

Hong Kong's Media Representations of China amid COVID-19: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, many scholars have noted the significant value of studying media representations of the COVID-19 pandemic everywhere. However, when observing these research results, one will find that more research results are about the Western media, and there are few reports about the Chinese media on the COVID-19 pandemic. This study employs corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis to examine what kinds of discourse Hong Kong media use to represent China in the news. The Sing Tao Daily was chosen for the study because it has been in existence for a long time and has readers all over the world. Its coverage of China COVID-19 will affect Hong Kong people's perception of their motherland. Hong Kong is unique in that it has just recently returned to China. The Hong Kong media's coverage of mainland China will affect China's national image in the minds of Hong Kong people. This study aims to examine what discourses are used by the Hong Kong news media in their coverage of China's fight against the epidemic and what kind of national image of China is presented to the Hong Kong and global audiences. The analysis reveals that China is presented as a victim, and an advantageous cooperative country. China is a responsible big country that has assumed the responsibility of helping countries in difficulty and is a united country. China's actions have had a positive impact on global humanitarian ideology. This study illustrates how the media can effectively utilize discursive strategies to promote cooperation and build a country's image in the midst of a global health crisis.

Keywords: corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, COVID-19, media representations, national image

1. Introduction

On January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic a public health emergency of global significance and declared it a pandemic on March 11 (Pofi, & Leung, 2022). This pandemic crisis is not a crisis of one country, China, but a pandemic crisis that concerns the fate of countries and people all over the world (Tooze, 2021).

The impacts of pandemics are not only detrimental to people's physical and mental health, but it also has a serious impact on the global economy, society, and politics (Naeem & Bhatti, 2020). The impacts of pandemics are not only detrimental to people's physical and mental health, but it also has a serious impact on the global economy, society, and politics (Naeem & Bhatti, 2020). For example, Euronews, (2020) argues that the impact of the pandemic on the economy is very significant and that this negative impact has never been encountered since the Great Depression after 1930 until now. In addition, social media, due to the lack of gatekeepers and lax vetting, also led to a lot of misinformation being passed on, exacerbating emotional anxiety and panic during the severe period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Jiang, Y. Huang, Cheng, Zhang, & L. Huang, 2021). On top of that, China, as the first country to be found infected with the virus, has been politically attacked and its national image has been tarnished for a while. Instead of reporting on the Chinese pandemic from a public health perspective, some media outlets have chosen to portray China's efforts in political and ideological terms. Some tabloid media outlets have even resorted to conspiracy theories, racism, and China-hating positions (Wanning, 2021). U.S. President Donald Trump even publicly called COVID-19 a "Chinese virus" in a tweet, which caused a large number of retweets by Internet users (Cao, Lindo, & Zhong, 2023). This has led to China being unfavorably labeled as a "Chinese threat" and "Chinese influence". Sinophobia is escalating in some

countries, and there are even calls from the populations of some countries to make China pay for the losses of the pandemic (Rutschman & Gatter, 2020). In June 2020, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of 14 developed countries. Survey data show that people in Australia, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, South Korea, Spain and Canada have less trust in China, and China's national image has taken on a negative color, with the proportion of negativity reaching an all-time high.

2. Literature Review

Country image is the sum of narrative, inferential, and informative perceptions of beliefs about a particular country (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). The media plays an important role in shaping and enhancing the image of the country (Malek, 1997). A country's national image is "the image it creates in the international news flow". It is the perception and grasp of the state by the public in the society that exists in international communication, and it is a composite formed by the public as a subject feeling the object of the state (Liu & He, 2006). The content presented in the media affects the audience's overall impression of the target country. Therefore, this study investigated the media presentation in Hong Kong, China during the COVID-19 pandemic.

More and more scholars are realizing that media coverage of COVID-19 affects public perceptions. That is why more studies have investigated how the media covers COVID-19. Hart et al. (2020) collected U.S. newspaper and television network COVID-19 news from March to May 2020 from the perspective of the degree of politicization and polarization. They argued that differing U.S. attitudes toward COVID-19 were influenced by the highly politicized and polarized nature of early reports. Mach et al. (2021) chose a sample of 12 print and online newspaper stories from three countries, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, for their study. They found that COVID-19 coverage had a not-so-high scientific quality and a certain amount of sensationalism. The focus of media reports on COVID-19 in the same country can vary from country to country. Some scholars have made findings after comparing the coverage of the pandemic in China by the China Daily (CD), a Chinese media outlet, and the New York Times (NYT), a U.S. media outlet. Their assessment of China's performance in the protests is reversed (Sing Bik Ngai, Yao, & Gill Singh, 2022).

