

A Linguistic Analysis of National Security Discourse and the Construction of National Consciousness From the Perspective of Attitude Resources*

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Abstract—Amid escalating geopolitical risks, the ideological construction in national security discourses has gained strategic significance. Guided by Martin and White’s Appraisal Theory, this study investigates how *China Daily* employs three attitude resources: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation, to construct national security discourses and shape public national consciousness. Through corpus analysis of 78 news articles (2023-2024), the findings reveal: 1) Affect mobilizes urgency and solidarity via “crisis alerts” and “collective belonging;” 2) Judgement constructs an image between a “responsible China” committed to sovereign equality and “just China”, legitimizing state actions as both ethically grounded and globally necessary; 3) Appreciation reinforces institutional superiority through repetitive valorization of policies as “scientific” and “strategic.” The research identifies a defensive “positivity” strategy in China’s state media discourse, which simultaneously counters external threats and consolidates internal cohesion. Also, this research offers interdisciplinary insights into the linguistic mechanisms of national consciousness construction.

Index Terms—national security, national consciousness, attitude resources, positive discourse analysis, *China Daily*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of evolving geopolitical landscapes, the discourse surrounding “national security” has emerged as a strategic instrument for states to address multifaceted international challenges. China’s conceptualization of national security originates from its distinct historical, cultural and political foundations. This perspective embodies a comprehensive strategy that addresses both conventional security priorities and emerging transnational risks. Within this framework, *China Daily* serves as a critical platform for disseminating state-formulated security narratives to domestic and global readerships through its English-language publications (Li, 2022).

The study of national security discourse has garnered significant attention from both domestic and international academy. Internationally, national security is often framed within the context of geopolitical competition, terrorism, and global governance, where discourse serves as a tool to legitimize state actions and policies (Buzan, 1998). Domestically, China’s national security discourse reflects its unique historical and cultural context, emphasizing a comprehensive approach that integrates traditional and non-traditional security concerns (Zhao, 2020). Historically, China’s national security concept has evolved from a focus on military defense during the Cold War to a more holistic framework that includes economic, technological, and cultural dimensions in the 21st century (Li, 2019). Contemporary features of China’s national security discourse highlight themes such as “territorial disputes” or “cyber sovereignty,” which align with the country’s strategic goals of maintaining stability and promoting development (Wang, 2021).

National consciousness refers to the correct understanding and rational practice of national sovereignty, national security, national development, national image and national responsibilities, which are formed by the citizens of a nation through long-term production, daily life and educational practices, based on a scientific cognition and accurate comprehension of the fundamental issues such as the origin, development and essence of the nation (Wang & Meng, 2020). Media play a crucial role in shaping national consciousness. Through the strategic use of language and symbols, media narratives can reinforce collective memory, construct national identity, and foster a sense of belonging among citizens (Anderson, 1983). In China, state-affiliated media strategically utilize symbolic constructs, including historical analogies, cultural archetypes and territorial allegories, to cultivate patriotic solidarity and reinforce sociopolitical cohesion (Xu, 2019). This process is further amplified by the dynamic relationship between linguistic frameworks and collective memory, which collaboratively shape interpretations of national heritage and aspirational futures.

Official rhetoric establishes foundational narratives for national identity, while public engagement which manifested through digital platforms, cultural expressions, and civic discourse refines these narratives. Such dialectical interactions

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ensure the durability and adaptability of collective identity in response to shifting sociocultural demands (Xu, 2019). Crucially, the formation of collective national consciousness relies on linguistic mechanisms, particularly attitudinal resources that simultaneously critique entrenched power asymmetries such as hegemony and inequity and envision transnational coexistence frameworks (Zhou, 2023).

Theoretically, this study seeks to expand the application of Martin and White's Appraisal Theory in political discourse analysis, particularly in the context of national security. By focusing on attitudinal resources: affect, judgement and appreciation, it aims to uncover how language functions as a vehicle for ideological encoding. Practically, the research sheds light on the media's role in constructing national consciousness through discursive strategies, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of how state narratives shape public perceptions of security and identity.

The primary objective of this study is to decode the ideological mechanisms embedded in national security discourse and their impacts on national consciousness. By analyzing the interplay between language, ideology and public perception, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of state media in fostering a cohesive national identity in the face of evolving security challenges. The findings of this study not only contribute to the theoretical development of national security studies but also offer valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and scholars interested in the intersection of politics, media and national identity so as to construct a cohesive national consciousness.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Three Dimensions of Attitude Resources

Martin & White's Appraisal Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how language constructs attitudes and ideologies. In the context of national security discourse, the three dimensions of attitude resources: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation, play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and legitimizing state narratives (Figure 1).

