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# A Comparative Study on the Construction of China's Industrial Image in Sino-US News Discourse

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## Abstract

A country's industrial image reflects the collective perception and impression held by both domestic and international publics regarding its industrial sector—encompassing material achievements, cultural dimensions, and micro-level elements such as corporate brands. Guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework, this study examines linguistic features in Chinese and American news texts concerning "Chinese industry" through the analysis of high-frequency words, collocations, and concordance lines. It aims to uncover the constructed image of Chinese industry and the underlying socio-cultural factors, providing a comparative perspective on media representation. Findings indicate that Chinese news discourse portrays China's industry as "innovation-driven and high-quality developed," whereas American discourse tends to construct an image of "remarkable yet competitively contentious" Chinese industry. This research highlights the role of discourse in shaping national image and seeks to contribute to the construction and global communication of China's industrial image by revealing the linguistic strategies and ideological underpinnings in cross-cultural media contexts.

## Keywords

News discourse; China's industrial image; Image construction; Comparative study; Three-dimensional analysis model

## 1. Introduction

A country's industrial image refers to "the overall evaluation and recognition given by both external and internal publics of a country to its industry itself, industrial behaviors, various industrial activities and their outcomes" (Luo, 2016). In December 2016, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Industrial Culture, proposing to shape a new national industrial image, strengthen the concept of green industry, cultivate national industrial brands, promote industries to move towards the medium-to-high end, and improve the international image of "Made in China".

The national industrial image largely depends on mass media (Chen, 2020). Media strategically employ various emotions in news narratives, which are embedded in news discourse in a seemingly objective manner (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Therefore, national image is socially constructed (Dong, 2018), and media from different countries shape distinct national images in their news discourse. As an important intangible asset of a country's industry, the national industrial image serves as a key factor for attracting global attention and investment, and plays a significant role in promoting the all-around development of a country (Wang, 2018). Since the reform and opening-up, China's industry

has developed rapidly and has become the world's largest manufacturing country. However, there remains a considerable gap in the construction of its industrial image (Jin, 2015). Current academic research on news discourse mostly involves economic images, either focusing on specific terms such as "Made in China" (Liu, 2023) or adopting a macro-economic perspective (Zhang, 2016; Zhao, 2017; Hou, 2018; He, 2019), while there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the specific field of industrial image. Existing studies related to "China's industrial image" include discussions on its concept (Luo, 2016) and analyses of the construction of industrial images in literary texts (Li, 2019; Wang, 2024). Based on this, this paper will use corpus methods to conduct a critical analysis of Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry", aiming to clarify the content and mechanisms of how Chinese and American media construct the image of "China's industry", and enrich research on China's industrial image in news discourse from a "comparative" perspective.

## 2. Research Design

### 2.1 Research Questions

Language is a form of social practice that reflects reality from various perspectives and manipulates and influences social processes by reproducing ideology (Fairclough, 1989). In a socio-cultural context, language interacts with values and power relations; discourse practice is a three-dimensional unity encompassing linguistic texts, discourse practice, and social practice. Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model, this study addresses the following two research questions:

(1) What images of China are constructed in the Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry" respectively, and what similarities and differences exist between them?

(2) What factors influence the construction of China's industrial image in the Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry" respectively?

### 2.2 Research Corpus

This paper constructs two self-built corpora: the New York Times Corpus of reports on "China's industry" (hereinafter referred to as the "NYT Corpus") and the China Daily Corpus of reports on "China's industry" (hereinafter referred to as the "CD Corpus"). These corpora include relevant news reports on China's industry from The New York Times and China Daily between 2013 and 2023. Statistics using Antconc 4.3.1 show that the token count of the NYT Corpus is 268,758, while that of the CD Corpus is 141,686.

### 2.3 Research Procedures

This paper will examine the Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry" from three levels: text, discourse practice, and social practice. Firstly, at the textual analysis level, with the help of the corpus software Antconc 4.3.1, the study will investigate the image of China constructed in the Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry" through the analysis of high-frequency words, high-frequency collocations, and index lines. Secondly, at the levels of discourse practice and social practice, it will analyze the factors contributing to the differences in image construction in the Sino-US news discourse on "China's industry".

