



# Critical Discourse Analysis on China's Image in Climate Coverage by Mainstream US Media

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**Abstract**— *In the trend of information globalization, mass media is not only an authoritative source of information but also a participant and executor of international affairs. News reporting is the most influential and authoritative form of media, shaping people's cognition and attitudes while conveying information. Therefore, using news reports to build a national image has become an essential strategy for the government of a country. At the same time, an excellent national image is essential for improving a country's global discourse power. Therefore, this paper uses discourse-historical analysis as a theoretical framework to analyze the China-related climate reports of mainstream media in the United States from 2015 to 2023 and explores the diachronic changes and reasons for the image of China in mainstream media reports in the United States. In this study, a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative methods is employed, with a particular emphasis on data-driven corpus research methods. The study found that mainstream US media's climate reporting on China mainly focuses on China's climate responsibility, renewable energy, and inter-country relations in climate governance. Through the analysis of the predication strategy, argumentation strategy, and intensification strategy, it is found that the media's stance has gone through a period of neutrality from 2015 to 2017, increased hostile rhetoric from 2018 to 2019, and continued to worsen from 2020 to 2023. The media's stance is mainly related to the changes in climate policies in the United States at different phases.*

**Keywords**— *media coverage, climate change, discourse-historical analysis, national image*



## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of national image encompasses multiple elements and has different interpretations in different disciplines. Therefore, the study of the national image is crucial. From the political economy perspective, national image is a part of a country's soft power and one of the critical elements for a country or organization to stand firm on the international stage. Maintaining an excellent national image helps to enhance global competitive advantages and maximize national interests. Due to the

different research fields of various scholars, there is no uniform definition of the concept of national image at present. The American political scientist Kenneth Boulding's definition is the most widely quoted, including "self-perception" and "other-perception." Boulding believed that in the international relations system, "image" is the basis for decision-makers to make decisions [1]. From the perspective of communication studies, a national image is the unity of public attitudes and emotions toward a country formed in mind. In the context of globalization,

competition among countries worldwide is becoming increasingly fierce, so shaping a great national image is crucial. Mass media usually use specific language strategies to shape a positive or negative national image in reporting domestic and foreign events, directly or indirectly affecting public attitudes.

Global warming has intensified recently, and extreme weather events have increased. Environmental protection and climate change issues have become hot topics in the international community. Climate change is closely related to national interests and image in global governance. Climate change has risen from an initial natural science issue to a political, economic, and diplomatic issue, becoming an important field of international political gaming and a key issue in external communication strategies. It significantly impacts the construction of a country's image and the game of foreign discourse power.

As the world's largest developing country, China's position on the international stage is becoming increasingly important. By conducting in-depth research on the shaping of China's image by Western media in the field of climate change, theoretical support and reference significance can be provided for China's dissemination of climate change information and climate diplomacy.

This study selected the research object of climate reports related to China by mainstream media in the United States from 2015 to 2023. It used Ruth Wodark's discourse-historical analysis as the theoretical framework to examine the implementation of language strategies in discourse practice in the historical context of news reporting. It explores what kind of image of China has been shaped by mainstream media in the United States, whether there has been any change in China's image over the past nine years, and the reasons for the changes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research of predecessors serves as the foundation for conducting new studies. This chapter primarily provides a literature review on the international image in the media and the theoretical basis DHA.

### 2.1 Research on the National Image in the Media

Grasping previous research achievements is the foundation and prerequisite for conducting new research. The following sections will summarize and comment on

the research achievements abroad and in China on national image to understand the current research hotspots and grasp the research trends.

With the continuous advancement of globalization and media, competition between countries has intensified. Along with economic and military competition, national reputation and image have also become an essential part of the competition. Therefore, research on the national image has also become an important area of concern for scholars.

The research on the national image in foreign countries started early. Since Lasswell [2] proposed "promoting the country as a powerful and wise image with unlimited protection and tolerance," the research on the national image in the West has never been interrupted. Scholars generally believe that national image is a part of national soft power, a part of national comprehensive strength, and an essential means of national interest game [3].

