

# Constructing China's National Image in China Daily's "Dual Carbon" News Discourse: An Ecological Discourse Analysis Perspective

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of deepening global climate change governance, the "dual carbon" goals have become an important topic in China's participation in global ecological governance. Drawing on the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, this study takes news reports on the "dual carbon" theme from China Daily as the corpus source, constructs a specialized corpus, and employs AntConc 3.5.9 to examine the linguistic features of the news discourse from three dimensions: high-frequency content words, lexical co-occurrence patterns, and the collocation patterns of the word "China," so as to explore how these features construct China's national image. The findings reveal that China Daily constructs a semantic network centered on climate governance by focusing on carbon governance and green development issues; through the typical collocations of "China" in different grammatical structures, it forms a narrative chain linking commitment, action, and planning; the overall discourse exhibits a constructive ecological discourse orientation, highlighting a sense of responsibility, policy execution capability, and an orientation toward international cooperation. These discourse strategies jointly shape a national image of China as responsible, action-oriented, and forward-looking, reflecting China's active role and discursive aspirations in global climate governance. The results provide empirical evidence from a corpus linguistics perspective for national image construction in the international communication of ecological issues.

**Keywords:** Ecological discourse analysis; dual carbon; news discourse; national image; China Daily.

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of global climate change has become increasingly prominent, and carbon emissions have become a focus of attention for the international community. In this context, as the world's most populous country and the second-largest economy, China's efforts to address climate change have attracted considerable attention. In September 2020, President Xi Jinping announced at the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly that, in order to combat climate change, China would enhance its nationally determined contributions, adopt more vigorous policies and measures, and strive to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

In September 2021, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Completely, Accurately, and Comprehensively Implementing the New Development Philosophy and Doing a Good Job in Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality," which set out a clear timetable and roadmap for China to achieve carbon peaking and carbon neutrality. In October 2021, the State Council released the "Action Plan for Carbon Peaking Before 2030," focusing on the implementation pathways for achieving the carbon peaking target by 2030. These initiatives demonstrate China's firm determination to actively address climate change, pursue a green and low-carbon development path, and promote common development. In recent years, China has made steady progress in the fields of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality ("dual carbon"), achieving positive results in both top-level design and policy implementation.

News media serve as an important vehicle for communicating national image, and the linguistic choices and

usage in news reports directly influence the construction of national image [1]. As an English-language daily published by the Chinese government, China Daily has become an important window for the world to understand China, by reporting on news events, major strategic decisions, and various policies and guidelines. Its core mission is to better introduce China's development philosophy, development path, and development achievements to the world, serving as a bridge for communication between China and the international community. It is an important medium through which China presents its image to the international community and plays a crucial role in shaping China's national image for international audiences.

With the continuous development of its economy and society, China has gradually moved from the periphery to the center of the international stage. As the world's second-largest economy, China plays a key role in international trade, yet its discursive power in the international discourse system has not increased correspondingly. A positive national image helps enhance international discursive influence [2], and the quality of a country's image has a significant impact on its international standing, not only shaping its foreign relations but also influencing policymaking in economic, military, and other domains to a certain extent [3]. The proposal of the "dual carbon" goals has created an important opportunity for China to enhance its international discursive power and construct a national image at the global level, because China's experiences and lessons in the process of climate governance constitute an important component of global climate governance. Against this backdrop, exploring the pathways through which China's national image is constructed is of significant practical importance. This study, based on a corpus of news texts on the "dual carbon" theme, analyzes how news

reports in China's mainstream newspapers construct China's national image.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. National Image

National image, also referred to as country image, is defined as the sum of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs that individuals hold about a particular country [4]. A country's image is determined not only by its political factors and economic strength but is also closely related to the perceptions and opinions of people in other countries within the international community. This is because image itself refers to "the beliefs, ideas, and impressions that individuals hold about a given object [5], and is essentially people's subjective perceptions and cognitions of that object.

In the fields of international relations, political science, communication studies, and even linguistics, national image research has always been an important and widely discussed topic. The concept of national image was first proposed by the British economist Boulding [6], who explicated the essence of national image from three dimensions--geographical space, psychological emotion, and material capability--and pointed out that the shaping of national image is often influenced by factors such as ideology, values, and cultural traditions. Subsequently, Scott [7] further elaborated on the concept of national image, arguing that it constitutes the overall cognitive attributes formed when people refer to a particular country, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. National image is the collective impression that people hold of a country, which can be manifested through dimensions such as diplomatic image, public image, and media image [3].

