

# An International Ecological Discourse Analysis of China's Image in the Reporting of the China-US Trade War

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## Abstract

Since the Trump administration took office again in 2025, the combined impact of trade imbalances and political factors has escalated China - US trade frictions. Analyzing *The New York Times*' coverage of the China - US trade dispute offers insights into how US media shapes China's image. Consequently, this study combined quantitative and qualitative research, guided by the transitivity theory in systemic functional linguistics and the international ecological philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefits and love", it constructed a small-scale corpus from *The New York Times*' reports on China - US trade issues post Trump's 2025 presidency. Using Word Smith Tools 9.0, it extracted semantic networks of verb collocations in the "China + V" material process structure to summarize China's actor image and explored the ecological representation of this image, revealing the international ecological philosophies of China and the US reflected in the discourse. The study found that in terms of "China + V" material processes, *The New York Times* portrayed China as a "tariff imposer," "strong retaliator," and "crisis manager." The ecological representation of these images was predominantly destructive, followed by neutral and beneficial discourse. The findings imply that China advocates mutual benefits, independence, and autonomy, while the US is linked to hegemonism. This research enriches the application of transitivity and promotes the development of a more objective, fair, and rational international ecological discourse system.

## 1. Introduction

The China - US trade dispute, triggered by trade imbalances and political factors, has escalated significantly after Trump's 2025 re - assumption of office, with the US imposing soaring tariffs on Chinese goods. This has caused trade restrictions to constantly upgrade. The dispute has deeply affected the global economic landscape, drawing worldwide attention. As a major information sources, news media not only influence people's thoughts and behaviors but also shape readers' views, and it can reveal stances, opinions, and tendencies regarding the china - US trade issue. *The New York Times*, one of the most influential US newspapers, has a certain stance on this issue.

Current research on national images focuses on both "self - shaping" and "other - shaping".

Under the Western dominated discourse system, it is crucial to focus on how foreign media shape our own's image. Thus, in national image research, we should focus on not only "self -

shaping" but also "other - shaping" (Ma & Cui, 2020). Transitivity, a key concept in Halliday's SFL, is divided into six processes, each with unique experiential meanings and involving specific participants and circumstances. Transitivity analysis can uncover ideologies, deconstruct power relations, and assess a text's ecological orientation. As an emerging discourse analysis paradigm, international ecological discourse analysis offers a new perspective for international relations. Scholars have integrated it with transitivity theory to create specialized discourse analysis models. By analyzing destructive, neutral, and beneficial discourse in international ecological discourse, it can reveal the international ecological philosophy behind the media and promote a more objective and fair international ecological discourse system.

Given this, this article combines transitivity theory from systemic functional linguistics with the international ecological discourse analysis framework, and selects *The New York Times*' reports on Sino - US trade issues post - Trump's 2025 presidency to build a small - scale corpus. Using Word Smith Tools 9.0, it extracts semantic networks of verb collocations in the "China + V" material process structure, summarizes China's actor image, and explores the image's ecological representation, revealing the international ecological philosophy of China and US. The study focuses on two questions:

- (1) What image of China does *The New York Times* construct through "China + V" material processes in its Sino - US trade dispute coverage?
- (2) What is the distribution of international ecological discourse (destructive, neutral, and beneficial) in the image, and what international ecological philosophies of China and the US does it reflect?

This study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, focusing on the "China + V" material process and its role in shaping China's image enriches the application of transitivity theory and advances its development in discourse analysis and international relations research. Practically, the study enhances understanding of US media's international ecological discourse strategies, compares China and the US's international ecological philosophies, and strengthens China's influence in international ecological discourse. It also promotes the establishment of a more objective, fair, and rational international ecological discourse system.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Research on National Image

The concept of national image is complex, and there are differences in its definition by scholars in various fields. Economist Bounding (1959) believes that country image is a synthesis of a country's perception of its own country as well as the perception of other actors in the international community, and that the shaping of country image is a two-way process that depends on both the strategy of the communicator and the cognitive framework of the receiver. Jarvis (1989), an expert in the field of marketing, also conducted an empirical study on the concept of national image, stating that country image is the public's psychological perception of a country. In the field of political science, Kunczik (1996: 1), defines it as a collection of a

country's perceptions of itself and the perceptions of other actors in the international system. It can be seen that a country's image, showcasing its influence and cohesion, reflects its overall national strength.