Although there is a growing number of scholars and results studying the media's performance on COVID-19, Chinese media, especially Hong Kong media's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in China has not gained much scholarly attention. However, in order to examine how political ideology plays a role in the media in the epidemic narrative, it is necessary to look at it from the perspective of the Hong Kong media. This helps the public understand how China is responding and managing the country in the face of the threat of this unprecedented pandemic.

This study aims to fill this gap by using a corpus approach to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does Hong Kong's Sing Tao Daily represent China linguistically?

RQ2: What are the ideological implications of the linguistic representation of Hong Kong's Sing Tao Daily?

In this study, corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2012) was used to analyze linguistic representations in the news media of Hong Kong newspapers, which will be presented in the methods section below.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collection

In order to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on China's national image, a corpus was created to study the semantic expression of the word "China" during the COVID-19 public health crisis. Using Wisenews, the world's largest Chinese-language media information service provider, we purposely created a sample of news stories about China's image published by Sing Tao Daily (STD). With Wisenews, we generated a dataset containing 510 Chinese-language news articles (199 768 words) using the keywords "COVID-19 and China". Because 2020 was the worst year of the pandemic, this study collected research samples from that year. On January 20, 2020, China initiated the highest level of public health emergency mobilization for all sectors in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. It was also from this date that the National Health Commission began to summarize and publish the number of new cases in each province (The Paper News, 2020). Using this day as a starting point, the choice was made to construct the composite week sequentially from Monday through Saturday. The last day was December 29, 2020 (date of data collection) for publication.

3.2 Analytical Framework and Procedures

Linguistic research requires the analysis of a large amount of data, which may be difficult to reach by human power, but the development of computer technology has helped researchers to solve this problem. Therefore corpus linguistics (CL) is widely used in linguistic research (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). CL has a unique advantage in linguistic analysis in that it allows many techniques to be used in the analysis, such as the use of synonyms, and it provides additional variables for analysis, such as key word in context (KWIC) and collocations.

CDA is a research tool. It relates language to social practices and criticizes language. All social practices that reproduce or contest existing social relations and serve different means of interest have a specific historical context. That is why discourse is linked to rights. CDA is an attempt to understand how discourse is linked to rights (Janks, 1997). In using the CDA methodology we draw on the work of Carvalho (2008). She proposes a "Framework for Analysis of Media Discourse" (see Figure 1). This framework is divided into two parts, the first being: textual analysis, and the second: contextual analysis. After completing the first stage it is time for the second stage. There are two instruments in this stage which are 1) a comparative-synchronic and 2) historical-diachronic analysis. The second stage is not the focus of this paper.

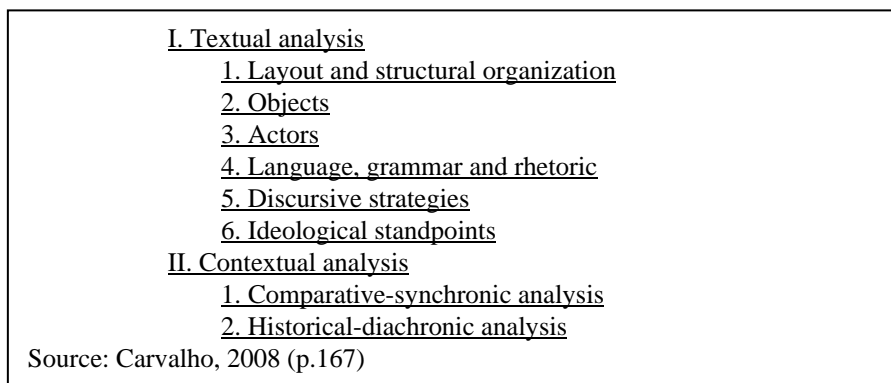


Figure 1. Framework for Analysis of Media Discourse

We processed the dataset using the AntConc software program, a free corpus analysis toolkit for concordance and text analysis (Anthony, 2011). AntConc can extract a word frequency table showing the salient words/phrases in the corpus, which can be used to illustrate the content or "relevance" of these news items. It is also worth noting that the term "salient" refers not only to the frequency of occurrence of a word, but also to the extent of its distribution in the text.