This study holds that national image refers to the perceptions and impressions formed by individuals of other countries about a given country, constituting a subjective cognitive and affective construct that encompasses the country's political, cultural, economic, and other aspects.

From a semiotic perspective, national image is essentially a cultural impression formed by external subjects (countries, groups, or individuals) about a nation. National image is not a direct reflection of reality but rather a symbolic expression created by image constructors based on their own understanding and subjective intentions [3]. Research has found that a country's global competitiveness, national culture and national psychology, and the unimpeded and reliable dissemination of information all exert significant influence on the shaping of national image, with the media serving as an important channel through which people come to know and understand a country [8]. The manner in which journalists or media outlets report can greatly influence readers' interpretation of news information [9]. By presenting recently occurring facts, news reports serve as a reliable source of information and have therefore always been a primary channel for people to obtain information [10]. It follows that news reports about a particular country directly affect people's perceptions and impressions of that country.

In the context of globalization, national image is an important resource for sovereign states participating in international affairs, and enhancing national image is virtually a prerequisite for strengthening national soft power and improving international competitiveness [3]. Chinese scholars recognized the importance of national image in the international community as early as the beginning of the 21st

century and began to pay attention to research on the construction of China's national image. Studies have shown that the evolution of China's national image is largely influenced by news reports from other major countries; China needs to proactively construct its own national image and deconstruct the image of China shaped by other countries, and optimizing news communication strategies aimed at international audiences is one of the effective approaches to enhancing China's national image [11].

Other studies have found that some mainstream Western newspapers tend to adopt negative attitudes when reporting on China-related issues, or present a distorted image of China to international audiences, thereby constructing a negative image of China in international communication [12, 13, 14]. Western media are often skeptical of China's relevant initiatives, readily questioning their political motivations and specific implementation plans, which poses challenges to China's efforts in environmental governance gaining global trust and recognition. It is particularly noteworthy that environmental news in The New York Times portrays China as a country that "pursues economic growth at the expense of the environment" and "possesses governance aspirations but lacks governance capacity" [15].

Today, China has become the world's second-largest economy and has an urgent need to improve its international image by demonstrating to the world its concrete actions in ecological and environmental protection and in building a community with a shared future for mankind. This study will contrast the negative perceptions of China in foreign media and explore how China Daily, as a Chinese international communication medium, constructs China's national image around environmental goals.

### 2.2. Ecological Discourse Analysis

Ecological discourse analysis, as a major research approach within ecolinguistics, refers to a paradigm that analyzes the ecologicality of discourse under the guidance of an ecological philosophy and employing certain research methods or linguistic theories. Its purpose is to elucidate how discourse constructs the relationship between human beings and ecosystems, and to reveal the ecological concepts and ideologies underlying discourse [16]. This paradigm breaks through the limitations of traditional environmental discourse research by extending the analytical scope from natural ecosystems to social-ecological systems encompassing relationships between individuals and society, between societies, and between nations [17], thus providing an appropriate analytical perspective for studying the "dual carbon" issue, which integrates both natural and social dimensions.

The core characteristic of ecological discourse analysis lies in its pronounced value orientation--that is, the use of a clearly defined ecological philosophy as the analytical criterion, which is an important dimension distinguishing it from other discourse analysis paradigms [18]. Stibbe [19] points out that to accurately assess the ecological orientation of discourse, researchers must go beyond the limitations of merely analyzing linguistic features and introduce an explicit "ethical framework." This study adopts the ecological philosophy of "pluralistic harmony and interactive coexistence" proposed by He et al. [16] as the analytical criterion. This philosophy emphasizes the diversity of elements within natural and social ecosystems and their harmonious coexistence, and focuses on the dynamic

relationships of mutual interaction and common development among them. It aligns with traditional Chinese philosophical wisdom and resonates with Marxist theory and contemporary Chinese diplomatic philosophy. According to this criterion, discourse can be classified into three types: ecologically beneficial discourse, which conforms to this ecological philosophy and encourages people to protect ecosystems; ecologically destructive discourse, which contradicts or opposes it and leads people to destroy ecosystems; and ecologically ambivalent discourse, which neither explicitly conforms to nor contradicts this philosophy, neither promoting nor hindering people's efforts to protect ecosystems [19].

