besides, BBC and CNN journalists usually put forward rhetorical questions as how to cope with a problem or situation immediately after proposing the exact issue. For example, BBC journalist puts forward rhetorical questions as how China will react to the confrontation in Hong Kong immediately after proposing the same issue faced by President Xi (example 38). BBC journalist raises a rhetorical question as whether China is able to solve the aging problem since forty percent of Chinese will have been over 60 by the year 2050 (exaple 39). Also, BBC journalist asks a rhetorical question in terms of the ability to answer sensitive questions about President Xi when "There are questions" about the effectiveness of censorship on the development of Chinese AI chatbots (example 40).

It shows that the form of rhetorical questions has a stronger tone than general declarative sentences, and can better arouse people's deep thinking and reflection. Just as Hågvar (2019) put it, these rhetorical questions are asked for the purpose that readers might be guided to stop and deeply reflect upon the issue when they are addressed directly to achieve an effect of levelling out the interpersonal imbalance between the newsroom and the readers and facilitate the eye-level communication (p.14).

Apart from the affirmative rhetorical question, here are two examples of negative rhetorical question from the data below.

(41)

"Uh oh, the U.S. now defeats China in exams. **Isn't** our exam-oriented education supposed to be superior**?** (CNN 1 para.7) [Emphasis added.]

(42)

There's also a pride factor as well, said Dreyer. What host country **wouldn't** want to win more medals on its home turf**?** (CNN 2 para.21) [Emphasis added.]

In the above examples, CNN journalists use the negative form of "isn't" (example 41) and "wouldn't" (example 42) to ask rhetorical question, indicating the journalists' affirmative meaning of "the exam-oriented education is not superior as supposed" in the former and "Every host country wants to win more medals on its homeland" in the latter. Although it does not directly express the viewpoint, it guides the possible answer to the question based on the preset position, affecting the audience's understanding of the reported question (Wang, 2021).

3.3 Emotional Tone Detected in Foreign News Report about China

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Emotion Tone Presented in New Media

Types of Emotion	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	2	10.00
Negative	12	60.00

| Neutral | 6 | 30.00 |
| Total | 20 | 100.00 |

Table 5 presents the frequency and percentage of emotion tone presented in the data. From the table, it can be seen that the BBC and CNN news media have the majority proportion of negative emotion tone reports on China, with 12 or 60%, followed by 6 news reports with neutral emotion tone (30%), whereas positive emotion tone reports are the least, with 2 or 10%.

3.3.1 Positive Tone

Positive tone refers to the optimistic, upbeat, and encouraging tone in news coverage, with a focus on the positive aspect of a story or event. As shown in table 15, BBC and CNN news media have the lowest proportion of positive emotion tone in their reports on China, containing only two news samples (BBC 1 and CNN 10). The data suggests that both BBC and CNN journalists have a relatively low level of complete recognition of China. Below are the few examples to illustrate how the two reports on China are viewed in a positive tone.

BBC and CNN news media have the lowest proportion of positive tone in their reports on China, with a small focus on China's ancient history and China's effort in handling disastrous gas explosion.

(43)

Nine people have been detained over an explosion at a barbecue restaurant in north-west China which has killed at least **31 people** (BBC 1 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

The death toll is expected to rise with at least **seven people injured**, one of whom is in a critical condition, Xinhua news agency reported (BBC 1 para.7) [Emphasis added.]

President Xi Jinping has **called for maximum efforts** in treating the wounded and boosting safety measures (BBC 1 para.8) [Emphasis added.]

"We must **do our best** to rescue the injured and **reassure the families** of the casualties, identify the cause of the accident as soon as possible, and seriously **pursue responsibility** according to the law," Mr Xi said. (BBC 1 para.9) [Emphasis added.]

The above examples are from a report on a restaurant gas explosion in China, in which BBC journalist first uses objective figures, like "nine people" detailed, "31 people" killed (para.1) and "seven people injured" (para.7) to represent the serious consequences of the event. Afterwards, BBC journalist collects a series of positive words, such as "called for maximum efforts" (para.8), "do our best to rescue", "reassure the families" and "pursue responsibility" (para.9) to express the government's concern about the incident and the great effort and determination to solve the problem.

3.3.2 Negative Tone

Negative tone refers to the negative, critical, and condemning tone in news report. Seen from table 15, negative tone takes up the highest proportion, up to 60%, in the samples. The data suggests that when choosing to report on China, journalists in BBC and CNN tend to emphasize and pay attention to the

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existing problems that may weaken China's image. Below are some typical examples of negative tone in news reporting.