Initial analysis of the 509 target news texts using AntConc software revealed 41 common words that consistently appeared in more than 30% of the corpus. Because this paper mainly analyzes the reports of COVID-19 pandemic in China, the Collocate of "China" and "Mainland" were mainly evaluated in the data analysis. Use AntConc 4.2.4 to search for collocations near "China" and "Mainland", i.e. frequent collocations of "China" and "Mainland". The researcher needs to set the span of "China" and "Mainland" to 5 words on the left and 5 words on the right when searching. In the study, lexical words (i.e., adjectives, adverbs, lexical verbs, and nouns) related to China's national image will be emphasized, while grammatical words (e.g., prepositions and conjunctions) will be ignored. This is because information is mainly composed of lexical words, and semantic construction and dissemination is mainly done by lexical words (Lam, 2018). For the purpose of this paper, the researcher next focused on these frequently occurring collocations. The role of different types of semantic prosodies is revealed by quantifying and summarizing them. Finally, we analyze how they play a role in promoting discursive and affective aspects of China's national image in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Results

4.1 Prominent Words in STD Discourse

Table 1 lists the prominent words in terms of frequency or range in the corpus. From Table 1, we can see that there are 12 high-frequency words distributed in more than 50% of the news texts and 41 high-frequency words distributed in more than 30% of the news texts. The word "epidemic" was the most widespread, appearing in 505 news articles. "China" ranked fourth, appearing in 369 news texts. "Mainland" ranked 23rd, appearing in 203 news texts. As shown in Table 1, these words can be further categorized into two main groups, namely, functional types and lexical types, as shown in Table 2. By categorizing the words we can find that out of the 41 salient words, the functional words (grammatical words) appear the most frequently with a total of 25 occurrences. Whereas content-related words appear only 16 times.

Table 1. Salient words in terms of frequency and consistency (range)

| Type | Rank | Freq | Range | NormFreq | NormRange |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| 疫情(epidemic) | 1 | 2241 | 505 | 10942.971 | 0.988 |
| 的 (of) | 2 | 6836 | 496 | 33380.699 | 0.971 |
| 在(in/at) | 3 | 1908 | 419 | 9316.907 | 0.82 |
| 中国(China) | 4 | 1912 | 369 | 9336.439 | 0.722 |
| 和(and) | 5 | 1713 | 356 | 8364.707 | 0.697 |
| 肺炎(pneumonia) | 6 | 693 | 322 | 3383.971 | 0.63 |
| 表示(express) | 7 | 654 | 307 | 3193.531 | 0.601 |
| 是(be) | 8 | 982 | 302 | 4795.179 | 0.591 |
| 对(to) | 9 | 746 | 301 | 3642.774 | 0.589 |
| 新冠(Coronavirus) | 10 | 804 | 297 | 3925.992 | 0.581 |
| 等(etc.) | 11 | 706 | 277 | 3447.451 | 0.542 |
| 有(have/has) | 12 | 569 | 273 | 2778.47 | 0.534 |
| 日(day) | 13 | 876 | 254 | 4277.574 | 0.497 |
| 将(will) | 14 | 519 | 253 | 2534.316 | 0.495 |
| 与(and) | 15 | 601 | 252 | 2934.728 | 0.493 |
| 但(but) | 16 | 489 | 247 | 2387.824 | 0.483 |
| 为(for) | 17 | 532 | 245 | 2597.796 | 0.479 |
| 国家(country) | 18 | 605 | 242 | 2954.26 | 0.474 |
| 了(finish) | 19 | 700 | 230 | 3418.152 | 0.45 |
| 月(month) | 19 | 929 | 230 | 4536.376 | 0.45 |
| 病毒(Virus) | 21 | 1020 | 217 | 4980.736 | 0.425 |
| 及(and) | 22 | 512 | 216 | 2500.134 | 0.423 |
| 内地(Mainland) | 23 | 419 | 203 | 2046.008 | 0.397 |
| 并(and) | 24 | 354 | 201 | 1728.608 | 0.393 |
| 后(after) | 25 | 363 | 194 | 1772.556 | 0.38 |
| 也(also) | 26 | 414 | 192 | 2021.593 | 0.376 |
| 已(already) | 27 | 274 | 178 | 1337.962 | 0.348 |
| 目前(currently) | 28 | 311 | 177 | 1518.636 | 0.346 |
| 防控(control) | 28 | 567 | 177 | 2768.703 | 0.346 |
| 以(by) | 30 | 315 | 174 | 1538.169 | 0.341 |
| 中(in) | 31 | 290 | 171 | 1416.092 | 0.335 |
| 从(from) | 32 | 346 | 170 | 1689.544 | 0.333 |
| 到(to) | 33 | 338 | 168 | 1650.479 | 0.329 |
| 进行(conduct) | 34 | 332 | 165 | 1621.181 | 0.323 |
| 就(for) | 35 | 318 | 164 | 1552.818 | 0.321 |
| 没有(no) | 36 | 330 | 159 | 1611.415 | 0.311 |
| 会(going to) | 37 | 251 | 156 | 1225.652 | 0.305 |
| 要(to) | 37 | 418 | 156 | 2041.125 | 0.305 |
| 时(when) | 39 | 250 | 155 | 1220.769 | 0.303 |
| 而(but) | 39 | 245 | 155 | 1196.353 | 0.303 |
| 影响(affect) | 41 | 286 | 154 | 1396.559 | 0.301 |

Table 2. Categories of salient words

| | |
|------------|---|
| Functional | 的 (of), 在(in/at), 和(and), 是(be), 对(to), 等(etc.) 有(have/has), 将(will), 与(and), 但(but), 为(for), 了(past tense marker), 及(and), 并(and), 后(after), 也(also), 已(already), 以(by), 中(in), 从(from), 到(to), 就(for), 会(going to), 要(to), 而(but) |
|------------|---|

In order to analyze what kind of image of China was portrayed in the Hong Kong newspaper's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, we need to focus on the use of the word "China" in the corpus. Through collocation analysis, we further investigated the co-occurring words around the way "China" is talked about.