### 2.3. News Reports on Carbon Neutrality

Climate change has become a topic of widespread public discussion and has attracted considerable attention from the global academic community, with corpus-based studies analyzing low-carbon discourse gradually increasing in number [20]. News reports can transform specialized knowledge into common sense, convert political discourse into accessible discourse, and embed ideological power within discourse; by disseminating such discourse, news reports shape social consensus and influence and change people's modes of thinking and behavioral patterns [21]. Therefore, news reporting is regarded as an important means of constructing national image [3] and is frequently used as linguistic evidence for analyzing national image.

Scholars have recognized the importance of reporting on the implementation of the "dual carbon" strategy to both domestic and international audiences. Che and Yu [22], through analyzing the current state of international communication of China's "dual carbon" strategy, proposed that for global audiences, the international communication of China's "dual carbon" solutions should form a synergy among three major discourse subjects: official discourse playing a leading role, social discourse serving an interpretive function, and public discourse acting in a supplementary capacity. Classified by news source, news reports can serve as important vehicles for both official discourse and social discourse. Qian and Wang [21], employing a corpus-based research method, analyzed the discursive construction of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" in People's Daily and found that relevant news reports, starting from the introduction of concepts, gradually constructed China's determination and confidence in achieving the "dual carbon" goals for domestic audiences. Zhou [1] conducted a corpus-based positive discourse analysis of the image of China constructed by Chinese mainstream media in the context of "dual carbon," finding that China's national image exhibits characteristics such as a high degree of responsibility in environmental governance, a proactive attitude toward crisis response, the pursuit of diversified cooperation, assistance to other countries and regions, advocacy of ecological civilization, and exploration of innovative concepts.

Other domestic studies on China's "dual carbon" strategy have mostly been conducted from the perspectives of social governance and environmental protection, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and response strategies for China's development in the context of "dual carbon," the implementation pathways of the "dual carbon" goals, and issues such as industrial structure transformation and green low-carbon development [23]. By comparison, research on the construction of national image in the global

communication of China's "dual carbon" strategy implementation remains relatively scarce. This study, based on a corpus of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality news reports from China Daily, China's mainstream English-language newspaper, analyzes the national image of China constructed in its "dual carbon" news discourse aimed at international audiences from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

## 3. Research Methods and Procedures

### 3.1. Corpus-Based Ecological Discourse Analysis

A corpus is a collection of naturally occurring language texts used to represent a particular language state or language variety. The collocates of a word refer to words that occur in close proximity to it in text, and collocation analysis examines the co-occurrence relationships of words within short distances by investigating the collocates of the word under study [24]. The corpus-based research method uses corpora as the research source to verify researchers' intuitive judgments or to examine the frequency and probability of occurrence of search items in the corpus, and can employ computer software to present word frequencies, concordance lines of search items, and collocates. The use of computer software enables researchers to comprehensively extract search items and their immediate contexts, and to analyze language use features in conjunction with the linguistic context of the search items.

Corpus-based critical discourse analysis is the integration of corpus research methods and critical discourse analysis, and is widely applied in media discourse analysis, having been proven to be an effective method for analyzing news texts. On the one hand, the corpus research method, by collecting authentic data reflecting actual language use and employing computer software to mine linguistic features hidden in fragmented texts, provides quantitative evidence for linguistic research; further corpus analysis can also reveal linguistic features that are difficult to discover through manual observation. On the other hand, critical discourse analysis places discourse within its social context, interpreting the cultural and ideological connotations embedded in discourse. The two are considered complementary [21]. For example, word frequency statistics can quickly identify high-frequency words in a corpus, which can serve as the starting point for critical discourse analysis and possess significant research value; the corpus research method compensates for the limitations of intuitive inference, providing reliable linguistic instances for critical discourse analysis and thereby enhancing the credibility of research conclusions.

This study employs the corpus-based ecological discourse analysis method to examine the national image constructed in the news corpus, analyzing the linguistic features of the news corpus from three aspects: high-frequency content words, lexical co-occurrence networks, and the collocation features of the word "China" in the news texts; and explores the modes of national image construction from three dimensions: text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice.

### 3.2. Research Questions

From the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, this study investigates the linguistic features of China Daily's news reports on the "dual carbon" goals and the national image they construct by analyzing high-frequency content

words, lexical co-occurrence networks, and the collocation features of the word "China." The specific research questions are as follows: (1) What are the features of the high-frequency content words in China Daily's news reports on the "dual carbon" goals? (2) What are the typical collocation features of the word "China" in the news texts? (3) What kind of China's national image do these news texts construct?

