Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese and American Online Media Coverage of the East Sea Dispute: A Socio-cognitive Approach

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Abstract: This paper aims to uncover the ideological differences between China and the United States (U.S.) regarding the East Sea (also known as the South China Sea) (hereafter ES) dispute by analyzing online news discourse. Specifically, by adopting van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis, the study analyzes English news reports from top media outlets in China (Global Times, China Daily) and the U.S. (The New York Times, The Washington Post) between 1 to 31 August 2023. Through qualitative analysis, the study interprets linguistic features that reflect each country's media outlets' underlying ideologies and then uncovers the differences between their ideologies. In addition, quantitative analysis identifies frequent discursive features that represent ideologies. Theoretically, the article contributes to the application of van Dijk's Ideological Square theory in exposing ideologies in online media discourse. Practically, it helps construct a critical perspective on how Chinese and American online media report on the ES dispute and the involved nations based on their contrasting ideologies. Overall, by linking ideologies and discourse, the research elucidates how language conveys and shapes ideologies to promote national interests.

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1. Introduction

Since 1992, the sovereignty dispute in the ES involving China, the territory of Taiwan, and ASEAN member countries - including Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam - has been, and continues to be, a geopolitical hotspot. Frontline nations on the political stage defending island sovereignty, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, often face China's encroachment on sovereignty over islands and entities in the region. Moreover, the internal disputes among regional nations escalated to a peak when the U.S. sought to maintain its presence and influence in the area to control China's expansion. Therefore, both Chinese and U.S. media strive to persuade the community about the correctness of each country's perspective on the ES sovereignty. As Mooney and Evans (2019) asserted, the media can manipulate readers' perspectives through information control and language use, and in the light of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially in terms of social cognition perspectives, the ideological factors embedded in different layers of language can be exposed.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The definitions of CDA

According to Fairclough (2001), discourse, written or spoken, is not merely created by linguistic structures and orders. As language is social semiotic, it is, on one hand, affected systematically by social circumstances, reflecting social structures, and social practices (Weiss & Wodak, 2007). On the other hand, it also reversely affects society to shape, retain, or change social relationships (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Therefore, CDA, seen as an approach to language analysis, identifies the correlation between linguistic production and social variables, or more specifically, the link between power and struggles over power in the composition of discourse. Put differently, by means of CDA, the traces of ideologies pertaining to power relations can be exposed in discourse. Sharing the same idea with Fairclough, but specifying in more detail the term *power relations* in Fairclough's definition, van Dijk, Wodak and Meyer defined CDA as a type of discourse analysis studying how social power abuse, dominance, discrimination, and inequality are "expressed,

signaled, constituted" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) as well as resisted in discourse in the social and political context (van Dijk, 2011).

From these points of view, it can be stated that *CDA is an approach to language analysis encompassing the interdependence of language, power, and ideology. With thorough description, explanation, and critique, CDA aims to defamiliarize the "naturalized" language used in the discourse, then reveal the power or struggles over power as well as hidden ideologies.*

2.2. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA

2.2.1. Ideology, cognition, and discourse

According to van Dijk (2012: 3), the concept of "ideology" is approached by incorporating cognitive and social psychology, sociology, and discourse analysis. In cognitive terms, ideology is defined as the shared social cognitions within a group; the social aspect clarifies the groups, intergroup relations, and institutions that contribute to ideology formation and continuation; while the discourse dimension delves into how ideologies impact on our everyday communication, our comprehension of ideological discourse, and how discourse plays a role in upholding ideological beliefs within society.

Explaining the societal role of ideologies, van Dijk (1998) argues that ideologies are not inherently classified as right or wrong; rather, their effectiveness varies in advancing a group's interests. Consequently, the primary societal role of ideologies is proposed to be the coordination of actions and behaviors among group members to achieve collective goals and safeguard shared interests. Furthermore, ideologies serve as the fundamental social representations of shared beliefs within a group, playing a crucial role in structuring and maintaining the consistency of these beliefs. Therefore, ideologies provide a framework that enables the deduction, assimilation, and dissemination of social perspectives within a group, especially in the face of new events and circumstances.

Thus, to make ideologies effective in their roles, their *cognitive aspects* (what people think) must align with *social functions* (what people do). Van Dijk (1998) states that social practices rely on shared beliefs such as knowledge, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies, and that the latter provide the foundational

principles guiding social judgments. In this sense, ideologies vary in form and structure. Many involve contrasting views of Self and Others, Us and Them, particularly in conflicting situations. These core ideas influence opinions about specific groups, such as prejudiced attitudes driven by racist ideologies. Overall, ideologies organize group attitudes, that is how groups and members perceive themselves and others.