Affect focuses on emotional responses and is instrumental in mobilizing public sentiment. In national security discourse, Affect is often used to evoke a sense of crisis (e.g. threats to national sovereignty), responsibility (e.g. the duty to protect the nation) and belonging (e.g. unity in the face of challenges). By appealing to collective emotions, media narratives can foster solidarity and readiness among citizens (Martin & White, 2005).

Judgement involves moral evaluations of behavior, particularly in terms of social norms and ethical standards (Hui & Lee, 2023). In the context of national security, "Judgement" is frequently employed to frame actions as "just" or "unjust," "responsible" or "irresponsible." For instance, state actors may be portrayed as "heroic defenders," while external forces are depicted as "aggressors" or "interventionists." Such moral dichotomies serve to legitimize state policies and delegitimize opposing viewpoints (Wang & Zhang, 2018).

Appreciation pertains to the evaluation of objects, events, or policies based on their aesthetic, social or functional value. In national security discourse, Appreciation is often used to valorize policies as effective, innovative or strategic. For example, cybersecurity measures may be described as "cutting-edge," while economic policies are framed as "sustainable." These positive evaluations reinforce the credibility and legitimacy of state actions.

The interplay of these three dimensions creates a complex narrative ecosystem that shapes public perceptions and national consciousness. By analyzing these dimensions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how state media construct and reinforce national security narratives, ultimately influencing public trust in government and the maintenance of national identity.

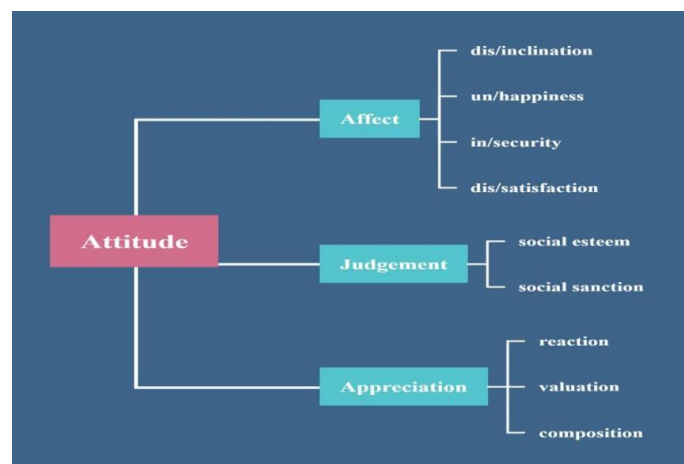


Figure 1. Three Dimensions of Attitude Resources

B. Practical Pathways of PDA

As an emerging paradigm within discourse studies, Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) proposes a constructive epistemological shift from the predominant critical tradition that prioritizes deconstruction of power asymmetries. Grounded in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and appraisal theory, PDA conceptualizes discourse not merely as a vehicle for ideological domination but as a dynamic site for cultivating solidarity, negotiating shared values, and envisioning alternative social futures (Martin & White, 2005). This approach distinguishes itself through its explicit commitment to identifying discursive resources such as metaphors of collaboration, lexico-grammatical patterns of inclusivity and narratives of collective agency that enable social practices in a more transformative way.

PDA offers a constructive approach to discourse analysis, shifting the focus from deconstructing power imbalances to identifying and promoting discourses that foster solidarity and consensus. In the context of Chinese media discourse, PDA reveals a distinctive “negotiative” characteristic, where state media seek to balance the articulation of national interests with the cultivation of public support.

PDA illuminates a distinctive discursive negotiation mechanism wherein state-aligned outlets strategically mediate between the imperative of articulating national interests and the necessity of fostering domestic-international consensus within the context of Chinese media discourse. Different from traditional critical discourse analysis which often emphasizes opposition and conflict, PDA emphasizes the role of media in constructing shared values and collective goals. And it tries to create a peaceful atmosphere, work together to achieve a set goal, and then build an equal and harmonious society. For example, Chinese state media frequently employ narratives of “peaceful development” and “win-win cooperation” to bridge domestic and international audiences, thereby fostering a sense of global responsibility and national pride (Zhang, 2020).

This negotiative characteristic is manifested through three interlocking mechanisms. By aligning China’s actions with resonant values like multilateralism and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), media discourse transcends parochial nationalism to claim ethical authority within global governance frameworks (Zhang, 2018). References to historical victim like century of humiliation are counterbalanced by narratives of rejuvenation, constructing a teleological trajectory that legitimizes present policies as both corrective and aspirational. Selective appropriation of Western academic terminologies (e.g: global public goods) recontextualizes them within socialist political philosophy, enabling China to participate in hegemonic discourses while subverting their ideological premises.

More importantly, PDA’s analytical lens exposes how such discourse transcends mere propaganda by fostering participatory identification. When China Daily frames national security through metaphors of “connectivity” and “shared destiny,” it interpellates readers in both domestic and foreign levels as stakeholders in a collective civilizational project, thereby naturalizing state actions as extensions of universal human progress. This stands in stark contrast to CDA’s frequent portrayal of media as monolithic ideological apparatuses, instead revealing the polyphonic adaptability of state discourse in navigating pluralistic audience expectations.