### 3.3. Research Tools

The corpus analysis tool AntConc 3.5.9 is a free concordance and text analysis software. This study uses it to identify high-frequency content words in the "dual carbon" news report corpus, extract concordance lines of these high-frequency words in the corpus, and perform collocation analysis on search terms, identifying their conventional usage patterns in conjunction with the linguistic context.

## 4. Research Results and Discussion

This section will analyze the relevant news discourse from an ecological discourse perspective. The corpus-based

research method can reveal the linguistic features of the target texts through word frequency, collocation, concordance line, and keyword analysis. The text analysis of news reports in this study comprises three parts: high-frequency content word analysis, lexical co-occurrence network analysis, and collocation analysis.

### 4.1. Analysis of High-Frequency Content Words

Corpora can provide reliable quantitative data, and word frequency is the most direct quantitative data in a corpus, helping to identify the basic information in the corpus, including the core content of the texts. Frequency information can reveal the basic features of language use, and high-frequency words have always been the starting point for computer-assisted discourse research, as they can reflect the common themes and focal points of the texts at the lexical level. This study used AntConc 3.5.9 to generate a word list and obtained the top 20 content words by frequency (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Top 20 content words by frequency

| Rank | Word        | Frequency | Rank | Word       | Frequency |
|------|-------------|-----------|------|------------|-----------|
| 1    | carbon      | 2381      | 11   | neutrality | 373       |
| 2    | China       | 1598      | 12   | percent    | 364       |
| 3    | energy      | 1346      | 13   | market     | 329       |
| 4    | green       | 821       | 14   | year       | 295       |
| 5    | said        | 801       | 15   | country    | 284       |
| 6    | development | 626       | 16   | more       | 270       |
| 7    | emissions   | 596       | 17   | global     | 261       |
| 8    | power       | 590       | 18   | climate    | 254       |
| 9    | low         | 460       | 19   | reduction  | 250       |
| 10   | new         | 435       | 20   | goals      | 231       |

Based on the word frequency statistics from the self-compiled corpus, high-frequency words can not only reflect the thematic focus of the corpus but also reveal the value orientation and national image constructed by the media in reporting on ecological issues. Overall, these high-frequency words exhibit a clear ecological governance orientation and developmental discourse features, collectively embodying China's sense of responsibility and development path in global climate governance.

First, from a thematic dimension, words such as carbon, emissions, energy, climate, reduction, and neutrality appear frequently, constituting a typical semantic field of climate change and emission reduction, indicating that China Daily's reporting on the dual carbon issue closely revolves around carbon emission control and climate governance. Among them, carbon ranks first, far exceeding the frequency of other words, indicating that carbon occupies an absolutely central position as a core concept in the news discourse. This high-frequency usage reinforces China's image as a participant and actor in global climate issues, constructing a discursive positioning of a responsible major country.

Second, from the perspective of national subject construction, China ranks second, indicating that the reporting consistently takes China as the narrative subject, emphasizing policy promotion and strategic deployment at the national level. Meanwhile, the appearance of words such as country, global, and market reflects that the reporting situates China within the framework of international cooperation and global governance, highlighting China's

image as a participant, promoter, and even leader in global climate governance. This discursive strategy helps shape a national image of openness, cooperation, and proactive responsibility.

Third, from a developmental dimension, words such as green, development, power, low, and new form a green transition semantic cluster, underscoring China's modernization path guided by green development. The high-frequency co-occurrence of green and development reflects the media's juxtaposition of ecological protection with economic development, emphasizing the importance of "green development" as a national strategy. This framing weakens the traditional opposition between development and environmental protection, presenting a narrative framework in which ecological civilization construction and economic growth are advanced in a coordinated manner, thereby shaping a national image of sustainable development.

Furthermore, the appearance of data-oriented expressions such as year, percent, and goals indicate that the reporting tends to present emission reduction progress through specific timeframe and quantitative indicators. This data-supported discursive approach enhances the credibility of policy commitments, reflecting a rational and pragmatic governance style and helping to construct a trustworthy national image.

From the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, the above high-frequency words generally exhibit characteristics of constructive ecological discourse, that is, they emphasize positive responses to ecological crises through technological progress, policy action, and international cooperation, with

fewer occurrences of negative semantics such as crisis, conflict, or responsibility attribution. This indicates that in its reporting on the dual carbon issue, China Daily tends to construct China's national image as a promoter of ecological civilization construction and a contributor to global climate governance through positive narratives.

In summary, the analysis of high-frequency content words demonstrates that China Daily's dual carbon news discourse constructs a responsible, action-oriented, and development-oriented national image of China by focusing on carbon governance, green development, and global cooperation, laying the foundation for the subsequent semantic network analysis and collocation analysis.