Currently, the national image based on the mass media is one of the key research areas for scholars. Giffard & Rivenburg [4] selected media reports from six countries, including Associated Press, Reuters, and Inter Press Service, as the research subjects, all of which are host countries of United Nations summits and include both developed and developing countries. Research has found that compared to participating countries, countries hosting the summit tend to gain a more positive image in their reports, and Western countries have a more significant advantage. Ingenhoff [5] used Google search trend data from different countries on Switzerland as the research object, exploring the composition of a country's image through five dimensions: competitiveness, values, culture, nature, and emotions. The study found that people's understanding of a country's image mainly relies on stereotypes, even in the digital age of convenient information. Once stereotypes are generated, they are difficult to change, and it is also found that the distance between countries increases, the more profound the stereotype is. Dubinsky [6] analyzed 114 media articles published by 19 national news agencies from 13 different English-speaking countries in 2022, using the "Super Bowl" sports event in the United States as a starting point. The study found that while praising American culture, the

norms, morals, and values of the United States were criticized, resulting in a mixed international image.

China's research on national image started relatively late. In 1996, Zhi [7] emphasized the importance of national image communication. Afterward, research on national image entered the right track, mainly exploring the significance of national image and conducting research based on news reporting. At the level of meaning exploration, Gan & Peng [8] explored the image of China in mainstream American media coverage of the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, pointing out that the construction of a national image is crucial for the competition for international discourse power. Liu et al. [9] pointed out that the main issue that China occupies the initiative and urgently needs to be solved in the power game of image construction is to break the inherent prejudices of the West.

As for news reporting, Zhao & Lu [10] selected the 2020 New York Times' COVID-19 report on China as the object of analysis, pointing out that under the premise of ideological opposition, the mainstream media in the United States have constructed a distorted image of China against the background of the impact of the epidemic on the country, conscious challenges to the existing power structure, and "threats" to their interests. Their reports need more fairness and objectivity.

Although China's research on national image started relatively late, theoretical and applied research is comprehensive. China's research on national image mainly serves political and diplomatic needs. However, in the context of the capitalist economy, the research on national image in the West is still in demand of economic interests. The results show that most of China's research is applied research, with the ultimate goal of providing opinions and suggestions on constructing the national image. However, most of the investigation by foreign scholars is only an analysis and comparison of phenomena.

## 2.2 Previous Studies on Discourse-Historical Analysis

Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is a research framework devised by Ruth Wodak and her research group in Vienna for their analysis of discourses surrounding racial discrimination, sexism, and immigration in Austria. Both in foreign countries and in China, scholars have conducted extensive research using DHA. In foreign DHA research,

there is a greater emphasis on such controversial discourses as immigration, racism and climate discourse within public discursive spaces[11]. Some scholars have applied DHA to the analysis of discourses related to the construction of national identity and image [14]. Furthermore, DHA has been utilized abroad to legitimize specific discourses. For instance, KhosraviNik, M. [15] conducted an analysis of the nature and quality of discourse strategies in the Iranian newspaper Kayhan, exploring the legitimization of the Iranian nuclear program through specific linguistic strategies. Similarly, Wodak, R. [16] examined the legitimization of European immigration control through the analysis of discourse strategies. In summary, scholars abroad have focused on investigating discourse themes and strategies.

In China, DHA provides a robust theoretical framework for the analysis of political discourse. Chinese scholars predominantly focus on its application in media reports, including newspapers and television, as well as in the political speeches of national leaders. Huang & Yang [17] analyzed reports on China's image using the web corpus WebCorp, revealing that online media, as a medium for shaping national image, possesses distinct advantages over traditional media. Li, J. [18] examined the discourse in the speech delivered by the Prime Minister of Norway at the United Nations General Assembly, concluding that the discourse constructed an image of Norway as a developed country that places a strong emphasis on human rights and pursues a sustainable development path. Dong, D. [19] conducted research on the coverage of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in mainstream Italian media, finding that media reports on the economic aspects of the initiative were generally positive, while concerns in the political arena occasionally surfaced.

