

An Integrated Study of Corpus-Based Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Case Study of Western Media's Coverage of One Belt and One Road Initiative

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Abstract

Taking Halliday's transitivity system and corpus linguistics as the theoretical framework, this study uses corpus research tools to conduct Critical Discourse Analysis on the news discourse of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative reported in the Western media. The study finds that most Western media reports on the Initiative adopt an objective and rational manner, believing that the Initiative demonstrates China's openness and cooperation; however, there are also instances of ideological and ecological bias and distortion in some Western media, which portray it as a means of military expansion or economic incursion by employing linguistic tactics and vocabulary choices. And there are also cases of ideological bias and distortion in some Western media that portray the Initiative as a way of military expansion or economic invasion through language strategies and word choice. At the same time, this study further interprets, analyzes and explains the discursive stance constructed in the news reports of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the internal motivation and logic of its formation. To a certain extent, this study provides a new research horizon for combining critical discourse research with modern technological tools.

Key words: Systemic functional linguistics; Corpus linguistics; Critical discourse analysis; News corpus

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1. INTRODUCTION

"One Belt, One Road" is a major initiative put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, aiming to promote economic cooperation and connectivity among countries along the route, and strengthen humanistic exchanges and common development. In the ten years since the initiative was put forward, the promotion of "One Belt, One Road" has achieved remarkable results.

News discourse, as a special form of discourse, is characterized by class, and news reports may be biased in their views, depending on the social class to which the media belong and the class attributes of the readership they serve. Media of different social classes may have different concerns and positions in reporting issues, thus presenting different class biases in news discourse. News discourse in turn has a stance, and a news stance is a clear perception of one's class and values. The Western media's irresponsible defamation of the Belt and Road initiative not only hinders the promotion of the initiative itself, but also has a negative impact on the telling of the Chinese story of the Belt and Road construction.

Studies have been conducted to dig deeper into the formation and dissemination of media discourse, however, limited attention has been given by researchers to investigating news discourse in Western media using functional linguistics and corpus research methods.

Therefore, based on the Dow Jones Factiva news corpus, this study employs Halliday's transitivity system as the theoretical framework and adopts AntConc 4.2.0 and UAM CorpusTool 6.2 as the corpus research tools, thus adopting a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodology to explore news discourses through the process of transitivity research and corpus linguistics research. By employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, this study aims to analyze the power dynamics and ideological relations underlying Western media discourse. With the help of corpus linguistics, this study examines the discursive construction of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Western media from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, aiming to analyze and study: (1) What are the perceptions and attitudes towards the Belt and Road Initiative constructed in the Western mainstream media discourse? (2) What are the themes and characteristics of the Western mainstream media's coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative? (3) Which strategies are used by the Western mainstream media to construct a discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years, with the continuous development and promotion of "One Belt, One Road", the discourse research on "One Belt, One Road" has become a hot research topic. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to reveal the dialectical relationship between language, power and ideology by analyzing surface linguistic forms (Wodak, 2001). Critical Discourse Analysis has come a long way in more than 40 years since Fowler et al. (1979) introduced the concept of Critical Linguistics in their book *Language and Control* in 1979. Although the initial research on critical discourse analysis was controversial because of its homogeneous corpus and lack of objectivity, nowadays critical discourse studies have received widespread attention and achieved fruitful research results. Caldas-Coulthard (1995), Krishnamurthy (1996) and Stubbs (1996) were the first scholars to try to apply corpus linguistic methods to the study of critical discourse analysis. After the onset of the 21st century, corpus-based critical discourse analysis research has witnessed a remarkable surge in both domestic and international academic spheres.

This study will utilize the Dow Jones' Factiva news corpus, and set the word expressions "One Belt One Road", "BRI", "China" and other lexical expressions as the search keywords, and the search time range is limited to the period between 2013-2023. The relevant reports are selected from six Western mainstream media such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the Guardian, and Reuters, including a total of 675 relevant news reports, and 71 news reports are selected after manually screening to build a small-scale news

corpus. After conducting a rigorous screening process, an initial news corpus of OBOR was established, followed by a meticulous and systematic cleaning and organization of the collected data. The research tools used in this study include AntConc 4.2.0, a corpus search software, and UAM CorpusTool 6.2, a transitivity annotation software.