## 4.2. Collocation Analysis of the Word "China"

One of the core issues in corpus research is the conventional collocation and recurrent co-selection of words, a phenomenon of significant importance in both linguistic and ideological research [25]. Collocation is defined as "two or more words that occur together within a short distance in text" [24], and collocational evidence often reflects the co-occurrence tendency of words, even when the selection of these words is largely independent of each other. Computer software can present researchers with word co-occurrence information in the basic form of concordances, and the lexical choices and syntactic structures in news texts on a particular topic shape the specific image associated with that topic. To reveal the characteristics of China's national image, this study conducts a concordance analysis of the word China, examining its typical immediate collocates in the news texts so as to analyze the media's communicative intentions and attitudes.

Analysis of the concordance lines shows that the word China occurs 1,598 times in the corpus; among the words immediately adjacent to its right, the possessive form "s" has the highest frequency, at 515 occurrences; the second and third most frequent words are "has/had" (173 occurrences) and "will" (46 occurrences), corresponding to the present perfect tense and the future tense, respectively. The use of the possessive form prominently highlights the importance and commitment that the Chinese government attaches to carbon emission reduction and environmental protection. For example:

(1) Addressing the Leaders Summit on Climate on Earth Day (April 22), President Xi Jinping reaffirmed China's pledge that its carbon dioxide emissions will peak before 2030 and the country will achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

(2) Digital solutions, green electricity, energy efficiency, new carbon management technologies, strengthened innovation, reduced use of water and energy, waste reduction, and even business diversification are among the host of strategies and measures that Chinese and foreign corporates are embracing and employing to bolster China's carbon goals.

(3) The operation of China's first offshore carbon capture and storage demonstration project will further facilitate China's carbon peak and neutrality goals, as oil companies step up research and investment to help them become sustainable in the long run, industry experts said.

(4) The State-owned enterprise started construction of the country's first 10-MW pumped storage hydropower project in Northeast China's Jilin province on Saturday, said its operator State Grid Corp of China.

Examples (1) and (2) emphasize China's firm commitment

to the "dual carbon" strategic goals and its attitude toward international cooperation; examples (3) and (4) indicate that the Chinese government is taking concrete and effective measures to comprehensively advance the implementation of various policies to ensure the timely achievement of the "dual carbon" goals.

The use of "has" and "had" demonstrates the concrete actions China has taken and the results it has achieved in response to the energy crisis. For example:

(5) China has completed construction of the dam for the Baihetan Hydropower Station, which will be the world's second-largest in terms of installed capacity, after working nonstop for 1510 days and nights...

(6) Yang said that China has come up with various supporting policies in recent years to ensure the achievement of carbon peak and carbon neutrality, which has led to the vibrant development of low-carbon industries in the country.

Example (5) introduces the construction and operation of the Baihetan Hydropower Station, while example (6) reports on the introduction of supporting policies and the achievements in low-carbon industry development in China. Both achievements would not have been possible without long-term and substantial efforts, reflecting China's strong execution capability in policy implementation and measure implementation.

The use of "will" indicates that China will continue to adhere to existing policies and take further effective measures to achieve the "dual carbon" goals. For example:

(7) China will also accelerate the optimization of the country's industrial structure and energy mix and promote a peak in coal consumption as soon as possible.

(8) China will control the aggregate amount and intensity of energy consumption, reduce the use of fossil energy and advance the low-carbon transition of sectors like industry, construction and transportation, according to the draft outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for national economic and social development and the long-range objectives through the year 2035.

The above two examples indicate that China will reduce energy consumption through further specific measures such as optimizing the industrial structure and strictly controlling the total amount and intensity of energy consumption across various sectors, reflecting China's firm determination and proactive attitude in actively seeking effective pathways to achieve the "dual carbon" goals.

The collocation analysis of the word "China" demonstrates that China is firmly honoring its "dual carbon" goal commitments, has taken and will continue to take effective measures to achieve these goals through technological innovation and international cooperation, manifesting China's image as a responsible major country and reflecting its strong policy execution capability.

## 4.3. Comprehensive Discussion

By integrating the results of the high-frequency content word analysis and the collocation analysis of the word "China," the construction and discursive strategies of China's national image in China Daily's "dual carbon" news discourse can be more systematically revealed.

