Communicating with the World

Interaction between Chinese and International Media

Edited by Liu Lihua

COMMUNICATING WITH THE WORLD

This book analyses the creation and dissemination of discourse in China while examining how its media and the people interact and communicate with the rest of the world. It explores the interplay between language, meanings, social practices, culture and politics in the processes of discourse generation.

The book critically studies intercultural communication and Chinese discourse models at the national, institutional and individual levels and the different modes of interaction between China and the world. With the help of several case studies the book analyses reports from the *People's Daily*, interpersonal meaning in promotional videos and advertisements in China, rhetoric in the editorials of *China Daily* and the representation by international media like *The Associated Press* and *The New York Times* to explore differences between Chinese and the Western media reporting the same event. It also looks at the complex models through which the Chinese people—both as individuals and as a collective—communicate with and gain an understanding of the rest of the world.

Rich in empirical case studies, this book will be an essential read for scholars and researchers of Chinese Studies, communication studies, media and cultural studies, international relations and political communication.

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Edited by Liu Lihua

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CONTENTS

List of figures *viii*
List of tables *ix*
List of contributors *xi*
Acknowledgements *xiii*

PART I
Representation by Chinese mainstream media **1**

1 Discourse interactional model of *People's Daily*: The case of discourse practice of the Belt and Road Initiative 3
Chen Qiuxiang and Liu Lihua

2 Identity construction and negotiation in Chinese political discourse: A case analysis of the fire in the Daxing District 21
Liu Lihua

3 A multimodal discourse analysis of the interpersonal meaning in promotional videos of China 39
Liu Jiahui and Liu Lihua

4 A social-semiotic approach to corporate identity construction: A case study of advertisements on Beijing subway line 2 55
Wei Rongbo and Liu Lihua

5 Discourse construction of social power: Interpersonal rhetoric in editorials of *China Daily* 71
Liu Lihua

6 Formalizing power in editorials of *China Daily*: A generic perspective 89
Liu Lihua

PART II
Representation by international media 107

7 News discourse study based on frame theory: A case study of the "Belt and Road Initiative" news reports of *The Associated Press* 109
Tong Ke and Liu Lihua

8 Discursive construction of Wanda's image in the European media: A case study of news discourse on the Wanda Group's acquisition of the Odeon & UCI 132
Xu Shuo and Liu Lihua

9 Discourse and manipulation: Stories about China in *The New York Times* 154
Liu Lihua

PART III
Interaction between Chinese and international media 169

10 Discourse interaction between *China Daily* and *The New York Times*: A case study of Meng Wanzhou event 171
Li Linjing and Liu Lihua

11 Discourse interaction between *The New York Times* and *China Daily*: The case of Google's departure 194
Liu Lihua, Zhang Cheng and Qian Jiahui

12 Discourse interaction and identity construction: A case study of President Hu and President Obama's press conference of January 2011 212
Liu Lihua

Appendix 5A Editorials of *China Daily* *230*
Appendix 6A *China Daily* Editorials *232*
Appendix 8A *A list of European media news reports on Wanda Group's acquisition of Odeon & UCI cinema chain* *234*
Index *236*

FIGURES

5.1 Attitude types in *China Daily* editorials 76
5.2 Inscribed and invoked attitudes in *China Daily* editorials 77
6.1 Model of genre (Based on Martin 1985, 1986, 1992, 1999, 2001) 90
7.1 Annual distribution of three frames 124
7.2 Diachronic distribution changes of three frames 125
8.1 High-frequency words 140
9.1 Discourse participants in *The New York Times*' Tibet reporting 160
9.2 Discourse participants in *The New York Times*' Xinjiang reporting 161
10.1 Top 20 lexical items in *China Daily* 178
10.2 Top 20 lexical items in *The New York Times* 179
10.3 Distribution of the top ten lexical items in *China Daily* 179
10.4 Distribution of the top ten lexical items in *The New York Times* 180
10.5 Attitude distribution of *China Daily* 182
10.6 Attitude distribution of *The New York Times* 183
11.1 Top 20 lexical words in *The New York Times* 200
11.2 Top 20 lexical words in *China Daily* 201
11.3 Top ten lexical words distribution in *The New York Times* 201
11.4 Top ten lexical words distribution in *China Daily* 201
11.5 Attitude analysis of *The New York Times* 202
11.6 Attitude analysis of *China Daily* 202
11.7 Attitude toward Google 203
11.8 Distribution of quotations in *The New York Times* 205
11.9 Distribution of quotations in *China Daily* 205