By selecting a series of words and expressions with negative connotations in the report, BBC and CNN journalists display the highest proportion of negative tone in their reports on China.

(44)

China has named Pan Gongsheng as the new governor of its central bank, the People's Bank of China (PBOC). The country is experiencing **challenging** economic times, with **sluggish** consumer spending, a **crisis** in the property market, **weakening** exports, **record youth unemployment**, and **high local government debt**.(BBC 5 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

When reporting on the personnel appointment of the new governor of people's Bank of China, BBC journalist focuses on depicting the negative economic situation in China. By choosing adjectives and nouns with negative connotations, such as "challenging", "sluggish", "weakening", "high...debt" and "crisis", the journalist could deepen readers' negative understanding of the Chinese economy, and expresses concerns and doubts that the new governor may have difficulty in changing China's current situation.

3.3.3 Neutral Tone

Between the positive tone and the negative tone, there is the neutral tone that provides objective information about a story or event. The data of 30% neutral tone news report in table 15 suggests that some of the news report from BBC and CNN could hold a quite objective view about China.

The proportion of neutral tone ranges between positive and negative tones, providing quite informative message like objective figures about events, without obvious praise or deliberate negation.

(45)

This summer President Obama hosted the new Chinese Premier, Xi Jinping at an informal summit in Palm Springs. It was a clear sign of the importance placed on the relationship between **the world's two greatest powers**. **Both leaders** stressed the need for their countries to cooperate - on a whole range of issues. **And yet both sides** are also competing against each other, economically, politically and, increasingly, in the military sphere (BBC 8 para.1) [Emphasis added.]

In the above example, BBC journalist holds a neutral tone toward the relationship between China and the US by using equal comparison. Firstly, the journalist uses "the world's two greatest powers" when mentioning the two countries, without emphasizing who goes first. Then, the journalist chooses "both leaders stressed" to affirm the need of cooperation for the two countries. Finally, the journalist changes the perspective by using "And yet both sides are" to emphasize competition between the two countries in the field of economy, politics, and military. Throughout the narrative, the journalist does not lean towards any side, but just fairly mentioning it.

4. The National Image of China Formed in the Pseudo- Environment

4.1 A Rising China

BBC and CNN journalists present the national image of China as a rising power in many fields, with priority on the economic field. For example, China is referred to as "a nation of producers" (BBC 2 para.2), "a rising superpower" (BBC 3 para.1), one of "the world's two greatest powers" (BBC 8 para.1) and "the world's second largest economy" (CNN 3 para.21). Besides, China has an economy "crucial to people's lives around the world" (BBC 3 para.1), has "a thriving internet sector" (BBC 10 para.14) and has become the "first country to green-light an inhaled Covid-19 vaccine" (CNN 5 para.1). Moreover, Chinese people's general status has "increased" (CNN 7, para.6), people's life quality has "improved" in just a few decades (CNN 7 para.7) with food supply and personal wealth expanded (CNN 7 para. 9). In addition, in military field, China has launched "its third and most advanced aircraft carrier" with better combat systems that maybe "fast catching up with" (CNN 4 para.1).

However, when reporting on the upward development of China's economy and society, BBC and CNN journalists often praise first and then criticize later, using rhetorical devices such as comparison, clause of concession, metaphor and specific vocabulary such as "while", "although", "but", and other connectors to introduce opposite or negative side of the issue immediately after the positive reporting. At the same time, they also include sudden events, like gas explosion (BBC 1) and flooding (CNN 7) to present China as a rising power but with frequent disasters and numerous problems during the process of developing.

4.2 A Cooperative China

From the data, BBC reporters tend to show that China is an active and cooperative partner, especially in the economic field, when reporting on China's development. For example, in BBC 6, when the reporter reports that Italy has joined China's the Belt and Road Initiative, the journalist points out that China is "a partner" (BBC 6 para.10). Besides, the journalist sees more "potential" of the cooperation between China and Italy in the future (BBC 6 para.14). In addition, BBC journalist quotes comments from China to validate "fruitful results" between China and Italy due to their cooperation (BBC 6 para.15). This sample further proves the finding of the sixth global survey conducted by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies (ACCWS) and Kantar (2018), which pointed out that the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China is beneficial to countries, regions and individuals.