Discourse, together with ideologies and cognition, form a triangle. Van Dijk (2012: 18) argues that cognition, through mental models, acts as a bridge between abstract ideologies and actual text and speech, playing a crucial intermediate role. Specifically, the meaning of discourse is only the tip of the iceberg which encompasses merely a fraction of the information stored in the mental model employed for comprehending that discourse. Furthermore, as discussed above, knowledge and attitudes, along with ideologies albeit indirectly, can impact how people shape the frameworks and details of their mental representations of specific events (van Dijk, 2012: 16). This ability also implies that people can adapt broad ideologies into specific personal experiences, which are reflected in their mental models. Therefore, discourse is also influenced by ideologies through cognition.

2.2.2. The analysis of news as ideological discourse

According to van Dijk (2008), the analysis of news structure reveals how ideologies are subtly embedded within news reports; and the socio-cognitive approach helps grasp how these underlying ideologies impact specific group attitudes. In the world of journalism, these ideologies influence the mental models that journalists hold. These models guide every step of news creation, from choosing what stories to cover, gathering information, conducting interviews, writing articles, and editing, to finalizing the news piece. What is intriguing is that all these journalistic actions are strongly shaped by the immediate context in which journalists operate, encompassing factors such as the location of the news event, deadlines, the people involved (journalists, editors, sources), their respective roles, as well as their shared social knowledge and group ideologies. Despite the existence of professional rules and norms (for example, accuracy, truthfulness, independence, impartiality, fairness, objectivity, etc.), it is this present context that primarily determines the suitability of news content for the current social and political

circumstances. In essence, news reports become a blend of the journalists' beliefs and the prevailing context, underscoring the intricate interplay between journalism, ideologies, and the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, according to Bell (1984), an ideological analysis of news delves into how news stories can distort or alter the "facts" as originally presented by their sources. This alteration in meaning or content is a type of structural transformation that occurs when information from the source discourse is translated into news discourse. This transformation can also be referred to as rhetorical, as it involves emphasizing or de-emphasizing information for various purposes. This may include highlighting negative aspects of certain groups (out-groups) or positive aspects of one's own group (in-groups). Therefore, not only does news discourse entail ideologies, but it also perpetuates and spreads them.

2.2.3. Expression of ideological schema in discourse

Expanding on the proposed framework, ideologies are evident in discourse through various types of meanings. The following categories, which form a general schema that reflects how groups will gradually develop a self-concept that is the result of their collective, shared experiences in society, are commonly observed in ideological discourse (van Dijk, 2011: 395-396):

- Group Identity and Identification: Ideological discourse influences discussions about group identity, including characteristics, criteria for membership, historical background, foundational texts, symbols, and markers.

- Activity: Ideological discourse shapes the definition of roles, expectations, and actions for group members in society. This category is significant in professional, political, and religious ideologies.

- Norms and Values: Norms and values play a crucial role in ideologies, shaping attitudes and practices. Ideological discourse often reflects specific norms and values chosen by each ideology.

- Group Relations: The representation of relationships between in-groups and out-groups is central to most ideologies. Ideological discourse often involves positive self-presentation and negative portrayal of others.

- Resources: Ideological discourse focuses on the defense or distribution of resources, privileges, and power. Socioeconomic ideologies and resistance ideologies often highlight this category, emphasizing the protection or redistribution of resources.

2.2.4. The ideological square

Figure 1.1. The Ideological Square

One primary method used to control ideological discourse is the Ideological Square (Figure 1.1), which falls under the Group Relations category manifested in ideological discourse. This strategy utilizes four complementary meta-strategies: emphasizing positive aspects of our group (in-group), emphasizing negative aspects

Emphasize Our good things	Emphasize Their bad things
De-emphasize Our bad things	De-emphasize Their good things

Source: van Dijk, 2011: 396

of their group (out-group), downplaying negative aspects of our group, and downplaying positive aspects of their group (van Dijk, 2011). These meta-strategies can be employed at various levels of discourse, including sound and visual structures, syntax, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, rhetoric, and organizational structures.

2.3. Overview of related studies

Numerous studies have effectively revealed the underlying ideologies present in news coverage of international conflicts, utilizing the socio-cognitive approach to media discourse analysis. Chan's study (2012) and his later work (2014), through the analysis of media discourse from the China Daily, both explore

the construction of identities and ideologies conforming to van Dijk's Ideological Square model. With both qualitative and quantitative approaches, Chan highlighted the strategies used to shape identities of the in-group, out-group and sub-groups through historical narratives, re-categorization, and reverse re-categorization, uncovering the complex construction of inter-group relations in news discourse covering conflicts between nations. Adding Social Identity theory (Oktar, 2001 as cited in Ali, 2017) to the theoretical framework of the Ideological Square, Ali's study (2017) analyzes the discursive construction of identities in a major Pakistani newspaper during a conflict between Pakistan and India. The study uncovers the ideological construction of identities, emphasizing the positive self-presentation of Pakistan and the negative other-presentation of India, revealing the power of language choices in shaping perceptions and constructing divisions between in-groups and out-groups. Toward a more in-depth qualitative approach, Apirakvanalee and Zhai (2022) examine how Western media polarizes positive and negative representations of "us" and "them" in discourse on China's rise, demonstrating in detail the relations between discourse and ideology in accordance with van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA. In this study, the findings of discourse properties in narratives, such as actor description, authority, categorization, dramatization, generalization, history as lessons, hyperbole, (il) legality, lexicalization, number game, presupposition, and vagueness reveal prevalent negative portrayals of China while selectively emphasizing positive aspects of Australia and Canada as "us" and excluding India, Indonesia, and Kenya from the "us" group by extensively discussing negative aspects of them.