TABLES

1.1 Samples of the belt and road news reporting of *People's Daily* 6
1.2 Discourse strategy of the belt and road in *People's Daily* 7
1.3 The distribution of personal pronoun "we" 8
1.4 Noun phrases used to nominate China 9
1.5 Top 20 verbs collocating with "China" 10
1.6 Concordance of "China" and "will" in the belt and road Discourse 11
1.7 The distribution of degree adverbs 11
2.1 Articles published by the government in the first phase 27
2.2 Distribution of evaluation in the first phase 28
2.3 Source of evaluation in government political discourse in the first phase 29
2.4 Relationships constructed among discourse participants in the second phase 33
2.5 Distribution of evaluation in the second phase 34
3.1 Interactive Meaning in Images 41
3.2 The distribution of contact subsystems of five publicity films 41
3.3 The distribution of shots of five publicity films 44
3.4 The distribution of horizontal angle shots of five publicity films 47
3.5 The distribution of vertical angle shots of five publicity films 48
3.6 The distribution of interactive meaning types in five publicity films 50
4.1 Spatial distribution of the SAs 57
4.2 Distribution of the SAs in different stations 57
4.3 Classification of the SAs 58
4.4 Amount and percentage of the four different categories 59
5.1 Distribution of modals and semi-modals in *China Daily* editorials 80
5.2 Distribution of metaphorical modal expressions 80

6.1 Types of editorial 93
6.2 Generic structure for the *explaining* type of editorials 95
6.3 Generic structure for the *calling-on* type of editorials 97
6.4 Generic structure of the *criticizing* and *praising* types of editorials 102
6.5 Generic structure for *celebrating* editorials 103
7.1 Signature matrix of the B&R discourse of *The Associated Press* 117
7.2 Framing devices of the "Cooperation and Development" frame 119
7.3 Reasoning devices of the "Cooperation and Development" frame 120
7.4 Framing devices of the "Hegemony and Worry" frame 121
7.5 Reasoning devices of the "Hegemony and Worry" frame 121
7.6 Framing devices of the "Challenge and Risk" frame 123
7.7 Reasoning devices of the "Challenge and Risk" frame 123
8.1 Sources of news reports 138
8.2 Collocations of keyword "Wanda" 142
8.3 Collocations of keyword "Wang (Jianlin)" 142
8.4 News headlines 146
8.5 Verbs used in headlines 147
8.6 Voices in the data 148
9.1 News source in Xinjiang violence 163
10.1 Data from *China Daily* 175
10.2 Data from *The New York Times* 176
10.3 Analytical framework and interactional model of media discourse 177
10.4 Vocatives of Meng Wanzhou, Ren Zhengfei and Huawei 181
10.5 Quotations in *The New York Times* and *China Daily* 184
11.1 Samples from *The New York Times* 197
11.2 Samples from *China Daily* 197
11.3 Comparisons of variance and standard deviation between the two newspapers 206
12.1 Topics in the speeches of President Hu and President Obama 217
12.2 Verbal processes in Obama's speech 218
12.3 Verbal processes in Hu's speech 219
12.4 Distribution of "we" in the two speeches 221
12.5 Judgment distribution in President Hu and President Obama's speeches 222

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PART I

Representation by Chinese mainstream media

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1

DISCOURSE INTERACTIONAL MODEL OF *PEOPLE'S DAILY*

The case of discourse practice of the Belt and Road Initiative

Chen Qiuxiang and Liu Lihua

1.1 Introduction

The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (hereafter the belt and road) were initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. The belt and road, the major strategic thought of the new central leadership group of China, has become not only a popular political discourse in China but also a hot topic of media coverage and public concern throughout the world. It is generally held that the media discourse model of this topic will influence readers' understanding of the belt and road, thereby further affecting their interpretation of China's international activities. On the other hand, media discourse, especially that of the mainstream Chinese media, is an indispensable political tool and helps produce and distribute the ideology of the state. Following this assumption, this chapter investigates how *People's Daily* communicates the belt and road to the world, and how the discourse model it uses influences the audience. Specifically, this study will make a detailed discourse analysis of 200 news reports in *People's Daily* concerning the belt and road and attempt to answer the following questions: What are the discourse strategies used in *People's Daily* and how is the interactional model of *People's Daily* construed through its discourse practice?

