

A Discourse-historical Analysis of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Self-portrayal Media Image Construction

Guo Huiyuan

Northwestern Polytechnical University

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ABSTRACT

Culture strategy is an important component of the national strategic system. Entering the new era, Chinese government has been striving to promote Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) worldwide. Adopting the discourse-historical approach, the present study explores Chinese mainstream's "self-portrayal" of TCM, investigating TCM related discourse from micro-leveled linguistic features, meso-leveled discourse strategies and macro-leveled themes, so as to delineate its media image in detail. After examining 361 reports from People's Daily and China Daily, the study has found out that: (1) On the macro level, seven prominent topics have emerged. According to their level of exposure they are TCM disease prevention and healthcare services, TCM globalization, TCM administration, TCM scientific research, TCM professionals, TCM culture, and TCM industrialization. (2) On the meso and micro levels, three specific discourse strategies have been employed by the mainstream media with specific linguistic hints: strategy of nomination has been used to portray the diversity of TCM; strategy of predication has been used to assign positive attributions to TCM; and the strategy of perspectivation has played an important role in position media's stance, which serves to present a holographic picture of TCM enjoying recognition from various respects.

Keywords: Discourse Historical Analysis, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Media Image Construction, Chinese Mainstream Media

1. Introduction

Culture strategy is an important component of national strategic system. The strength and international competitiveness of Chinese culture are important indicators of China's power and prosperity. In today's world, profound changes are taking place in the international sage. Marching on the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, for China, it becomes increasingly urgent to stress the the importance of cultural soft power and to stick to the "go global" strategy.

Traditional Chinese medicine(TCM) is a treasure of Chinese civilization and contains the nation's ideas and experience in healthcare spanning millennia. Entering the new era, the Central Party and the State have been devoted to advancing the modernization and globalization of TCM. With the strong support of the Party and the State, the international publicity of TCM has achieved much in different aspects, including the diversification of the TCM culture communicators, the expansion of TCM international education and so on(Zhao Haibin, 2023). In this sense, studying TCM's media image is of great practical value for TCM's further global presence. However, current research on TCM's media image mainly focuses on how western media understand and construct TCM, that is, "other-portrayal image", less attention is paid to Chinese media's own portrayal, namely, "self-portrayal image". Given this, the present study sets out to explore how Chinese mainstream media construct TCM and promote its international publicity, focusing on TCM's "self-portrayal image", so as to provide suggestions for its future construction.

2. Literature review

TCM is an iconic cultural carrier of Chinese culture. Actively constructing the positive overseas image of TCM is a good way to promote "China's label". Currently, from communication studies, research on the image construction of TCM has mainly been conducted on two dimensions: one focuses on western media's construction of TCM(Ye Qing & Wu Yeqing, 2015; Li Shuangyi, 2016; Qian Minjuan, 2019), while the other sets its basis on the theory of cross-cultural communication, exploring the difficulties in TCM overseas image construction(Liu Guowei, 2013; Dong Wei et al., 2014).

Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) takes language as a social practice, and interpret it in the social historical context. The study from which the DHA was first developed analyzes the construction of anti-Semitic stereotyped images emerged in public discourses in Kurt Waldheim, the former UN General Secretary's 1986 Austrian presidential campaign (Wodak et al., 1990). Four salient characteristics of the DHA emerge in this research project: interdisciplinary, problem-oriented interests; triangulation as a fundamental and constitutive methodological principle; and orientation toward application. The approach is further elaborated and developed in its later application in the investigation on discrimination against migrants, foreigners, minorities, etc. and the discursive construction of nation and national identity, where the five discourse strategies and three-dimensional analytical framework are brought up and come into being (Wodak & Matouschek 1993; Wodak et al., 2009). In recent years, empirical research on DHA has mainly been carried out by domestic scholars. In tracking and analyzing political (Li Qianqian, 2017; Yang Yiyi, 2017; Yang Min & Fu Xiaoli, 2018; Yu Hang and Wang Yuhang, 2023) and business (Wu Nan & Zhang Jingyuan, 2019; Cheng Xia, 2021; Zhang Peng & Hou Fuli, 2023) discourse which involves construction of identity, social actors, phenomena, events

etc., DHA reveals great practical and operational significance in interpreting image as discursively constructed by the discourse.