The abovementioned studies collectively highlight the power of media discourse in constructing and representing ideologies, national identities, and group divisions in the media. Their findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of discourse in shaping societal perceptions and constructing divisions in different socio-political contexts, especially when it comes to inter-group conflicts covered by the media. Furthermore, the abovementioned studies also provide the potential of applying van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA on media coverage of inter-group conflicts. Therefore, the effectiveness of this approach in elucidating the mechanisms of ideological discourse construction is considered well-suited for dissecting the ideological discourse within Chinese and American online media coverage of the ES dispute.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The thesis examines authentic online news reports written in English, extracted from online news outlets in both the U.S. and China. The data consists of news reports obtained from American news outlets, including The Washington Post (WP) and The New York Times (NT), as well as from Chinese news outlets, namely China Daily (CD) and Global Times (GT). The selection of these specific news outlets is based on their prominence and influence in their respective countries (Mody, 2010; Zeng & Sparks, 2019). The decision to focus on English-language media is based on the understanding that online news reports in a language accessible to foreign audiences serve as a means for governments to inform and influence international perceptions of the issues discussed. Factiva (Down Jones, 2024) - an online global news search engine - is utilized to search for the keywords: "South China Sea dispute" in the headlines, since news headlines epitomize the primary concepts of online news articles and serve as a valuable tool for uncovering news themes and their connections (Mazumder, Bishnoi, & Patel, 2014); the date range of articles is set from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2023. Furthermore, the subject of the news reports is limited to "International relations" since it is the most common subject of news reports covering the ES dispute (according to the statistics from Factiva), and this subject also aligns with the focus of van Dijk's Ideological Square – the main framework of this study, which is on Intergroup relations.

Using this method, a total of 48 news articles, with a total word count of 29,440 were selected (The New York Times: 12,874 words/17 articles, The Washington Post: 3,594 words/five articles; Global Times: 6,019 words/12 articles, China Daily: 6,949 words/14 articles). Subsequently, the researchers thoroughly read these selected articles and selected relevant discourse related to the ES dispute.

3.2. Data analysis

Drawing from van Dijk's (2012) theoretical framework, this study employs the Ideological Square model to investigate four distinct strategies: (1) emphasizing positive attributes within our group, (2) emphasizing negative attributes within their

group, (3) de-emphasizing negative aspects of our group, and (4) de-emphasizing positive aspects of their group. In the analysis of ideological discourse properties, to make it as practical as possible, van Dijk (2012: 48-64) identified several, among which, the following are featured in this study*:*

Actor Description: Involves the way discourse portrays individuals or groups involved in events. It can influence the perception of who is responsible for an action or event.

Authority: Refers to the use of authoritative sources or references to enhance the credibility of a message or ideology.

Categorization: Involves classifying people, events, or concepts into specific categories, which can lead to the reinforcement of social, cultural, or political hierarchies.

Comparison: Involves framing issues by comparing them to others, often using evaluative language to highlight differences or similarities. This strategy shapes perceptions by associating certain qualities with specific entities, influencing how people interpret information.

Dramatization: Refers to the use of vivid language and emotional appeal to heighten the impact of events, often to evoke specific responses from the audience.

Disclaimer: Involves using language to soften the impact of a statement or to reduce the perception of responsibility, often by indicating uncertainty or alternative viewpoints.

Explanation: Involves providing interpretations or justifications for events, actions, or ideologies. Explanations in discourse can be selective, emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others, shaping the audience's understanding and perception.

Fallacy: Disputes regarding conflicting viewpoints and opinions often involve normative violations of "proper" argumentation, characterized by the presence of fallacies. These fallacies can manifest in various aspects of the argumentative process. The analysis, guided by Damer's (2009) Theory of Fallacy Classification, will identify and elucidate numerous fallacies present in these argumentative situations.

Generalization: Involves making broad statements about a group or concept, which can lead to oversimplification and reinforcement of stereotypes.

(Il) legality: Involves framing actions or events as legal or illegal, often to justify certain policies or perspectives based on legal norms.

