

The Discursive Construction of National Image —A Case Study of *People's Daily Online's* Reports on Beijing Winter Olympics

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Abstract: As the most influential sports event in the world, Olympic Games have provided an important opportunity to promote international communication. China has been recognized by the international community for hosting Beijing Winter Olympics successfully, which also has promoted the construction of China's image. Based on discourse—historic approach and combined with corpus techniques, this article attempts to analyze the discursive strategies adopted by Chinese media *People's Daily Online* on the construction of China's image from the perspective of keyword, collocation and concordance lines. The strategies of perspectivization, nomination and prediction of discourse-historical approach (DHA) have manifested China as a peace-loving, responsible, environment protection, open, fair and cooperative country to the world. The results of this paper have enriched the study of national image from the perspective of linguistics, and have provided reference for the construction of China's image and the study of discourse construction.

Keywords: Discourse historic approach, Media Discourse, Corpus techniques, National image

1. Introduction

National image is the understanding and evaluation of a country's political, economic, social, cultural and geographical conditions by people all over the world^[1]. In order to establish a good national image in the world, China has taken lots of measures such as actively participating in international affairs, assuming international responsibility and exploring channels of external communication since the reform and opening up. Especially in the new historical period, China's comprehensive national power and international influence have been continuously improved, and China's international status has undergone historic changes. Therefore, showing a true, comprehensive, three-dimensional and powerful image of China to the whole world has become a historical mission and an urgent task for people from all works of life.

Olympic Games is an important channel to introduce a city and a country to the world. Hosting the Beijing Winter Olympics is a crucial step for China to enhance its international image, reduce the stereotype and prejudice about China and further enhance the mutual understanding with other countries in the world. Foreign-oriented publicity is a kind of communicative act between media and the international audiences^[2]. In this context, China has made good use of the platform of media to actively show the world a credible, lovely and respectable national image, share a simple, safe and splendid Beijing Winter Olympics with the international community, and write a brilliant page in the history of international sports.

People's Daily is the main-stream media of China's official publicity, and as the online English publishing platform of *People's Daily*, *People's Daily Online* actively follows the laws of the Internet to reform news, integrates a large number of videos, pictures and message boards into the page, and shows the development trend of modernization and internationalization. Therefore, its communication validity can truly reflect the situation of China's foreign publicity. Critical discourse analysis (CAD) believes that discourse reflects and acts on society, and it is committed to revealing the ideological meaning and power relationship behind language. In view of the above background, this paper will analyze relevant reports about "Beijing Winter Olympics" in *People's Daily Online* from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, so as to explore the discourse strategies for the construction of China's national image.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on China's image

Generally speaking, the research on national image began from the disciplines of international relations and politics, communication, etc. At present, lots of research have been conducted from the perspectives of communication, politics, sociology, translation and international relations^[3-7]. Most of the foreign studies on the construction of China's image are also carried out by Chinese people^[8-9]. Media reports is the communication process of news media on recent events, so they are often regarded as the main means to construct national image, lots of studies have focused on the interpretation of the construction of China's image from different topics^[10-11]. In recent years, more and more studies have been conducted from the perspective of linguistics^[12-15]. Language is the main carrier of information, so the role of language in the construction of identity can not be ignored in any research.

2.2. Critical discourse analysis

CDA studies discourse from a critical perspective, examines the ideological significance behind it by analyzing the linguistic characteristics of discourse and its social, historical and cultural context, and then reveals the relationship between language, power and ideology^[16]. News is a communicative behavior that the media transmits information to the public. The research on news discourse is mostly based on functional linguistics to analyze the communication mode and effect of discourse, among which critical discourse analysis is the most common research path. It was first systematically introduced into news discourse research by Van Dijk, and has gradually become the mainstream framework of news discourse research. For example, Reul et al. made a critical discourse analysis of the news of two Dutch newspapers from 2013 to 2015, revealing that the study of media is conducive to people's deeper understanding of the whole process of the initiation and termination of social debate^[17]. A few studies have shifted from a critical perspective to a positive one, and explored the good phenomenon of promoting social equality in news through positive discourse analysis.