3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE "BELT AND ROAD" NEWS BASED ON THE TRANSITIVITY SYSTEM

The transitivity system consists of six different processes, namely: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process. The transitivity system is a semantic system that expresses ideational function in Transitivity grammar, and its function is to divide what people see, hear and do in the real world which can be further classified into a number of processes.

UAM CorpusTool 6.2 provides functions such as extraction, retrieval, feature comparison, etc. In analyzing the transitivity system of the corpus, the embedded automated labeling system of transitivity can be used to achieve the purpose of automated labeling of the text, and the software has a high accuracy rate of the results of the labeling of transitivity processes, which can facilitate the analysis of transitivity of the corpus of the present study. The text of OBOR Corpus was imported into UAM CorpusTool 6.2, and the automated and transitivity system embedded in the system was used as a framework (Figure 1) for automatic annotation. After the results were obtained, a second manual annotation test was carried out to ensure the accuracy of the annotation results. After double-checking and labeling the transitivity processes in the OBOR news corpus, the total frequency of the transitivity was counted as 3447 (see Table 1). The frequencies of the six processes were as follows: material process appeared with a total frequency of 2251 (64.7%), relational process occurred in 528 (15.8%), verbal process occurred in 352 (10.1%), mental process was observed in 260 (7.5%), existential process was observed in 56 (1.6%).

Table 1
Frequency of six processes in the OBOR Corpus

Clause Type	N	%
Material	2251	64.7
Mental	260	7.5
Verbal	352	10.1
Relational	528	15.2
Behavioral	9	0.0
Existential	56	1.6
Total	3447	99.1%

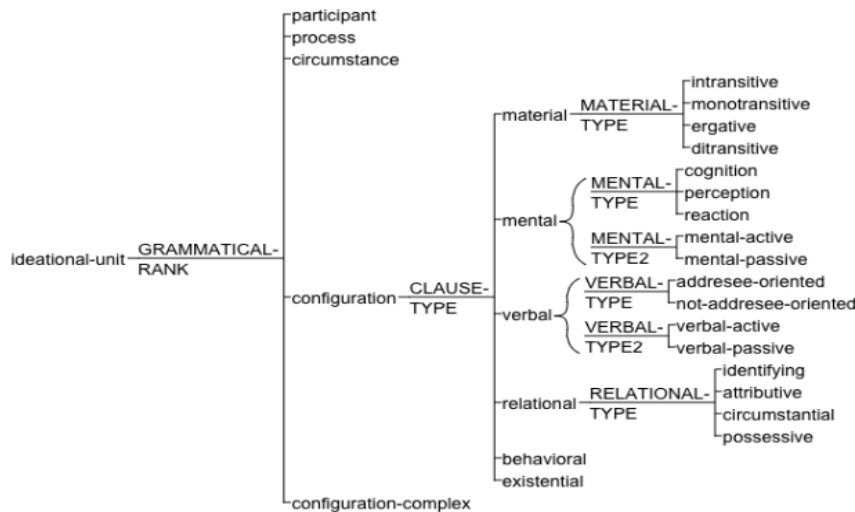


Figure 1
Annotation Framework

3.1 Analysis of Material Processes

As shown in Table 2, material processes account for much more than the other five processes in the OBOR news corpus. Material processes are involved in behavioral processes, which are processes of “doing”. Material processes involve two objects, namely the actor and the goal, along with contextual components such as time, place, and manner in which the action is expressed. Generally, the author’s ideology determines whether the actor and the goal appear in the clause. There are two forms of this process, defined as active and passive. The material process is commonly found in news media report discourse, and its frequency of occurrence in the OBOR Corpus is 2251, accounting for 64.7%. Material process is the most frequently used process type. In the process of transitivity analysis, this paper will select five clauses containing the keywords “One Belt One Road”, “China” and “BRI” for the example analysis (see Table 2).