Founded in 1948, *People's Daily* is the biggest newspaper group in China and one of the world's top ten newspapers. Its main layouts include important news, domestic news, monographs and international news. *People's Daily*, as the "mouthpiece" of the Communist Party of China and the government and an important window for Chinese cultural exchange with foreign countries as well as a stage for presenting a thriving new socialist China, actively publicizes the Party's and the government's policy position, records the changes in Chinese society and reports on what has happened and is happening in China. Its political status justifies it as the perfect platform for shaping Chinese political discourse.

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It is undoubted that the discourse model of this newspaper is typical and representative of the Chinese political discourse model.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Discourse studies in China

Originating from linguistics studies in the 1950s, the concept of discourse gradually entered into the field of philosophy and social sciences. Under the influence of Foucault's thought, the connotation and extension of discourse have been greatly expanded. Discourse is thus defined as a meaningful social practice, which reflects and constructs social reality at the same time (Martin, 1995; Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Harvey, 1996; Fairclough, 2003; Burr, 2003; Wodak *et al.*, 2009; van Dijk, 2014; Chaliganti & Müller, 2016; Krzyżanowski, 2016). Following the assumptions of social constructionism, Holzscheiter (2010) pointed out that discourse is not only a kind of space but also a way for people to understand the material world, give meaning to the material world and then express the material world. Therefore, discourse is defined as a system for meaningful practice that constitutes the identity of an object (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000: 3). It thus shapes an object in a specific way, limiting the possibility of action relative to that object (Epstein, 2008: 14–15). In this sense, the model of discourse will have a great impact on the way people perceive objects.

Discourse studies in China have made great progress both in theory and practice. After more than 20 years of rapid development, there are more and more discourse studies about different topics (Miao, 2004; Xin, 2005; Shi, 2008; Xie, 2010; Qian, 2010; Dou, 2011; You, 2015; Tian and Zhao, 2017). Tian Hailong (2015: 32) pointed out that the reason why "discourse" is used much more frequently than "language" is that sociolinguists are not satisfied with just describing the language but eager to explore the field of "discourse construction". At the same time, the discourse types are becoming more and more delicate, and the categories of discourse such as business discourse, media discourse, political discourse, immigration discourse, environmental discourse, energy discourse, and crisis discourse have gradually become the research foci of scholars. However, discourse research in China more or less adopts foreign theories or just follows foreign analytical frameworks; there is more imitation and less local innovation and transformation; there are more linguistic descriptions in discourse research, while the macro interpretation concerning social practice is insufficient.

1.2.2 Previous studies about the belt and road

Previous research on the belt and road mainly involved disciplines such as political science, economics and communication studies. Scholars in political science set out to interpret the connotations of the belt and road and international society's attitudes toward it. An Husen and Zheng Wenguang (2016) held that the belt and

road will promote world peace and replace military supremacy and thus build a new order of world economic development. Research in the field of economics and management studies focused on the opportunities and risks to the economy brought about by the belt and road. Scholars in the field of communication mainly discussed the communication dilemma and countermeasures of the belt and road, and how to tell better Chinese stories to the world. Sun Youzhong and Jiang Lu (2017) made a content analysis and discourse analysis of four of the Australian mainstream media's reports on the belt and road with the aim of revealing Australia's understanding of and attitude toward the belt and road. Li Xiguang (2015) discussed how to combine the cultural construction of the belt and road with the cultural revival of the Silk Road, and he pointed out that the cultural construction of the belt and road should be connected to people's lives and that it was necessary to reestablish some cultural projects related to the silk road cultural remains.

Furthermore, more and more research concerning the foreign media's representation of the belt and road has been done from the perspective of linguistics and discourse analysis. Based on the LexisNexis news database and taking the reports published in *The New York Times*, *The Times of India* and *The Straits Times* as research data, Shi Xiaoyun (2018) explored the characteristics, differences and reasons for discursive construction of the belt and road among different media from the perspective of semantic rhyme and evaluation theory. With a similar research paradigm, Tang Qingye and Shi Xiaoyun (2018) analyzed the data from *The New York Times*, *The Times of India* and *European Union News* published between September 2013 and December 2017 and explained the discourse construction of the belt and road in terms of discursive features, attitudes and reasons. Shan Liyang (2017) explored metaphors used in news reporting on the belt and road of six American mainstream media, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *USA Today*, from the perspective of narrative metaphor. There was also research concerning China's own discourse construction of the belt and road. Jiang Guodong and Chen Xu (2017) studied the interpersonal meaning of engagement resources in news reporting on the belt and road in *Xinhua News Agency* and *China Daily*.