Nevertheless, scholars caution against overly optimistic readings of PDA’s emancipatory potential. The emphasis on consensus-building may inadvertently obscure structural contradictions, such as the tension between China’s non-interventionist rhetoric and its growing geopolitical assertiveness (Chen & Wang, 2021). In addition, the efficacy of positive discourse remains contingent upon institutional power to enforce preferred interpretations, a reminder that even constructive narratives operate within asymmetrical regimes of truth (Li, 2022).

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. *Research Objects*

This research delves into the discursive construction of “national security” within China Daily, a prominent English-language state media outlet in China. As an official mouthpiece of the Chinese government, China Daily serves dual functions. Externally, it articulates China’s geopolitical stance to international readers; internally, it reinforces domestic narratives through English-language dissemination, particularly influencing bilingual elites and institutional actors. The research is designed to address two pivotal questions and spans a two-year period from 2023 to 2024, capturing the evolution of narratives in response to significant geopolitical and domestic events. A corpus of 78 articles was carefully selected based on the inclusion of keywords such as national security, sovereignty, China and development (Figure 2), and their relevance to both traditional and non-traditional security issues, including military defense, cybersecurity, economic stability and public health.



Figure 2. Words Cloud of Corpus

B. Research Methods

Employing a mixed-methods approach, this research combines quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the data. The quantitative analysis involves frequency analysis to identify recurring themes and linguistic features in national security discourse, as well as the use of the UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 to annotate and categorize attitudinal resources based on appraisal theory. This statistical analysis helps determine the distribution and prominence of each attitudinal dimension. The qualitative analysis, on the other hand, includes in-depth textual analysis of representative texts to explore the strategic deployment of attitudinal resources in constructing specific narratives. For instance, texts emphasizing “social stability” are analyzed to understand how Judgement is used to legitimize state policies. Additionally, contextualized interpretation is crucial, given the unique characteristics of Chinese political discourse. The analysis incorporates contextual factors such as historical background, cultural values, and policy priorities, interpreting terms like “stability” as positive Judgement markers within the Chinese context, reflecting the state’s emphasis on social harmony.

C. Research Questions

- (1) How does China Daily employ Attitude resources to construct the national security discourse?
- (2) How do such discursive strategies contribute to the shaping of public national identity and national consciousness?

IV. ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDE RESOURCES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

A. Affect and the Construction of National Consciousness

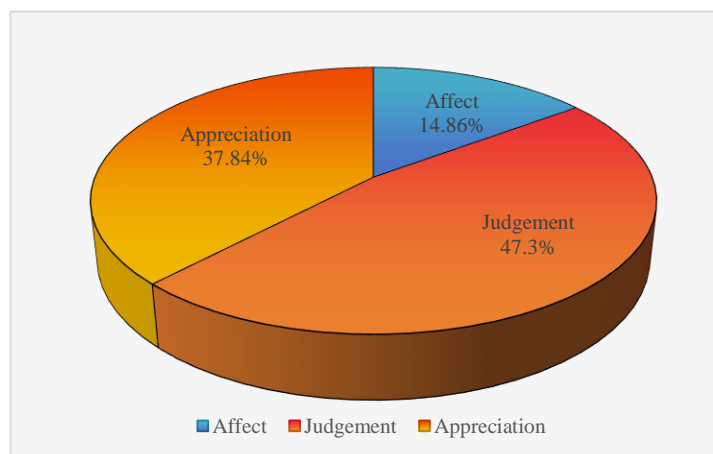


Figure 3. The Proportion of Attitude Resources in News Discourse

As illustrated in Figure 3, judgment vocabulary dominates the attitude system, appearing 108 times (accounting for the highest proportion), indicating a relatively clear and explicit evaluative stance in the discourse. Appreciation follows with 37.84%, while Affect is the least frequent category, occurring only 34 times. This distribution pattern can be attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, journalistic texts prioritize objectivity and authenticity, requiring the conveyance of accurate information to audiences. Excessive use of subjective language, particularly emotionally charged terms, would undermine this fundamental principle, thereby explaining the restrained application of Affect. Second, despite efforts toward neutrality, news production inherently involves editorial selection and framing by media institutions, which inevitably introduces subtle emotional undertones and subjective perspectives into the discourse.