Table 2
Examples of material process analysis

Example sentences for material process
(1) This new relationship with China was accompanied by a significant increase in assistance and investment in the country through China’s One Belt One Road program.
(2) Chinese President Xi Jinping stands ready to promote the One Belt One Road initiative together with Kyrgyzstan.
(3) In order to enhance its influence in Asia, the European Union has launched a Globally Connected Europe initiative as a project alternative to China’s One Belt One Road, “ the news agency reported citing the president’s statement.
(4) China’s BRI strategy was first introduced in 2013 by the Chinese leader Xi Jinping.
(5) China’s One Belt One Road initiative can boost economic recovery in Central Eurasian countries once the coronavirus pandemic is over, Chairman of the Board of the Valdai International Discussion Club’s Development and Support Foundation Andrei Bystritsky.

As can be seen from sentences (1) and (5), China’s Belt and Road Initiative has been described by foreign media

as “significant” and “boost economic recovery”. “This is of great significance to the recovery of China’s economy and even the world economy. Sentence (3) recognizes that after the “One Belt, One Road” initiative was put forward, China’s influence in Asia has been increasing, and it has achieved remarkable results in all aspects.

Through the statistics of the high-frequency words in the material process, it is concluded that the frequency of China and Chinese in the material process clauses is as high as 1,586 times, accounting for 70%. In the material process, the active and passive voice is used more often, and the relational process between the sender and the receiver of the action is a dynamic process, which can help to reveal who is in the active position and who is in the passive position in the framework of power, and the image between the active and passive sides, as well as what kind of clauses power is shaped through and in what way it is shaped. Obviously, when reporting on the Belt and Road Initiative, major Western media are accustomed to using a large number of material clauses with China as the sender of the action, which highlights the fact that the Belt and Road Initiative is China-centered and dominated by China. As a result, most Western mainstream media put China in a proactive position in their coverage, and reported the achievements of the Belt and Road Initiative in a positive manner.

3.2 Analysis of Relational Process

Relational process refers to the relationship between an entity (e.g., person, object, situation, event, etc.) and another entity or situation, or defines the nature characteristics of an object, the situation in which it is located, etc. (Huang, 2008), which can be divided into attribute and identifier. From UAM CorpusTool 6.2, all the relational process statements can be exported to obtain 528 relational process clauses, which are imported into AntConc 4.2.0 tool for keyword searching, resulting in the occurrence of high frequency of relational verbs (see Figure 3). Among them,

the frequency of linking verb is as high as 689 times. Linking verb collocates with adjectives and nouns to form

attributive relational process and identification relational process (Chen and Peng, 2023).