Although there is no precise definition of national image, it is important to pay attention to “self – shaping” and “other – shaping” in the study. Under the international discourse system dominated by Western countries, the current research on China's national image in the field of linguistics shows a parallel trend of other-shaping (Liang & Li, 2020; Liu & Mao, 2020) and self-shaping (Shi & Huang, 2019; Wu et al., 2021). At the macro level, Chinese scholars have combined the construction of China's national image with a number of disciplinary fields, such as international politics, news media, and literature, to form an interdisciplinary research system (Dai et al., 2023). In the field of linguistics, research on China's national image has even covered multiple aspects, including language construction, media communication, intercultural communication, rhetorical strategies, corpus analysis, and identity (Liu, 2022). Previous studies have not only enriched the theoretical system of country image, but also provided diversified research methods, such as diachronic research, comparative analysis and corpus building.

The results of existing studies on China's national image are rich, reflecting the development trend of multidisciplinary integration and multi-method synergy, but there are still deficiencies. At present, most studies focus on political events, such as Lu and Hou (2024) exploration the perspective of evidentiality in the translated report of the 20th Party Congress; Or starting from a macroscopic perspective, such as Tang et al.'s (2024) exploration of the image of China's overall economic rise; While others are broader in scope, taking the whole picture of foreign media reports on China as the object of their studies, such as Liu and Mao 's (2020) study of the image of China as presented by foreign media reports randomly extracted the foreign media corpus with "China" as the keyword. In contrast, there are relatively few studies that explore China's national image from the perspective of specific economic issues, such as the trade dispute between China and the United States.

## **2.2 Research on Transitivity**

Systemic Functional Linguistics holds that language has three meta-functions of meaning representation: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1994; 2004; 2014). Further, Halliday (1968: 209) argued that the ideational function includes experiential and logical functions. Transitivity is a set of grammars for expressing the experiential function, mainly consisting of three parts: participants, processes, and environmental components. Existing research mainly focuses on two aspects: theoretical construction and applied practice.

At the theoretical development level, as the founder of transitivity theory, Halliday has made important contributions to its theoretical advancement: In 1961, he broke through the traditional framework of verb research, first extending transitivity analysis to the clause level and revealing the correlation between verb selection and lexical density (Halliday, 1961); In 1967, he constructed a formal framework for the transitivity system from the dual dimensions of combination and paradigm (Halliday, 1967); and in 1985, in *An Introduction to Functional*

*Grammar*, he established a semantic triangle model including participants, processes, and environmental components, formally establishing a classification system of six process types (Halliday, 1985). On the basis of Halliday, subsequent scholars have continued to promote the deepening of the theory of materiality. Matthiessen (1995) presented a discourse on materiality in which behavioral processes are classified as material process and existential process were classified as relational processes. Cheng (1994) combined transitivity with the ergative system, attempting to establish a semantic system network to explain material and mental processes. In order to distinguish participant roles, Xiao (1997) provided a systematic overview of participant roles. Fawcett (2009) constructed a refined analysis framework containing 71 semantic structures. In recent years, with the emergence of eco-linguistics as a new discipline, He and Wei (2017) have expanded and refined participant roles from an ecological perspective to realize the value of clauses.

In terms of practical applications, transitivity theory was first applied to literary works. Halliday (1971) was the first to analyze literary works using transitivity. Through the analysis of *Inheritor*, he identified linguistic features, providing inspiration for studying literature from a transitivity perspective. Short (1976) analyzed *Man and Mice* from the perspective of transitivity. Simpson (1993) analyzed William Gold's *Pincher Martin*, further verifying the explanatory validity of the theory in literary discourse analysis. Thereafter, the application of transitivity gradually expanded, forming a trend of interdisciplinary integration and combined analysis of multiple discourses. For example, Bell (1991) applied transitivity to translation studies in *Translation and Translating*. Transitivity has been widely used in news discourse analysis (Akram et al., 2025; Kashif et al., 2022), with some studies combining critical discourse analysis (Wu & Li, 2025; Akram & Yasmin, 2024) or ecological discourse analysis (Cao & Yang, 2022; Wei, 2022) to effectively analyze the ideology or ecological philosophy behind discourses.

Despite the fruitful achievements in theoretical construction and application expansion, existing research still has the following limitations: in the combined study of news discourse and transitivity systems, most research focuses on the overall distribution characteristics of the six process types, with fewer studies on specific process types and a lack of focused investigation into material processes as the core type.

### **2.3 Research on Ecological Discourse Analysis**

Ecolinguistics emerged alongside growing global attention to ecological issues, with its primary research approach being ecological discourse analysis (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014). There are two main research paradigms in ecological discourse analysis: the "Haugen Model," also known as the metaphorical model, and the "Halliday Model," referred to as the non-metaphorical model (Fill, 2001; Fan Junjun, 2005; Han Jun, 2013). The former posits that language has its own ecological environment, where the social context of language use and speakers' attitudes determine its survival conditions. The latter emphasizes language's crucial role in ecological issues, highlighting linguists' social responsibility (Huang, 2016).