Drawing on research from both overseas and China, this study applies DHA to the discourse on climate topics within the media, merging media discourse with climate discourse. It seeks to explore the image of China constructed by mainstream US media, thereby, to some extent, transcending the limitations of prior DHA research and national image studies that have predominantly focused on political discourse.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The knowledge in discourse has the characteristic of dynamic changes, manifesting as the social and historical environment constrains knowledge formation and changes with the changes in the social and political environment [20]. Therefore, this study uses the discourse-historical analysis approach to study climate reports related to China by mainstream American media, examining the media's image construction of China in a historical context.

Discourse-historical approach is one of the branches of critical discourse analysis. In the 1970s, Fowler [21] and several other linguists first proposed the method of discourse analysis, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis emphasizes the relationship between ideology and power. By the 1990s, critical discourse analysis had formed three leading schools: Fairclough's [22] dialectical relational approach, Van Dijk's [23] social cognitive approach, and Ruth Wodark's discourse historical approach.

CDA focuses on the interactive relationship between discourse and society, aiming to reveal the underlying ideological issues through discourse. Wodark constructed a conceptual framework of discourse from a cognitive perspective, studying the dialectical relationship between discourse, social structure, and social practice. He viewed discourse as a dynamic context-dependent semiotic practice within a specific social action category. He believed context is crucial in discourse interpretation, especially contextual factors, including history [24]<sup>90</sup>. The historical dimension of discourse action needs to be examined from two aspects: firstly, attempting to integrate as much information as possible about the historical background and origins of discourse events; Secondly, tracking the diachronic changes of discourse and examining its developmental trajectory [24]<sup>7-8</sup>,

Wodark proposed three steps and five discourse strategies for DHA analysis[25]. The steps include:

- (1) Determine the specific content and theme of a particular discourse;
- (2) Study the strategies used in the discourse;
- (3) Check the implementation form of the discourse, mainly from various levels such as discourse, sentence, and vocabulary.

Discourse strategies include nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, intensification or mitigation. Nomination refers to the construction and presentation of social subjects. Predication refers to using modifiers with positive or negative meanings in the predicate to evaluate social subjects. Argumentation strategy refers to the use of beneficial/advantageous, useless/unprofitable, defined, dangerous or threatening, humiliating, fair, responsible, burdensome, financial, factual, numerical, legal and power, history, culture, abuse, and other argumentative topics to argue for positive and negative descriptions. Perspectivization strategy refers to reporting, describing, and stating an event or speech, in which the speaker integrates their viewpoints into their report, description, statement, or reporting by selecting different perspectives, mainly manifested in quotations. Intensification or mitigation strategy can adjust (strengthen or weaken) the perlocution of discourse, thereby confirming or changing the level of the speaker's understanding of the facts [26].

This study mainly examined the language characteristics of climate reporting in mainstream American media related to China from three perspectives: prediction strategy, argumentation strategy, and intensification strategy.

### IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 4.1 Research questions

This study takes DHA as the theoretical framework and utilizes corpus analysis tools to explore the following three issues specifically:

- (1) What are mainstream US media reporting themes in climate reporting related to China?
- (2) What language strategy has the report adopted, and what image of China has it portrayed?
- (3) Has China's image changed at different stages, and if so, what are the reasons?

#### 4.2 Data Collection

The present study focuses on the research object of "mainstream media climate reporting on China in the United States," using the authoritative, comprehensive academic database Dow Jones News Database to collect language materials. The news database covers newspapers, journals, magazines, and news content such as television

and radio from multiple countries worldwide. The sample selection period is from January 1, 2015, to June 30, 2023, using “Chinese+climate” and “China+climate” as search keywords. The information sources were “New York Times All Sources,” “The Washington Post All Sources,” and “The Wall Street Journals All Sources,” and a full-text search was conducted for relevant news reports. The reasons for selecting those three newspapers as representative media of mainstream media in the United States are as follows:

The New York Times is one of the comprehensive daily newspapers distributed by the United States to the world, with considerable influence. It is the primary representative of serious and high-end newspapers in the United States and has long had good credibility and authority. The Washington Post is the largest and oldest newspaper in Washington, USA, known for reporting on political dynamics. In 2016, The Washington Post entered the top ten in circulation in the United States and also one of the most influential newspapers in the country. The Wall Street Journal was founded in 1889 and is the largest paid-circulation newspaper in the United States, covering daily international economic activities. Those three media outlets are all publications with significant brand influence, comprehensive dissemination coverage, and a large readership. Specifically, the reporting focus of each newspaper is also different, so they were selected as representatives of mainstream media in the United States. After manual screening and deduplication of the collected news texts, 95 valid news articles were retained, totaling 80814 words.