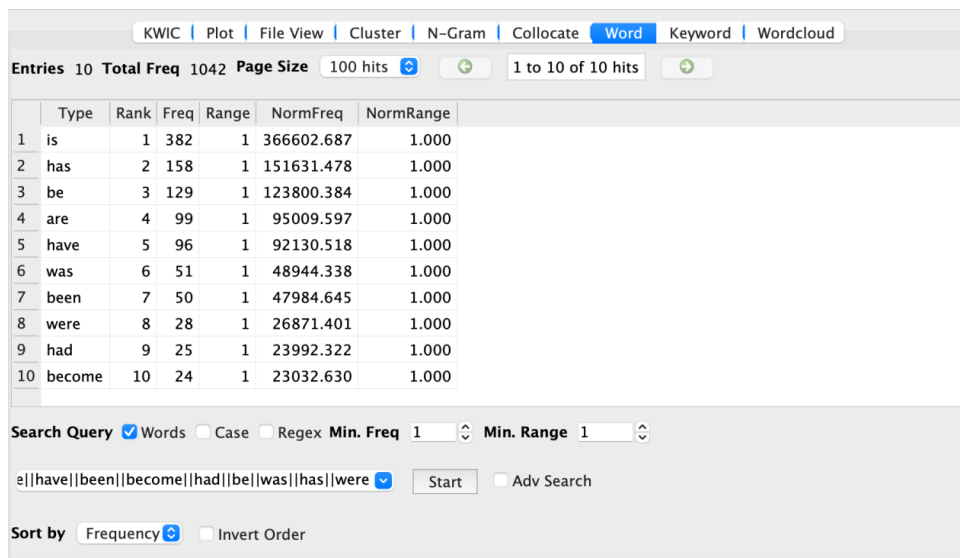


Figure 2
Frequency of relational verbs

The example sentences (6) to (13) are all relational processes, of which the example sentences (7), (8), (9), (10), (12), and (13) belong to the identification class of relational processes. An identification type relational process is one in which one entity is used to determine the specific identity of another entity. For example:

John is the leader; the leader is John.

In example sentences (7), (8), and (13), the Western media associate the identifier with the identified through negative terms, and China's Belt and Road Initiative is negatively depicted and portrayed in the Western media as "economic expansion", China's "Belt and Road" initiative has been negatively portrayed and portrayed in the Western media as "economic expansion", "competition for world economic hegemony", and "imperialist ambitions", etc. Some Western media tend to associate the Belt and Road Initiative as a means to promote economic development with China's political diplomacy, while intentionally ignoring China's political and economic development. Some Western media tend to associate the Belt and Road Initiative with China's political diplomacy as a means of promoting economic development, while intentionally ignoring its purpose of promoting economic development and the development of countries along the Belt and Road.

Example sentences (6), (9), (10), and (11) are positive descriptions of China's Belt and Road Initiative, including that the Belt and Road Initiative can promote the deeper development of economic globalization, and that the Belt and Road Initiative can promote the development of the world economy. At the same time, the Belt and Road Initiative is also an important link connecting the economic and political exchanges of the countries along the route, and has increasingly become an indispensable

part of the economic development of the countries along the route. In the above relational process clauses expressing positive attitudes, it can be seen that the Western media, by associating the identifier and the identified with positive words, reflect that the initiative focuses on *cooperation*, *construction* and *connectivity*.

Table 3
Example of relational process analysis

Example sentences for relational processes
(6) It has strived to be a node of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei world-class city cluster, "One Belt One Road Initiative," and the Beijing-Shanghai Expressway.
(7) It is an attempt to unify allies in the Western world to stand against China's expanding "economic territory" through a large-scale external economic cooperation scheme.
(8) It (BRI) is a move designed to recapture the ancient Silk Road and expand China's influence.
(9) Its leaders, Xi in particular, have become a voice for globalization.
(10) The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is, in fact, a trunk passageway connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt in the north with the 21st-Century Maritime...
(11) China has been the elephant in the room at this year's G7 summit with the whole of Saturday dedicated to discussion about the rising super-power
(12) The BRI is an internationally planned infrastructure development project for China and the emerging economies that trade with or border China.
(13) Nearly half the respondents felt that within the next 10 years, the Chinese communist regime would become the most threatening country.

3.3 Analysis of Verbal Process

The verbal process in the Transitivity system refers to the process of using language to convey information, express ideas and achieve communicative purposes. In the OBOR news corpus, 352 verbal process clauses were involved, in which the verbal verb say occurs (294 times), announce

(8 times), claim (5 times) declare (4 times), and others (41 times).

Direct speech maintains the independence of the paraphrased discourse and minimizes the intervention of the reporter in the discourse. Indirect speech can filter and process the interview content, remove some other information, and present the news reporter’s point of view ideas to the readers.