Through analyzing the attitude resources in 78 texts from China Daily, a detailed interpretation was carried out, which was categorized into three types: affect, judgment and appreciation. The distribution of positive/negative affect, positive/negative judgment, and positive/negative appreciation in the texts was obtained respectively (Table 1), where “+” represents positive attitudinal resources and “-” represents negative attitudinal resources.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF ATTITUDE RESOURCES IN CORPUS

	Affect	Judgement	Appreciation	Total
Positive	+23	+89	+52	+164
Negative	-11	-19	-25	-65
Total	34(14.86%)	108(47.3%)	87(37.84%)	229(100%)

Table 1 indicates that among the attitude semantic resources, the proportion of affect resources is the lowest, while the proportions of judgment and appreciation resources are relatively large and quite close to each other. This suggests that news discourse primarily employs judgment and appreciation resources to convey attitudes, rather than emotional resources. Affect resources directly express the speaker’s own or others’ inner feelings, whereas judgment and appreciation resources express attitudes towards the objects such as the news figures and their actions or the things and phenomena involved in the news (Xue, 2019). The former is more subjective, while the latter is somewhat more objective. News report is a subjective activity based on “objective reporting.” Therefore, news writers will try to make rational judgments on the basis of news facts and more often use the objects involved in the news, such as the figures and their actions, to evoke attitudes. In Judgment and Appreciation resources, positive evaluations account for the vast majority compared to negative evaluations, which indicates that in news reviews, the objects such as things and phenomena in news events are more frequently used to evoke positive attitudes. Faced with the diverse world where people’s desire for common interests and the aspiration of people around the world for a better life, the commentary on news events is filled with affirmation and expectation, hence there is a higher proportion of positive appreciation resources (Fang, 2020).

In news reports on national security issues, communicators need to consider how to skillfully incorporate their own attitudes and positions on objective facts into the text in order to attract the audience and reach a consensus with them (Liu, 2019). The use of affect resources is not only an auxiliary means of information transmission but also a key strategy for constructing national identity and ideology. Based on the corpus statistics (Figure 4), it can be seen from the analysis of the relevant reports in China Daily that the types and polarity distribution of emotional resources show a distinct tendency. Among them, the proportion of positive emotional words is as high as 82.4%, such as “effective,” “innovative” and “unity.” These words shape the national image of “security, confidence and unit” by emphasizing the effectiveness and legitimacy of national security policies. On the other hand, negative affective words are mainly used to describe external threats or warn of risks (accounting for 17.6%), such as “hegemonic behavior” and “severe challenges,” in order to contrast and strengthen the necessity of national actions.

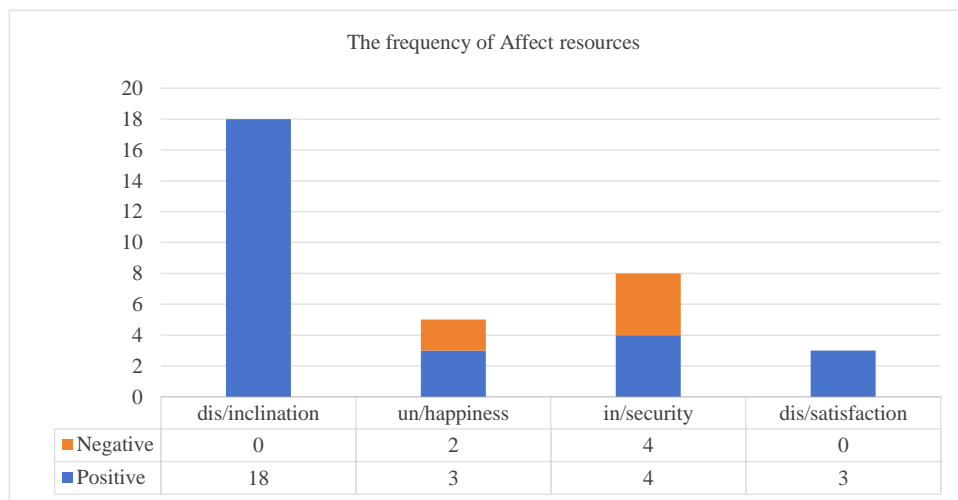


Figure 4. The Frequency of Affect Resources

In examining the implementation pathways of affect strategies, China Daily demonstrates a pronounced reliance on positive affective resources to construct national identity through emotional mobilization. Notably, the publication employs imperative discourse marked by terms like “must” (e.g: Every citizen must heighten their awareness of national security), thereby transforming national security obligations into civic duties and cultivating a collective consciousness of “whole-society participation.” Concurrently, the newspaper reinforces regime legitimacy by foregrounding a discourse of security assurance, as evidenced in statements such as “The implementation of the

National Security Law has provided robust safeguards for social stability.” This rhetorical strategy explicitly links state security policies with public welfare, reinforcing the positive image of the state as a protector.