Implication: Discourse frequently relies on implicit information, which recipients infer from shared knowledge or attitudes, incorporating it into their mental models of the represented event or action. This general cognitive-pragmatic rule of implicitness, avoiding redundant information, is influenced by interactional, socio-political, and cultural factors, including politeness, keeping face, and adherence to cultural norms.

Lexicalization: Refers to the use of specific words or phrases that carry ideological connotations, shaping how people perceive and discuss certain topics.

Metaphor: Utilizes metaphorical language to convey abstract concepts, framing them in terms of more familiar or emotionally charged domains. Metaphors can be powerful tools for shaping attitudes and perceptions by invoking specific images or associations.

Number Game: Involves using statistics and numbers to support an argument or perspective, often to lend an air of objectivity or authority to the discourse.

Polarization: Involves framing issues or groups in extreme terms, emphasizing contrasts and oppositions. This strategy creates a binary perspective, fostering an "us versus them" mentality and reinforcing ideological divisions.

Presupposition: Involves assuming certain background knowledge or beliefs that can influence the interpretation of the discourse and reinforce underlying ideologies.

Reasonableness: Presents arguments or claims coherently and logically to justify a certain perspective or action, often aimed at persuading the audience by appealing to their sense of reason.

Vagueness: Involves using vague or ambiguous language to allow for multiple interpretations, which can be strategically used to appeal to different audiences or avoid direct commitments.

Victimization: Involves portraying oneself or a group as a victim, often in the context of perceived injustices or threats. This strategy aims to garner sympathy, support, or justification for certain actions or positions by framing them as defensive responses to victimhood.

However, constrained by length limitations, this article exclusively examines a selection of noteworthy examples of discourse properties mentioned above.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Discursive representation of groups in U.S. news

4.1.1. The representation of China as the Out-group

The quantitative analysis of U.S. news discourse suggests that China is the most focused actor that is discursively represented in news articles. To be more specific, the number of occurrences of the word "China" (excluding references to the "South China Sea") ranks first among content words (as opposed to function words) with the frequency of 278. With detailed qualitative analysis following van Dijk's framework, the negative representation of China is revealed.

Table 1: China as an Unlawful Actor

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
1	China's military buildup, and increasingly aggressive action by its coast guards and maritime militia, <u>have also raised questions</u> about China's intentions in the region and its willingness to comply with international law and norms.	NT: Tensions with China Cross a New Line in the South China Sea; News Analysis
2	"The nine-dash line is seldom, if ever, used by <u>anyone outside China</u>"	WP: Vietnam pulls movie 'Abominable' from theaters over South China Sea claim
3	The tensions are particularly pronounced in the Philippines, where fishermen have been blocked by Chinese vessels from fishing, and Manila has been prevented from fully exploring oil and gas deposits within an area that an international tribunal in The Hague ruled in 2016 to be part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone	NT: Tensions with China Cross a New Line in the South China Sea; News Analysis

In Example [0], the narrative employs the Vagueness property raising questions about China's intentions and its willingness to comply with international law and norms, insinuating potential non-compliance, which downplays the significance of international law in regards to China.

Overgeneralization and Implication are also invoked to reinforce the Actor Description. In Excerpts [0], the statement *"The nine-dash line is seldom, if ever, used by anyone outside China"* demonstrates a form of Overgeneralization (*anyone outside China*) and Implication that outside of China, there is little to no usage of the nine-dash line; hence, it does not necessarily mean that every mention of the nine-dash line indicates support for China's territorial claims in the ES. These two properties therefore undermine the legality of China's claims and reinforce the notion of an unlawful China.

Illegality is also frequently invoked to reinforce the Actor Description property. The above example [0] illustrates discourse property of Illegality versus Legality. It strategically employs Comparison and Polarization by emphasizing the contrasting positions of the Philippines, which possesses a legal right within the exclusive economic zone, and China, which is depicted as violating that legal right. This juxtaposition serves to portray China's actions as illegal, contributing to the portrayal of China as an actor engaged in unlawful activities. This deliberate framing enhances the broader narrative that characterizes China as a violator of international laws and norms in the context of the ES disputes.

Table 2: China as an Aggressive Actor

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
4	But Chinese forces have been unrelenting in using confrontation, raising worries about an escalation	NT: Tensions With China Cross a New Line in the South China Sea; News Analysis
5	David R. Stilwell, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, derided China's 'gangster tactics' in the maritime region	WP: Caught in a South China Sea standoff
6	Senior State Department officials also accused China and its state-owned companies of 'bullying and coercion' in the region.	NT: U.S. Penalizes 24 Chinese Companies Over Role in South China Sea