Due to the different theoretical emphases on which text analysis is based, different schools have been formed within CDA. As an important method in CDA, discourse-historical approach (DHA), founded by Professor Ruth Wodak of Lancaster University, focuses on the analysis of context and discourse strategies. It is social issues oriented, and pays attention to the scientific analysis of discourse in the historical context. In addition, as a cutting-edge interdisciplinary discourse analysis method, DHA is mainly based on sociolinguistics and social criticism theory, involving linguistics, politics, sociology and other multidisciplinary fields. According to Reisigl & Wodak^[18], DHA emphasizes the influence of context on some language phenomena in discourse, and advocates analyzing discourse from the aspects of discourse theme, discursive strategies and linguistic means. In order to achieve a specific purpose, the speaker often intentionally or spontaneously uses certain discourse strategies to build a specific image and serve the discourse power group. Therefore, the analysis of discursive strategies is one of the main links of DHA, which was often analyzed from the following aspects: Strategies of nomination, Strategies of prediction, Strategies of argumentation, Strategies of perspectivation, and Strategies of intensity and limitation.

2.3. Corpus and Critical discourse analysis

In recent years, many scholars have advocated the combination of CDA and corpus methods^[19-20]. On the one hand, corpus can process texts on a large scale, extract representative linguistic patterns, and avoid subjective bias caused by single or a small number of texts; On the other hand, quantitative statistics of corpus can effectively capture language rules that are easy to be ignored, and make up for the limitations of traditional discourse analysis based on subjective presupposition^[21]. Many studies have combined DHA with corpus for critical political discourse analysis in China^[22] and abroad^[23-24]. However, there are few studies conducted on political discourse analysis from the perspective of DHA combined with corpus methods in China. Therefore, this paper will use corpus assisted DHA approach to explore the discourse construction strategies of China's image on the reports of "Beijing Winter Olympics" in People's Daily Online, which will be a beneficial attempt to study the self shaping of China's image from the perspective of linguistics.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research questions

The Olympic Games is an important channel to introduce a city or a country to the world. How does China's foreign publicity show the world a true, comprehensive, three-dimensional and colorful image of a powerful country during Beijing Winter Olympics? Based on the above analysis, this study analyzes relevant reports on 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics in *People's Daily Online* from the perspective of CDA, in order to answer the following three questions: (1) What is the image of China in relevant reports? (2) What discourse strategies are used in the construction of these images? (3) Why the image of China can be constructed by these strategies?

3.2. Research corpus

First, the news reports text corpus of China's foreign publicity was established. We take "Beijing Winter Olympics" as the keyword to search on the official website of *People's Daily Online*, and the time range is set from February 4, 2022 to February 20, 2022. At the same time, the data were manually screened and sorted out, and the articles with duplicate or irrelevant content were eliminated to ensure the reliability of the corpus. Finally, 42 news reports were obtained (27544 words).

3.3. Research methods

Corpus analysis software Antconc3.5.8 is used to analyze the discourse strategies of their reports from keyword, collocation and concordance lines, so as to explore the discourse construction of national image of China's foreign-oriented publicity media.

4. Results and Discussion

Overall, the findings reveal some basic images of China and some discourse strategies in the construction of these national images through the analyze of the keywords, collocation and concordance lines, which will be discussed in details in section 4.1 (RQ1) and 4.2 (RQ2). Based on the analysis of the above parts, section 4.3 provides two reasons of why these images can be constructed by these strategies (RQ3).

4.1. Keyword analysis

Keywords in corpus linguistics are words that appear more frequently than reference corpus and the study of keywords is of great significance for discourse analysis. In this paper, the study of keywords reveals the focus of media reports and discourse demands. After importing the corpus into the analysis software Antconc 3.5.8, a word list themed as "Beijing Winter Olympics" is generated. Excluding prepositions, conjunctions and different variants of the same vocabulary, the top 10 keywords are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Keyword list

Rank	Type	Freq
1	said	154
2	Chinese	146
3	world	109
4	first	108
5	president	77
6	ceremony	75
7	national	74
8	athletes	72
9	opening	66
10	gold	56

