

## Ideological Construction of China's Economic Growth by American Mass Media—A Critical Case Study of the New York Times

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**Abstract:** As we know, news media is a vital means for people to know about the outside world including foreign coverage. This paper examines published news on the Chinese economy in most prestigious newspaper the New York Times on line, in the form of Transitivity System under the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, aiming at exploring ideological construction behind economic news report about China's economic growth.

### 1. Introduction

News media have been playing an increasingly important role in people's daily life in the modern society characterized by an information era. It is news media that sketch a large number of pictures in our minds so that we think we know the world out there. As Hillier notes, “the world of the Press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged” (Hillier 2004:38). In recent years, the professional journalist's proclamation on the question of impartiality has come under strong challenge from various fields of study, in which critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a widely used approach to exploring messages behind the news, and that is how language is used in newspapers to represent and construct ideas, beliefs or, in the present study, ideologies. The aim of CDA is to, through analyzing linguistic forms, explore and identify those ideological assumptions hidden in a text that have largely been taken for granted and bring them to the surface for reinspection. Therefore, a critical approach is advocated to analyze the news which is considered as “the most prestigious of daily media genres”, and whose role is “at the centre of the exercise of power in modern societies” (Bell&Garrett 1998:4).

As we know, news media is a vital means for people to know about the outside world. Foreign coverage in the media is a very important, and sometimes the only source for many people in their construction of an image of the foreign nation in question. So this paper critically examines the three published news on the Chinese economy in most prestigious U.S. newspaper the New York Times on line, aiming at exploring ideological construction behind economic news report about China's economic growth.

### 2. Theoretic Framework

After World War II, an approach of news study named critical news study flourished in the European Continent. The scholars of this approach consider that there exist unequal power relations in the social economic and political contexts. Through critically analyzing news discourse, they try to explicate the unequal power relations and dominant ideology embedded in news discourse and explore the causes of these power relations (Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1995; Fairclough 1995). Just as Fairclough (1995: 36) puts it, “an account of communication in the mass media must consider the economy and politics of the mass media, the nature of the market which the mass media are operating within, and their relationship to the state, and so forth”.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) “is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2001:352). It has established itself internationally in nearly thirty years as a new approach to discourse, which aims at demystifying

naturalized discourse and showing that grammatical and semantic forms have close connections with ideology and power.

Halliday gives a thoroughgoing functionalist explanation of linguistic structure in terms of studies of news discourse with Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This indicates that an understanding of basic claims of Halliday's grammar and his approach to linguistic analysis is essential for a proper understanding of CDA of news reports.

In Transitivity System, our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of “goings-on-doing, happening, sensing, meaning, and being and becoming (Halliday 1994:106). Transitivity provides six different process types and associated participants as options, and the systematic selection of a particular process type may be ideologically significant. Namely, the same process existing in the actual world can be represented in language by virtue of different process types; or by virtue of the same process type, but changing the locations of participants and circumstances. In short, the choosing of process types and the placement of participants and circumstances are largely determined by ideology.

### 3. Data Analysis

The current research chooses economic news, more specifically, news on China's economic growth, as samples for analysis. Via “advanced search” on the New York Times on line, three reports in terms of topic choice by reporting China's economic growth as associated with global economy, the economic growth of other nations or other issues beyond the economic sphere.

Halliday holds that transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types, and he identifies in the English language six process types and their categorical meanings as well as their respective principal participant(s). (Halliday 1994:46) The choices of process type and participant(s) are very important clues of ideological investment in the use of language. Therefore, categorizing clauses into different process types of a discourse and studying relationship between Participants and Circumstances will be available to decode the hidden ideology. For critically probing the way language represents reality, transitivity analysis is very powerful. The following shows the occurrences of processes in the sample reports.

Table1 Sum of each type of processes in the sample reports

	Mate.	Rela.	Verb.	Ment.	Beha.	Exist.	Total
Sample 1	116 (61.4%)	36 (19%)	25 (13.2%)	8 (4.2%)	3 (1.6%)	1 (0.5%)	189
Sample 2	74 (50.3%)	50 (34%)	13 (8.8%)	8 (5.4%)	2 (1.4%)	0	147
Sample 3	54 (51.9%)	30 (28.8%)	14 (13.5%)	5 (4.8%)	0	2 (1%)	105

#### 3.1 Material process

Material processes, which describe what is happening or being done in the external material world, are found mainly refer to three aspects in this sample, that is, China's performance of economic activities, China's economic trend and its social problems.

Some material processes inform readers of certain economic activities performed by China, as is indicated by the following examples:

(1) The nation's manufacturing companies **are building** wealth at a remarkable rate, **using** some of that money **to buy** assets abroad.

(2) That \$18.5 billion bid **comes** as America's trade deficit with China is ratcheting ever higher...

And some others are used to describe China's economic trend, like sentences listed below:

(3) China **is developing** a large and diverse economy, creating an almost Darwinian competition.

(4) China's economy **has risen** rapidly with foreign expertise and investment.

Processes in sentences (1) to (4) have shown a dynamic scene of economic development and its potential in China. At the same time, China's development does not advance without any problems, as pointed out in the same article by using material processes to the aspect of social problems.

(5) ...China's labor force will drop to 813 million from 842 million...

(6) Millions move to the cities each year, an immense migration that slowed increases in Chinese industrial wages...