Theoretical studies on ecological discourse analysis have primarily focused on defining the field and constructing its theoretical models. Alexander and Stibbe (2014) first coined the term "ecological discourse analysis" in their paper *From the Analysis of Ecological Discourse to the Ecological Analysis*. Building on Halliday's model, Stibbe proposed beneficial discourse, ambiguous discourse, and destructive discourse in *Critical Discourse Analysis and Ecology: The Search for New Stories to Live By* (Stibbe, 2017: 497). He and Wei (2018) argued that ecological discourse analysis differs significantly from critical discourse analysis, positive discourse analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis in research objectives and methods, positioning it as an independent paradigm. Huang and Zhao (2021) introduced the harmonious discourse analysis framework for ecological discourse research in *The Framework for Harmonious Discourse Analysis and its Application*.

In applied research, scholars often draw on existing theoretical frameworks to analyze ecological orientations in diverse discourses, covering literary, educational, and news discourse. For example, Chen (2019) explored ecological concepts in ancient Chinese poetry by analyzing transitivity systems; Boughen (2021) investigated factors influencing Xinhua News Agency's coverage of ecological issues in African countries; and Bozhenkova et al. (2019) analyzed Russian political discourse from an ecological perspective.

Against the backdrop of economic globalization, scholars have turned to international ecosystem research, constructing relevant frameworks (He & Wei, 2017). Empirical studies in international ecological discourse analysis have also emerged. For instance, Niu and Niu (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of media reports on the "Yunnan elephant migration event" in China, the UK, and the US, guided by the philosophy of "pluralistic harmony and interactive symbiosis", finding that both Chinese and Western media coverage was dominated by ecologically beneficial or contradictory discourses.

Despite abundant research achievements, international ecosystem studies predominantly focus on natural ecology (Crutzen et al., 1999; Suttle, 2007; Niu & Niu, 2017), with limited attention to social ecology. In reality, social and natural ecologies are equally important (Bookchin, 1981: 22). As a vital component of social ecosystems, international social ecology warrants more academic attention and in-depth inquiry.

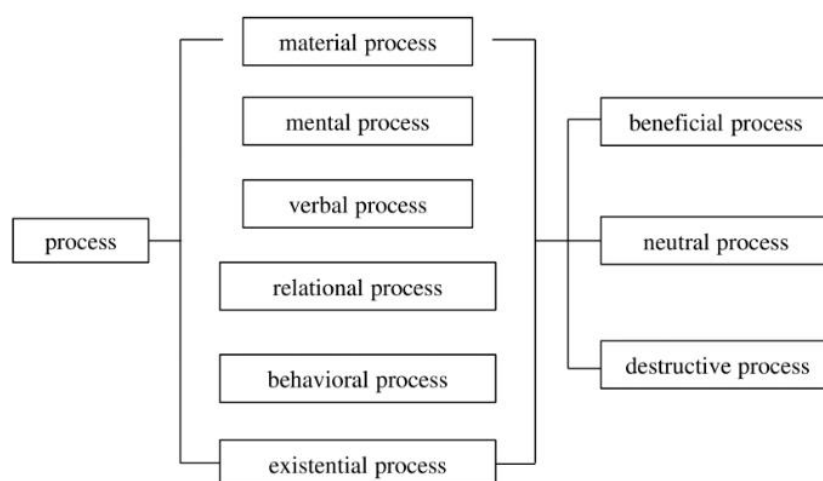
Therefore, this article guided by transitivity theory in Systemic Functional Linguistics and the international ecological philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefits and love," constructed a small corpus of *The New York Times* reports on China-US trade issues following Trump's 2025 inauguration. It aims to summarize representations of Chinese actors, analyze the distribution of their ecological characteristics, and reveal the international ecological philosophies of China and the US embedded in news discourse.

### **3. Transitivity and International Ecological Discourse Analysis Framework**

Transitivity is a set of grammars for expressing experiential functions, mainly comprising three

components: participants, processes, and circumstances. Process lies at the core of transitivity. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) proposed six types of processes in the English transitive system. Material process represents human actions or events in the objective world, serving as external representations of experiential reality. Relational process denotes states of being or possession, divided into two categories: attributive and identifying. Verbal process involves acts of saying, expressing symbolic relationships through linguistic forms. Mental process reflects human perceptions of the external world, presenting internal psychological and emotional experiences. Existential process signifies the existence or occurrence of entities.

Based on transitivity, He and Wei (2017) constructed a framework for international ecological discourse analysis. Within this framework, they innovatively categorized participants into "living beings" and "non-living beings". Living beings are further subdivided into: Human living beings (primarily referring to national citizens), non-human living beings (encompassing animals, plants, and other life forms), with both categories including individual and group participants. They also refined and ecologicalized the main transitive processes, guided by the ecological philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefits and love", establishing three ecologically significant subsystems: beneficial process, neutral process and destructive process (as illustrated in Figure 1).