The above review reveals two facts. For one, though DHA is of great practice and operational significance, the existing empirical research revolves around political and business discourse while DHA be applied to more fields. For another, research on media image of TCM mainly come from communication studies, focusing on the media and their publicity effects, which overlooks the exploration on media discourse itself to a certain extent. Given these, this study attempts to conduct a DHA analysis oriented towards discourse itself, examining Chinese media reports on TCM, exploring its image construction.

3. Methodology

This study is carried out under the guidance of DHA, aiming at revealing TCM's media image constructed by China's mainstream media by answering the following three research questions: (1) What themes are set in the media's overseas coverage on TCM, is there a diachronic change? (2) What discourse strategies are used in those coverage, and what are their specific linguistic realization? (3) Through applying the above themes, strategies and languages, what kind of image has been constructed on TCM by Chinese mainstream media? The specific theoretical framework and data collection process are as follows.

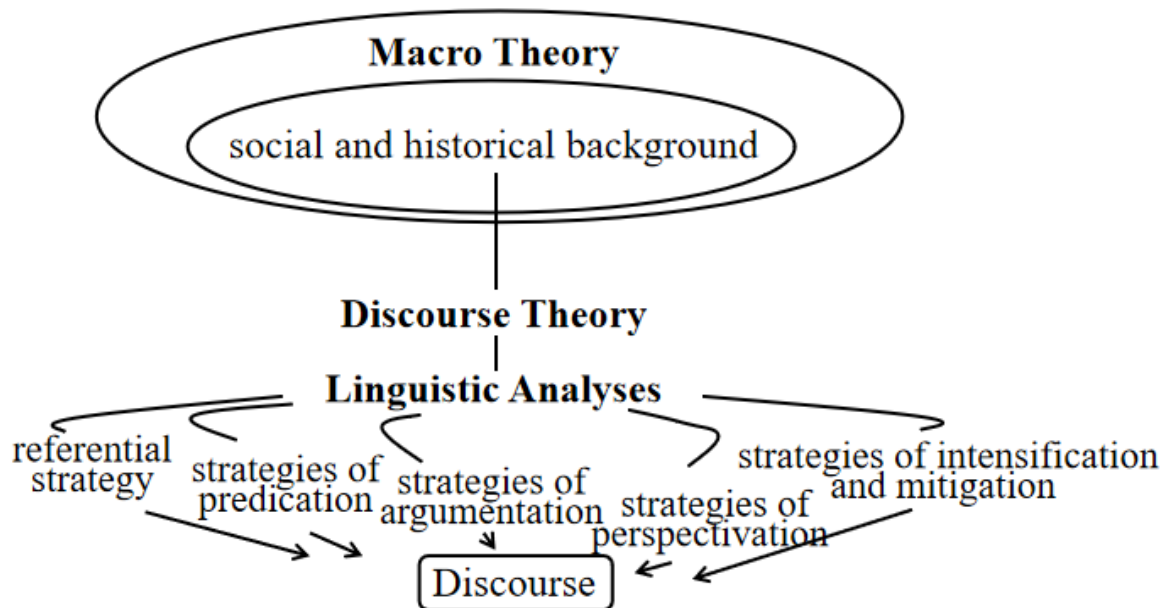
3.1. Theoretical Framework

DHA is a research approach which attempts to transcend the pure linguistic dimension and to include, more or less systematically, the historical, political, sociological dimension in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion. By analyzing the context, intertextuality of the specific discourse, DHA tries to bridge between specific linguistic subsystems and social structure, providing the practical analyzing tool orientation toward social application (Zhao Linjing, 2009). Specifically speaking, DHA is a three-dimensional analytical framework: macro-dimensional thematic orientation, meso-dimensional strategic orientation and micro-dimensional linguistic orientation. For the mesoscopic investigation, Wodak & Meyer (2009: 29) further specify five types of discursive strategies: referential strategies, strategies of predication, strategies of argumentation, strategies of perspectivation and strategies of intensification and mitigation.