In the analyzed discourse taken from U.S. news, the Actor Description property is consistently applied to depict China as an aggressor, which encroaches on other nations' territories. For instance, discourse [0] highlights China's unrelenting actions, which involve direct confrontation, leading to regional instability. The analysis also finds that Lexicalization plays a crucial role in shaping how China and its actions are portrayed negatively. Many variations of the word denoting China's aggressiveness are found. In terms of word choice in Example [0], *"unrelenting", "direct confrontation", "raising worries", and "escalation"* are words used to refer to this aggression, as well as the negative effects on the stability of the region. The discourse further features nominalized phrases like *"gangster tactics," "coercion,"* and *"bullying,"* (in [0], [0]). By using nominalization, which excludes any indication of time - because there is no verb to be tensed and any indication of modality - the writer's views are seen as the truth or the desirability of the proposition (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979). As a result, China is characterized as "a bully" with strong-arm tactics and intimidation in the ES. These lexical choices collectively contribute to the negative framing of China, portraying its actions as aggressive, coercive, and disruptive, influencing how readers perceive and discuss the ES disputes.

Table 3: China as the World's Common Enemy

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
7	The Philippine defense secretary, Delfin Lorenzana, called their presence "a clear provocation." Vietnam's foreign ministry accused China of violating the country's sovereignty and demanded that the ships leave.	NT: With Swarms of Ships, Beijing Tightens Its Grip on South China Sea

The Polarization properties can be identified in the responses of countries that are polarized against China, for example the Philippine defense secretary and Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs labeling China's presence as "a clear provocation" and "violating the country's sovereignty" (in Example [0]). Quoting these responses further polarizes China as the antagonist, given its provocative actions in the eyes of other nations. In addition, the quantitative findings also imply

that China is frequently polarized against the U.S. as the clusters of words: *"China and the U.S."* and *"the U.S. and China"* appear most frequently, with 12 occurrences in total, when the keyword *"China"* is analyzed. Furthermore, all these clusters follow or precede the context denoting the contest between the two countries, for instance: *intensifying confrontation*, *deterioration of relations between*, *lack of an agreement between*, *power play between*, *soured relations between*, *a war of words between*, *naval contest between*, *growing dispute between*, *the rivalry between.* This polarization, combined with the positive representation of the U.S. in the following part of the study, reinforces the image of China as a common enemy of the U.S. and the rest of the world.

4.1.2. The representation of the U.S. as the In-group

Within the discourse surrounding the ES dispute in the U.S. news articles, the representation of the U.S. as the in-group is discernible in various instances.

Table 4: The U.S. as an Actor that Conforms to International Law

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
8	Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken expressed <u>support for the Philippines</u> over the presence of the Chinese vessels. 'We will always <u>stand by our allies</u> and <u>stand up for the rules-based international order</u>,' he wrote on Twitter.	NT: With Swarms of Ships, Beijing Tightens Its Grip on South China Sea
9	The State Department also declared last month that China's expansive maritime claims across most of the South China Sea <u>were illegal</u>, siding more clearly than ever before with other nations in the region, including Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.	NT: China Fires Missiles into South China Sea, Sending U.S. a Message

As opposed to the Illegality property, which is frequently used to negatively represent China as the out-group, Legality is a prominent property that appears in discourse that represents the U.S. in a positive light. In Excerpt [0], the property of

Legality is utilized to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the international rules-based order. Furthermore, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken's statement, expressing support for the Philippines as well as other allies and reiterating their alliance, categorizes (the property of *Categorization*) the U.S. as a member of the international community committed to preserving the rules-based system. This portrayal positively frames it as an advocate for the principles of international law and order, aligning itself with its allies.

Legality can also be reified through Illegality as can be seen in Example [0]. The State Department's declaration of China's "expansive maritime claims" as illegal positions the U.S. positively as a member of the international community fighting against perceived illegality. By emphasizing the collaboration with nations such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, the U.S.'s representation is strengthened, highlighting its role as a protagonist within the international discourse surrounding the ES.

Table 5: The U.S. as A Superior Actor

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
10	"However incensed China's neighbors are by its bullying; they are in no position to push back unless they can be certain of American support and leadership."	NT: China's Claims to the South China Sea Are Unlawful. Now What?
11	"Last month, Mr. O'Brien gave a speech in Arizona saying that China's president, Xi Jinping, saw himself as a 'successor' to the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and warned that China sought to take advantage of the coronavirus crisis 'to displace the United States as the leading global power.'"	NT: U.S. Says Most of Beijing's Claims in the South China Sea Are Illegal

Not only is the U.S. discursively portrayed as a supportive ally, but it is also represented as a superior nation able to lead other countries in the fight against China. Excerpt [0] employs the property of *Presupposition* by presupposing that only the U.S. is capable of leading other countries. It implies that the U.S. is seen as

a reliable source of support and leadership by China's neighbors. By positioning the U.S. in this role, the discourse strengthens the U.S.'s representation as a dependable ally and leader within the context of the ES dispute. Another example of the Presupposition of U.S. power can also be seen in Example [0]. This excerpt makes use of the property of *Presupposition*, implying that the U.S. is the current leading global power that China wants to replace. This reinforces and furthers the image of the U.S. as the leading, superior actor within the international system.