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Textual Analysis

#### 3.1.1 High-frequency Content Words and China's Industrial Image

"Examining the frequency of specific words or related phrases is one of the most basic ways to reveal discourses or attitudes using corpus methods" (Baker, 2010). The selection or preference for specific words can highlight the content or focus that discourse producers consider important. Therefore, "studying recurring wordings is extremely important for the research on language and ideology" (Stubbs, 1996), among which high-frequency content words can reflect the content focused on in the text (Li & Hu, 2024). Thus, this paper selects high-frequency verbs, nouns, and adjectives for analysis. In addition, collocation refers to "the co-occurrence of two or more words within a certain distance in a text" (Sinclair, 1991). Starting from high-frequency content words, analyzing their index lines and collocations will present meaningful patterns in the discourse (Li & Hu, 2024). Therefore, for a deeper investigation, we

select some key words to further analyze China's industrial image in the corpus through collocations and index lines.

According to Antconc 4.3.1, the specific situations of the top 15 high-frequency nouns, verbs, and adjectives in the NYT Corpus and CD Corpus are as follows:

**Table 1. High-frequency Nouns**

| NYT Corpus | | | CD Corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Collocative Nouns | Frequency | No. | Collocative Nouns | Frequency |
| 1 | company | 1607 | 1 | industry | 1136 |
| 2 | industry | 882 | 2 | company | 703 |
| 3 | car | 766 | 3 | market | 552 |
| 4 | government | 735 | 4 | percent | 507 |
| 5 | country | 593 | 5 | development | 451 |
| 6 | market | 558 | 6 | technology | 405 |
| 7 | technology | 518 | 7 | country | 316 |
| 8 | factory | 507 | 8 | growth | 272 |
| 9 | trade | 466 | 9 | world | 262 |
| 10 | world | 436 | 10 | chip | 238 |
| 11 | chip | 331 | 11 | manufacturing | 235 |
| 12 | official | 317 | 12 | sector | 221 |
| 13 | coal | 307 | 13 | production | 220 |
| 14 | business | 305 | 14 | product | 216 |
| 15 | administration | 303 | 15 | government | 213 |

Based on Table 1, in terms of commonalities, words such as company, industry, market, government, technology, and chip appear in the high-frequency word lists of both corpora. This indicates that the main entities of China's industry, market dimensions, and technological innovation are the common focuses of the two media outlets. In terms of differences, The New York Times highlights special attention to China's automobile and coal industries through the words car and coal, while trade and administration imply trade conflicts. In contrast, China Daily emphasizes the development of manufacturing and product production through words such as development, manufacturing, production, and product.

**Table 2. High-frequency Verbs**

| NYT Corpus | | | CD Corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Collocative Verbs | Frequency | No. | Collocative Verbs | Frequency |
| 1 | say | 2120 | 1 | say | 1359 |
| 2 | have | 1555 | 2 | have | 624 |
| 3 | make | 788 | 3 | make | 279 |
| 4 | use | 382 | 4 | add | 142 |
| 5 | include | 348 | 5 | help | 139 |
| 6 | build | 326 | 6 | use | 138 |
| 7 | take | 316 | 7 | become | 137 |
| 8 | come | 249 | 8 | expect | 134 |

**Table 2. Continued**

| NYT Corpus | | | CD Corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | sell | 244 | 9 | build | 130 |
| 10 | help | 233 | 10 | develop | 116 |
| 11 | become | 222 | 11 | increase | 114 |
| 12 | work | 213 | 12 | grow | 112 |
| 13 | produce | 212 | 13 | take | 111 |
| 14 | buy | 197 | 13 | see | 105 |
| 15 | grow | 188 | 15 | promote | 100 |