*Figure 1: International Ecological Discourse Process System (He & Wei 2017)*

These three processes are respectively characterized by destructive, neutral and beneficial discourses. Specifically, destructive discourse prevents people's behavior in protecting international ecosystems; beneficial discourse promotes people to actively participate in protecting international ecosystems; and neutral discourse neither prevents nor promotes protecting international ecosystems. (as shown in Figure2). International ecological discourse analysis focuses on exploring the complex relationship between language and international ecosystems, so as to deeply reveal the impact of language on international ecosystems.

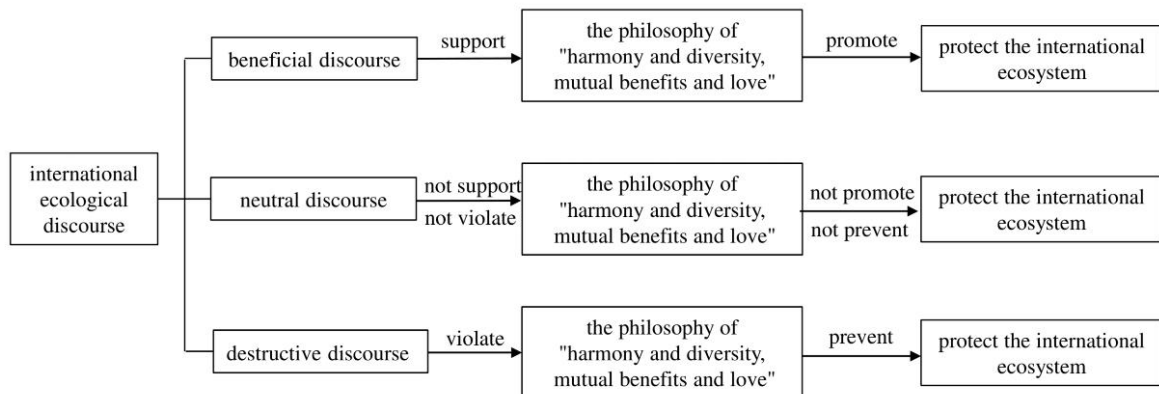


Figure 2: International Ecological Discourse Classification (He & Wei 2017)

Transitivity theory facilitates the analysis of action process and participant relationships in discourse, while the international ecological discourse analysis framework provides insights into decoding ecological concepts and image construction behind media discourse. Given this, this article integrates transitivity theory with the international ecological discourse analysis framework to construct a research framework, as specifically outlined in Figure 3. Adopting a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study focuses on material processes from the transitivity perspective, given that material process denotes substantive action, and selects the non-living participant "China" as the research object. Concretely, within material process clauses, verbs collocating with "China" are extracted, grouped, and lemmatized. Based on semantic features and contexts, these verbs are summarized to identify the images of China.

Then, guided by the ecological philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love", the study further identifies three ecological representations in material process clauses depicting China's actor image: ecologically beneficial discourse, neutral discourse, and destructive discourse. Through these research steps, the study aims to deeply explore the international ecological philosophies of China and the U.S.