According to the result of the pilot study, Chinese mainstream media coverage of TCM is more focused on medical, cultural and people's livelihoods, mainly using referential strategies and strategies of predication to construct TCM's media image; meanwhile, strategies of perspectivation occur quite often in the reports for the specific nature of the media discourse. Given this, the current study chooses to focus on the meso-leveled strategies of nomination,

predication and perspectivation of the discourse, as well as their micro-leveled linguistic realizations and macro-leveled topics via diachronic investigation.

Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of DHA (Wodak, 2008)



3.2. Data Collection

Current investigation chooses Chinese official media *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* as the main media sources, selecting their overseas reports on TCM during 2013-2022. Advanced Search from *People’s Daily* and *China Daily*’s web page (people.com.cn; chinadaily.com.cn) is utilized for the data selection. Keywords such as “TCM”, “acupuncture” “cupping” etc. are checked in full texts. After selection, altogether, there are 361 related reports. All of them have then been cleaned by EditPlus with press information deleted. Only the dates and the original text are saved and converted to the txt. format for the corpus building. A Chinese Media Report on Traditional Chinese Medicine (CMR) corpus and 10 sub-corpora based on reports’ year of publication, CMR13-CMR22, have been built in the present study to investigate general features of TCM’s media image as well as its diachronic change.

3.3. Analytical Process

Based on DHA, the present study is a corpus-based research on Chinese mainstream media reports of TCM, planing to investigate the media discourse on three levels of macro, meso and micro: the macroscopic analysis is assisted by Wmatrix 5.0 with the function of semantic

tagging, meso-leveled strategies and micro-leveled language are closely related to each other, and examined both by AntConc3.4.3 with its function of collocates and concordances retrieval. After finishing the quantitative descriptive analysis, adhering to the principle of DHA, the study is about to interpret the results based on social historical background, so as to complete its exploration on TCM's self-portrayal media image construction.

4. Result and Discussion

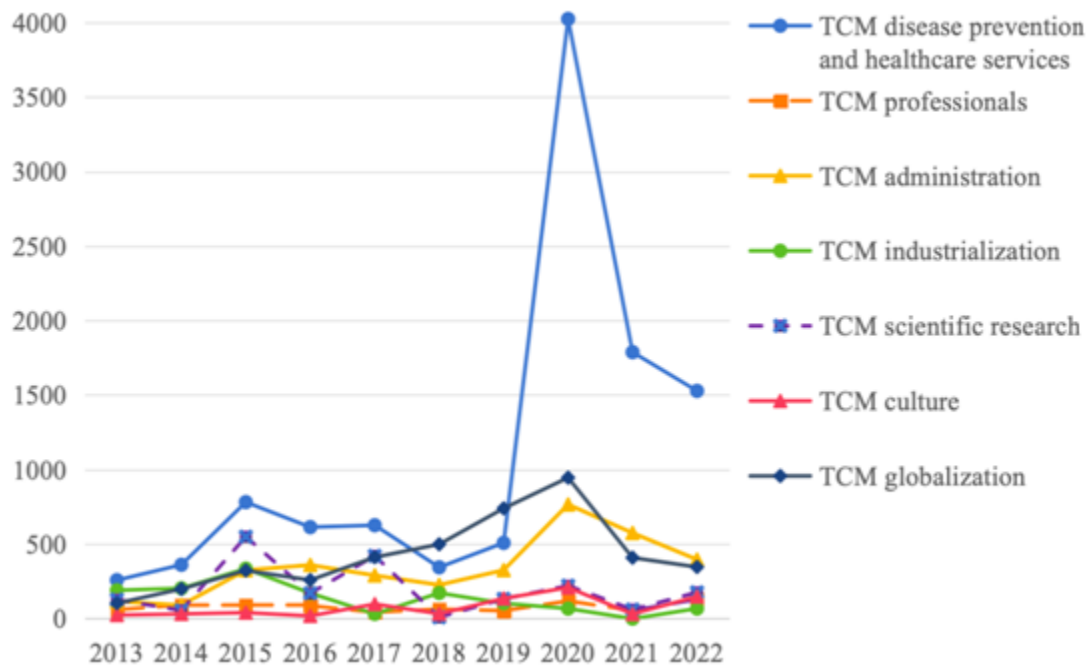
4.1. Macro Thematic Orientation

After comparing CMR to the reference corpus (BNC Sampler Written) in Wmatrix 5.0, 148 semantic domains with log-likelihood values larger than 6.63 and frequency counts greater than 5 were identified. Upon manually eliminating repetitive semantic domains, the top 20 key semantic domains were extracted using the log-likelihood value. Then the selected 20 domains have been classified into different categories and annotated with thematic topics based on the key TCM development sectors proposed in the official strategic plan as well as high-frequency words from each semantic domain.