Afterward, the retained data will be divided into three stages based on time: 2015-2017, 2018-2019, 2020-2023. The main basis is as follows: On November 12, 2014, China and the United States jointly issued a joint statement to address climate change. In 2015, China and the United States worked together to promote the Paris Agreement, and since then, China has played an active role in global climate governance. China-US climate cooperation has flourished. Until 2018, the Trump administration imposed tariffs on some Chinese goods, followed by a trade conflict between China and the United States. That led to a sharp deterioration of Sino-US relations and interrupted cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, 2015-

2017 was a period of relative relaxation in Sino-U.S. relations, while 2018-2019 saw a deterioration in Sino-U.S. relations. 2020-2023 is a more special period, as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and affected the world. During this period, countries devoted to responding to public health crises. During those three periods, inter-country relations changes may impact China's image portrayed by foreign media. Therefore, according to the particular period, the news reports from 2015 to 2017 were constructed as corpus 1, 2018-2019 as corpus 2 and 2020-2023 as corpus 3.

#### 4.3 Research Steps

The discourse-historical analysis approach places discourse in a specific historical and cultural context to expose and criticize issues such as power, discrimination, and social injustice hidden in discourse to improve the current discourse use and eliminate social injustice.

This paper used corpus linguistics to objectively and systematically analyze the corpus, providing a quantitative analysis foundation for discourse research. The author utilized qualitative methodologies for the analysis of recurring language instances, including three steps as follows:

First step: using the corpus tool AntConc3.4.3 to extract high-frequency theme words from the target corpus to determine the reporting theme.

Second step: combining concordance to analyze the language strategies adopted by the media, focusing on predication, argumentation, and intensification strategies. Through the analysis of language strategies, it can be observed how the mainstream media in the United States shaped the image of China and its changes.

Third step: discussing the reasons for the changes in the image of China portrayed by mainstream American media in the context of social history.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Theme Analysis

The keyword list in AntConc can help determine the research topic. The author uploaded the text to corpus software and selected the BNC as the reference corpus to extract high-frequency topic words. In this study, the first 50 topic words were retained, and after removing

functional words such as articles and prepositions, the final 44 high-frequency topic words are as follows:

*Table 1. High-frequency keyword in climate coverage*

Ra nk	Freque ncy	Word	Ra nk	Freque ncy	Word
1	1374	China	23	157	plants
2	887	climate	24	178	agreement
3	533	emissio ns	25	125	percent
4	483	coal	26	100	solar
5	427	change	27	102	pollution
6	353	Chinese	28	132	gas
7	347	energy	29	86	dioxide
8	313	carbon	30	83	fossil
9	280	global	31	81	warming
10	204	Beijing	32	404	Mr.
11	179	Xi	33	152	nations
12	173	Trump	34	87	accord
13	344	United	35	168	country
14	244	power	36	120	officials
15	335	world	37	68	environm ental
16	206	Paris	38	65	consumpti on
17	151	Biden	39	85	India
18	241	countrie s	40	88	fired
19	139	Kerry	41	73	clean
20	315	States	42	61	gases
21	133	Obama	43	58	Jinping
22	132	greenho use	44	113	economic

By categorizing and analyzing Table 1, it can be seen that the keywords are mainly divided into three categories: the first category contains the country and national leader, involving words such as "China," "Beijing," "the United States," "Mr. Xi," "Obama," "Trump," and "Biden," which mainly highlight the national subject. As policymakers and leaders in climate negotiations, national leaders occupy a considerable frequency in the theme words. In the list, the term "China" has a high frequency of 1374, and mainstream media in the United States continuously emphasizes the theme of China as a country, intending to