The term "Mainland" is used in relation to Hong Kong's geographical location in China, which is China in addition to Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Since "Mainland" represents China, both "China" and "Mainland" should be used as prominent words to assess their collocate, and then to examine the image of the epidemic in China. collocate, thus examining the image of China's epidemic.

4.2 China's Image in STD Discourse

China as a victim.

When the epidemic first appeared in Wuhan, China, China was the first country to be victimized by the epidemic. After

analyzing the collocations of "China" and "mainland", three discourse prosodies were found to contribute to the discourse of China as a victim. The three discourse prosodies are: "victim" (#1), "other countries' assistance" (#2), and "politicization" (#3). These discourse emphasize that other countries have chosen to help China in the midst of the pandemic crisis. It also argues that the United States politicization of the pandemic has hurt China and tarnished its national image. It argues that the pandemic should not be politicized and that other countries should not blame China too much. Because China is not a victimizer, China is also a victim of the pandemic (see Examples 1-7).

- 1.美国的一些人必须要清楚:他们的敌人是病毒,不是中国(Some people in the United States must be clear: their enemy is the virus, not China.) (Editorial, 2020a)。
- 2.新冠肺炎疫情持续,内地至今累积确诊个案 59 617 宗,死亡人数增至 1359 人。其中湖北单日新增 14 849 宗个案,累计 48 206 宗(The outbreak of C pneumonia continues, with 59,617 confirmed cases and 1,359 deaths in the Mainland so far. Among them, 14 849 new cases were reported in Hubei on a single day, with a cumulative total of 48 206 cases.) (Editorial, 2020b)。
- 3.普京总统是第一个向习近平主席致电慰问的大国元首,先后五次对中国政府和人民的防疫努力和果断措施给予高度评价。(President Vladimir Putin was the first head of state to send a message of condolence to President Xi Jinping, on five separate occasions, giving high praise to the Chinese government and people for their anti-epidemic efforts and decisive measures.) (Editorial, 2020c)。
- 4.韩国总统文在寅表示,愿向中方提供所需支援与协助,希望疫情早日得到控制(South Korean President Toru Moon said he is willing to provide the necessary support and assistance to China in the hope that the epidemic can be brought under control as soon as possible) (Editorial, 2020d)。
- 5.纳瓦罗曾经在自己的多部书里引用了一个所谓的专业人士“罗恩·瓦拉”的言论来批评和攻击中国。后来他自己也公开承认这个人物完全是他自己虚构出来的。(Navarro once quoted a so-called professional, "Ron Valla", in several of his books to criticize and attack China. He later publicly admitted that this character was a figment of his imagination.) (Editorial, 2020e)。
- 6.国务卿蓬佩奥早前接受媒体访问时,坚持用“武汉冠状病毒”一词,并指控中方在疫情前期缺乏透明度,延缓美方的防疫工作(In an earlier media interview, Secretary of State Pompeo insisted on using the term "Wuhan coronavirus" and accused China of delaying U.S. efforts to prevent the epidemic by lacking transparency in the early stages of the outbreak) (Editorial, 2020f)。
- 7.这些人应该认识到,他们的敌人是病毒,不是中国。(These people should realize that their enemy is the virus, not China.) (Editorial, 2020g)。

Table 3. Discourse prosodies on the term "China" and "mainland".

| # | Discourse prosodies (3 items) | Example of collocates | Freq. |
|---|--|--|-------|
| 1 | China is a victim (16 items) | 疫情(epidemic), 肺炎(pneumonia), 确诊(confirm), 新冠(Covid-19), 宗(cases), 病例(cases), 持续(preservation), 新增(additional), 爆发(outbreak), 个案(case), 肆虐(rage), 病例(cases), 感染(infect), 患者(patient), 染疫(infected with epidemic), 病人(patient) | 827 |
| 2 | Many countries assisted China (7 items) | 俄(Russia), 俄方(the Russian side), 俄罗斯(Russia), 韩国(South Korea), 加油(Cheer up), 声援(solidarity), 感谢(gratitude) | 191 |
| 3 | The politicization of the pandemic has China under fire. (8 items) | 美国(America), 特朗普(Donald Trump), 美方(the American side), 批评(target), 抹黑(blacken), 索赔(claim), 指责(criticize), 隐瞒(hide) | 275 |