The interplay between affect resources and national consciousness is fully demonstrated in China Daily’s reports. Domestically, the frequent use of words such as “must” and “resolutely” portrays national security as a “sacred mission” that cannot be compromised, prompting the public to form a value consensus that “national security is above all.” Externally, through negative emotional markers such as “hegemony” and “interference,” it constructs the China’s image as a legitimate defender of sovereignty and proactive responder to external pressures, consolidating the moral legitimacy of national actions. This affect strategy not only conveys information, but also constructs national ideology through linguistic symbols, elevating the discourse of national security from policy language to the core carrier of national consciousness, and becoming a tool for the dissemination of ideology and a key mechanism for the reproduction of national identity (Chen, 2023).

Examples:

[1] Hopefully, Li’s visit will drive home the message that China was, is, and will forever be, a partner that Germany and France can work with for their own development and prosperity as well as those of the EU as a whole.

[2] China must resolutely defend national sovereignty.

[3] The improvement of the national security system is deeply gratifying.

[4] Threats from external forces to national security cannot be ignored.

In the discourse of national security, affect resources play a pivotal role in shaping public perception and constructing national consciousness. For instance, the example 1 is laden with emotional cues. The explicit emotional marker “hopefully” conveys a positive anticipation for Sino-European cooperation, aiming to inspire trust in international collaboration. Meanwhile, the implicit emotional marker “will forever be a partner” reinforces China’s image as a reliable partner, indirectly enhancing the audience’s identification with the national security strategy. China is positioned as a stable supporter of EU development, highlighting its image as a responsible country and implying its contribution to both domestic and global security.

In example 2, the explicit emotional markers “must resolutely defend” form a responsibility-mobilization framework, expressing the firm determination to safeguard national sovereignty. The implicit emotional marker “defend” implies the awareness of potential threats to national sovereignty, arousing the public’s vigilance against national security risks. By using “must,” the moral legitimacy of national actions is strengthened, and the defense of sovereignty is portrayed as an inalienable civic duty. At the same time, the crisis narrative consolidates the collective identity of the “nation-citizen” community.

Similarly, the third example directly expresses satisfaction with the progress of the national security system through the explicit emotional marker “deeply gratifying.” This positive emotion communicates the effectiveness of policies, enhancing the public’s trust in the government’s capabilities. The improvement of the national security system is directly linked to the well-being of citizens, reinforcing the positive image of the “nation as a protector” and boosting the public’s pride in the national system.

The fourth example uses the implicit emotional marker “Threats...cannot be ignored” to construct a crisis-warning framework. By emphasizing the urgency of external threats, it stimulates the public’s anxiety and defense awareness. The “sense of crisis” is used to build a binary narrative of “external threat-internal unity,” prompting public support for strong national measures and binding national consciousness with security needs to consolidate the ideological consensus that national security is above all.

In general, the encoding mechanism of national consciousness through emotional resources is characterized by a predominance of positive affect resources. The first three sentences are mainly filled with positive affects such as hope, responsibility, and satisfaction, which is consistent with the overall strategy of The China Daily’s preference for positive emotional resources. These positive affects enhance the public’s acceptance of national security policies through emotional resonance, shaping a “confident, united and progressive” national image (Chen, 2021). The fourth example uses negative emotions such as a sense of crisis mainly for risk warning, but in a relatively low proportion. The limited use of negative affects serves to arouse public vigilance and contribute to the construction of a collective psychology of “being prepared for danger in times of safety.” Affect symbolizes national consciousness by transforming the abstract concept of national security into perceptible ideological symbols through linguistic signs such as “sovereignty,” “threat” and “partner,” achieving the reproduction of national identity. In conclusion, affects are not only tools for expressing attitudes but also linguistic levers for constructing national ideology, shaping the public’s value consensus on national security through the dual pathways of emotional resonance and cognitive guidance.

B. Judgement and the Construction of National Consciousness

From the perspective of attitude resources, the corpus contains a total of 108 judgement resources (Table 2), with social identity resources appearing 89 times, accounting for 36.33% of the attitude system, significantly more than the number of social sanction resources. This indicates that the language used in China Daily is predominantly framed from a stance of peace and cooperation. Within the semantic range of social identity, the tenacity resource occupies a higher proportion compared to other types of vocabulary, suggesting that China is confident and determined to uphold national interests in matters of national security and seeks to alleviate tensions in Sino-US relations. This is followed by the capacity and normality resources, which account for 11.73% and 6.41%, respectively. These imply that China possesses

the necessary capabilities to address issues of national security and that its approaches align with international recognition, receiving support from European nations.

TABLE 2
THE FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF JUDGEMENT RESOURCES

	Type	Amount	Proportion
Social Esteem	Normality	16	6.41%
	Capacity	29	11.73%
	Tenacity	44	18.19%
	Subtotal	89	36.33%
Social Sanction	Veracity	5	2.89%
	Propriety	14	8.08%
	Subtotal	19	10.97%
	Total	108	47.3%

From the perspective of affect resources, the high frequency of social esteem resources reflects China Daily's emphasis on conveying positive emotional orientations in its reporting, highlighting China's firm stance and spirit of international cooperation. The high proportion of the tenacity resource underscores China's resolve in safeguarding national security and conveys an optimistic inclination, indicating that China is capable of overcoming challenges and maintaining stability. The use of capacity and normality resources further reinforces China's positive image in the international community, showcasing its composure and confidence in navigating complex situations.