These analyses demonstrate how the discourse in U.S. news reports positions the country in various roles, such as an advocate for freedom of navigation, an unbiased actor opposing Chinese aggression, a supporter of international law, a member of the international community, a protector of regional stability, a reliable source of support and leadership, and the incumbent global power, collectively contributing to the representation of the U.S as the in-group in the discourse surrounding the ES.

4.2. Discursive representation of groups in Chinese news

4.2.1. The representation of the U.S. as the out-group

The U.S. as a disrupter

In the Chinese news, many discursive sub-strategies of representing the U.S. as a disrupter to the ES regional stability are identified. Particularly, the analysis reveals several instances of fallacious reasoning.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
12	The more the US intervenes in the South China Sea issue, the more the Philippine policies in the South China Sea will likely swing back and forth, Ding said.	GT: US 'aims to escalate tensions' through joint naval sail with Philippines in South China Sea
13	Removing interference from external factors is the only way to ensure lasting peace and stability in the South China Sea.	CD: External factors threaten stability in the South China Sea

For instance, Statement [0] employs a causal fallacy (Damer, 2009: 176), linking U.S. intervention to fluctuations in Philippine policies without providing substantial evidence for this direct cause-and-effect relationship. In addition, in Example [0] involves a fallacy of oversimplification. This assertion, which states that *"removing interference from external factors is the only way to ensure lasting peace and stability in the South China Sea"* neglects the possibility of a multifaceted approach involving diplomatic, political, and economic considerations for achieving peace and stability, thereby oversimplifying the complex nature of the situation.

Furthermore, the ideological discourse property of the *Number game* is also employed to reinforce the negative representation of the U.S. as a disrupter in Chinese news, which is clarified in the following analysis.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
14	Nearly 80 percent of the public surveyed said that the US is the biggest disruptor of the development of China-ASEAN relations, the survey said.	GT: US 'biggest disruptor' of China-ASEAN ties, with the South China Sea question in focus: GT survey
15	It also means that 94.2 percent of the respondents hold a positive attitude toward the two sides handling the South China Sea question well.	GT: US 'biggest disruptor' of China-ASEAN ties, with the South China Sea question in focus: GT survey
16	The US conducted more than 2,000 operations close to Chinese waters and over 500 in the South China Sea in the first half of 2021 if close-up reconnaissance flights are counted. So, the chances of an accident involving Chinese and US vessels have greatly increased.	CD: - Building guardrails for the US in the South China Sea

Statement [0] highlights a striking level of consensus among the public, with nearly 80% of the surveyed individuals expressing the view that the U.S. holds the role of the most significant disruptor in the development of China-ASEAN

relations. The use of a specific numerical figure, "80%" adds weight to the assertion, emphasizing the strength and prevalence of this perspective within the surveyed population. Furthermore, the provided statistic in [0], indicating that 94.2% of respondents express a positive attitude toward China and ASEAN handling the ES issue, strongly suggests a prevailing sentiment among the majority. This high percentage implies a widespread belief that external forces, particularly those outside China and ASEAN, may not be necessary or welcome in addressing the challenges related to the ES. The sub-strategy of the Number game is also illustrative in the data in [0]. The substantial numerical emphasis, particularly the use of "more than 2,000" and "over 500," underscores the intensity of U.S. military activities in the region. The subsequent assertion that these operations increase the chances of accidents involving Chinese and U.S. vessels implies a correlation between the high frequency of U.S. presence and the elevated risk of maritime incidents, which can also be seen as a causal fallacy.

Furthermore, *Metaphor* is skillfully utilized in the discourse of Chinese news to emphasize a perception of the U.S. as an agent of disturbance in the Asia-Pacific, actively contributing to tensions and conflicts in the ES for its own interests.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
17	Unfortunately, the more Washington becomes intoxicated by the heady thrill of its game, the more unlikely any fence-mending will be until after the inevitable hangover.	CD: US hijacking stability in South China Sea
18	For years, the United States has played the role of troublemaker in the Asia-Pacific region, constantly making waves over regional maritime disputes to sow the seeds of conflict.	CD:US aggressively troublemaking in the South China Sea

The metaphorical language in Extract [0], including terms such as "intoxicated," "heady thrill," "game," and "hangover," creates vivid imagery suggesting that Washington perceives the ES issues as a form of entertainment. The use of "intoxicated" implies a state of being excessively engaged or enthralled, while "heady thrill" adds a sense of excitement and exhilaration. Describing the

situation as a "game" further reinforces the notion of the U.S. treating the matters related to the ES as something to be played with or manipulated. Finally, the reference to an "inevitable hangover" implies that there will be negative consequences or regrets for the U.S. actions in the aftermath, emphasizing the potential seriousness of viewing geopolitical issues through the lens of entertainment. Another illustration of this sub-strategy can be seen in the metaphorical expressions in extract [0], such as "making waves" and "sowing the seeds of conflict," which paint a vivid picture of the U.S as a troublemaker in the Asia-Pacific region. The term "making waves" suggests that the U.S. is actively creating disturbances or disruptions, particularly in the context of regional maritime disputes in the ES; while the metaphor "sowing the seeds of conflict" implies a deliberate and strategic effort by the U.S. to instigate or initiate discord in the region, with the potential long-term consequence of fostering conflicts.