The role of the Chinese "victim" is formed in these "victimization" discourses. This is evidenced by the discourse prosody of "victimization" (#1). "Confirmed," "additional," "outbreak," "rage," and other frequent collocates were used to express the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic. In describing the pandemic, STD uses the metaphor of "the enemy" to humanize COVID-19. It suggests that COVID-19 is the common enemy of the world, someone to be fought together. This metaphor makes COVID-19 more figurative and inspires more disgust (Example 1). Metaphor is a frequent method chosen by journalistic staff when writing news (Bednarek & Caple, 2012) because it enhances the intensity of human emotions. Use collocates such as "cases", "patient", "confirm" when reporting the latest number of locally diagnosed patients (Example 2). The use of casualty statistics such as 59 617, 1 359, 14 849, and 48 206 magnifies the risk of a COVID-19 pandemic.

It is gratifying to note that other countries did not stand by idly at the very beginning when only people in China were infected with COVID-19. This shows that although we are all of different nationalities and races, we all share the same humanitarian spirit and will unite in the face of a powerful enemy, as evidenced by the discourse prosody "Many countries assisted China" (#2). The use of frequent collocates such as "Cheer up" and "solidarity" demonstrates the support and assistance of other countries to China. STD draws on Russian President Vladimir Putin's first words of condolence to China and South Korean President Moon Jae-in's words of support for China to express these countries' assistance to China (Examples 3-4). Verb phrases such as "expressed solidarity" and "provide support and assistance" are attributed to Russia and South Korea, realizing the function of predicates (Examples 3-4).

Victims' discourse disapproves of the politicization of COVID-19 and condemns it. Because this politicization blames the victims and makes a pandemic with millions of deaths worse (Abbas, 2022). Countries hurt by pandemics can be hurt again. This is found in the discourse prosody of "politicization" (#3). Frequent collocates such as "target," "blacken," "claim," and "criticize" prove it. For example, STD's use of frequent collocate "claims" to argue that because COVID-19 first appeared in China, China is responsible and should provide compensation to other countries is false. In addition, some politicians "insinuating", "attacking and smearing China" and "calling COVID-19 by the Wuhan coronavirus" are all considered by STD as manifestations of the politicization of the pandemic by these politicians. These discourse prosodies imply that these irresponsible statements of theirs violate moral norms and fulfill the function of predicates (Examples 6-7). Some politicians even go so far as to fabricate so-called professionals to discredit China, and finally admit to themselves that everything is false (Example 5). China has had to respond to these "politicized" actions by repeatedly emphasizing that their enemy is the virus, not China. Instead of attacking and smearing China, it is imperative that the world strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic (Example 7). The STD argued at the outset of the pandemic that China was a victim of the COVID-19 pandemic and should be sympathized with and assisted. And those who deliberately politicize the COVID-19 pandemic by attacking China are immoral and can be said to be accomplices of COVID-19, and their actions are contrary to the common values of global solidarity.

China as a fighter

In the face of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, China has taken a series of measures to deal with the situation and become a "fighter". In constructing the "fighter" discourse (Table 4), STD selected three discourse prosodies, including: "tackle COVID-19" (#4), "recover economy" (#5), and "priority people" (#6). STD uses the term "fighter" to describe China's response to the pandemic, as it recognizes that in the face of a pandemic that has killed millions of people, China is actively adopting a number of rigorous measures to deal with the situation. China has striven to minimize the damage to human health caused by the epidemic and has done its utmost to reduce and compensate for the economic losses. China always puts the interests of its people first and prioritizes their safety and health.

8. 面对此次新冠肺炎疫情,韩国愿与中国同舟共济,共同努力,并坚信中国将在抗击疫情的斗争中取得胜利 (In the face of this new pneumonia epidemic, Korea is willing to join hands with China in this endeavor and is confident that China will win the battle against the epidemic.) (Editorial, 2020h).

9. 正如联合国秘书长古特雷斯所言,中国用实实在在的行动生动践行了构建人类命运共同体的承诺 (As United Nations Secretary General Guterres has said, China has vividly realized its commitment to building a commonwealth of human destiny through concrete actions) (Editorial, 2020i).

10. 政治局会议指出,内地经济稳步恢复 (At the Politburo meeting, it was pointed out that the Mainland's economy was recovering steadily) (Editorial, 2020j).

