A study on the construction of China's national image in international poverty alleviation reporting: discourse analysis based on Chinese and foreign mainstream media

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Abstract. This study compares and analyses Chinese mainstream media and European and American mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation events through the lens of critical discourse analysis theory and adopts a corpus-based research method. With the help of the LexisNexis database, this study constructs a special corpus, collects and analyses a large number of news reports, and reveals the political stance and the construction of China's national image in different media reports. Chinese mainstream media constructed a win-win, open and sharing national image that focuses on people's livelihood and human rights; European and American mainstream media affirmed that China is a contributor to global development, but also partially distorted the image of a China that attempts to dominate and is not conducive to world economic peace.

Keywords: national image, critical discourse analysis, corpus, news discourse, external poverty alleviation

1. Introduction

The contemporary world is undergoing profound and complex changes, the competition between countries is becoming increasingly fierce, and the national image has become an important part of the soft power of a country [1]. Under the background of globalization, a country's national image has become an important support for its participation in international affairs and access to international discourse power. **Based on the national physical image, mass media, shapes the audience's perception of the nation**[2]**.** National image not only affects the status and influence of a country in the international arena, but also directly relates to the country's economic development, cultural communication and other aspects.

In recent years, China has actively promoted the Belt and Road Initiative, helped other countries reduce poverty, played an increasingly important role in global affairs, and made positive contributions to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. But at the same time, Western countries have also raised many questions and criticisms on China's national image. Such doubts and negative evaluations stem from Western countries' concerns and wariness over China's rise, as well as differences in ideology and values. In addition, countries along the "Belt and Road" have different national conditions and people's feelings, and complicated religious beliefs [3]. How to build a positive and friendly national image of China and highlight its concept of peaceful development and win-win cooperation has become the focus of academic and practical circles.

This paper aims to use "Poverty Alleviation" and "China" as search terms [4], collect China's foreign poverty alleviation reports from mainstream news media in China, Europe and the United States from 2019-2024 through LexisNexis, a large-scale database, and build a self-compiled corpus. This paper studies China's foreign poverty alleviation discourse from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. In terms of research methods, this paper intends to analyze the texts of foreign poverty alleviation reports by the media of both sides through corpus means such as high-frequency words and index lines, and reveal the political positions and the construction of China's national image in different media reports from the aspects of theme focus, vocabulary selection and emotional attitude [5].

2. Literature review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an important discourse analysis theory that originated in the 1970s, whose basic linguistic view is that language practice is social [4]: discourse is not only a manifestation of social behavior but also participates in the

construction of the whole society [6]. It is the study not only of what language is, but of why it is as it is; Interested not only in the meaning of words but also in how words produce that meaning [7]. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to analyze the relationship between language, power, and ideology, and to reveal how discourse originates from and serves social structures and power relations [8].

However, CDA has also faced some criticisms, especially the subjectivity of its critical analyses. Fowler argues that CDA may be biased in text selection and lacks objectivity and systematicity in interpretation[9]. To address these challenges, some linguists have begun to incorporate corpus linguistic approaches into CDA, resulting in corpus-based critical discourse analysis. By combining quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative critical discourse analysis, this approach aims to provide a more scientific and empirical approach to research.

Stubb argues that the inclusion of corpus analysis in CDA is a positive attempt because the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses is able to comprehensively reproduce the whole picture of discourse at both macro and micro levels. Corpus-based CDA not only breaks through the limitation of the number of texts in traditional research but also reduces the subjectivity of research, which has become a new trend in the field of discourse analysis at present. In the past 20 years, foreign scholars have widely applied corpus technology to critical discourse analysis. These studies have explored the intrinsic meaning and function of discourse in depth by meticulously analyzing linguistic features such as word frequency, index lines, subject words, collocations, and clusters of words, as well as lexical patterns and grammatical structures in the text [10]. The application of this method not only enriches the theory and practice of discourse analysis but also provides new perspectives and tools for understanding and interpreting social phenomena.

Overall, although corpus-based critical discourse analysis is a rapidly developing field, the current study still has room for further research in some aspects: firstly, there are relatively few international studies on the topic of China's foreign poverty alleviation; secondly, there are limitations in the application of the corpus in domestic studies, which are mainly manifested in the fact that the corpus sources are mostly confined to a few newspapers, failing to widely cover the mainstream news media. This limitation is especially obvious in the context of the big data era[10]; finally, few studies have analyzed the comparison between China and the West on common discourse. This study aims to further explore the topic of China's foreign poverty alleviation from the perspective of critical discourse analysis in academia on the basis of the previous researchers, and plans to extract the relevant corpus through the database, and then apply the corpus research methodology to analyze the data in-depth, and to comprehensively interpret the western media's reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation with the help of the theoretical tools of critical discourse analysis [10].