The U.S. as a manipulator

Within the discourse of Chinese news, the U.S. is depicted as a manipulative actor who tries to lure other countries into destabilizing the ES for its own benefit. To reify this depiction, many discursive sub-strategies are employed, including the property of *Fallacy*.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
19	On his first stop in Singapore, Austin could not wait to drive home the true purpose of his visit, by reassuring local countries that the US will support them in "defending their rights" while dealing with China. It is predictable, that he will be striking the same chord during his visits to Vietnam and the Philippines in a bid to stir up tensions in the otherwise tranquil waters of the South China Sea. Thus, making it clear which country is the troublemaker in the region.	CD: US can learn how to erect guardrails from South China Sea countries

Excerpt [0] exhibits a causal fallacy (Damer, 2009) by suggesting a direct correlation between U.S. Defense Secretary Austin's reassurance of support to local countries and the intention to stir up tensions in the ES. This simplified connection

implies a manipulative strategy by the U.S., insinuating that its actions intentionally aim to escalate tensions in the region. However, this assertion lacks substantial evidence or a clear causal mechanism, potentially misleading the audience by portraying the U.S. as manipulative without a nuanced understanding of the intricate geopolitical dynamics at play. The use of the impersonal construction "it is predictable that" serves as an instance of the fallacy of appeal, creating an impression of the embedded clause's nature as an axiom without providing concrete evidence or reasoning to support this predictability.

Implication and *Presupposition* are also two strategies that contribute effectively to the depiction of a manipulative U.S.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
20	Experts believe that Wang's speech not only shows the real intention behind the hype of the US and other Western countries on the issue, but also conveys the willingness of dialogue to the Philippines.	GT: China and ASEAN members have the capability and wisdom to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea: Wang Yi
21	…observers argued the true intention of the US-ASEAN summit is to pressure the Southeast Asian countries to join Washington's small clique of containing China	GT: US 'biggest disruptor' of China-ASEAN ties, with the South China Sea question in focus: GT survey

In Example [0], the term "real intention" presupposes that the U.S. is concealing its true motives behind the hype generated by the issue. The use of the word "real" implies an underlying assumption that the apparent intentions expressed by the U.S. and other Western countries may not align with their actual motives, further emphasizing the manipulative undertones attributed to them. Similarly, Discourse [0] implies that there is a hidden or undisclosed intention behind the US-ASEAN summit, which observers argue to be pressuring Southeast Asian countries to join a small clique aimed at containing China. This implication suggests a contrast between the stated purpose of the summit and what some perceive to be its actual motive. The presupposition lies in the assertion that there might be an untrue

or concealed intention that differs from the summit's stated goals, reinforcing the idea that the U.S. may be engaging in manipulative strategies within the ASEAN context.

4.2.2. The representation of China as the In-group

China as a country that tries to protect its sovereignty

The discourse analysis of Chinese news reveals that language that involves discursive sub-strategies of *Victimization* is employed to garner sympathy and support for China by presenting it as a nation subjected to unwarranted attacks and emphasizing the violation of international norms by its accusers.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
22	Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin expresses strong dissatisfaction and has lodged solemn representations with relevant parties after the leaders of the US, Japan and South Korea smeared and attacked China on the Taiwan question and South China Sea issue during the Camp David summit, which seriously violated the basic norms governing international relations, the Chinese Foreign Ministry responded on Monday.	GT: China lodges solemn representations with relevant parties in Camp David summit on Taiwan question and South China Sea issue: FM

The discourse in Example [0] portrays China as a victim of wrongful actions, specifically smearing and attacking by the leaders of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea during the Camp David Summit. The use of language such as "expresses strong dissatisfaction" and "lodged solemn representations" underscores China's objection and protest against what it perceives as unjust accusations. By characterizing these as a serious violation of the basic norms governing international relations, the statement seeks to position China as a principled actor adhering to established diplomatic standards. The term "victimization" is evident in the narrative, framing China as unjustly targeted and emphasizing the alleged misconduct of the leaders from the mentioned countries.