11. 中国人民大学邱海平教授表示当前,在以习近平总书记为核心的党中央坚强领导下,疫情防控形势积极向好,复工复产有序推进,这是中国负责任大国的担当,也是稳定全球供应链、产业链,全力恢复经济活力的生动实践 (Prof. Qiu Haiping of Renmin University of China saidAt present, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, the situation of epidemic prevention and control is positive and favorable, and the resumption of work and production is progressing in an orderly manner. This is the responsibility of China as a responsible big country, and a vivid practice to stabilize the global supply chain and industrial chain, and to restore the vitality of the economy at all costs) (Xue, 2020).

12. 巴拿马国际关系学者、亚洲战略研究中心名誉主席胡里奥·姚·比利亚雷斯说:“中国政府本着负责任态度,采取了最严格、最详尽的防控措施.....中国政府高度重视人民健康安全,在抗击疫情中体现出令人敬佩的专业精神 (Julio Yao Villares, a Panamanian scholar of international relations and Honorary President of the Asian Center for Strategic Studies, said: "The Chinese government attaches great importance to the health and safety of its people and has demonstrated admirable professionalism in the fight against the epidemic.") (Editorial, 2020k).”

13. 中国共产党的宗旨是全心全意为人民服务。(The Communist Party of China aims to serve the people with all its heart and soul) (Editorial, 2020l).

14. 中国以救人为第一要务。中国深知,一致的公民责任和牺牲行为对经济意味着什么,但他们将救人视为第一要务,也是唯一要务(China knows what consistent civic responsibility and sacrificial behavior means for the economy, but they see saving lives as their first and only priority) (Editorial, 2020m).
15. 驻外使领馆普遍重视,解决好留学人员在当地学业、住宿、签证、延期等方面出现的困难,协调当地华人或者是企业为其就餐、购物等提供帮助(Embassies and consulates abroad generally attach importance to solving the difficulties encountered by overseas students in their local studies, accommodation, visas, extension of visa, etc., and coordinate with local Chinese or enterprises to provide assistance in dining and shopping) (Editorial, 2020n).

Table 4. Discourse prosodies on the term "China" and "mainland"

| # | Discourse prosodies | Example of collocates | Freq. |
|---|--|--|-------|
| 4 | Action on tackling COVID-19 (7 items) | 缓和 (easing), 受控 (control), 趋缓 (slowdown), 抗疫 (fight), 抗击 (combat), 成功 (successes), 医院 (hospitals), 检测 (test) | 183 |
| 5 | China tried to recover its economy (4 items) | 经济 (economy), 银行 (bank), 港商 (businessman), 复工 (resumption) | 44 |
| 6 | China prioritised people's safety and health (2 items) | 公民 (civic), 人民 (populations), 留学生 (overseas students) | 175 |

STD uses frequent collocates such as "control", "fight", "combat", "test", etc. to indicate that China has taken many actions to counter COVID-19 (#4). STD places the response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of war and uses metaphors such as "battle" and "win" to achieve this (Example 8). The phrase "earned it praise" fulfills the function of a predicate by showing that other countries recognize and praise China's actions against the pandemic (Example 9). To prove it, the STD also quotes UN Secretary-General Guterres as saying that China has "filled the vacuum" and "lived up to its promises" (Example 9). The title of the post (UN Secretary General) and the name (Guterres) can validate his saying via the topos of authority.

Another indication that "China is a fighter" is China's efforts to restore its economy. This can be seen in the prominent discourse prosody "China tried to recover its economy" (#5). Frequent collocates such as "economy" and "resumption" are evidence of this. Phrases such as "recovering steadily" and "progressing in an orderly manner" indicate that China's initiatives to restore its economy have been effective and have fulfilled the function of a predicate (Examples 10-11). After the heavy blow of COVID-19, the Party Central Committee correctly directed the rapid recovery of the Chinese economy, which was a responsible performance by China (Example 11). The name of the meeting (Politburo meeting), the full name of the institution (Renmin University of China), the title (Prof.), the full name (Qiu Haiping), etc. are all ways to enhance persuasive power through the topos of authority. STD here used Prof. Qiu's words "China as a responsible big country" to affirm China's responsibility and commitment. The world is a huge economy of interest, and China's orderly progress in resuming work and production and stabilizing its economy will help the global economy recover in an important way (Example 11).

China always puts the interests of its people first, and the first thing China does to fight epidemics is to maintain the safety and health of its people. This can be found in the "priority" (#6) discourse prosody. Frequent collocates such as "civic" and "people" attest to this. Phrases such as "attaches the health and safety" and "Safeguarding the lives and safety" recur in STD's news texts, emphasizing China's commitment to the people's health and safety, realizing the function of predicates (Examples 12-13). The indication of full name (Julio Yao Villares) and title (scholar of international relations and Honorary President of the Asian Center for Strategic Studies) enhances the authority and credibility of the discourse. It also shows that China's approach to safeguarding the safety and health of its people is in line with mainstream international values (Example 13). In Example 14, the continuous use of "priority" shows that China puts the people first and always puts the interests of the people in the first place, which is consistent with the purpose of the CPC. In addition to emphasizing the safety of people at home, China is also very concerned about the safety of foreign students and Chinese abroad, which can be seen in the request collocate "overseas students". Phrases such as "solving the difficulties" and "providing assistance" illustrate the efforts made by embassies and consulates abroad to help international students, local Chinese and businesses out of difficult situations (Example 14-15).