According to Table 2, in terms of commonalities, “say” is the most frequently occurring verb in both corpora. This phenomenon reflects the common feature of news reports citing sources, indicating that both media pay attention to enhancing the credibility of reports by quoting authoritative opinions. In addition, verbs indicating changes and development, such as make, become, and grow, have high frequencies in both corpora. The use of these verbs jointly constructs a dynamically developing image of Chinese industry, indicating that the progress and transformation of Chinese industry are the common concerns of the two media. In terms of differences, apart from “grow”, China Daily has a higher frequency of verbs with obviously positive meanings, such as promote, increase, and develop. The use of these verbs strengthens the positive image of the Chinese industry in self-improvement and promoting industry development, while such verbs are relatively rare in The New York Times.

**Table 3. High-frequency Adjectives**

| NYT Corpus | | | CD Corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Collocative Adjectives | Frequency | No. | Collocative Adjectives | Frequency |
| 1 | Chinese | 1850 | 1 | Chinese | 943 |
| 2 | American | 694 | 2 | industrial | 474 |
| 3 | new | 537 | 3 | global | 329 |
| 4 | solar | 511 | 4 | new | 326 |
| 5 | electric | 452 | 5 | high | 206 |
| 6 | last | 424 | 6 | large | 196 |
| 7 | many | 385 | 7 | foreign | 159 |
| 8 | global | 352 | 8 | economic | 129 |
| 9 | foreign | 256 | 9 | domestic | 125 |
| 10 | economic | 235 | 10 | local | 112 |
| 11 | industrial | 195 | 11 | international | 109 |
| 12 | local | 187 | 12 | big | 107 |
| 13 | recent | 183 | 13 | technological | 93 |
| 14 | largest | 172 | 14 | strong | 91 |
| 15 | national | 167 | 15 | green | 82 |

According to Table 3, in terms of common features, “Chinese” is the most frequently occurring adjective in both corpora. This phenomenon directly reflects the consistency of the reporting objects, indicating that both media take the Chinese industry as the core focus. At the same time, adjectives such as new, global, foreign, strong, economic, and green have high frequencies in both corpora. The use of these words jointly constructs an image of Chinese

industry with innovation, global vision, continuous development, market orientation, and green transformation, reflecting the modern characteristics and internationalization trend in the development of the Chinese industry. In terms of differences, "American" appears with a high frequency of 630 times in The New York Times Corpus, which is completely absent in China Daily. This significant difference directly reflects that The New York Times is more inclined to report Chinese industry within the framework of Sino-US comparison, constructing a competitive discourse context. In addition, the high-frequency use of adjectives specific to certain industries, such as solar and electric, in The New York Times indicates that the media pays special attention to China's new energy industry, while China Daily uses the general adjective "industrial" more widely, reflecting its reporting orientation towards the overall development of the Chinese industry. Another important difference is that China Daily uses more adjectives with positive evaluation meanings such as high and first, which are often collocated with nouns such as quality and technology, jointly constructing an image of Chinese industry with high quality and leading development; while such adjectives are relatively few in The New York Times, which is more inclined to use neutral or ambiguous adjectives such as many.

### 3.1.2 High-frequency collocation words and the image of the Chinese industry

AntConc software can determine the collocation strength of a collocation word with a specified word using its MI value and Likelihood value. MI measures the collocation strength of a collocation word (Chris, 2006). The larger the MI value, the stronger the collocation strength between the two words. Generally speaking, significant collocation words have an MI value equal to or greater than 3 (Feng, 1995). Since there are relatively few words with MI values greater than 3 in the CD corpus and the NYT corpus, this essay focuses on words with MI values greater than 2. The likelihood value describes the plausibility of the model parameters given a specific observation; a larger likelihood value indicates a more accurate model. If a collocation word has a positive likelihood value and a low MI value, it can be assumed that the collocation word has a high co-occurrence frequency with the node word but lacks a semantic connection.