First, at the macro level, the high-frequency word analysis shows that the reporting revolves around core ecological issues such as "carbon," "emissions," "energy," "climate," "reduction," and "neutrality," constructing a semantic framework centered on climate governance and green

transition; the fact that “China” ranks as the second most frequent word indicates that all ecological actions and policy narratives are unfolded with the nation as the subject.

Second, from the perspective of micro-level discourse practice, the immediate collocations of the word “China” further reinforce this subject image. The high-frequency use of the possessive form (China’s) explicitly attributes the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals to the national level as China’s commitments and responsibilities, highlighting the nation’s leading position in ecological governance; the use of “has/had” emphasizes the specific actions China has already taken and the phased achievements it has obtained, constructing a pragmatic and action-oriented national image; the use of “will” points to future policy directions and long-term planning, presenting a forward-looking and strategic national development vision. The combination of past, present, and future tenses forms a continuous narrative chain, shaping an image of China as continuously advancing and steadily implementing in the “dual carbon” process.

Third, combining the results of both parts, it can be observed that China Daily, through the green development semantic cluster presented by high-frequency words (such as green, development, power, market, and goals) and the collocation use of China, constructs an image of coordinated advancement of development and environmental protection. This discourse not only emphasizes China’s capability to promote economic transformation but also highlights its contributions to global green development, thereby weakening the stereotype of the contradiction between developing countries and environmental protection found in traditional media discourse.

Furthermore, the reporting extensively uses data-oriented expressions and policy terminology, and through their co-occurrence with China, presents the specificity and operability of national actions, enhancing the authority and credibility of the discourse. This narrative, centered on policy implementation and technological progress, exhibits typical characteristics of constructive ecological discourse—that is, responding to ecological crises by emphasizing solutions and cooperation prospects rather than highlighting conflicts and responsibility attribution.

From the perspective of national image construction, the above discursive strategies jointly shape a multi-dimensional image of China: it is both a responsible major country that firmly fulfills its international commitments and a developing country that actively promotes green transition, while also being an actor with policy execution capability and technological innovation capacity. This image not only serves the needs of external communication but also helps enhance China’s discursive power in global climate governance within the international public opinion arena.

In summary, China Daily’s dual carbon news reports, through the synergistic effect of high-frequency word selection and keyword collocation, construct a national image of China with responsibility, action, and cooperation as its core characteristics, reflecting the value orientation and narrative strategies of official media in the international communication of ecological issues.

## 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, this study, based on a corpus of China Daily’s news reports on the dual carbon theme, explores the national image of China

constructed in its news discourse through high-frequency content word analysis, examination of lexical co-occurrence features, and collocation analysis of the word “China.”

First, addressing Research Question 1, the high-frequency content word analysis shows that China Daily’s dual carbon news reports revolve around carbon emission control, energy transition, and green development, forming a semantic network centered on climate governance. The high-frequency words not only highlight the importance of ecological issues but also, by placing China within the context of global climate governance, construct an image of China as a responsible major country and active participant. Meanwhile, the high-frequency co-occurrence of words such as green, development, and market presents a discursive logic of coordinated advancement of development and environmental protection, reflecting China’s national image of exploring a sustainable development path.

Second, the collocation analysis of the word China reveals that its typical collocations exhibit a pronounced temporal dimension: the possessive structure emphasizes national commitments and responsibilities, “has/had” highlights existing actions and achievements, and will points to future planning and policy directions. This past-present-future narrative pattern constructs an image of China as an actor that continuously advances and steadily implements in the “dual carbon” process, reflecting policy continuity and execution capability.

Third, the comprehensive analysis of linguistic features reveals that China Daily’s “dual carbon” news discourse overall exhibits a constructive ecological discourse orientation—that is, responding to ecological crises by emphasizing solutions, technological innovation, and international cooperation rather than highlighting conflicts and responsibility attribution. This discursive strategy shapes a multi-dimensional national image of China: it is both a responsible major country that actively fulfills its international commitments and a developing country that promotes green transition, while also being an actor with policy execution capability and innovation capacity.

Overall, through the synergistic effect of high-frequency word selection and keyword collocation, China Daily constructs a national image of China with responsibility, action, and cooperation as its core characteristics, reflecting the value orientation and narrative strategies of Chinese official media in the international communication of ecological issues.

This study still has certain limitations. For example, the corpus is limited to a single media source and does not include a comparative analysis with foreign media. Future research could expand the corpus scope and conduct cross-media or cross-cultural comparative studies to more comprehensively reveal the mechanisms of national image construction in the international communication of ecological issues.

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