Humanitarian actions such as "taken the most stringent and detailed preventive and control measures" "demonstrated admirable professionalism in the fight against the epidemic" "Medical teams from all over the world rushed to Wuhan" are attributed by the STD to the Chinese government for realizing the predictive function (Example 12-13). The Chinese government adheres to the concepts of "life first" and "people-oriented", and the actions taken by the Chinese government to combat the epidemic, such as the "Dynamic COVID-Zero Strategy", are based on this philosophy (J. Liu, M. Liu, & Liang, 2022). This is also consistent with the dominant philosophy of the global health governance system, "building a global community of health for all" (Chan & Yu, 2023).

China as an advantageous / cooperative country

China's institutional advantages and the strong leadership of the Communist Party allowed China to control the epidemic quickly. After successfully controlling the epidemic, it immediately threw itself into assisting other countries in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. So China is a systemic advantage and cooperative country that loves to help others. This discourse is composed of two discourse prosodies including "China's systemic advantage" (#7), "China's assistance" (#8). The discourse emphasizes that China's victory in the war against the COVID-19 pandemic is inseparable from the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. The Communist Party of China has provided effective leadership in the fight against the epidemic and has played a firm role as a leader. Immediately after China's victory in the fight against the epidemic, it shared its successful experience and practices, and emphasized cooperation by lending a helping hand to the international community when it encountered difficulties, providing supplies and experts, among other things.

16. 在中共总书记习近平亲自指挥、亲自部署下,让中国成为今年疫情后第一个恢复经济正增长的主要经济体。(Under the personal direction and deployment of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC, China has become the first major economy to return to positive economic growth after this year's epidemic.) (Editorial, 2020o).

17. 许多媒体刊发报道和评论指出,中国防控疫情高效有序展开,充分彰显了中国共产党的领导和中国特色社会主义制度的显著优势(Many media reports and commentaries have pointed out that the efficient and orderly implementation of the prevention and control of the epidemic in China has fully demonstrated the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the remarkable advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics) (Editorial, 2020p).

18. 中方向 8 个亚洲国家、16 个欧洲国家、26 个非洲国家、9 个美洲国家、10 个南太国家提供紧急援助;从援助方式看,包括医疗 物资援助和医疗技术援助两种形式。(China had provided emergency assistance to 28 Asian countries, 16 European countries, 26 African countries, 9 countries in the Americas, and 10 South Pacific countries; and in terms of assistance modalities, they included both medical supplies and medical technical assistance. In terms of the form of assistance, it includes medical material assistance and medical technical assistance) (Editorial, 2020p).

19. 意大利洛迪省省长弗朗西斯科·帕塞里尼感谢云南省雪中送炭。他说,意方非常赞赏并借鉴了中国应对疫情的成功经验 做法,从中方身上看到了战胜疫情的希望,相信意大利也将克服困难,走出阴霾(The Governor of Lodi, Italy, Francesco Pasellini, thanked Yunnan Province for its generous offer.He said that Italy greatly appreciated and drew on China's successful experience and practices in dealing with the epidemic, and saw from the Chinese side the hope of overcoming the epidemic, believing that Italy would also overcome the difficulties and come out of the darkness) (Yu, 2020).

20. 新加坡外长维文表示,患难见真情。作为新加坡值得信赖的朋友,中国坚定地同新加坡站在一起,毫不犹豫伸出援手,我们深表感谢(Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Vivian, said, "In times of trouble, there is true love. As a trusted friend of Singapore, China has stood firmly by Singapore and has not hesitated to lend a helping hand, for which we are deeply thankful) (Editorial, 2020r).

Table 5. Discourse prosodies on the term "China" and "mainland"

| # | Discourse prosodies (3 items) | Example of collocates | Freq. |
|---|--|---|-------|
| 7 | China has a systemic advantage.(3 items) | 社会主义制度 (socialist system), 共产党 (CCP), 智慧 (wisdom) | 59 |
| 8 | China assisted other countries (3 items) | 感谢 (thank), 经验 (experience), 援助 (aid) | 84 |

STD affirms China's systemic advantage, which is confirmed by the "China's systemic advantage" (#7) discourse prosody. Frequent collocates, such as the "socialist system" and the "CCP" show that the CCP has fully utilized the political advantages of the socialist system (Examples 16- 17). Xi Jinping, as the country's first leader, led the way with "personal command and planning", making China the first major economy to return to positive economic growth after the epidemic (Example 16). The advantages of CCP's leadership and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in combating the COVID-19 pandemic have also been recognized by many overseas media (Example 17). Many media reports and commentaries have pointed out that the efficient and orderly implementation of the prevention and control of the epidemic in China has fully demonstrated the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the remarkable advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.