In the NYT corpus and CD corpus, the high-frequency collocation words after searching with the node words set to "China", "Chinese", and "industry" are as follows:

**Table 4. High-frequency Collocation Nouns**

| NYT Corpus | | | | CD Corpus | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | High-frequency Collocation Nouns | Likelihood | MI | No. | High-frequency Collocation Nouns | Likelihood | MI |
| 1 | segment | 26.092 | 3.939 | 1 | academician | 21.707 | 3.497 |
| 2 | auto | 183.304 | 3.493 | 2 | mainland | 207.357 | 3.489 |
| 3 | association | 27.168 | 3.469 | 3 | insider | 62.762 | 3.405 |
| 4 | group | 49.847 | 2.954 | 4 | merchant | 25.902 | 3.292 |
| 5 | tech | 48.078 | 2.799 | 5 | pioneer | 26.653 | 3.158 |
| 6 | telecommunication | 29.579 | 2.724 | 6 | chipmaker | 27.899 | 3.062 |
| 7 | semiconductor | 62.256 | 2.498 | 7 | regulator | 19.926 | 2.8 |
| 8 | giant | 31.528 | 2.337 | 8 | EV | 30.235 | 2.636 |
| 9 | ambition | 30.088 | 2.257 | 9 | maker | 57.187 | 2.494 |
| 10 | leader | 30.718 | 2.17 | 10 | photo | 20.357 | 2.482 |
| 11 | authority | 25.996 | 2.074 | 11 | investor | 32.626 | 2.467 |
| 12 | automaker | 72.431 | 2.048 | 12 | minister | 19.249 | 2.411 |
| 13 | analyst | 19.683 | 2.03 | 13 | carmaker | 38.02 | 2.394 |
| 14 | government | 271.656 | 2.029 | 14 | telecom | 19.003 | 2.394 |
| | | | | 15 | automobile | 35.869 | 2.374 |

Table 4 shows the commonality between the two corpora, showing a shared focus on specific Chinese industrial sectors. Regarding differences, the high frequency of institutional terms such as "government" and "authority" in the NYT corpus, paired with potentially negative terms such as "ambition," creates an image of Chinese industry as government-led and expansionist. In contrast, China Daily prefers positive terms, including "pioneer," creating an image of Chinese industry as innovative and leading.

**Table 5. High-frequency Collocation Verbs**

| | NYT Corpus | | | | CD Corpus | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | High-frequency Collocation Verbs | Likelihood | MI | No. | High-frequency Collocation Verbs | Likelihood | MI |
| 1 | dominate | 20.863 | 3.097 | 1 | make | 31.243 | 2.93 |
| 2 | make | 89.485 | 2.948 | 2 | boom | 23.827 | 2.482 |
| 3 | accuse | 28.063 | 2.634 | | | | |
| 3 | gain | 20.373 | 2.155 | | | | |

Table 5 shows that there are very few words with an MI greater than 2. The verb frequency MI values for co-occurring node words in the corpus are all low, indicating that both corpora rarely directly collocate "China," "Chinese," and "industry." In order to explore the image of Chinese industry constructed by these frequently collocated verbs, this essay uses index lines for supplementary analysis.

**Table 6. NYT Corpus High-frequency Collocation Verb Index Lines**

| NO. | Index Lines |
|---|---|
| NYT-2019-17 | China **dominates** the market for items like solar panels, and has emerged as the world's largest producer of cars, car parts and many other sophisticated products. |
| NYT-2018-20 | China also **dominates** the business of making wind turbines and is focused on becoming a force in electric cars. |
| NYT-2021-01 | The electric car company is helping Chinese companies **become** global players in the emerging industry, posing a competitive threat to traditional rivals. |
| NYT-2014-19 | China has also **become** a major player in an area traditionally dominated by the United States, Latin America. |
| NYT-2017-02 | That plan, called **Made in China 2025**, worries many Western businesses who fear competing against government-supported Chinese companies |
| NYT-2015-15 | I think we're all contributing to changing people's mentality toward the "**Made in China**" stigma. |