The corpus of this paper is selected from the LexisNexis News Database from January 2021 to March 2024, and the reports on 'China's poverty alleviation abroad' from Chinese, European and American media are manually screened to create two corpora: one is 'One is a corpus of Chinese mainstream media reports on poverty alleviation in China, which contains 158 English texts with a total token count of 15,1506 words; the other is a corpus of European and American mainstream media reports on poverty alleviation in China, which contains 128 English texts with a total token count of 15,1506 words; and the other is a corpus of European and American mainstream media reports on poverty alleviation in China. The first is a corpus of 'European and American mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation', which contains 128 English texts with a total token count of 72,368 words. AntConc4.0 corpus was selected for the comprehensive analysis of high-frequency words and search lines [11, 12].

3. China's national image construction

3.1. Comparative analysis of high-frequency words

The author extracted the top 20 high-frequency words in the wordlist of the corpus of 'Chinese mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation' and the corpus of 'European and American mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation', and then manually filtered them as shown in Tables 1 and 2. The top 20 high-frequency words in the wordlist of the corpus and the wordlist of 'European and American mainstream media's reports on China's poverty alleviation'were manually filtered and shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. High-frequency actual words in Chinese mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation (top 20)

Number	High-frequency words	Frequency	Frequency (per100 words)
1	China	3070	0.994
2	Development	1599	0.968
3	Cooperation	1493	0.956
4	Countries	1345	0.943
5	Global	912	0.797
6	Road	710	0.956
7	Said	874	0.747
8	People	694	0.873

Table 1. Continued

9	International	623	0.81
10	Initiative	603	0.918
11	All	560	0.994
12	Economic	541	0.797
13	Chinese	536	0.816
14	Poverty	529	1
15	World	521	0.658
16	New	449	0.759
17	Xi	447	0.468
18	BRI	442	0.475
19	Africa	383	0.335
20	Central	372	0.304

Table 2. High-frequency real words in European and American mainstream media reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation (top 20)

Number	High-frequency words	Frequency	Frequency (per100 words)
1	China	1143	1.58
2	Say	704	0.97
3	Chinese	462	0.64
4	World	437	0.60
5	Government	411	0.57
6	Pakistan	316	0.44
7	People	284	0.39
8	Economic	275	0.38
9	Africa	274	0.38
10	Debt	274	0.38
11	Development	257	0.36
12	Foreign	249	0.34
13	Loan	248	0.34
14	International	246	0.34
15	Need	198	0.27
16	Global	179	0.25
17	Poverty	176	0.24
18	Trade	174	0.24
19	Lend	167	0.23
20	Support	163	0.23

The analysis reveals that the high-frequency words in Table 1 and 2 have similar overlapping parts, which can be roughly classified into two categories:

The first category points to national or regional organisations related to poverty eradication [13]: china, countries, BRI (Belt and Road Initiative Belt and Road), Africa, Pakistan, Xi, Chinese, Central. According to the theory of critical discourse analysis, discourse conveys information content and implies specific viewpoints, value orientations, and ideological positions. Among them, China, the Chinese is mostly the subject of 'foreign poverty alleviation', while Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Africa and Pakistan are mostly seen as 'beneficiaries of poverty alleviation'. The use of the terms China, and Chinese has a clear connotation of otherness, emphasizing China's identity as a 'political actor', and explaining what has been achieved or what needs to be done at the macro level. The recurrence of Pakistan and Africa reflects their close relevance to China's foreign poverty alleviation endeavors. Pakistan and many countries in Africa are important participants in China's 'One Belt, One Road' Silk Economic Belt, and they actively participate in and support the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative to jointly promote economic development and regional cooperation, and cooperation with China involves infrastructure construction, Cooperation with China involves infrastructure construction, resource development, industrial cooperation, and other fields. According to Ifcrow, 'discourse is a mode of behavior in social and historical contexts, and has a dialectical relationship with other dimensions of society', which relates the effectiveness of China's foreign poverty alleviation to the countries and regions that have benefited from it as well as China's 'Belt and Road' initiative, highlighting the importance of Chinese mainstream media and European and American mainstream media to the 'Belt and Road' initiative. The phrase 'there is a dialectical relationship between the effectiveness of China's foreign poverty alleviation and the specific countries and regions that have benefited from it, as well as China's '"Belt and