Sentences (16) and (17) are direct speech, showing that the Belt and Road Initiative can provide development opportunities for other countries and promote the development of the world economy. Example sentence (14) is an indirect quotation, this clause is guided by “announced”, followed by its projected clauses. The word “announced” is used very formally in this clause, and the subject of the action is President Xi Jinping, the leader of China, who first put forward the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative. This also shows that China has been actively seeking to develop with the rest of the world, reflecting China’s positive image of “promoting the development of the world’s economic cooperation”. The use of “accessive interference” in example sentence (18) presupposes a preconceived reading position for the readers. In this clause, Thailand’s act of building its own railroad is described by the Western media as “a manifestation of China’s interference in the development of its neighboring countries through the use of its own political and cultural influence”. The use of “interference” in the verbal process clause directly quotes diplomats to endorse the negative portrayal of China’s national image, and at the same time, it also reveals the Western media’s ideological bias against China: they implicitly incorporate their ideology into their news discourse to create an unfavorable international public opinion against China, which then influences the evaluation and decision making of countries all over the world.

Table 5
Distribution of modality verbs

	Low		Median		High			
	Occurrence	Proportion	Occurrence	Proportion	Occurrence	Proportion		
can	54	11.7%	should	34	7.3%	must	18	3.9%
may	30	6.5%	will	197	42.5%	ought	2	0.4%
could	54	11.7%	would	70	15.1%			
might	9	1.9%						
dare	0	0						
Total	97	31.8%	301	65%	20	4.3%		

Table 6
Collocation of *China will...*

	Cluster	Rank	Freq.	Range
1	China will seek	1	3	1
2	China will build	2	2	1
3	China will beef up	3	1	1
4	China will construct	3	1	1
5	China will remain	3	1	1

Table 4
Examples of verbal process analysis

Example sentences for verbal processes
(14) It was in Central Asia when China, in the personification of Xi Jinping, announced the launch of the One Belt, One Road Initiative.
(15) Faisal Afridi declared that China will construct a new world economy that would serve generations.
(16) We have every opportunity to become a leading country in the 21st century that will develop science-intensive technologies. This will make it possible to dramatically increase the GDP”, he stated.
(17) “Serious opportunities are opening up for cooperation between all our states in the context of aligning integration processes underway in the Eurasian Economic Union with the major infrastructure and trade project One Belt One Road, which is being implemented by China,” Putin said.
(18) Thailand plans to finance the construction of the railway on its own--a move that is believed to be aimed at avoiding China’s excessive interference. “Southeast Asian countries are trying to expand profits while restraining China’s influence.” diplomatic sources said.

4. A COMBINATION OF CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS AND CDA

In this study, AntConc 4.2.0 will be used to analyze the modality, lexical classifications, and concordance in the OBOR Corpus, and CLAWS7 lexical annotation will be used to provide auxiliary analysis.

4.1 Modality Analysis

Modality analysis is also an important part of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The modality consists of the subject and the qualifying operative (tense, mood). Systemic Functional Grammar recognizes that both modal verbs and modals have high, medium, and low modal values: high (e.g., must, ought to), medium (e.g., should, will), and low (e.g., can, may).

CLAWS (Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) is a set of programs that automatically assigns an appropriate grammatical tag to each word in a continuous text, and thus can lexically assign a lexical code to each word in the text. The OBOR Corpus was imported into CLAWS7 for lexical tagging, and then the tagged corpus was opened in AntConc 4.2.0. Check the lexical assignment of modal verbs against the UCREAL

CLAWS7 lexical assignment table as VM, VMK, and subsequently utilize the KWIC search function of AntConc4.2.0 to obtain the corpus frequency of all modal verbs in the corpus as 463 when inputting VM, VMK. Following the corpus search, Table 5 is obtained.

According to the distribution of modality verbs in Table 5, it can be seen that the most frequently used modal verbs in the news reports on China's "One Belt, One Road" in the Western media are medium-value modal verbs, accounting for 65% of the total. Among them, the word "will" appears 197 times, accounting for 42.5%. After the keyword search, it is easy to conclude that the subject of the word "will" is often collocated with China. Using the Cluster detection function of AntConc 4.2.0, the collocations of this group of words in the OBOR news corpus can be obtained by inputting the keyword "China will", as shown in Table 6 (sorted by word frequency). After that, using the KWIC (Key-Word-In-Context) and Plot functions in AntConc 4.2.0, we can locate the keywords, retrieve the distribution of the words and the specific context, which can visually display the position and distribution of the retrieved words in the whole text, and thus facilitate the further analysis of the use of the words in the context.