**Table 7. CD Corpus High-frequency Collocation Verb Index Lines**

| No. | Index Lines |
|---|---|
| CD-2018-06 | In an earlier interview, she said her company would concentrate on robots and precision machine tools as part of efforts to upgrade and transform Chinese manufacturing, as well as providing entirely self-developed high-end equipment for **Made in China** 2025. |
| CD-2023-19 | China's EV industry will continue to **boom** and gain a stronger overseas presence, thanks to the country's competitive edge in the EV value chain, especially in batteries, they added. |

In terms of commonalities, both media outlets use verbs such as "become" and "has"—verbs that convey development—to depict the dynamic changes or current achievements of China's industry, as seen in NYT-2014-19 and CD-2018-15. The use of these verbs collectively constructs an image of Chinese industry as continuously developing and progressing, demonstrating that the growth and transformation of Chinese industry are a shared focus for both media outlets. Regarding differences, the New York Times prefers "dominates," while China Daily uses "boom" to convey differing attitudes toward the current state of China's industry. This difference is further reflected in the index lines: NYT-2019-17 reflects the Western media's competitive perception of China's industrial rise, conveying a sense of concern. In contrast, CD-2013-19 showcases the prosperity of the Chinese industry in the electric vehicle sector.

Of particular note, "made" primarily appears in the form of "Made in China" paired with "China," appearing 66 times. The 66 index lines reveal the presence of two predominant attitudes. The first, as illustrated by index line

NYT-2017-02, articulates concerns regarding the competitive implications of "Made in China 2025." The other, as conveyed by index line NYT-2015-15, reflects a shift in stereotypes about "Made in China," constructing an image of China's industrial development that has given rise to concerns about competition from Western industries. In the CD corpus, the term "make" also appears in the form of "Made in China," yet in both cases, it is imbued with a positive connotation.

**Table 8. High-frequency Collocation Adjectives**

| NYT Corpus | | | | CD Corpus | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | High-frequency Collocation Adjectives | Likelihood | MI | No. | High-frequency Collocation Adjectives | Likelihood | MI |
| 1 | domestic | 78.545 | 2.959 | 1 | dairy | 18.903 | 2.706 |
| 2 | eastern | 21.255 | 2.556 | 2 | entire | 19.847 | 2.611 |
| 3 | unfair | 22.519 | 2.401 | 3 | automotive | 47.672 | 2.482 |
| 4 | military | 21.488 | 2.134 | 4 | robotic | 37.019 | 2.352 |
| 5 | global | 56.087 | 2.021 | | | | |

**Table 9. Index Lines for Some High-frequency Adjective Collocations in the NYT Corpus.**

| No. | Index Lines |
|---|---|
| NYT-2014-01 | Chinese solar companies had received **unfair** subsidies from their government and dumped products on the American market below costs |
| NYT-2022-11 | But domestic manufacturing groups have criticized the president's decision to halt any imposition of tariffs, saying he is failing to enforce America's trade rules and crack down on **unfair** Chinese practices. |

Table 8 shows that the high-frequency adjective collocations of node words in the two corpora share little in common. First, the NYT corpus uses "global" to indicate a focus on the globalized nature of Chinese industry, while the CD corpus uses "dairy," "automotive," and "robotic" to highlight attention to the dairy, automotive, and robotics industries. Another notable difference is the New York Times' use of the negatively evaluative adjective "unfair." These words, in contexts such as index lines NYT-2014-01 and NYT-2022-11, construct a controversial image. China Daily, on the other hand, uses neutral adjectives such as "entire" to highlight the holistic development of the Chinese industry.