Road" initiative' highlights the specific entry point for the evaluation of China's foreign poverty alleviation by mainstream media in China and in Europe and the US. Xi Jinping, as the leader of China, has advocated and promoted the Belt and Road Initiative, which has led to China's widespread international attention and recognition. The high frequency of paraphrase quotes said in Chinese and foreign reports suggests that there is a great deal of 'intertextuality' in news reports. Fairclough points out that intertextuality occurs when different discourses and genres are intertwined in the same communicative event, and through the analysis of intertextuality, analysts can observe the reproduction of discourse......and then link the changes in the order of discourse to the changes in social culture [14]. After describing a poverty alleviation event or elaborating a poverty alleviation initiative in China, the mainstream media in China and abroad often implicitly show the attitudinal stance and ideological tendency behind the media discourse through the direct and indirect quotes from political authorities headed by national leaders and even entrepreneurs and people related to the event.

The second category of high-frequency words relates to the effectiveness and impact of poverty alleviation. The main ones are: development, initiative, economic, poverty, cooperation, global, international, people, support, and so on. The term 'support' is used in the following way. Fairclough points out that 'discourse is not only conditioned by social practices, but is also constructive. The social world and the individual are constantly constructed by discursive practices, and language is not a reflection of objective reality, but an active medium of construction' poverty, as the core theme of poverty alleviation reports, ranks only 14th in the list of high-frequency real words of mainstream media in China, and 17th in the list of high-frequency real words of media reports in Europe and America, which suggests that the mainstream media do not focus exclusively on the poverty issue, but rather are This shows that the mainstream media do not focus entirely on the issue of poverty, but rather are committed to digging out more details about China's foreign poverty alleviation action itself, so as to make an extended evaluation or criticism. For example, the main collocations of world include world economy, world food, and world health, showing the close connection between China's poverty alleviation work and economic development, food production and human health. people appear in the reports either as poor people or as descriptors of regional poverty. People appear in the report either as the subject of poverty (poor people), which is a descriptive footnote to regional poverty or as a reference to the results of regional poverty alleviation; for example, searching for poverty in the index line yields the following example: 'we cheer the enrichment of the Chinese people and the economic opportunities thus generated' to a certain extent showing that the European and American media recognize China's foreign poverty alleviation actions. economic, development, trade, and support reflect the effectiveness of China's foreign poverty alleviation efforts in promoting economic growth, expectations, and the mutually beneficial nature of cooperation, constituting a grasp of the connotation of China's foreign poverty alleviation. international's collocations are mainly community, organization, cooperation, etc., indicating that China's efforts in the Belt and Road involve a wide range of issues and that the only way to achieve world commonweal is to have in-depth cooperation. synergistic development, the dream of a common world and a community of human destiny can be realised. In many reports led by Chinese mainstream media, China, as a responsible big country in the international arena, under the correct leadership of the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the core, has actively constructed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). 'Under the correct leadership of Xi Jinping and the Party Central Committee, China has actively constructed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI) to strengthen the strategic and planning interface of industrial cooperation between China and the countries along the Belt and Road, and to help the countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to achieve deeper economic cooperation and development, reflecting the importance of the BRI to China's economic development. development, reflecting the image of a great power that seeks the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the happiness of the people of the world.

However, the high-frequency words reported by the Chinese and European and American media face a big difference in the third category of high-frequency real words (led by debt, loan, and lend), which refer to the economic 'debt issue' in the European and American mainstream media. A close reading of the corpus texts on the topic of debt reveals that although the mainstream media in Europe and the United States have appreciated the effectiveness of China's foreign poverty alleviation, they have strongly questioned or even discredited China's 'motives' for foreign poverty alleviation. Some reports put forward the 'debt trap theory', accusing China of 'debt-trap diplomacy'.

This statement is obviously very misleading, China to provide loans to Sri Lanka is mainly based on economic assistance and win-win cooperation strategic considerations, the use of their own technology and experience to help Sri Lanka's development, while taking into account the improvement of diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka, in the international community to show the style of a responsible great power. Sri Lanka's debt problem is more due to its excessive borrowing in the Western market and economic structural problems. Reports have also misinterpreted China's motivation for the Belt and Road Initiative as 'please potential allies' and China's foreign poverty alleviation as a 'military threat'. These comments are mostly subjective speculations of the European and American media, which have a one-sided and ambiguous understanding of China's true national image.