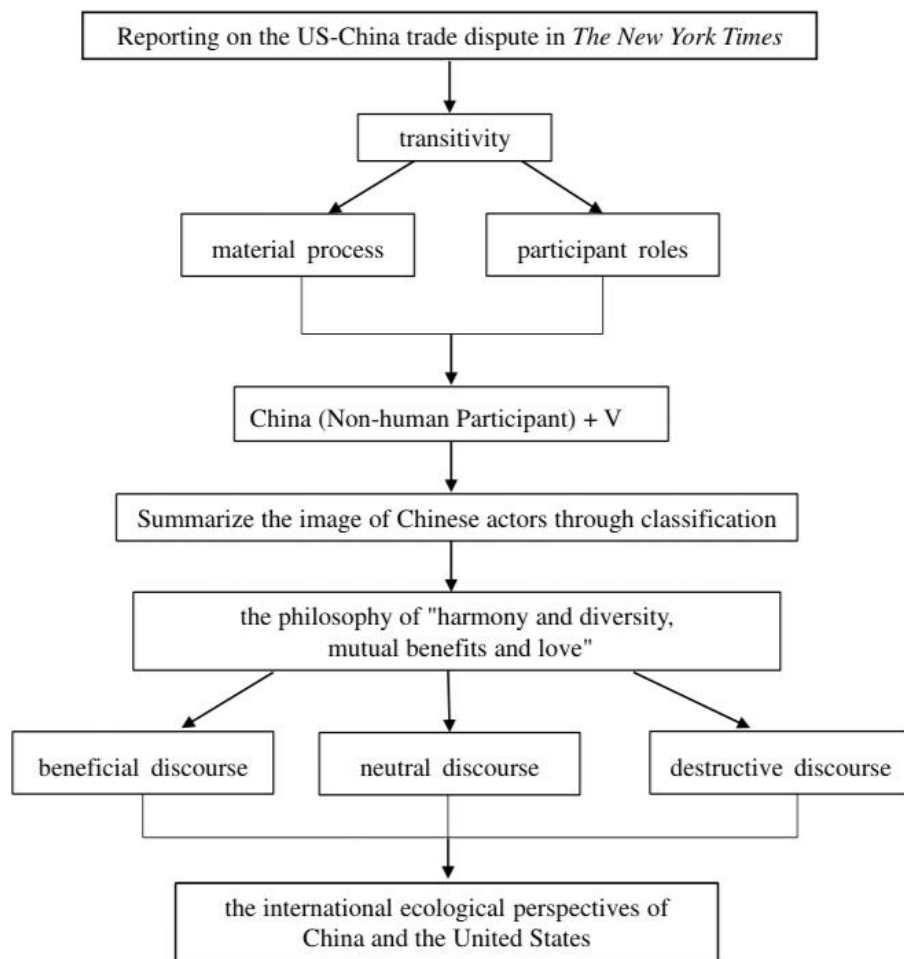


Figure 3: Analytical Framework

## 4. Methodology and Procedures

### 4.1 Corpus Collection and Preprocessing

The corpus of this study is derived from *The New York Times* reports collected by Lexis Nexis, a world-renowned news and business information provider. As one of the most influential media in the United States and the world, *The New York Times* has high authority and wide recognition for its reports, and Lexis Nexis has cooperated with many famous media in the world, which makes the information authoritative and accurate. Therefore, it is reasonable and reliable to use this database to search for stories in *The New York Times*.

Specifically, in the Lexis Nexis database, using “China-US trade war” and “China-US trade dispute” as keywords, this study retrieved reports on China-US trade disputes in *The New York Times* since 2025. After batch downloading, irrelevant articles were manually excluded, leaving 52 news reports. The corpus undergone manual cleaning to remove noise such as dates and sources, resulting in approximately 334,759 characters. News reports after 2025 were selected because the China-US trade dispute continued to escalate in 2025, reaching a climax in April, a

timeframe that reflects the latest dynamics of China-US trade.

## 4.2 Data Processing and Analysis

Using Word Smith Tools (9.0), index lines for "China" were extracted, yielding a total of 745 index lines. Among these, 175 "China + V" index lines were manually screened out. A summary of the notional verbs in material processes within these index lines revealed 114 verbs. These 114 collocating verbs were then lemmatized, grouping verbs of different parts of speech and tenses under a single lemma. For example, "will fight with," "will fight to," and "fought" were categorized under the lemma "fight," resulting in 80 lemmas, as shown in Table 1. Subsequently, based on semantic features and contextual information, the collocation words were summarized into 3 groups to refine the "actor" roles. It should be noted that during the identification of prominent collocating verbs, process types, and participant roles, the word indices themselves often fail to provide sufficient contextual information. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the analysis to the entire paragraph and even the full article where the word index is located, requiring careful reading and identification (Tang, 2024). As shown in Table 2, the "actor" images of China were categorized as "Tariff Imposer," "Strong Retaliator," and "Crisis Manager."

Table 1: Summary of Chinese Collocated Verbs

Verb	Frequency	Verb	Frequency	Verb	Frequency	Verb	Frequency
need	6	choose	2	prepare	2	maintain	1
impose	6	end	2	barrel	2	produce	1
fight	6	kick	2	work	2	suspend	1
respond	6	push	2	alternate	2	promise	1
retaliate	5	raise	2	raise	2	pause	1
produce	5	export	2	place	2	run	1
pose	4	buy	2	believe	1	build	1
try	3	trigger	2	unveil	1	dump	1
face	3	advocate	2	expect	1	pump	1
sell	3	make	2	stand	1	import	1
show	3	self-depend	2	erode	1	strive	1
know	3	vow	2	reduce	1	install	1
halt	3	point	2	support	1	restrict	1
say	3	consider	2	refuse	1	come out	1
hope	3	seek	2	diversify	1	dismantle	1
counter	3	enter	2	fail	1	push	1
look	3	dominate	2	stuck	1	booster	1
increase	3	announce	2	warn	1	handle	1
take	3	become	2	send	1	pour	1
signal	3	learn	2	develop	1	begin	1