## 3.2 An Analysis of the Discourse and Social Practice of "China Industry" News Discourse in China and the United States

Founded in 1851, The New York Times is a mainstream daily newspaper with extensive influence in the United States. It boasts a large global circulation and international discourse power, covering a wide range of areas such as politics, economy, and international affairs. The New York Times is widely disseminated through mainstream official channels and social media. The stance of its reporting is driven by American ideology and national interests, and in its economic coverage of international affairs, it tends to highlight negative economic impacts (Xia, 2021). Although not an official media outlet of the U.S. government, the content of its reports has an indirect connection with U.S. foreign policies and values. Many reports in the NYT corpus are rooted in the U.S.-first foreign policy strategy, often depicting China's industrial and technological innovations as a challenge to U.S. dominant status and providing public opinion support for its protectionist policies. For instance, "Made in China" is directly termed as a "threat" (NYT-2019-07), and the word "threat" appears a total of 44 times in the NYT corpus. Moreover, U.S. media outlets emphasize that China's industrial rise may undermine the U.S. technological edge, and they link technological leadership to a "security risk" (NYT-2021-05), with the aim of mobilizing responses in domestic industrial policies.

Founded in 1981, China Daily is a national English-language daily newspaper in China. It serves as a key official platform for China's international communication, with a broad readership both domestically and internationally, and aims to present China's perspectives and voices to the world. Its content covers China's politics, economy, culture, and other fields, making it an important window for the international community to understand China.

The political stance of China Daily is highly consistent with China's diplomatic philosophy and national strategy.

In reporting on international events, it upholds the diplomatic philosophy of "independence, self-reliance and mutual benefit", emphasizes win-win cooperation and objectivity, and shapes China's image as a responsible major power (Xia, 2021). Its reports frequently use positive vocabulary to convey the values of peaceful development and openness, and inclusiveness advocated by China (Yang, 2023).

**Table 10. Partial Index Lines for the NYT Corpus and the CD Corpus**

| No. | Index Lines |
|---|---|
| NYT-2019-07 | But the Chinese threat is already fundamentally changing thinking across the board. |
| NYT-2021-05 | It was an early stage of a frostier tech competition between the United States and China that eventually led to American blacklisting of Chinese companies over human rights and national security concerns. |
| CD-2014-12 | China produces more than 90 percent of the world's rare earth metals, a group of 17 elements used in a wide range of applications, in sectors like renewable energy, telecommunications and defense. |
| CD-2017-15 | Chinese internet-based companies are pitching in to help advance the Belt and Road Initiative by building a "digital Silk Road "between China and Germany and facilitating mutual business exchanges and the realization of the Industry 4.0 strategy. |

In this study, the reports in the CD corpus echo the concept of peaceful development. Through cases of Belt and Road cooperation, they convey a mutually beneficial industrial image (CD-2017-15) and mitigate the international community's misunderstanding of resource plunder. Chinese media focus on achievements in independent innovation, highlight the competitiveness of the Chinese industry through data and cases, and help expand the international market and enhance the country's discourse power (CD-2014-12). The word "percent", used to describe data status and changes, appears 507 times (see Table 1).

In conclusion, the differences in industrial discourse between Chinese and American media outlets are effectively a clash of diplomatic objectives, interests, and values. Understanding this struggle for discourse power provides crucial insights for China's international communication strategy, which requires balancing ideological expression with the presentation of facts and strengthening diverse information sources and persuasive narratives.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper adopts a corpus-based research method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the discourse related to the Chinese industry in The New York Times and China Daily from 2013 to 2023. Through comparative analysis, it is found that in the discourse of The New York Times, the image of Chinese industry is multifaceted. There is some recognition of its scale and technological progress, but there are also doubts and biased statements on issues such as trade, human rights, and subsidies, highlighting competition and concerns. In contrast, China Daily focuses more on presenting the achievements of China's industrial innovation, the concept of sustainable development, and its positive role in promoting global industrial development. This difference reflects the distinct political and economic interests as well as cultural values of China and the United States. Through various efforts, it is hoped that a more objective, positive, and comprehensive image of Chinese industry can be built in the news discourse of China and the United States, creating a favorable public opinion environment for promoting the healthy development of Sino-US economic and trade relations and global industrial cooperation. Meanwhile, this study also provides useful references for subsequent related research. In the future, combined with more corpora and multimodal discourse analysis methods, further in-depth exploration can be conducted on the image of Chinese industry and its communication strategies in Sino-US news discourse, so as to contribute more wisdom and strength to enhancing the international discourse power and cultural soft power of Chinese industry.

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