In addition, some mainstream media reports in Europe and the United States are neutral in that 'The world should embrace the BRI with cautious optimism, holding its orchestrators accountable for the initiative's shortcomings while also acknowledging its potential to usher in a new era of global development, trade connectivity, and productive capacity. The world should embrace the BRI with cautious optimism, holding its orchestrators accountable for the initiative's shortcomings while also acknowledging its potential to usher in a new era of global development, trade connectivity, and productive competition. They have generally They remain generally optimistic about the future of China's foreign poverty alleviation and the Belt and Road Initiative. On the other hand, they also criticise the 'long absence' of Western economic participation in Africa and Latin America, and agree with China's positive stance on poverty alleviation and economic cooperation.

In short, the Chinese mainstream media and the European and American mainstream media are good at showing their multi-directional and three-dimensional attention to China's foreign poverty alleviation work in high-frequency repetitions, grasping the policy situation and digging out the details of poverty alleviation, and both of them convey their ideologies in subtle language to construct an image of China that promotes co-operation, synergistic development, and positive and enterprising development. However, some European and American media are still misinterpreting China and fabricating a sinister and powerful image of China.

3.2. Comparative analysis of search lines

China was selected as the search term and its index line was analyzed to explore the Chinese national image constructed in the text [15]. By analyzing the search lines of the corpus texts, it can be seen that the four major themes of politics, economy, society and culture are often mentioned in Chinese media when exploring topics closely related to China poverty alleviation.

Examples:

(1) Belt and Road cooperation moving forward with brighter prospects, featuring mutual help and assistance continued to deepen, Wang said. China has given strong support to other countries in their international affairs.

The economic theme is second only to the political theme in terms of coverage, which includes economic and trade cooperation to help lift people out of poverty, investment reforms, economic support for businesses, economic comparisons, and economic and trade cooperation with other countries.

To name a few:

(1) China_ The 8th Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Beijing. Exchanges have accelerated across the board. The trade volume between China and the Mekong countries will reach 416.7 billion US dollars.

The cultural theme is mainly about cultural practices such as exploring regional characteristics, historical monuments, and traditional cultural heritage to help lift local people out of poverty. Although the proportion of coverage is significantly lower than that of political and economic themes, it is developing rapidly, reflecting the fact that Chinese media are gradually realizing the communication advantages of the cultural elements of cultural poverty alleviation in their overseas coverage. Reporting on cultural poverty alleviation not only highlights China's wisdom in poverty alleviation but also spreads traditional Chinese culture and demonstrates the country's cultural soft power, thus killing two birds with one stone.

The Belt and Road Initiative, global climate, agriculture, and infrastructure are often mentioned in reports on social issues, demonstrating that China is actively exploring the positive development of the world and that it has always been a builder of world peace and a contributor to global development. It has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of international order, and is committed to promoting the construction of a new type of international relations centered on win-win cooperation, and the formation of a community of human destiny and interests [14].

Examples:

(1) A Global Community of Shared Future China's Proposals and Actions: Learning among different civilizations. working with more countries and regions has proposed a range of regional and bilateral initiatives.

(2) A decade on, BRI injects vigorous impetus into Cambodia 's development experts catalyzed a significant transformation of its infrastructure. Sam added that China's investment in energy infrastructure has helped reduce Cambodia'.

On the whole, under the historical orientation of the new era, China's great achievements in poverty eradication have made great contributions to the development and progress of human civilization. China's successful experience in getting rid of poverty has not only enabled China to construct a true and responsible image of a great power in the international arena but also contributed Chinese wisdom and Chinese experience to global poverty governance.

However, this also includes questions about the economic problems of China and the countries along the 'Belt and Road'. European and American media focus on accusing the 'Belt and Road' of being debt-trap diplomacy, and that China is using the 'Belt and Road' to provide loans to some countries in the Asia-Pacific region to carry out 'debt diplomacy', which refers to excessive borrowing. China has used the 'Belt and Road' and other means to provide loans to some countries in the Asia-Pacific region to engage in 'debt diplomacy', pointing out that excessive borrowing (loan) will lead to national sovereignty in the hands of China. At this level, the media in Europe and the United States have created an image of China as a country that attempts hegemony and undermines world economic peace.

Examples:

(1) But after a few years of straightforward Chinese government loans, those countries found themselves heavily indebted, and the optics were awful. They feared that piling more loans atop old ones would make them seem reckless to credit rating agencies and make it more expensive to borrow in the future.