The result suggests that seven topics have been frequently covered in TCM related reports. According to the exposure degree, they are: TCM disease prevention and healthcare services, TCM globalization, TCM administration, TCM scientific research, TCM professionals, TCM culture, and TCM industrialization. The macro-leveled investigation on these seven themes highlights the medical nature of TCM. It can also be observed from the reports that the government's positive support in promoting the TCM's modernization and globalization has been particularly emphasized by the mainstream media.

Meanwhile, in order to examine the diachronic change of the macro thematic setting, the current study also compares sub-corpora CMR13-22 with the reference corpus(BNC Sampler Written) one by one to generate each year's major topics. Fig.2 shows that seven main topics emerged in the general orientation have their respective coverage every year from 2013-2022. And apart from the general trend, year 2015 and year 2020 have witnessed a surge in reports intensity. Probing into the social historical context, the study finds out that both years are accompanied by big events concerning TCM's promotion. In 2015, Tu Youyou takes inspiration in TCM and receives her 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for the discovery of artemisinin used in the treatment of malaria, while in 2020, TCM's distinctive advantage shown in its coping with COVID-19 have attracted global attention. It can then be concluded that though the general topic setting remains steady, the yearly focus and reports intensity still varies according to the historical events.

Fig. 2. CMR13-22 Topic Setting



4.2. Meso Discursive Strategies and Micro linguistic realization

Referential strategy refers to the discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and processes, which is realized through membership categorization, anthroponyms, etc. Through retrieving key nominal collocates of “TCM”(log-likelihood \geq 6.63, $p < 0.05$), the present study finds out that TCM has been construct from multiple aspects through membership categorization of medical practice, medical institution, medical industry and medical culture by Chinese mainstream media.

Strategy of predication stands for the discursive qualification of social events or actors(more or less positively or negatively). To figure out whether TCM has been constructed positively or negatively, key verbal and adjective collocates of “TCM”(log-likelihood \geq 6.63, $p < 0.05$) have been extracted. Verbal collocates including “show”, “treat”, “improve”, etc. indicate that as a Chinese traditional healthcare culture, TCM “displays” as well as “shows” distinctive medial effect in “treating” and “curing” various diseases, “offering” alternative options, and therefore helping to “improve” the public health. Aside from the positive portrayal form the verbal collocates, through assigning good attributes to TCM, such as “effective”, “helpful”, “curative”, etc., adjective collocates also construct TCM in a commentary way.

Strategies of perspectivation are used to position speaker's or writer's point of view and express their involvement or distance. Through examining the speech presentation of 1534 concordance lines, the current study has found out that Chinese mainstream media tend to use indirect speech more often than direct speech so as to make the opinions more available and accepted by the audience. And for the sources of the speech, through referring to different sources of the officials and public, the media manage to portray TCM from various perspective. But it must be noticed that elite discourse, namely official source, makes up the majority of the reports, indicating the media stance as the authority's endorser.

5. Conclusion

Based on DHA, the present study has examined the TCM related reports from Chinese mainstream media, *People's Daily* and *China Daily*, to delineate their portrayal on TCM's as presented to international audience. After close investigation on the report discourse itself, the study has found out that: (1) On the macro level, seven topics have been set for the overall portrayal, depicting TCM in all round. And there is a diachronic change in the topic orientation, indicating the dynamic nature of image construction. (2) On the meso and micro levels, three specific discourse strategies have been employed by the mainstream media: strategy of nomination helps to portray TCM's diversity with various categorization; strategy of predication manages to assign good attributes to TCM with positive predicative expression; and the strategy of perspectivation has played an important role in position media's stance, serving to present a holographic picture of TCM enjoying recognition from various respects.

The above results suggest that Chinese mainstream media has positively presented TCM as an effective traditional Chinese medical system which is undergoing standardization and modernization. Bearing Chinese wisdom, TCM is expected to improve the well-being of people around the world, making full contribution to a brighter future for mankind.

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