In terms of social sanctions, the proportion of propriety vocabulary is 8.08%, nearly three times that of veracity vocabulary. From the perspective of emotional resources, the use of these words is more emotionally negative, primarily focusing on criticism of actions, such as describing the United States' behavior as improper or self-serving, prioritizing its own interests over those of others. This judgement resource usage demonstrates that China Daily not only emphasizes China's positive stance in its reporting but also conveys dissatisfaction and cautionary attitudes through critical language.

Above all, the high frequency of social esteem resources contrasts sharply with the low frequency of social sanction resources, further highlighting, from the perspective of affect resources, China Daily's positive attitude and spirit of cooperation in matters of national security. This reflects China's firm resolve and composure in safeguarding its national interests and promoting international cooperation.

Examples:

[5] China remains steadfast in safeguarding its national security interests amid global uncertainties.

[6] The Chinese government has demonstrated remarkable capacity to address national security challenges.

[7] National security is a cornerstone of stability and prosperity for any nation.

[8] The United States' unilateral actions on security issues have raised concerns about the balance of global power.

The word "steadfast" is a positive attitude resource and belongs to the social identification resource in the fifth example. It conveys China's firm stance and determination in maintaining national security, showing an unwavering commitment in the complex and changing international environment. The word "safeguarding" is also a positive one and is part of the social identification resource. It emphasizes China's active measures to protect its national security interests and gives out a positive emotional tendency. The phrase "global uncertainties" is neutral, but through the use of "uncertainties," it implies the instability of the external environment and belongs to the social sanction resource, highlighting the necessity for China to safeguard its national security. In terms of national consciousness construction, by using "steadfast" and "safeguarding," the sentence builds up China's image of being firm and active in the issue of national security. And with "global uncertainties," it suggests the existence of external threats, strengthening the legitimacy and urgency of China's efforts to maintain national security.

For Example 6, "demonstrated" is a positive verb and is a social identification resource. It stresses China's pro-activity and ability in dealing with national security issues. The phrase "remarkable capacity" is a highly positive one and also a social identification resource, highlighting China's strong ability to deal with national security challenges. As for "address challenges," it's a neutral phrase but combined with "capacity," it conveys a positive emotional tendency. In the construction of national consciousness, the sentence builds up China's powerful ability and positive image in the field of national security through "demonstrated" and "remarkable capacity." And the sentence uses "address challenge" to imply that China not only has the ability to deal with threats but also is committed to solving problems, showing a responsible major-country attitude.

When it comes to Example 7, the word "cornerstone" is a positive metaphor and a social identification resource. It emphasizes the importance of national security for a country's stability and prosperity. The words "stability" and "prosperity" are two positive words and are social identification resources. They convey a positive emotional tendency, showing that national security is the foundation for a country's long-term development. In terms of national consciousness construction, by using "cornerstone," the sentence builds up the core position of national security in a country's development. And by linking national security with "stability" and "prosperity," the sentence strengthens the importance of national security for a country's overall interests.

The phrase “unilateral actions” is a negative one and a social sanction resource in the example 8. It implies that the US’s actions lack international cooperation and conveys criticism of its behavior. The phrase “raised concerns” is neutral, but combined with “unilateral actions,” it gives out a negative emotional tendency. As for “balance of global power”, it’s a neutral phrase, but combined with “unilateral actions”, it implies concern about the global power structure and is a social sanction resource. In the construction of national consciousness, through “unilateral actions,” the sentence builds up a critical attitude towards the US’s behavior, suggesting that it may threaten global security. And by emphasizing “balance of global power,” the sentence implies the international community’s concern about the power structure, further strengthening the negative evaluation of the US’s behavior.

C. Appreciation and the Construction of National Consciousness

As shown in Table 3, the corpus contains 87 instances of Appreciation resources, accounting for 37.84% of the attitude system and exhibiting an overall positive orientation. This suggests that evaluative lexis in the discourse predominantly conveys affirmative or neutral stances, emphasizing supportive perspectives and favorable assessments. Such a tendency likely reflects China Daily’s strategic emphasis on positive societal values and national interests in its reporting, aiming to reinforce readers’ identification and confidence through constructive narratives.