Furthermore, to de-emphasize the aggressiveness of China's actions and to position it as a nation acting within the bounds of international law to protect its rightful interests in the ES, the *Explanation* property is utilized to clarify China's undertakings.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
23	Wang Wenbin, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said at the routine press conference on Monday that the Chinese Coast Guard vessel exercised professional restraint during on-site operations, facing a Philippines Coast Guard vessel entering waters near the Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea on February 6 without permission.	GT: US' coercion will not shake China's strong will to safeguard sovereignty and legitimate rights in South China Sea: FM

As can be seen in Excerpt [0], in response to U.S. Admiral John C. Aquilino's assertion that China poses a threat to regional countries, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, a spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, emphasized that China's actions are driven by its indisputable sovereignty over the islands and adjacent waters in the ES. This explanation aims to clarify that China's activities in the region are framed within the context of safeguarding its territorial integrity and sovereignty. By underscoring China's legal claims over this area, the statement seeks to mitigate any negative implications or perceptions arising from the U.S. admiral's characterization of China as a regional threat.

Additionally, in the analysis, *Disclaimer* is also identified as another discursive sub-strategy employed to deemphasize the negative impression of China.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
24	"China is happy to see countries outside the region play a positive and constructive role in the peaceful development of the region, but will not accept any actions that undermine regional peace and stability and undermine regional unity and cooperation	GT: US 'biggest disruptor' of China-ASEAN ties, with the South China Sea question in focus: GT survey

In Extract [0], China expresses contentment with the positive and constructive role played by countries outside the region in the peaceful development of the area. However, a disclaimer follows, making it clear that China will not tolerate actions that undermine regional peace, stability, unity, and cooperation. The use of a disclaimer construction provides a positive impression of China as objective and friendly, potentially influencing the perception of reasonableness regarding the subsequent statement about China's readiness to counteract actions from other countries that may threaten regional interests.

China as a peacekeeper

Under the light of van Dijk's CDA framework, it is also discovered that the discourse in the Chinese news emphasizes the representation of China as an advocate who tries to maintain regional peace. Particularly, this positive depiction of China is reified through several discursive sub-strategies, among which *Fallacy* is one the most prominent ones.

No.	Extracted discourse	Source
25	China maintains a high degree of stability and continuity in its domestic and foreign policies, and is committed to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese modernization. This will bring stability to regional peace and security, and provide stronger driving forces for regional development and prosperity, Qin said.	GT: China vows to build the South China Sea into a sea of peace and cooperation
26	First, China should strengthen its security forces, especially the navy, to safeguard regional peace and increase deterrence. The US will not succeed in its plan to stir trouble in the South China Sea and use it as an excuse to strengthen its military presence in the region if China's air and sea forces are strong enough to act as deterrent.	CD: Building guardrails for US in South China Sea

In Discourse [0], a causal fallacy is identified in the assertion that China's commitment to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through modernization will bring stability to regional peace and security. While the

statement presents a positive view of China's intentions, it oversimplifies the complex factors influencing regional peace and security. The idea that one nation's modernization efforts alone will bring stability to an entire region is a simplification and may not accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of geopolitical dynamics. Another illustration of Fallacy can also be seen in Discourse [0], which contains a form of begging-the-question fallacy (Damer, 2009: 63). It assumes the validity of the claim it seeks to establish without providing independent evidence or reasoning. Specifically, the statement presupposes that the strengthening of China's security forces, especially the navy, will automatically result in regional peace and increased deterrence. It suggests that the mere assertion of China's military strength will prevent the success of the alleged U.S. plan to stir trouble in the ES. However, this argument lacks a logical foundation and fails to address the complexity of geopolitical dynamics, potential consequences, and the perspectives of other nations involved.

5. Conclusion

In the light of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA, the meta-strategies embedded in the Ideological Square framework are discerned within the discourse of news coverage concerning the ES from both U.S. and Chinese news outlets. Despite professing objectivity, U.S. news sources tend to depict China in a negative light, positioning it as an out-group, while simultaneously portraying themselves and their allies as the in-group. Conversely, Chinese news outlets adopt a similar approach, frequently casting the U.S. and its allies as the out-group and positioning themselves as the in-group. These discursive representations not only illuminate the ideological orientation of the respective nation's news outlets but also exemplify how discourse can be manipulated to perpetuate and disseminate specific ideologies among the audience. Therefore, it is imperative to approach the issue of the ES dispute with a critical and discerning mindset, acknowledging the potential for biased interpretations within the news discourse.

6. Disclaimer

In this paper, the marine area in question is denoted as "the East Sea," a translation from the Vietnamese term "Biển Đông". Despite its widespread global media recognition as "the South China Sea," the utilization of this name may

potentially undermine diverse political and sovereignty claims from various stakeholders. The designation "the East Sea" corresponds with Vietnam's sovereignty claim over the area, aligning with the political views of the authors and consequently employed in this article. However, it is imperative to underscore that this paper deliberately refrains from engaging in any political discourse pertaining to the name and its associated issues. The primary focus remains on linguistic aspects, maintaining a strictly objective stance within the academic purview of the research.

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