(2) Yellen testified earlier this year that she is 'very, very concerned about some of the activities that China engages in globally - engaging in countries in ways that leave them trapped in debt and don't promote economic development.'

Overall, China's national image is improving, with Western media recognizing China's significant contribution to poverty reduction in Belt and Road countries, and presenting a three-dimensional, multi-sensory, and complex picture of China, rather than emphasizing the 'China threat' or 'demonizing' China when dealing with the issue. Instead, they present a three-dimensional, multi-sensory and complex image of China - both the image of great power as a contributor to global development and a defender of the international order and the image of a hegemonic and threatening country that attempts hegemony and debt diplomacy.

4. Research conclusions

This paper takes Chinese mainstream media and European and American reports on China's foreign poverty alleviation as the research object and conducts an in-depth analysis from the perspective of critical discourse to explore the construction of China's foreign country image. The theory of critical discourse analysis stresses that discourse is not only a tool for transmitting information but also a part of social practice, capable of constructing and responding to social reality. Through the analysis of high-frequency words and index line analysis of the two corpora, it is found that: in terms of thematic focus, the foreign poverty alleviation reports of both sides of the media revolve around the cause of poverty alleviation and pay high attention to such key elements as the subject of poverty alleviation, the target of poverty alleviation, the vision of poverty alleviation, and the practice of poverty alleviation; in terms of vocabulary selection, the words used in the reports highlight the officiality of discourse in terms of its authoritativeness and distinctive value; in terms of affective tendency, the mainstream media in China fully recognizes the great achievements in foreign poverty alleviation and In terms of emotional tendency, Chinese mainstream media fully recognized the great achievements in poverty alleviation, affirmed the correctness of the Party's leadership and poverty alleviation policies, and conveyed national pride. The mainstream media in Europe and the United States also recognize China's achievements in foreign poverty alleviation, positively affirming China's achievements [16]. However, they are skeptical about the debt crisis that occurred in China's foreign poverty alleviation, and there is a certain negative sentiment. This reflects the power struggle relationship behind the discourse. In terms of national image construction, Chinese mainstream media's foreign poverty alleviation narrative around the topic of poverty reduction has constructed a mutually beneficial, win-win, open and sharing national image that focuses on people's livelihoods and attaches importance to human rights, is pragmatic and pragmatic in development, is strong and courageous in helping people in danger, is positive and proactive in the face of challenges, is coordinated and efficient, takes the overall situation into account, is united in cooperation and is mutually beneficial and win-win, is responsive to the development of the times, bears international responsibility, and adheres to the path of green and sustainable development [17]; Mainstream media in Europe and the United States affirm China's national image as a positive and active builder, a contributor to global development, and a defender of international order, but they also partially distort the image of China that attempts to be hegemonic and is not conducive to world economic peace.

5. Research implications

Critical discourse analysis provides a powerful theoretical tool for the process of deconstructing the hegemony of Western discourse and telling China's story to the world in a justified, favorable and appropriate way. This study is conducive to reflecting on future national image outreach strategies. Firstly, Chinese mainstream media as communicators should do a good job of macro-planning. It is appropriate to use critical discourse analysis to deeply analyze Western media reports about China, identify and challenge their potential biases and misunderstandings, set up a platform for discourse research, and focus on the theme of 'poverty alleviation abroad' at the levels of 'cross-cutting methodology, theoretical borrowing, pulling on issues, and cultural integration', and put forward the following recommendations. The discourse research platform is set up, and a framework for constructing a discourse system and communication strategy for 'China's external poverty alleviation' is proposed around the theme of 'China's external poverty alleviation' from the levels of methodological intersection, theoretical reference, issue pulling and cultural integration [15]. Secondly, facing an international audience, mainstream media should apply the power and ideology theory in critical discourse analysis when interpreting China's foreign poverty alleviation work, and analyze in depth the influence of domestic and foreign backgrounds, reform and opening-up, and the Belt and Road Initiative on China's poverty alleviation work. It is advisable to integrate the international discourse expression system to form a special discourse system for poverty alleviation [18, 19]. Third, the construction of China's national image is a long-term and complex systematic project. In this process, the mainstream media should play the role of the main force and use the method of critical discourse analysis to continuously improve their communication ability and level. At the same time, Chinese media should strengthen cooperation and exchanges with international media, and jointly promote the development of the international communication order in a more just and reasonable direction. Finally, we should insist on building a foreign discourse system with Chinese characteristics, displaying China's temperament on a global scale, and shaping a big-picture image in communication consciousness [20, 21].

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