Table 2: China's Actor Images

China's Actor Role	Collocated Verb Lexemes
Tariff Imposer (21, 24.7%)	impose (6), sell (3), pose (4), unveil (1), push (2), raise (2), maintain (1), place (2)
Strong Retaliator (24, 28.2%)	fight (6), retaliate (5), respond (6), halt (3), announce (2), install (1), restrict (1)
Crisis Manager (40, 47.1%)	try (3), face(3), hope(3), signal(3), counter(3), work(2), seek(2), self-depend(2), vow(2), prepare(2), learn(2), diversify(1), develop(1), bolster(1), handle(2), announce(2), install (1), restrict (1) bolster(1), handle(1), suspend(1), strive(1), produce(1), promise(1), build(1), begin(1), refuse(1), reduce(1), pour(1)

Finally, ecological analysis was conducted on 85 lines of text corresponding to three types of actor roles, based on the philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefits and love." First, the target lines were compiled into a txt. file. Then, a code-list was created, and the txt. file was imported into BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.2 for manual annotation and statistical analysis. The software then automatically presented the data. Using specific examples from this analysis, the study reveals the international ecological philosophies of China and the US behind US media's shaping of China's image.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Research results

Based on the above data - processing method, three types of international ecological discourse are detected in the 85 retrieved lines presenting China's "actor" image. As shown in Figure 4, the distribution is unbalanced. Of them, constructive discourse was the least (14, 16.5%), neutral discourse occurred 28 times (32.9%), and destructive discourse was the most (43, 50.6%). This distribution mirrors the ideological construction of China's image by the U.S. media. Next, the analysis will focus on how the Chinese "actor" image is manifested through these different types of ecological discourse, as well as the international ecological philosophies of China and the U.S. reflected in the discourse.

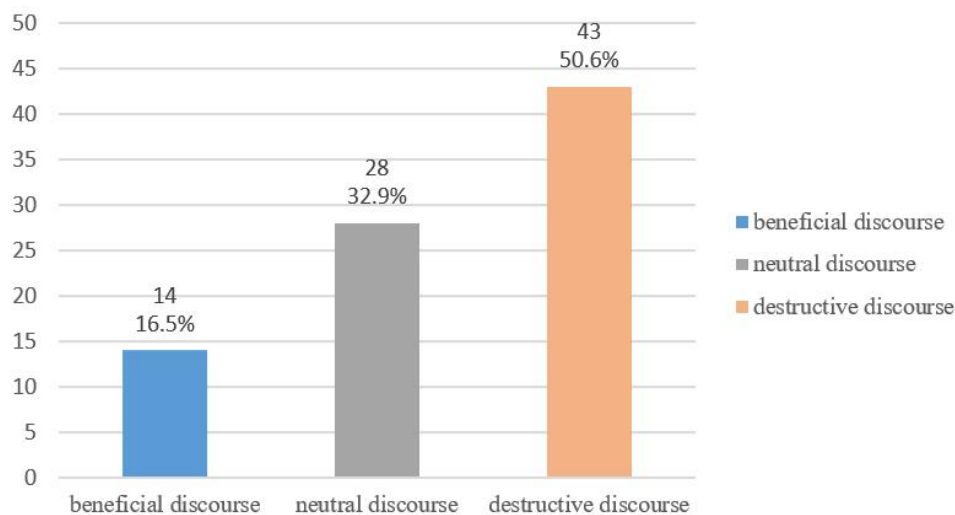


Figure 4: Distribution of Three Types of Ecological Discourse

## 5.2 Analysis of Ecological Discourse

### 5.2.1 Beneficial Discourse Analysis

Beneficial discourse refers to obeying the international eco-philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love", and the image of China's "Crisis manager" is usually characterized by beneficial discourse, which is conducive to the protection of international ecosystems. The following examples are analyzed:

(1) As China **faces off** with the United States over a punishing trade war, it is under pressure to shore up its **friendships around the world**, starting with its neighbors in Southeast Asia. neighbors in Southeast Asia.

In the sentence, the subject "China" match the verb phrase "faces off", so it is a material process, showing that despite a trade crisis, it doesn't shift the trouble to others. Instead, it widens multilateral cooperation to build a "trade - ecological buffer zone," like investing in Southeast Asian nations to stabilize the supply chain. This regional cooperation, replacing unilateral confrontation, reflects the "peace - oriented" ecological philosophy. It eases China's dependence on US and creates regional economic chances, in line with the "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love" principle, without the zero - sum - game thinking.

(2) "For more than 70 years, China **has always relied on self-reliance and hard work for development**," Mr. Xi continued.

This sentence directly quotes President Xi Jinping's words, in which China is paired with "has relied on" and modified with the word "always", emphasizing China's adherence to the principle of "independence" in the face of the China US trade dispute, and shaping China's image as a "crisis responder". Emphasizing "self-reliance" rather than relying on external charity, reflecting respect for the diversity of development paths of various countries, avoiding being trapped in a "dependent economic ecology" due to the US technological blockade, and conforming to the philosophy of "harmony in diversity"; Based on China's development background, it can be seen that while China is independent, it does not plunder other countries'

resources, refuses to suppress other countries with "technological hegemony", and is consistent with the ecological ethics of "mutual benefit and love".