Table 7
Examples of modal verb analysis

Example sentences for modal verbs
(19) China says it will seek a peaceful solution to them through dialogue and negotiations...
(20) China will build string of military bases around world, says Pentagon.
(21) China will beef up on infrastructure, which accounted for almost 45% of the total demand growth in 2016, to ensure a stable economy.
(22) China will construct a new world economy that would serve generations.
(23) Xi has often said China "will remain on a path of peaceful development."

The frequent use of *will*, *would* as a modality verb is intended to show that China will take a positive attitude to develop its economy and promote the Belt and Road Initiative. It can express China's political and economic stance and its position on international affairs, and it can also show that China is seeking cooperation and contact with other countries in the world.

The proportion of low-value modality verbs (*can* and *could*) is 23.4%. A keyword search in the corpus reveals that the word *can*, and *could* are often collocated with verbs such as *assist*, *apply*, *bring*, *enhance*, *bring*, and so on. The use of low-value modality verbs in Western media mainly serves to moderate the tone and indicate a neutral attitude.

Example (5) *China's One Belt One Road initiative can boost economic recovery in Central Eurasian countries.*

For example, the use of *can* in the clause indicates a neutral attitude towards China's One Belt One Road initiative, which is not absolutely praised or interpreted in a malicious way.

Example sentences (19), (21), (22) and (23) are examples of positive news coverage of China's Belt and Road Initiative by Western media. The vocabulary collocation "seek...peaceful solution to..." shows that China, as a responsible big country, has taken a series of positive and effective measures to deal with disputes with neighboring countries. The most important of these is to ensure that disputes do not affect regional security and that they are resolved through diplomatic negotiations. Sentence (21) illustrates China's strategy of focusing on infrastructure development and strengthening global economic ties in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. Sentences (22) and (23) show that China's Belt and Road Initiative is an extension of peaceful development, aiming to promote the economic development and prosperity of all countries and realize common prosperity.

Sentence (20) is a malicious interpretation of China's "Belt and Road" initiative by the Western media, which believes that China's "Belt and Road" initiative to build infrastructure in foreign countries is to build China's overseas military bases for the purpose of military expansion. This fully reflects the consistent political bias and misguided orientation of some Western media towards China.

4.2 Concordance Analysis

Liang (2021) pointed out that concordance analysis is one of the most commonly used methods in corpus research, and its outstanding advantage is that it can use computer technology to take a node as the center, and arrange the left and right context words within a certain span from the node in order according to the user's needs, which is very convenient for linguistic researchers to observe a number of instances of node words' usage in a corpus, and then depict and generalize the words' typical It is very convenient for language researchers to observe several usage examples of node words in the corpus, and then depict and summarize the typical collocations, class connections, semantic tendencies and semantic rhymes of the words.

The news coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative in Western media inevitably centers around the word "China". In this study, KWIC (Key Words In Context), a concordance tool in the corpus search software AntConc 4.2.0, was utilized to extract news reports related to the word "China" from the OBOR corpus, using the word "China" as the keyword and concordance of news reports from the OBOR corpus. The search results are shown in the following table.