From table 1, we can find that "world" and "national" are one of the most frequent words in relevant reports. By further analyzing the context of these words, it can be summarized that *People's Daily Online* is committed to emphasizing China's efforts for the success of Beijing Winter Olympics and the impact of holding Beijing Winter Olympics against the background of the COVID-19, which highlights

China's status and role in the world. During this process, China has shouldered its responsibility to popularize the Olympic Games and spread the Olympic spirit in China and internationally. And this is consistent with the Chinese government's commitment to maintaining world peace and building a global community of a shared future. After the shock brought by the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games to the world, in the opening ceremony of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, China has fulfilled its commitment of delivering a safe and splendid Olympics to the world. In addition, the principle of green, inclusive, open and clean has been followed throughout this process, which once again make the world witness the romance and characteristics of Chinese people. From table 1, we can find that the words such as "opening" and "ceremony" accounts for a high frequency, which show that *People's Daily Online* has grasped the important link of the opening ceremony to publicize Chinese culture when reporting, which highlighted our cultural confidence and made Chinese civilization the focus of the world again.

In addition, it was hard-earned and of great significance for Beijing to host the Winter Olympic Games and the winter Paralympic Games, because it is highly consistent with the realization of our "two centenary goals". At the same time, Beijing made history as the first city to host both Summer and Winter Olympic Games, which injected new impetus into the development of Beijing in the new era. During this process, the professional and fair competition environment has impressed the world; The strong and effective COVID-19 protocols have set a successful example for the hosting of major international events; Combined with the context of the keyword "first", we can find that *People's Daily Online* has highlighted the innovation of Beijing Winter Olympics and the role of Beijing when reporting. In particular, Beijing has become the world's first city to hold both the summer and winter Olympics, which engraved with the extraordinary course of a nation's continuous struggle. Finally, "said", "Chinese", "President", "athletes" and other high-frequency words show the diversity of the content reported by *People's Daily Online*. At the same time, we can find that the publicity media tend to report from multiple perspectives, especially by reporting the comments of presidents and athletes of other countries on the topic of Beijing Winter Olympics to show and build a responsible image to the world.

The analysis of keywords show that *People's Daily Online* has grasped the key information such as "the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Winter Olympics" and "the first city to hold both summer and winter Olympics". At the same time, with the help of multiple perspectives, *People's Daily Online*'s reports have a positive role in promoting the construction of China's national image.

4.2. Discursive strategies

The analysis of discourse strategies is the core of DHA. The study of political discourse texts should focus on the following five strategies: Strategies of nomination, Strategies of prediction, Strategies of argumentation, Strategies of perspectivation, and Strategies of intensity and limitation^[25]. This part mainly focuses on the analysis of Strategies of perspectivation, Strategies of nomination and Strategies of prediction.

4.2.1. Strategies of perspectivation

The analysis of perspectivation strategy mainly focuses on the analysis of direct quotation, indirect quotation and free indirect quotation, aiming to locate the author's point of view and find the author's involvement or alienation^[18]. The main purpose of quoting others' words in news discourse is to enhance credibility, show the objectivity of the report, and convince readers that the reporter has not been mixed with personal opinions. But at the same time, some reporters rarely quote the original words directly and tend to translate the language into their own words in news reports. Fairclough (2013) believes that the media are increasingly using indirect speech when reporting, and the result is that the boundary between the speaker's discourse and the original one is blurred. In this corpus, *People's Daily Online* used a lot of perspective strategies to reveal different subjects' understanding and evaluation of the same event. From the analysis of subject words, we find that the word "said" has a high frequency. Through further analysis, we find that there are 161 sentences totally, and direct quotations account for 40% of all quotations. Here are some typical examples:

Example 1: "The Olympic spirit could only shine so brightly, because the Chinese people set the stage in such an excellent way-and in a safe way," **said the IOC chief.**

Example 2: **Bach said**, "The intensity of this Olympic experience was above and beyond what I have experienced before in Olympic Games."

Example 3: **Rahmon said**, “I remember the festive atmosphere that prevailed in those days in Beijing, which left an indelible impression on me.”