deepen readers' impressions. Among those words, the term "India" has been repeatedly used in climate reports because India and China are the two primary carbon-emitting countries. The second category mainly focuses on carbon emissions and energy, with keywords "emission," "carbon," "greenhouse," "gas," "pollution," and "fossil." Among them, "greenhouse," "emission," and "pollution" correspond to "China" in the first category, aiming to indicate that China's greenhouse gas emissions remain high. The US media has portrayed China as a highly polluting country. The description of China's energy sources also emphasizes that China relies heavily on fossil fuels such as coal. In addition, "clean" and "solar" in the keyword list refer to clean energy. Another focus of mainstream media in the United States is the development of clean energy in China, including clean energy technology and the clean energy market. It can be seen that the US media focuses on the "economic" field. The third category is international climate negotiations that include terms such as "global," "countries," "nations," and some international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, which mainly involve inter-country relations. The Paris Agreement is frequently mentioned because its adoption is an important turning point in global climate governance, transforming the global carbon emissions control model into a "bottom-up" national contribution submission model[27].

Through the analysis of the topic words, mainstream media in the United States mainly focus on China's carbon emissions, energy development, and inter-country relations in climate reporting related to China. Moreover, when it comes to China, the media constantly focuses on its carbon emissions, shaping China as a highly polluting country.

## 5.2 Discourse Strategy Analysis

Based on the characteristics of the text and using the DHA theory as the analytical framework, this article explored how discourse strategies manipulate discourse practices in mainstream American media climate reports related to China. The following section mainly focuses on three strategies: prediction, argumentation, and intensification. The discourse themes of American media reports on China's climate are mainly China, China's climate, and Chinese officials. Nominating other relevant social actors, objects, processes, or actions does not involve

new discourse construction. Therefore, this study does not explore the nomination strategy.

### 5.2.1 Prediction Strategy

The prediction strategy is a language approach that assigns characteristics and attributes to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and processes. The language implementation forms include positive or negative evaluative language. This study focuses on climate reporting related to China. Therefore, the author used an advanced search to select the reporting subjects with "China" and "Chinese climate" as search terms and searched the corpus of three stages separately. Adjectives and predicates around the search terms in Concordance were examined to determine the use of prediction strategy in the discourse.

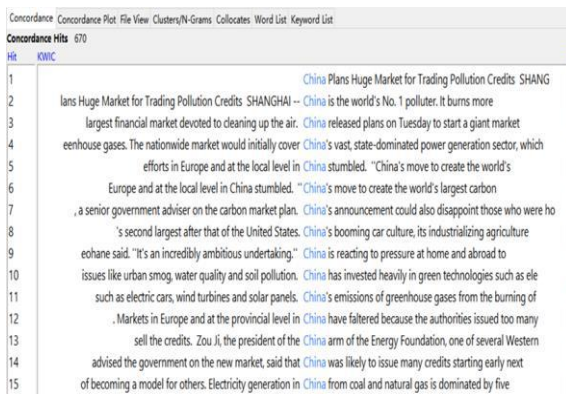


Fig 1. Screen shot of search lines for "China" and "Chinese climate" from 2015 to 2017

In the 2015-2017 period, after conducting contextual analysis on the left and right sides of the search term, it was found that the expressions of negative meaning before and after the search term were mainly expressed in noun phrases, including words such as "air pollution," "carbon emission," "severity," and "impact." Additionally, some predicates also expressed negative meanings, such as "produce," "promote," and "step up," with a total frequency of 34 for negative meanings. In relevant texts, U.S. media mainly criticized China's high carbon emissions as exacerbating climate pressure. China's efforts to reduce carbon emissions may become futile as new energy deployment faces domestic pressures. Currently, China's energy structure is dominated by fossil fuels, which hinders climate action progress. The U.S. media has created a negative image of China. China's pollution

accumulation is challenging to return, and China remains and continues to be a significant rejection of global climate governance. For example:

**Example (1):** Coal use in China also produces more emissions than all the oil, coal, and gas consumed in the United States. (November 30, 2016. *The New York Times*)

**Example (2):** The Chinese are stepping up, taking a greater leadership role. They get to forge closer ties with lesser-developed countries to who they very happy are going to export lots of their equipment. (March 30, 2017. *The Washington Post*)

Example (1) indicates that China is highly dependent on coal, emitting a large amount of carbon dioxide, and its energy structure needs to be more balanced, far inferior to the United States. Example (2) indicates that China is increasing cooperation with less developed countries, actively investing abroad, and actively striving for the role of a global leader. The terms "foreign investment," "cooperation," and "step up" originally had positive meanings. However, for a long time, the United States has been the rule-maker and plays a leading role in global governance. China's pursuit of leadership threatens the United States, so both "step up" and "leadership" have negative meanings here.