STD also reported on China's assistance to other countries, which is in line with the humanitarian spirit. Frequent collocates, such as "aid", "thank", "experience" and "China's assistance" (#8) discourse prosody proved this. (#8) discourse prosodies that prove this point. The assistance provided to the European Union, the African Union demonstrates that this is the most concentrated and wide-ranging emergency humanitarian operation since the founding

of New China (Example 18). The assistance provided to the European Union, the African Union and a number of ASEAN countries demonstrates that China has no reservations about the international fight against the epidemic, and that this is the most concentrated and wide-ranging emergency humanitarian operation since the founding of New China (Example 18). The use of numbers such as 28, 16, 26, 9, 10, etc. is also used via the topos of numbers to specify the large number and wide range of countries benefiting from China's assistance this time. China's assistance includes not only material assistance but also medical assistance (Example 18). China has also actively shared its successful experiences and practices for the benefit of other countries. Francesco Pasellini, governor of the Italian province of Lodi, believes that China's fight against the epidemic has been successful and worthy of reference, giving Italy hope of overcoming the epidemic (Example 19). The use of the office (Governor of Lodi) and the full name (Francesco Passerini) is STD enhanced persuasive power through the topos of authority. Countries that have been helped by China, such as Italy and Singapore, have also expressed their gratitude for China's ability to lend a helping hand to them in times of trouble and help them tide over their difficulties (Examples 19-20).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Using a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis approach, this study examines the discursive expression and ideological impact of STD on China in the context of the global health pandemic caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the study, it was found that STD shaped China as a victim, a fighter and a country with institutional strengths/cooperation. Together they build China's national image on the international stage. STD's discursive representations in news texts not only have a profound ideological impact on global solidarity and humanitarianism, but also intertwine with broader discursive contexts to co-construct a complex system of international discourse.

This paper shows how to conduct a corpus-based discourse analysis of media on the topic of the global health crisis. Most importantly, we examined the Collocate of important salient words based on the association strength of the words. The analysis of Collocate helps researchers to narrow down the use of salient words (Joharry & Turiman, 2020). In the analysis we came up with eight discourse prosodies. The first three discourse prosodies constitute the image of China as a victim. By comparing the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic to a war, STD uses the metaphor of "the enemy", pitting China against COVID-19 and suggesting that China is also its victim. Those who politicize the outbreak by stigmatizing the COVID-19 virus as a product of China and referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and "Wuhan virus" should be morally and socially reprehensible (Viladrich 2021). It is a form of political bullying (Taskinsoy, 2020).

Three discourse prosodies #4, #5 #6 constitute the image of China as a fighter. China is a fighter, and this is reflected in its efforts to combat the pandemic and restore its economy. In the face of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, China has actively taken strict measures to control the spread of the epidemic. China became the first major economy to return to positive economic growth after the epidemic.

Global solidarity and humanitarianism are also ideological influences on STD's discourse. China's institutional strengths helped the country achieve victory against the COVID-19 pandemic. After China's success in combating the epidemic, it has actively shared its successful experience and practices, and has provided material resources and medical technology to other countries. China has always advocated that the world is a community, and this is also true for health. In the face of this powerful enemy, COVID-19, the peoples of the world should be united (Chan & Yu, 2023). The latter two discourse prosodies #7, #8 constitute this image of China.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, few researchers have examined Chinese media coverage of Chinese affairs during the COVID-19 period. Unlike other researchers, we systematically analyzed the linguistic patterns/tendencies used to describe China's national image in a large COVID-19 news corpus. This study demonstrates the value of using corpus-based CAD to study Hong Kong media representations of China's national image during the COVID-19 period, which addresses the problem of what others consider to be "cherry-picking" (Baker, 2012). There is still a limitation in this study, which is that STD's readers at home and abroad are educated people. Then the image of China shaped by STD discourse also has an impact mainly among these readers. Whether those who are uneducated or poorly educated will be affected by China's image propaganda efforts during COVID-19 will be something we will investigate in the future through an experimental study.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Diyana Nawar Kasimon and Dr. Wan Anita Wan Abas were responsible for study design and revising. PhD candidate Hu Xiaolin was responsible for data collection. PhD candidate Hu Xiaolin drafted the manuscript and revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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