TABLE 3
THE FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF APPRECIATION RESOURCES

Type	Amount	Proportion
Reaction	23	10.04%
Composition	28	12.16%
Valuation	36	15.64%
Total	87	37.84%

Valuation resources, representing the highest proportion within the attitude system, indicate a frequent reliance on evaluative language to articulate viewpoints. This phenomenon underscores the outlet’s preference for deploying evaluative terms, particularly those aligned with expert opinions and scholarly perspectives, to enhance the authority and persuasiveness of its narratives. The prominence of valuation resources further aligns with China’s proactive stance in safeguarding national interests and promoting socially meaningful agendas.

Composition resources (12.16%) and reaction resources (10.04%) demonstrate comparable but relatively lower frequencies. Engagement is primarily employed to delineate the structural or logical relationships between events, while reaction pertains to emotional responses. The limited use of reaction resources aligns with journalistic conventions prioritizing objectivity, as excessive emotional language could compromise factual neutrality. This practice helps mitigate the influence of emotional expressions on factual reporting, thereby preserving the text’s professional credibility.

Given the restrained application of reaction resources, the discourse predominantly relies on valuation resources to articulate institutional positions. This approach facilitates the construction of a positive national image, bolstering the authority of state narratives and reinforcing China’s unwavering commitment to national security. Furthermore, the strategic use of evaluative language not only asserts China’s principled stance on security issues but also communicates its dedication to fostering international cooperation and peaceful development within the global community (Liu, 2023).

Examples:

[9] President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of maintaining national security and called for a comprehensive approach to safeguarding the nation’s interests in the new era.

[10] The Chinese government has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

[11] Intelligence agencies play a crucial role in identifying and mitigating security threats to ensure the stability and prosperity of the nation.

[12] National security is not only a matter of military strength but also a reflection of a nation’s resilience and unity.

In the first example, the words “emphasized” and “called for” are strong evaluative terms. They convey the leader’s high-level attention to and firm stance on national security. “Importance” and “comprehensive approach” further highlight the urgency and systematic nature of national security. These assessment resources show that national security is a top priority issue that requires a well-thought-out and all-inclusive strategy. The phrase “in the new era” provides a temporal framework, emphasizing the adaptability and contemporary significance of national security strategies. It indicates that the approaches to safeguarding national security are evolving with the times to meet the new challenges and opportunities of the current period. “Safeguarding the nation’s interests” clearly defines the core goal of national security, which is to protect the fundamental interests of the country and its people. There are few reaction resources, maintaining an objective and formal tone, which is in line with the neutrality of news reports. This allows the focus to be on the content of the message itself, that is, the leader’s call for a comprehensive approach to national security, without being distracted by emotional or subjective reactions.

In terms of emphasizing the leader’s authority and the comprehensiveness of the strategy, the sentence constructs the concept that national interests are paramount. The “comprehensive approach” conveys the country’s systematic and holistic thinking on security issues, enhancing the public’s trust in the country’s governance capabilities. At the same

time, the expression “in the new era” implies the dynamic and up-to-date nature of national security, strengthening the country’s sense of responsibility on the international stage.

“Demonstrated” and “strong commitment” are positive evaluative words in the tenth example, highlighting the government’s determination and action-oriented attitude in safeguarding national sovereignty. “Protecting national sovereignty” and “territorial integrity” are core concepts with a strong positive evaluative color, indicating that these are non-negotiable and highly-valued aspects of the country’s interests. The sentence structure emphasizes the government’s role as the protector of national sovereignty, highlighting the country’s firm position on sovereignty issues. It shows that the government is the main body responsible for ensuring that the country’s territorial integrity is not violated. Through the government’s “strong commitment,” the sacred and inviolable nature of national sovereignty is reinforced. This helps to shape the people’s sense of pride and protective awareness of national territorial integrity. Such an expression contributes to the construction of the value that “national interests are supreme,” while also implying the government’s authority and effectiveness in maintaining national security.

In the Example 11, “play a crucial role” and “identifying and mitigating” are evaluative words, emphasizing the importance of intelligence agencies in the context of national security. “Ensure the stability and prosperity of the nation” is a positive evaluation, highlighting the key role of national security in the country’s development. It shows that the work of intelligence agencies is not only about dealing with threats but also about contributing to the overall well-being of the nation. Emphasizing the “crucial role” of intelligence agencies, the sentence constructs a multi-layered defense system for national security. The expression “ensure the stability and prosperity of the nation” closely links national security with national development, strengthening the public’s awareness of the importance of national security. It also highlights the government’s efforts in maintaining social stability.

As for the last example, the structure “not only...but also” is a balanced evaluation, emphasizing the multi-dimensional nature of national security. “Reflection of a nation’s resilience and unity” is a positive evaluation, highlighting the importance of non-military factors in national security. It shows that national security is a comprehensive concept that includes both hard power like military strength and soft power such as the country’s ability to withstand difficulties and the unity of its people. The sentence structure contrasts “military strength” with “resilience and unity,” constructing a comprehensive framework for national security. It presents a more holistic view of what constitutes national security, breaking away from the traditional focus on military aspects.