However, there are also a considerable number of positive expressions in the concordance rows, with a total of 39 frequencies, including predicates such as "promote," "contribute," "develop," "achieve," "innovate," "collaborate," and "support," as well as noun phrases such as "economic growth," "positive impact," and "sustainable development. For example:

**Example (3):** China is already the largest renewable energy investor in the world, contributing about \$102 billion, or 36% of total global investment, to these projects in 2015. (November 14, 2016. *The Wall Street Journal*)

Example (3) indicated that China actively engaged in outward investment in renewable energy and promoted international cooperation. In those positive expressions, mainstream media in the United States also emphasized the importance and significance of climate cooperation between China and the United States. The potential for climate cooperation between China and the United States is enormous, especially as China has strong innovation capabilities in new energy technologies and has become the

world's largest investor in renewable energy. China-US climate cooperation is essential to global climate governance, promoting sustainable development and global cooperation. Regarding Sino-US cooperation, mainstream media in the United States has created a positive image of China with intense creativity and enormous potential.

By conducting the same processing on the text from 2018 to 2019, examining the Concordance, and determining the implications of each predication strategy in specific contexts, the author found that 12 cases actively constructed China's image, including words such as "retain," "genius," "coordinate," "fit," "effective," and "pledge." In those expressions, the U.S. media recognized China's efforts in reducing carbon emissions and addressing climate change. China is committed to making progress to some extent. There are 41 cases of negative construction of China's image, such expressions as "want," "largest," "emitter," "relationship," "aggressive," and "leadership." The U.S. media still emphasized China's dependence on coal and China's competition for the role of global leader in international governance. During that period, the frequency of mainstream media in the United States shaping China's negative image was much higher than that of shaping a positive image.

From 2020 to 2023, 19 expressions actively constructed the image of China, including "cooperate," "enhance," and "commit." Among the positive expressions during that period, the main focus was on predicates. The language representations that negatively express China's national image are often found in adjectives and predicates, including words such as "resistor," "ramp up," "continue," "relative," "execute," and "unwilling," with up to 90 negative expressions. The negative statements made by the media at this time mainly emphasized that China is the world's largest emitter and second-largest economy. However, it regards itself as a developing country, and its responsibility for emission reduction does not match its emissions and the economy. Despite China's progress in emission reduction and renewable energy, it has consistently refused to assume greater responsibility for emission reduction. It is worth noting that during this period, American media mentioned the issue of "human rights abuses" in China in their reports. For example:

**Example (4):** *The two countries continue to be in conflict over China's trade practices and human rights conflicts in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, which have overshadowed many other aspects of the bilateral relationship. (October 8, 2021. The New York Times)*

China has been accused of human rights violations in the Xinjiang region, including forced labor and suppression of ethnic minorities. Disputes over human rights have hindered climate cooperation between China and the United States. During that period, mainstream media in the United States continued to shape China as a highly polluting nation and also shaped China's irresponsible and human rights abuses.

In summary, by examining the changes in narrative strategies during the three periods, the construction of China's image by mainstream media in the United States has shifted from a balance of praise and criticism at the beginning to an increasing proportion of negative images. It has risen from actual pollution issues to ideological levels, such as human rights.

### 5.2.2 Argumentation Strategy

The argumentation strategy is mainly manifested in the use of various arguments in the text, with mainstream American media using a large number of numbers in the text to support their views.