Example 4: “Thank you for making these Olympic Winter Games happen and making them happen in a safe way for everyone,” **said Bach**.

Example 5: **Putin said** he is convinced that China’s extensive experience in the excellent organization of representative international competitions will make it possible to hold this global festival of sports of the highest level.

Generally speaking, the direct speech in news reports is the discourse of people with high news value, which has an important function of promotion or development to the theme of news, and it can be classified as discourse events. Different from direct speech, indirect speech refers to the processing of the language form by the reporter on the basis of retaining the original content of the speaker, so the discourse presented by indirect speech is highly subjective. Therefore, it is not widely used in some news reports, which also reflects the essential characteristics of accuracy and objectivity of news reports. From the above examples, we can find that *People’s Daily Online* has quoted the words of different representative figures by using the word “said” to express their views on Beijing Winter Olympics, which has manifested a true and confident image to successfully host the Winter Olympics against the background of the global epidemic. All of this has shaped the image of Chinese government and country indirectly by pulling readers back to the essence of the speech. At the same time, the authenticity of the report has been increased, and the persuasion of building China’s national image has been enhanced.

4.2.2. Strategies of nomination

Strategies of nomination, also known as referential strategies, refer to the use of language to construct social behavior subjects, phenomena, events and processes. The methods which are often used include metaphor and metonymy of member categorization. The words used for reference or naming often highlight certain images or characteristics of the social group or individual. Collocations are words that have a co-occurrence trend with node words. They can supply and perfect the meaning of node words, which is an important embodiment of discourse characteristics. Significant collocations can not only reflect the author’s speaking habits, but also reveal his implicit attitude. Therefore, take “Olympics” as the keyword to search in the corpus, and the collocation nouns with practical significance are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Significant collocation of “Olympics”

Collocate	Frequency
event	3
Start point	2
festival	1
epitome	1
platform	1
catalyst	1

Nouns are highly abstract. Through analysis, we find that *People’s Daily Online* used conceptual nouns such as “platform”, “festival”, “event”, “epitome”, “catalyst” in their reports to present the image of China through metaphors and other rhetorical devices. China’s international status has experienced a cascade rise from a regional power to a powerful country with international influence. The successful hosting of Beijing Winter Olympics has also become a major event of far-reaching significance in the history of China and even the world. Moreover, comparing Beijing Winter Olympics to “festival” and “epitome” shows the important role of Beijing Winter Olympics in consolidating world peace and strengthening world solidarity and cooperation.

4.2.3. Strategies of prediction

Strategies of prediction refers to the use of positive or negative evaluative words in the predicate components of a discourse (including explicit predicates or predicated nouns, adjectives, etc.) to give positive or negative characteristics and attributes to the participants of social activities (including people, objects, phenomena, etc.). According to Halliday^[26], transitivity system is a set of grammatical system which construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types. There are six principle process types in transitivity system: Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioral, Verbal, and Existential. Process types in transitivity system help human beings recognize and encode their experience or phenomena of the real world. This part will use the function of Concordance in

Antconc3.5.8 to retrieve the collocation words of “Beijing Winter Olympics”, the result shows that *People’s Daily Online* tends to use more material and relational process in the construction of China’s national image (Table 3).

Table 3: Part of the index lines of the node word “Beijing Winter Olympics”

Left context	Hit	Right context
For the first time in the Olympic history,	Beijing Winter Olympics	has achieved 100 percent green electricity supply for all venues
Hosting the	Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics	has advanced the Chinese people's understanding of the allure of ice and snow
The opening ceremony of the	2022 Beijing Winter Olympics	has attracted a lot of attention from sports fans around the world.
The high-profile	Beijing Winter Olympics	has become a window into China’s scientific and technological innovations.
The	Beijing Winter Olympics	has deeply impressed the international community
The	Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics	is a starting point, not an end point.
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, said the	Beijing Winter Olympics	is an auspicious event for the CPC and the Chinese people
The technology-empowered	Beijing Winter Olympics	is the epitome of how innovations propel human progress.