(3) "If you choose to cooperate, you will achieve mutual benefit and win-win results; if you blindly exert pressure, **China will definitely, resolutely** If you blindly exert pressure, **China will definitely, resolutely counter**," the Chinese foreign minister said.

This sentence directly quotes the words of the Chinese Foreign Minister. The combination of "China" and "counter" in the sentence belongs to a material process, and the verb "definitely, resolutely" is used to modify it, emphasizing China's determination and confidence in the face of trade disputes. China appears as a "crisis responder", neither blindly compromising nor actively confronting. It firmly opposes the hegemonic thinking of the United States, is committed to friendly, mutually beneficial and coordinated development among multiple countries, and promotes the construction of a fair and just international ecosystem.

(4) But **China has been diversifying** its export markets to reduce its dependence on the United States... exports to the EU soared.

The combination of "China" and "has been diversifying" in this sentence belongs to a material process. Faced with the pressure of US tariffs, China does not passively bear it, but instead resolves the crisis through systematic restructuring of the global trade network, reflecting its image as a "crisis responder". This move can break unilateral dependence on the United States, avoid excessive concentration of global trade ecology in a single market, reduce systemic risks, create trade opportunities for other countries (such as Southeast Asian countries), and conform to the ecological ethics of harmonious coexistence.

As can be seen from the above example sentence, the image of China as a "crisis responder" is characterized by beneficial ecological discourse, which follows the international ecological philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love", and has positive significance for protecting the international ecosystem. In the trade crisis, China has built a "trade ecological buffer zone" by expanding multilateral cooperation such as establishing friendly relations with Southeast Asian countries and promoting diversified export markets, breaking its unilateral dependence on the United States. At the same time, China adheres to the principle of "independence", firmly opposes hegemonism in the face of trade disputes, neither blindly compromises nor actively confronts, and is committed to promoting the construction of a fair and just international ecosystem, demonstrating responsible great power responsibility.

### 5.2.2 Neutral Discourse Analysis

Neutral discourse means that it neither follows nor violates the international eco-philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love", so it neither promotes nor hinders the protection of international ecosystems. In promoting the construction of a harmonious international ecosystem, efforts can be made to prevent neutral discourse from becoming destructive discourse and to promote the transformation of neutral discourse into beneficial discourse. The following examples are analyzed:

(5) **China sells** nearly four times more goods to the United States than it buys.

(6) **China has poured** money into Brazilian infrastructure to secure soybean imports.

(7) **China is trying to dig out of a property crisis through exports.**

(8) **China has built** expertise and resources for manufacturing that no other country has - with advanced machine tooling, for instance.

In the above four examples, China is separately paired with “sells”, “has poured”, “is trying to”, and “has built”, all of which are material process. Example (5) objectively presents the quantitative fact of China's trade surplus with the U.S. It is a factual description of economic interaction, without any value judgment on trade policies or attribution of responsibility. It neither shows a cooperative tendency of “mutual benefit and love” nor has a negative “confrontational and destructive”, fully meeting the neutral discourse feature of. Example (6) describes China's strategy of investing in Brazil's infrastructure to diversify soybean imports, a normal decision for national economic security. It neither disrupts the existing trade system (such as sanctioning U.S. agriculture) nor directly promotes China - U.S. cooperation, meeting the definition of neutral discourse. However, this behavior also implies China's philosophical thinking of “reducing unilateral dependence and maintaining trade ecological diversity”, in line with the ecological wisdom of “harmony in difference”. Sentence (7) objectively states China's economic strategy of relieving trade crises through exports, which is a factual description of domestic economic adjustment. It neither seeks external intervention nor harms other countries' economies, belonging to the typical neutral discourse category. It implies China's ecological governance logic of self - reliance in facing challenges. Example (8) objectively records China's construction of manufacturing expertise through advanced machine tool technology, without judging the technology source or its impact on the global industrial chain. It neither emphasizes the beneficial “technology sharing” nor shows the destructive “technology monopoly”, meeting the neutral discourse features. Essentially, it is a practical presentation of China's ecological philosophy of independent development without hindering others.

In summary, all the above cases point to China's objective actions. Their common features are: only stating facts without embedding value judgments of “mutual benefit” or “confrontation”. They neither violate nor actively follow the international ecological philosophy of “harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love”. In discourses, the key to promoting the transformation of neutral discourse into beneficial discourse is to supplement its narrative chain with the philosophical view of “mutual benefit and love”. For example, combining the “trade surplus” with “fair consultation” and linking “technological development” with “global sharing” can break the one - sided interpretation of hegemonic discourse and truly unleash the positive potential of neutral discourse in building a harmonious international ecological system.