Table 8
Results of KEYWORD *China* in the OBOR corpus

Concordance	Keyword	Concordance
Washington is hostile to	China's	One Belt One Road project, and Beijing feels concerned over Washington's moves to create an anti-China alliance...
Though the plan released by	China's	economic planning agency and the commerce and foreign affairs ministries, didn't commit to specific projects, it outlined some priorities.
Analysts believe Wang's statements further explain Chinese President Xi Jinping's view on	China's	foreign policy as China is expected to enhance exchanges with neighboring countries and adopt a more proactive approach toward major issues.
"The new type of international relations means a shift in	China's	foreign policy from creating more favorable conditions for..."
The signing of an overall free trade agreement between Israel and	China	and establishing a free trade zone would have a far reaching impact on trade between the two countries in many fields...
Mr. Li discussed essentially on the Covid-19 and its effects around the world and what	China	has been doing to contain the spread of the pandemic.
Regional prominence	China	has already established well-armed outposts on contested atolls it built up in the South China Sea.
Alexander Lukashenko in power.	China	is building a new airport in Minsk, energy infrastructure and a commercial park known as Great Stone just outside the capital.
in his April speech that	China	would seek to cooperate with "high-quality, sustainable and reasonably priced" infrastructure projects in the BRI.
according to a US defense department report,	China	will build military bases worldwide to protect investments in its ambitious "One Belt One Road"(OBOR) global infrastructure program.
after Mr. Xi launched his grand trade plan in 2013,	China	began consolidating a maze of railroads into three primary routes, coordinated regular timetabled service and simplified customs procedures.
diplomatic accomplishments in 2014, Wang said	China	building a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation and has taken a new path of external relations characterized by partnerships rather than alliances.
To back up this offer,	China	is investing huge sums in its "One Belt, One Road" plan and in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.
The narrative behind this is that	China	ought to gain back control of the waters surrounding it as a symbolic end to its "Century of Humiliation" ...
Ever since President Xi Jinping gave speeches on regional development in 2013,	China	has heralded plans to lay networks of infrastructure to better connect its economy with the rest of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

From the concordance results shown in Table 8, it can be seen that Western media mainly focus on the four core semantic clusters of **responsibility**, **construction**, **cooperation** and **threat**, revealing the ideological stance behind Western news discourse.

From the perspective of *responsibility*, China has demonstrated its image as a responsible great power in the construction of the Belt and Road. China has assumed the important responsibility of promoting regional cooperation and economic development, and has helped countries along the Belt and Road to improve their infrastructure and economic development through investment and cooperation.

From the perspective of *construction*, China has shown a proactive attitude in the construction of the Belt and Road. China has put forward a series of initiatives and cooperation frameworks to promote the development of countries along the Belt and Road through investment and infrastructure construction.

From the perspective of *cooperation*, China emphasizes the concept of win-win cooperation in the

construction of the Belt and Road. In the Western media's discursive representations, such as "establishing trade zone", "focusing on building a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation" and "building the Belt and Road", China has emphasized the concept of win-win cooperation in the construction of the Belt and Road.

From the perspective of *threat*, the construction of the "Belt and Road" has also been questioned and worried by some outsiders. Some Western media believe that China may have geopolitical considerations when promoting the Belt and Road, describing China's foreign infrastructure as "building military bases worldwide", and worrying that China's expanding influence may have an impact on the interests of Western countries.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper finds that the news coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Western media is characterized by the coexistence of objective rationality and ideological

bias. From the perspective of transitivity analysis, Western media is inclined to use material process, relational process and verbal process to recognize and characterize the impacts and subjective feelings about the Belt and Road Initiative, and attempts to construct the news position closely connected with “Western-style” ideological bias. At the same time, some Western media use negative words in their choice of micro-language vocabulary to construct negative news attitudes and reading positions.

From the perspective of corpus linguistic analysis, it is found that Western media mainly focus on four core semantic meanings: “responsibility”, “construction”, “cooperation”, and “threat”. Most Western media are likely to pay enough attention to such four semantic clusters to shape their news viewpoints and stances, and tend to construct “objective” and “positive” discourse ideologies and positions in the process of discourse dissemination. Due to the limited size of the corpus selected for this study, it cannot fully reflect and analyze the coverage of “One Belt and One Road” from the perspective of Western media. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the corpus and strengthen the in-depth research in order to improve the persuasiveness of the study.

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