The use of positive words and expressions in predicate components is conducive to the construction of positive images. Through analysis, we can find that the material process accounts for the highest proportion in the reports of *People’s Daily Online* on Beijing Winter Olympics by using positive verbs such as “achieve”, “advance”, “attract”, “become”, “impress”, etc. These notional verbs reflect that foreign-oriented publicity media highlighted China’s contribution during Beijing Winter Olympics in their reports. For example, China has achieved 100% environment-friendly Olympic Games, and the opening ceremony, as well as venues, meals, accommodation of Beijing Winter Olympics have left a deep impression on people all over the world. All of these are reported based on the facts. In the process of relations, Beijing Winter Olympics is called a “start point” and “symbol”, which shows the confidence of the Chinese people and highlights China’s position and role in promoting world peace and development, so as to construct a positive image of China.

4.3. Discursive strategies and China’s image

The successful holding of Beijing Winter Olympics has promoted the spread and development of China’s international image. Through the above analysis, we can find that China’s foreign-oriented publicity media has built a responsible, trustworthy, warm and friendly national image to the world. China is committed to organizing green, open and fair Olympic Games and actively promotes the peaceful development and harmonious sharing of the world. In addition, China adheres to mutual respect, equality and cooperation and unites to meet the common challenges faced by the international community, so as to promote the exchange and mutual learning of human civilizations and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind. These are the basic images of China, but the construction of these images is not accidental, which is rooted in the changes in China’s national conditions and international status. Based on the above analysis, this section will further discuss the reasons for the discourse construction of China’s images.

First, the recognition of international community has promoted the construction of China’s national image. The above results show that strategies of perspectivation are used in building the image of China. By using direct quotations of leaders and athletes of other countries, a confident, responsible and friendly national image are shown to the world. In the analysis of nomination strategy, we found that the leaders of other countries are not hesitate to praise China. They compare Beijing Winter Olympics to an important platform, event and festival, because China has always been a responsible and peace loving country throughout the history. Especially during the COVID-19, while doing a good

job in the prevention and control of the epidemic in China, China has repeatedly provided assistance to other countries, for example, Chinese government has provided more than hundreds of millions of vaccines to many countries in order to improve the coverage of COVID-19 vaccine in the world. And China still brought a wonderful and safe Winter Olympics to the world against the background of COVID-19. Therefore, it has been recognized by the international community with practical actions, thus promoting the construction of China's national image.

Secondly, the construction of China's national image is rooted in the improvement of China's comprehensive national power and international status. We found that *People's Daily Online* used positive verbs such as "achieve", "advance", "attract", "become", "impress" to show the world China's contributions to promote world peace, economic and social development objectively. Chinese media is used to reporting based on China's national and actual conditions without vilifying or over beautifying the reports. As the largest developing country, China has built a well-off society in an all-round way, which provides successful experience for developing countries to get rid of poverty; At the same time, China has strengthened solidarity and cooperation with developing countries and made important contributions to the cause of opposing hegemonism and maintaining peace. Especially since entering into the 21st century, with the accelerating process of globalization, China's international status has undergone significant changes, and the international influence of China has increased. Therefore, the discourse construction of China's image is based on the change of China's international status.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

Combined with the analysis of keywords in corpus and the discourse strategies of DHA, this paper analyzes the reports on Beijing Winter Olympics in China's foreign-oriented publicity media *People's Daily Online*, and explores what kind of image it constructs, what kind of discourse strategies are used, and why these images can be constructed through certain strategies. The results show that 1) the strategies of perspectivization, prediction and nomination of DHA are used by *People's Daily Online* on the reports of Beijing Winter Olympics. And all these has manifested China as a peace-loving, responsible, environment-friendly, open, fair and cooperative major country to the world. 2) The reasons why the media can promote the spread of China's image through certain discourse strategies are rooted in the improvement of China's international status and the recognition of the international community. The results of this paper has enriched the study of China's image from the perspective of linguistics, and provide reference for the study of discourse construction. However, this paper only selects the reports of one publicity media of English, and future research can be done to expand the sample size, so as to further explore the construction of China's national image by China's foreign-oriented publicity media.

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