### **5.2.3 Analysis of Destructive Discourse**

Destructive discourse refers to the violation of the international eco-philosophy of "harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love", which prevents people from protecting the international ecosystem. The images of China as a "tariff-imposer" and "strong retaliator" are often constructed through such discourses, which are analyzed as follows:

(9) In early December, **China halted** the export of critical minerals like antimony and gallium.

(10) **China imposed** a two-month freeze on rare earth shipments to Japan in 2010.

(11) **Earlier this month, China restricted** American access to critical rare earth materials.

(12) **China has retaliated** by imposing 125 percent tariffs on U.S. imports.

(13) **China has retaliated** with an array of measures, pledging never to back down.

In the above examples, China is paired with “halted”, “imposed”, “restricted”, and “has retaliated”, thus these examples all belong to material process. Sentence (9) The word “halted” directly refers to the action of “supply - chain disruption”. U.S. media distorts China's normal export - control measures as “threatening the global semiconductor supply chain”, ignoring the prior context of the long - term U.S. technology blockade. By labeling it as “resource weaponization”, it portrays China as a “destroyer of the technological ecosystem”. This narrative, centered on “technological hegemony”, defines the U.S. - led tech industry chain as the “international ecological benchmark”. It distorts China's legitimate actions to protect its resource rights into “disrupting the global tech symbiotic order”. In essence, it reinforces the hegemonic notion that “U.S. tech monopoly equals ecological balance”.

Examples (10) and (11) both address the issue of China restricting the export of rare resources. The verbs “imposed” and “restricted”, together with “freeze”, emphasize the attribute of “economic coercion”. U.S. media deliberately downplays the event background. As the world's largest rare - metals producer, China's policies are interpreted as “using resources to restrict others”. China's normal resource - control actions are stigmatized as a “politically motivated economic weapon”. Behind this lies the logic of “resource - distribution hegemony”, which distorts China's normal resource - management actions into “disrupting the ecological balance of resource distribution”. This exposes the hegemonic essence of “U.S. interests first, others' sovereignty second”.

Example (12) directly states China's action of “retaliating retaliated by imposing 125 percent tariffs”. U.S. media uses the label “retaliated” to define China's counter - measures as actively escalating conflict. It covers up the U.S.'s primary responsibility for first increasing tariffs, portraying China as a “destroyer of trade order”. Based on the “U.S. - interests - first” criterion, U.S. media views China's reasonable counter - measures as disrupting the global trade ecological balance. This implies the hegemonic logic that “U.S. tariff policies have inherent legitimacy”, meaning the U.S. can unilaterally adjust trade rules, while China's responses are defined as “disruptive”.

Example (13) summarizes China's “response with a series of reprisals and a pledge to never back down”. U.S. media distorts China's stance of “defending its own interests” as “actively prolonging conflict”. By emphasizing the “never - back - down” statement, it reinforces China's image as a “destroyer of trade peace” while concealing the U.S.'s responsibility for “extreme pressure”. The core of the U.S. ecological philosophy is also the hegemonic logic that the established order must not be challenged.

These destructive discourses, through the three strategies of “verb - labelization”, “causal -

relation concealment”, and “impact exaggeration”, distort China's defensive counter measures into ecological destruction. The essence of this discourse construction mechanism is to import “American - centrism” in international ecological philosophy through “destructive discourse”. It beautifies hegemonic order as “natural ecological balance” and defines all non - compliant forces as “ecological destroyers”, thus serving the U.S. hegemonic mindset.

## 6. Conclusion and Suggestion

Combining systemic functional linguistics' transitivity theory with the international ecological philosophy of “harmony and diversity, mutual benefit and love”, this article built a corpus from *The New York Times*' reports on China - U.S. trade disputes after Trump's 2025 return to power. Using Word Smith Tools 9.0, it extracted verbs in the “China + V” material process, summarized China's “actor” image, and analyzed the ecological representation distribution and the philosophical views of China and the U.S. It found that China was portrayed as a “tariff - imposer”, “strong retaliator”, and “crisis manager”, with 50.6% destructive discourse, 32.9% neutral discourse, and 16.5% beneficial discourse in relevant lines. U.S. media used strategies like verb labeling and concealing causality to promote “America - first” hegemony, while China's actions reflect the philosophies of “mutual benefit and co-existence” and “independence and self - reliance”. Theoretically, the study enriches transitivity applications in discourse analysis. Practically, it helps understand U.S. media discourse strategies and enhances China's international discourse power.

However, the study has limitations like a narrow time-span and insufficient analysis of other transitivity processes. Future research could expand the corpus and combine transitivity with other linguistic theories for a more comprehensive multi - dimensional analysis of China - U.S. trade disputes, deepening the understanding of discourse - building mechanisms in international economic interactions.

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