The word "percent" ranks 25th in the topic word list (seen Table 1.), indicating that numerical argumentation accounts for a considerable proportion in the text, such as

**Example (5):** *It is unclear which China - the world's largest annual emitter and the source of 13 percent of historical releases - will impress the loss and damage deal. (December 15, 2000. The Washington Post)*

**Example (6):** *China moved in recent months to rein in coal. Coal production dropped 3 percent last year - a result of that effort, but also a sign of slowing economic growth. (November 30, 2016. The New York Times)*

Example (5) showed that China accounted for 13% of historical emissions. In international climate negotiations, developing countries often emphasize the issue of "loss and damage" because they believe climate change is a severe injustice to them, and those countries often lack the resources and capacity to address the impacts of climate change. Therefore, developing countries advocate that wealthy countries should bear the responsibility of "loss



and damage,” including funding, technology, and support to help affected countries and communities cope with the irreversible impacts of climate change. In that example, the U.S. media indicated through the number “13%” that China accounted for a significant proportion of historical emissions and should bear the responsibility of loss and damage. In example (6), China's coal production has decreased, which may seem to acknowledge China's efforts to reduce carbon emissions. However, that comes at the cost of economic growth for a highly coal-dependent country like China, indicating that the U.S. media is not optimistic that China can break from coal dependence.

In addition to the number argument, the responsibility argument and the threat argument were also used in reporting, such as:

**Example (7):** *That moment was groundbreaking because China, as a developing country site its skyrocketing emissions, was executed under the rules of the U.N. climate body from taking mandatory action to cut emissions. (November 12, 2021. The New York Times)*

Both examples (6) and (7) demonstrated that China had high emissions and should take on more responsibility in climate governance. That indirectly reflected that the American media had shaped China's irresponsible image through the topic of responsibility.

According to statistics, there were 89 cases of argumentation strategy in the text from 2015 to 2017, including 37 positive and 52 negative descriptions. As for the argumentation strategy for the 2018-2019 stage, there were 17 positive and 40 negative descriptions; There are 19 positive and 45 negative descriptions for the 2020-2023 stage. There is a gradual upward trend from the number of negative descriptions of the three periods. U.S. media still criticized China's high emissions and insufficient climate responsibility. At the same time, some of the negative descriptions involved statements about “global leaders.” The media described China as a global leader, implying China's struggle for international leadership. The United States has always held a dominant position in global governance. The media emphasized China's active development of inter-country relations and active performance on the international stage. However, they accused China of being ambitious and wanting to replace the United States in international status.

From 2015 to 2023, the mainstream media in the United States experienced a shift in their portrayal of China's image from neutrality to negativity, although at each stage, the media has to some extent acknowledged China's climate actions.

### 5.2.3 Intensification Strategy

Intensification or mitigation strategy refers to enhancing or weakening the illocutionary power of discourse. Intensification and mitigation are usually achieved by adding or subtracting verbs, indirect speech acts, modal verbs, subjunctive mood, vague expression, speaking, feeling, and thinking. The following will focus on analyzing the effectiveness of the intensification strategy through analyzing modal verbs.

The mainstream U.S. media has repeatedly used modal verbs such as “can, will, should, still” in climate reports related to China, such as:

**Example (8):** *Now is not the time to call into question committees made on global environmental protection or the role multilateral platforms played in providing a foundation for global, science-based collaboration. China has it fully within its power to make this achievement a reality. Success would be long to all nations, despite our differences. (October 27, 2020. International New York Times)*

**Example (9):** *China is still building hundreds of coal-fueled plants despite global pressure to reduce emissions. (May 26, 2015. The New York Times)*

In example (8), regarding establishing a protected area in Antarctica, U.S. media stated that China is fully capable of promoting that international cooperation, and success would belong to all countries. It indicated that U.S. media has a positive attitude towards the effectiveness of China's international cooperation in the field of climate, emphasizing that China not only actively participates in international cooperation but also significantly contributes to global climate governance.

### 5.2.4 Analysis in Social and Historical Context

The study found through subject analysis that mainstream US media coverage of China's climate mainly revolved around three levels: carbon emissions, clean energy, and national relations. Then, by examining the implementation of discourse strategies in the text, it was found that the image of China shaped by American media

has transitioned from a mixed positive and negative attitude to a negative one. At each stage, the US media acknowledges to some extent the effectiveness of China's emission reduction measures and its strong potential in renewable energy. However, the media always believes China refuses to take on more emission reduction responsibilities and threatens the US global leadership position.