It is interesting to note that an overwhelming percentage (95%) of the material processes are found in the active voice, with the Actors explicitly stated. In most cases, the Chinese side takes the role of an active actor to get things done, whereas the U.S. side is mainly positioned as Goal, as can be seen in the following:

(7) The bid by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation for Unocal has raised worries among politicians in Washington.

(8) China has missiles with nuclear weapons that... already able to hit not just Hawaii but probably California.

In other words, China is represented as an active role in the process. Activation occurs when social actors are represented as the active, dynamic forces in an activity, and passivation occurs when they are represented as “undergoing” the activity, or as being “at the receiving end of it”. In the present case, China is clearly foregrounded in an activated role, and USA backgrounded as undergoing activity.

### 3.2 Relational process

Relational processes are processes of “being”. Halliday distinguishes two types of relational processes in his functional grammar: the attributive relational process and the identifying relational process. The two participants in attributive relational process are the Carrier and the Attribute. In identifying relational process, the participants are labeled as the Identified and the Identifier.

China and Chinese companies take the position of the Carrier or Identified of relational process on one hand, and on the other hand Africa-related issues take the Carrier or Identified position.

(9) **China** (Carrier), it seems, is suddenly **everywhere in Africa, not just in oil-rich states** (Attribute).

(10) **China** (Identified) is hardly **the first nation to seek its fortune in Africa** (Identifier).

(11) But **China's growing presence** (Carrier) is also **manifest in less obvious spots** (Attribute).

(12) But **the economic history of African nations** (Identified) is **a cautionary tale of exploitation and failed schemes** (Identifier)...

The homogeneity of China and Africa nations has been pointed out in above examples. However, Africa had undergone different “tale of exploitation”, more thinking and practice should be done to African people. In a word, the relationship between China and Africa is close, important and significant.

### 3.3 Verbal process

The central verbal processes, nevertheless, are easily recognized in that they all relate to the transfer of messages through language. Here an analysis of the participants in verbal processes—the Sayer and the Verbiage (if there is any) is equally helpful to uncover the ideological investment in the representation of the ideational meaning. Sayer is one participant in any verbal processes. The person who speaks need not be explicitly mentioned in the clause sometimes.

Of the 25 verbal processes in Sample 1, 11 Sayers are from the US, and only four are from China. Others are voices of non-authoritative persons (Chinese factory workers in the anecdotal story in the report) or unspecified sources, such as “companies”, “executives in many industries” and “some factory owners”.

In terms of the Sayer in Sample 2, it is found that most projections come from the voice of famous scholars (as “William Belchere, the chief Asia economist for Macquarie Securities in Hong Kong”), world organizations (as “The Asian Development Bank”), director of enterprises (as “Atsuyoshi Hyogo, the chairman of the Honda subsidiary here”), and Chinese government officials (as “Zhang Jieming, the director of the Guangzhou Bureau of Labor and Social Security”). These

Sayers have been specified with complete and detailed titles, which can not only increase the reliability of the sources of information, but also indicate the authority and legitimacy of their projection.

In Sample 3, most voices come from Senegal (as “Moussa Lamine Sane, a Senegalese executive at Henan China”) and only one voice from a Chinese man (as “Lu Shaye, China's ambassador to Senegal”). The voices from the West are also projective (as “economist Jeffrey Sachs”). They all give neutral even positive comment to China's help. While unspecified sources, such as “a study”, “the report” and “some”, send out negative attitude towards China's “Turing” in Africa. The messages from Sayers are almost expressed as projected clauses, in both direct and indirect ways.

### 3.4 Mental process

A mental process accounts for the process of sensing. There are two inherent participant roles associated with the mental process, which are Senser and Phenomenon. As to the factuality claim of the news industry, the incidence of mental processes in each sample is not much. Below are examples by means of mental process.

(13) Chinese officials have begun **worrying** that an unsustainable economic...

(14) The company **was considering** the new Guangzhou airport as the site of an Asian hub...

(15) “I **think** we underestimate the importance of having an alternative to a single path.”

Mental processes are rarely found to be used in any explicit way to express the writers' opinions in neither of the news cases, given the factuality claim of the news industry. They are found to be expressed in present tense, a metaphorical way or in quotations.

## 4. Conclusion

The present case study use critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to economic news discourse analysis. The critical study of three economic news reports from The New York Times have been analyzed for the purpose of unfolding the hidden ideological construction under the language. An analysis of linguistic features based on Systemic-Functional Grammar(SFG). Four types of transitivity: material process, relational process, verbal process and mental process have been concentrated on.

Language in three news reports is full of ideological meanings. The journalists resort to different linguistic choices to reproduce and reinforce their values while hiding them under the surface of language. Also, ideology, as a shared and naturalized value system in a certain group, can reveal itself in one way or another. Through analysis, the main hidden ideological messages behind the sample news reveal themselves in front of us: advocating of capitalism and priority of national interests. These two elements come from the mainstream value system in the U.S.A. and are used to make judgments about China's economic growth and its adoption of the new currency policy. Moreover, the judgments are expressed implicitly in the apparently factual reports and contribute to a positive US image and a negative Chinese image in the present cases. The ideology reinforcement and image building are hidden under the language of the news texts. They are both the decider and the product of the news discourse under the current study.

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