From a macro perspective in sample 8, BBC journalist reports on the relationship between China and the US in a more neutral manner, referring the two countries as "the world's greatest powers" (BBC 8 para.1). Besides, through emphasizing "Both leaders [President Obama and Chinese Chairman Xi] stressed the need for their countries to cooperate - on a whole range of issues", the journalist presents a growing and cooperative China on the international stage.

Just as Wang (2021) put it, "the rapid development of the Chinese economy and the concept of a 'community with a shared future' that China has always upheld have enabled China to actively engage in economic and trade cooperation with countries around the world" (p.56). However, the cooperative

image of China is only detected in BBC news report from the samples data and there is no sign of showing such a cooperative image in CNN news report in the data. For CNN news report, China is more likely to be presented as a competitive image, which will be illustrated in the following section.

4.3 A Competitive China

Accompanied by the image of collaborator is the image of competitor, which has been repeatedly mentioned in BBC and CNN reports and is mainly reflected in economic and political aspects.

Firstly, China is presented as an opposing competitor by BBC and CNN media. For example, BBC and CNN journalists adopt competitive expressions with negative connotations to present the competitive image of China. Expressions like "growing tension between China and the west" (sample 3 para.4), "competing against each other" (BBC 8 para.1) and "it doesn't shift the competitive environment" (CNN 3 para.9) all indicate the competitive aspect of China.

Secondly, the media emphasizes China's damage to the Western economy, presenting China's image as a "troublemaker" in the global economy, and weakens other countries as "victims". For instance, China is unfairly stigmatized as "large-scale industrial espionage" and thief to "steal the west's business secrets and technological know-how" (BBC 3 para.4) and China's devaluation has "rattled" financial markets of the US (CNN 3 para.3), whereas the west becomes "victim" who just expresses their so called "concern" （BBC 6 para.7) and worry (BBC 8 para.2) about China.

Finally, from the perspective of BBC and CNN media, China becomes a huge challenge and even threat to the West. China is reported to be "the largest naval force in the world" (CNN 4 para.10) that could aggravate "growing geopolitical tensions" with the US (CNN 4 para.11) in the field of military. Also, China's currency devaluation could "rival" the dollar, euro and yen (CNN 3 para.19) and could be "devastating" for the U.S. economy (CNN 3 para.3).

4.4 A Mysterious China

From the sample data, it can be seen that there is only one report on China (CNN 10) in the field of culture. Although the sample size is relatively small, it also partially reflects the foreign media's preference coverage of China. Just as Wang (2021) proposed, culture is the common language of humanity and plays an important role in national communication and development (p.58). It is also an important manifestation of a country's comprehensive national strength.

As shown in artifact CNN 10, foreign media present China's cultural image with positive evaluations. For instance, objective figure "dating back at least 80,000 years" (CNN 10 para.1) showcases the long history of Chinese civilization. In addition, evaluative superlative "one of the most importance finds coming out Asia" (CNN 10 para.3) suggests the significance of the "ancient teeth" found in China. Other evaluative adjectives like "stunning" (CNN 10 para.3), "unknown", "amazing", "wild" and "variable" (CNN 10 para.19) give full expression to the journalist's surprise at the discovery of this mysterious tooth. Moreover, the journalist's comment that "The research also raises questions about how and why modern humans reached Asia earlier than Europe" (CNN 10 para.11) reveals the academic significance of this mysterious discovery.

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In summary, although it is the only one cultural topic report on China, media reporter has provided positive reports on the discovery of mysterious teeth, presenting the ancient and mysterious image of China.

5. Conclusion

In summary, BBC and CNN journalists have constructed four types of national images of China through topic selection and linguistic devices. However, these four types of images are not equivalent to China's reality. On the one hand, the presentation of China's rising, cooperative and mysterious image in BBC and CNN news report basically reflects China's current development, suggesting foreign media's attention and recognition of China's progress. On the other hand, BBC and CNN news reports show an tendency to have an imbalanced presentation of the positive and negative aspects of China, first focusing on the positive and then capitalizing on the positive to prioritize the negative image of China.

On the whole, positive tone and complimentary words take up very small proportion, and there is a clear negative tone in overall reporting. Although BBC and CNN news reports present some positive attitude about China, they focus more on the negative aspects of China. By forming a word screen, BBC and CNN news media shape China's national image mainly from their own perspective with the national interests of the UK and the US as the starting point.

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