The linguistic or discourse approaches used usually focus on the foreign media's reporting of the belt and road and a comparative analysis between foreign media and Chinese English media like *China Daily* is usually conducted. The methods used are usually Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional analysis model or Halliday's (1994) systemic functional grammar, while there is little research that combines linguistic analysis with media politics, such as in the case of the political discourse practice of *People's Daily*. And there is little research of this kind focusing on the hidden reasons why China's mainstream media has adopted this interactional model when communicating with the world or the mechanisms by which it does so. This study, taking the news of Chinese mainstream media *People's Daily* as the data, discusses the discourse practice of the belt and road of the *People's Daily*. It also focuses on the discourse model of *People's Daily* which is used to present China to the world and the underlying impetus behind this kind of interactional model.

1.3 Research design

1.3.1 Data collection and selection

In view of the authority and importance of the *People's Daily*, this study selected its news reporting about the belt and road as the research data. The author searched the *People's Daily* full-text database with "the Belt and Road" as the keywords from January 1, 2013 to October 31, 2017 and obtained 1,132 texts. In order to ensure that the data was appropriate and representative, the author removed editorials, commentaries and news reports of less than 500 words, and so finally settled on 670 texts. Then the author renumbered the 670 texts (No.1-670) and made a random sampling and finally reduced the number to 200 texts, totaling 3,37,565 Chinese characters (type token 12,737 and word token 3,78,526) as the research data. The specific data distribution is shown in Table 1.1.

1.3.2 Research questions and research procedures

This study has adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the belt and road discourse practice of *People's Daily*. The corpus analysis software AntConc3.5.2.0 is used in this research. In order to ensure accuracy, speech tagging and word segmentation of 200 texts are conducted with the help of the Chinese word segmentation software Corpus Word Parser. The data is then transcoded since AntConc cannot deal with Chinese data. The text format of the data is transferred to UTF-8 format, and the data in UTF-8 format is then imported to AntConc to generate high-frequency words and make collocation analysis.

1.3.3 Constructing an analytical framework

Since *People's Daily* is the official newspaper of the CPC and the mainstream media in China (Yan, 2017), it is obvious that *People's Daily* is advancing a positive perspective. It is obvious that the value positions of the news discourse of *People's Daily* must be consistent with that of the Party. In 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed at a national conference on publicity and ideological work in Beijing that to build socialist ideology, the key is to build up confidence in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics and publicity agencies should

TABLE 1.1 Samples of the belt and road news reporting of *People's Daily*

Year	*Total texts*	*Effective texts*	*Sample texts*
2013	1	0	0
2014	44	26	10
2015	223	123	33
2016	270	170	68
2017	594	351	89
Total	1,132	670	200

TABLE 1.2 Discourse strategy of the belt and road in *People's Daily*

Macro strategies	*Target questions*	*Meanings foregrounded*	*Micro strategies*
Positive self-presentation of China	Who is China?	The sameness	The pronoun "we"
	Why is China reliable?	Capability	Verbs, degree adverbs, etc.
		Responsibility	Predicates, topos of responsibility
		Long history and culture	Topos of history and culture
Correctness and legitimacy of the belt and road	Why is the belt and road plausible?	Positive appreciation of the belt and road	Foregrounding advantages and usefulness of the Belt and Road
	How is the initiative supported?	Dialogic space expanding	Quotations, direct speeches, indirect speeches

uphold the correct direction in guiding public opinion, inject positive energy and encourage the whole Party and all the people to unite and fulfill the goals set by the CPC Central Committee (http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2018-08/23/content_59845799.htm). The above statement indicates that positive energy and foregrounding Chinese culture are major tasks of the publicity work of the CPC. From this perspective, a positive self-judgment of China and positive appreciation (Martin & White, 2005) of the belt and road will be the first principle of this media discourse. Furthermore, the media discourse of *People's Daily* is an important means for shaping its potential audience (van Dijk, 2006: 373, 2008: 227), and it is also an indispensable force of constructing the national identity. Based on van Dijk's socio-cognitive model (van Dijk, 2014) and the Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak *et al.*, 2009), this study holds that the discourse practice of *People's Daily* is centered on the following two principles: (1) positive self-judgment and (2) the correctness and legitimacy of the belt and road.