Against freedom of speech, mainstream media in the United States claim neutrality and objectivity. Authority is the source of commercial value for the media. In pursuit of commercial value, the media still heavily relies on official information. So, the shift in the stance of the US media is not accidental but closely related to national climate policies. Firstly, in the 2015-2017 phase, which was in the early period of the Obama administration, Obama vigorously developed new and renewable energy to stimulate economic recovery, enhance energy security, and restore the leadership image of the United States in the international response to climate change. To such an end, he took a series of active actions to address climate change, including but not limited to regulating coal-fired power plants and actively promoting international climate cooperation. During that period, the climate cooperation relationship between China and the United States was good. Therefore, although American media criticized China's high carbon emissions during that period, they were largely optimistic about Sino-US cooperation. In 2017, the Trump administration came to power, and in June of the same year, Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. That move attracted widespread criticism from the international community, which, to some extent, weakened the criticism of China by the US media.

Trump is a climate skeptic who abolished the previous government's "Clean Power Plan" after taking office, considered a landmark event in the comprehensive regression of US climate policy [28].

In addition, the Trump administration has adopted a strict policy towards China, especially the trade frictions between China and the United States, which have significantly deteriorated the relationship between China and the United States. As a result, climate cooperation between China and the United States has also stagnated.

Therefore, during the 2018-2019 period, mainstream media in the United States focused on the economic trends and trade frictions between China and the United States, and their attention to climate has decreased. However, during this period, there was an apparent ideological conflict between China and the United States, so mainstream US media coverage of climate change in China was inevitably affected by the trend of national relations. Adverse reports on China increased, believing that China actively promoted international cooperation by taking advantage of the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement to strive for global governance leadership.

The period from 2020 to 2023 is in a global pandemic. Moreover, the Trump administration was still in power in the early stages. The US policy towards China stayed the same. After the Biden took office in 2021, it reversed the previous government's negative attitude towards climate change and adopted a more radical climate policy. Biden stated that climate change is humanity's number one issue and a threat to its survival [29].

The Biden administration has proposed more ambitious emission reduction targets and re-joined the Paris Agreement to restart climate cooperation between countries, thus putting climate cooperation between China and the United States back on track.

Compared with the Trump administration, Biden's climate policy is more radical. Despite the overall competitive situation between China and the United States during the Trump administration, Trump's negative climate attitudes have, to some extent, alleviated the climate pressure faced by China. The Biden administration's climate policy may lead to more tremendous climate pressure on China internationally, and the United States will pressure China to set more aggressive emission reduction targets. Therefore, whether due to the tense situation between China and the United States in the early stage or the aggressive climate policies of the Biden administration in the later period, the attitude of mainstream US media on climate reporting in China will not become optimistic during the 2020-2023 period, and the image of China portrayed by the media will become more negative, exerting international public opinion pressure on China.

## VI. Conclusion

This article adopted a DHA perspective and constructed specialized corpora. Regarding the three questions posed in this paper, the research reveals the following findings:

- (1) The focus of American media such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal emphasized China's carbon emissions, clean energy development, and international relations within the context of climate governance.
- (2) Three primary strategies were employed, namely the "predication strategy", "argumentation strategy" and "intensification strategy."
- (3) From 2015 to 2023, the media stance on climate reporting related to China shifted from neutrality to negativity. China's image also shifted from a combination of positive and negative aspects to a negative image. This transformation is mainly influenced by the media's pursuit of authority and national climate policies. The media is not a representative of objectivity and authority. The government has used it as a forum to help set the tone, form, and even content of foreign affairs [30].

Media reports inherently have a high degree of timeliness and complexity. Therefore, the examination of media discourse needs to be placed in a specific social and historical context, observing how discourse is realized during specific periods and events. This is also the focus of using discourse history analysis methods to analyze media discourse. This article utilizes DHA to examine climate reporting, which fully demonstrates the value of DHA in studying media discourse and confirms its effectiveness in political discourse. Examining climate reporting by mainstream foreign media in a diachronic manner can fully grasp the trend of international public opinion changes and provide reference for building discourse advantages for Chinese media.

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