Through the structure “not only... but also,” the sentence constructs a broad concept of national security, emphasizing the importance of the country’s soft power. The expression “reflection of a nation’s resilience and unity” strengthens the public’s sense of identification with the country’s resilience and unity, shaping the awareness that “national security is a common responsibility of all people.” This kind of expression helps to construct a more inclusive concept of national security, emphasizing the cultural, social, and psychological aspects of it.

From the perspective of the Appreciation resources, the above sentences construct a multi-level concept of national security and national consciousness through positive evaluative words, a clear structural framework, and appropriate reaction resources. Through these examples of authoritative expressions from leaders and the government, the sanctity of national interests and the governance capabilities of the leadership are reinforced, enhancing the public’s trust in the country. Through words like “comprehensive approach” and “crucial role,” a systematic framework for national security is constructed, covering multiple dimensions such as military, political, cultural, and psychological aspects. By paying attention to the multi-dimensionality of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security, the public’s sense of identification with and awareness of national interests are shaped, constructing the value that “national security is a common responsibility of all people.” This language strategy not only reflects the importance of national security but also conveys the country’s cultural values and social cohesion through positive attitudinal resources, providing a solid linguistic foundation for the construction of national consciousness.

In summary, this research guided by attitude resources from Martin and White’s appraisal theory, investigates how China Daily constructs national security discourse through three types of attitude resources: affect, judgment and appreciation, to shape public national consciousness. Based on a corpus analysis of 78 relevant reports published between 2023 and 2024, the research reveals that affect resources employ dual rhetorical strategies of “crisis alerts” and “collective belonging” to evoke public urgency and identification regarding national security. Judgment resources employ “moral narratives” to construct “responsible China” and “just China,” thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of national actions. Appreciation resources, through repeated evaluations of policy scientificity and strategic vision, consolidate perceptions of institutional superiority. The findings demonstrate that Chinese mainstream media adopt a defensive positive discourse strategy in national security discourse, addressing external threats while fostering internal consensus, offering a cross-disciplinary perspective on the linguistic mechanisms of national consciousness construction (Jiang, 2022).

V. CONCLUSION

This study, guided by the attitude resources from appraisal theory, delves into how China Daily constructs “national security” discourse through affect, judgement and appreciation and explores the impact of these strategies on shaping public national consciousness. Based on the analysis of relevant corpus, the study reveals the following key findings.

First of all, China Daily employs affect resources in its national security discourse, utilizing dual rhetorical strategies of “crisis alerts” and “collective belonging” to evoke a sense of urgency and identification among the public regarding national security. Judgement resources are utilized through “moralized narratives” to construct an image of a “responsible China” and a “just China,” thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of national actions and shaping China’s image as a responsible actor on the global stage. Appreciation resources are leveraged by repeatedly emphasizing the scientificity and strategic vision of policies, consolidating perceptions of institutional superiority and enhancing public trust in national governance capabilities.

Second, the study also identifies a unique “defensive and positive” strategy in the national security discourse. This strategy aims to address external threats while fostering internal consensus, emphasizing the importance of national security and the measures taken to safeguard it. Through highlighting the significance of national security and the actions taken by the state, the media play a crucial role in shaping public cognition and reinforcing national identity.

This research extends the application of attitude in the realm of political discourse analysis from the theoretical perspective, particularly in the domain of national security, demonstrating how language serves as a tool for ideological encoding in the construction of national consciousness. Practically speaking, the study points out the fundamental part of media in framing public insights of security and identity, bringing to light the importance of discursive strategies in fostering national unity and dealing with security challenges.

Nevertheless, this study also has certain limitations. The temporal scope of the corpus is restricted, potentially failing to fully capture the long-term trends and evolution of national security discourse. Additionally, the analysis primarily focuses on linguistic features without fully taking the visual and multi-modal aspects of media discourse into consideration. Future research could expand the corpus and incorporate multi-modal analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the discursive construction of national security and national consciousness.

In conclusion, this study provides profound insights into the construction of national security discourse and its impact on shaping national consciousness through an analysis of China Daily media discourse. National consciousness is not merely imposed through top-down official discourse but is also shaped by the dynamic interaction between state narratives and public reception. This research offers a cross-disciplinary perspective on how media employ linguistic strategies to shape national identity and public awareness for the construction of national consciousness in the context of global geopolitical challenges.

APPENDIX. WORDS AND FREQUENCY

Words	Frequency	Words	Frequency	Words	Frequency
security	566	national security	356	China	354
challenges	320	cooperation	276	strategy	265
policy	228	trade	189	economy	176
development	134	international security	125	management	108
technology	83	politics	76	energy	54
guard	30	risk	26	protection	23
sovereignty	325	government	243	social stability	154
military	92	science	39	weapon	14

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