As for the realization of macro strategies, there are two groups of questions concerning these two macro strategies, one involving the identity of China and why China is reliable, and the other asking why the belt and road is plausible and how it is supported by other countries. Six types of foregrounded meaning are then chosen as the realization of the target questions. Finally, the micro strategies list the concrete linguistic realizations of the macro strategies. The proposed discourse practice of the belt and road in *People's Daily* is indicated in Table 1.2.

1.4 Discourse strategy of *People's Daily*

1.4.1 Positive self-presentation of China

1.4.1.1 Who is China?

Various studies have focused on the use of personal pronouns, especially first-person pronouns, in discourse studies. One major research context is academic discourse. According to Ivanic and others, the choice of first-person pronouns is the practical

TABLE 1.3 The distribution of personal pronoun "we"

Meaning	*Frequency*	*Percentage (%)*
China and other countries	115	24.10
China	156	32.70
Others (other counties, cities, organizations)	206	43.20

rhetorical strategy to present the author himself in the discourse (Ivanic & Simpson, 1992; Ivanic, 1998). Therefore, the selection of first-person pronouns is not only used to complete the text structure or satisfy the requirement of grammar, but to reveal the writer's authority and increase the credit of the writing. Mao found that the use of *wo-men* (the pronunciation of Mandarin characters, which means "we" in English) in discourse echoes and emulates a traditional Chinese ethos that values the communal over the individual (Mao, 1996: 123). Xin Bin (2005) believed that the use of the personal pronoun "we" and "us" is the full embodiment of the ideology of "centralism" which is characteristic of preferring the same and rejecting the other.

"we" occurs 477 times in the data. It is found that the personal pronoun "we" in the belt and road discourse refers to China (China, Chinese, Chinese enterprise, etc.), China and other countries, and others (other counties, cities, organizations). The distribution of "we" is shown in Table 1.3.

After a careful reading of the data, it is found that the personal pronoun "we" in the data respectively refers to "China and Arabic countries", "China and Tajikistan", "China and Middle Eastern countries", "China and Uzbekistan", "China and Russia" and even refers to all mankind. China is thus discursively classified into different groups by "we" in which China and other countries, such as Arabic countries, Tajikistan and Russia, are endowed with the same mission. They have been discursively constructed as having the same values and behavior orientation. As a member of these groups, China is represented as willing to join hands with all countries in the group to create a bright future and realize joint development, which thus helps construct China as a nation "seeking win-win cooperation and mutual benefit".

Wodak and others believed that reference can be used to construct national identity (Wodak *et al.*, 2009). In terms of geography, China belongs to Asian countries; in terms of economic development, it belongs to developing countries. In this study, "developing countries" and "Asia" are used as keywords to retrieve concordance plot, and some of the concordances of these two words are shown as follows.

> (1) China, as the biggest developing country in the world, really knows the hardships of realizing the prosperity of the country.[1]
> (2) China is willing to provide more public goods to neighboring Asian countries through interconnection and interworking, and China welcomes taking the train of China's development.

TABLE 1.4 Noun phrases used to nominate China

No.	*Concordance*		
1	China	is	one of the fastest growing economies
2			the world's second-largest economy
3			the third biggest importer and important export market of Poland
4			Hungary's first trade partner besides Europe
5			one of the important drivers of world economic development
6			The Czech Republic's largest trading partner outside the EU
7			the EU's second-largest trading partner
8			Fiji's important partner
9			a big country with abundant new energy sources
10			the main export market for many countries
11			the largest source and destination for import and export goods in Songkhla Port
12			a big market with a population of more than 1.3 billion
13			an important force in safeguarding world peace
14			a responsible great country
15			one of the first countries to provide assistance to Fiji
16			a global leader in 4G industry
17			our (Egypt's) main partner and excellent investor
18			the first country to not only thank Sri Lanka for cornea donation, but also to give back love

In example (1), China and other developing countries are classified as a group with similar aspirations and developmental goals. It is reported in the data that China, as a member of this group, is willing to help other group members to develop their economies. In example (2), China is reported to be willing to deepen her partnership with other Asian countries and establish a community with a shared future for the mankind. With the references of "developing countries" and "Asia", China and other developing countries and Asian countries are discursively classified into the same group in which they are interdependent.

The "China + is" structure, as an expression of the relational process, might be helpful in describing the characteristics of China, recognizing its identity and endowing China with certain features. A total of 18 sentences of this kind from the data are shown in Table 1.4.

By analyzing these noun phrases used to nominate China in the "China + is" structure, it can be concluded that these noun phrases construct a positive Chinese national image from three aspects: economy, politics and science and technology. Economically, noun phrases like "the world's second-largest economy", "one of the fastest growing economies" and "one of the important drivers of world economic development" present China as an economic power with high-speed economic strength. Politically, expressions like "a responsible country", "an important force in safeguarding world peace" and "a country always ready to help others" are used to indicate that China is a righteous, kindhearted and grateful nation. Technologically, China is described as a "global leader in 4G industry".

TABLE 1.5 Top 20 verbs collocating with "China"

Rank	*Verbs*	*Rank*	*Verbs*
1	will	11	promote
2	propose	12	build
3	invest	13	favor
4	work for	14	help
5	become	15	establish
6	sign	16	want
7	participate	17	joint
8	push	18	work together
9	initiate	19	launch
10	provide	20	advocate

1.4.1.2 Why is China reliable?

1.4.1.2.1 A capable China

Verbs in discourse are often used to present the actions the agent of the discourse. In this data, the top 20 (modal) verbs collocating with "China" are shown in Table 1.5.

As indicated in Table 1.5, verbs like "propose", "initiate" and "advocate" clearly declare China's political purpose in the belt and road, i.e. seeking development with countries. Also, verbs such as "invest", "advance", "participate", "provide", "establish" and "unite" present China's efforts to promote development. Verb phrases such as "became the largest investor in Myanmar with a cumulative investment of $18.5 billion", "advanced the construction of international transport corridors with neighboring countries and created new heights of economic cooperation in the greater Mekong sub-region", "provided 10,000 government scholarships every year to countries along the Silk Road", etc., demonstrate the practical actions China has taken for building a community with a shared a future for mankind. Furthermore, verbs like "sign", "help" and "benefit" indicate the achievements and results of China's actions.

It is noted that the modal verb "will" is used most frequently in the news reporting and the following table lists typical examples. Coates (1983: 169) states that "the meanings associated with "will" are those of willingness, intention, predictability and prediction, all of which are closely related to the concepts of future" (Table 1.6).

The modal verb "will" indicates her willingness when China does something. Explicit verbs like "invest", "consult", "co-promote", "resolve", "strengthen" and "advance" clearly specify what China is willing to do for the development of countries along the Silk Road. Moreover, in the belt and road discourse, many degree adverbs have been used with the modal verb "will" or the word "willingness". The distribution of degree adverbs in the data is shown in Table 1.7, and some specific examples are extracted as follows.

> (3) China is **willing to shoulder more** responsibilities and obligations within its capabilities and make **more** contributions to the peaceful development of mankind.

TABLE 1.6 Concordance of "China" and "will" in the belt and road discourse

Concordance		
China	will	invest 40 billion US dollars to set up the Silk Road Fund
		provide 20,000 training places for neighboring countries in the field of interconnection and communication
		go hand in hand with the countries along the line, negotiate on an equal footing, take into account the interests of all parties and reflect their demands, jointly promote a larger, higher and deeper level of openness, communication and integration
		work hand in hand with the international community to actively find solutions to the current problems facing the world and regional economies and inject new energy into the realization of linkage development
		increase its financial support for the belt and road construction, add 100 billion yuan to the Silk Road Fund and encourage financial institutions to carry out RMB overseas fund business with an estimated scale of 300 billion yuan
		provide 60 billion yuan of assistance to developing countries and international organizations involved in the "Belt and Road" construction to build more livelihood projects in the next three years.
		strengthen interconnection with its neighboring countries in energy infrastructure, promote cross-border energy corridor construction, share regional energy resources and gains and enhance regional development and energy services under the framework of the "Belt and Road" Initiative

TABLE 1.7 The distribution of degree adverbs

Meaning	*Degree adverbs*	*Frequency*
Comparative degree	more	559
Superlative degree	biggest	146
	Unprecedented (ly)	13
	best	31
	highest	28

(4) China has shouldered the heavy responsibility that no country can afford. The world **will witness the unprecedented** achievements of the belt and road.

In example (3), "more" is used to modify "responsibility" and "contribution", which indicates that on the one hand, China has a sense of responsibility as a great nation and, on the other hand, China is willing to make a contribution to world peace and development. In example (4), "unprecedented" is a superlative degree adverb which means that the development brought by the belt and road is