

A Systematic Literature Review on China's Image in News Discourse Studies

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Abstract—To better understand how China's image is represented in global news discourse, this study systematically reviews and examines existing studies on the topic. Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, this study employed Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus to retrieve relevant articles published between 2015 and 2024. Through content analysis, this study identified six themes reflecting China's media image: (1) economic development and international relations, (2) health and crisis management, (3) social and political issues (4) integrated media representation, (5) environmental issues, (6) culture and education. After analysis, the SLR revealed that research on China's image from 2015 to 2024 was generally on the rise, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most of the studies focused on Western media, making non-Western media relatively underexplored. China's image in Western media tended to be negative. While China's image in the non-Western world was generally presented in a positive light, negative portrayals also existed, resulting in a more nuanced picture. Methodologically, there was a growing trend towards employing mixed methods, particularly the combination of corpus linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The findings of this study provide a clearer understanding of the discursive construction of China's image in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024 and highlight important directions for future research, including greater engagement with non-Western media, visual content, and interdisciplinary analytical frameworks.

Index Terms—systematic review, PRISMA, China's image, news media, discourse analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

National image is a comprehensive and multifaceted construct that encompasses both a nation's self-perception and how it is perceived by external actors within the international system (Boulding, 1956). Its construction is shaped to a large extent by mainstream media outlets, including news agencies, print media, cultural programs, sports events, and literary works (Kunczik, 2016). Despite advances in globalization and communication technologies, many people still have limited direct experience of traveling abroad. Consequently, media remain one of the principal ways through which people form perceptions of other countries (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). As Fairclough (2001) pointed out, the mass media play a pivotal role in creating and maintaining power relations, as dominant ideologies are reproduced and legitimized through discursive practices. The formation, dissemination, and maintenance of national image are thus inseparable from language. Through discourse, language not only serves as a tool for constructing and reproducing national identities but also, through specific linguistic choices, exerts a profound influence on how countries are represented and perceived in the global arena (Wodak, 2015; van Dijk, 2018).

Since the end of the Cold War, governments have increasingly recognized the strategic importance of constructing national image in the context of global cooperation and competition (Li & Chitty, 2009). As an intangible asset and a vital element of soft power, national image has emerged as a crucial tool for countries to shape and enhance their global status in what has been described as an era of "image hegemony" (Meng, 2020, p. 10). Soft power refers to a nation's capacity to achieve its desired outcomes by appealing to others rather than using force or financial incentives (Nye, 2004). As a central component of soft power, national image has become the focal point of international attention (Meng, 2020). Moreover, a nation's image can be either strengthened or undermined through its representation in global media. A positive image can increase tourism and investment, while a negative one may reinforce stereotypes and strain international relations (Almakaty, 2025). These dynamics are particularly relevant in the case of China.

After becoming the world's second-largest economy in 2010, China has consistently been a key driver in global economic growth. Recognizing the importance of international reputation alongside economic influence, the Chinese government has adopted multifaceted strategies to enhance its image abroad. These strategies include cultural

diplomacy—for instance, the establishment of Confucius Institutes (d’Hooghe, 2015; Repnikova, 2022); media outreach through platforms like CGTN and social media (Zhao, 2015; Song et al., 2023); and regional economic programs like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013 to boost infrastructure, trade, and regional connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa (Huang, 2016; Yu, 2018; Khanal & Zhang, 2024). However, despite these efforts to project a positive national image, international media coverage continues to depict China through negative frames, such as China threat theory, expansionism in the South China Sea, and human rights abuses (Huan, 2023; Ooi & D’arcangelis, 2017; Boykoff, 2024). Today, Western media continue to dominate the global media landscape. As China has yet to establish itself as a genuine media power, Western narratives maintain a “hegemonic discourse” (Meng, 2020, p. 14).

Since 2015, there has been a noticeable rise in scholarly interest in the representation of China in international media discourse, particularly in the domain of news reporting. Two recent reviews have highlighted this trend (Wang & Sun, 2023; Ali et al., 2021). Deploying a bibliometric analysis approach, Wang and Sun (2023) mapped out macro-level trends in Chinese discourse studies between 1994 and 2021. While valuable for visualizing research productivity, thematic focus, and citation patterns, this approach has notable limitations. Their data was limited to 18 journals in the WoS core collection, potentially excluding relevant studies from other important databases such as Scopus or IEEE Xplore. Moreover, the bibliometric method is largely quantitative and descriptive, making it unable to capture discourse content or contextual dynamics shaping representations of China in global news discourse. Similarly, Ali et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative narrative review of studies on China’s image in global media, highlighting growing media attention and scholarly focus across both Western and non-Western contexts. Their findings provide important insights into the overall representation of China’s image in Western and non-Western media. However, this study lacks methodological transparency and does not follow a systematic protocol for literature retrieval and analysis, making it difficult to assess the consistency or replicability of the findings.

In contrast to these previous reviews, the present study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) based on the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework (Page et al., 2021). This method allows for a transparent, replicable, and rigorous process of identifying, screening, and synthesizing peer-reviewed empirical studies (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021; Siddaway et al., 2019). Therefore, using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, this study aims to conduct a systematic literature review on discursive representation of China’s image in global news discourse. To achieve this aim, three research objectives were highlighted:

- (1) to identify the current status of China’s image representation in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024;
- (2) to analyze the overall portrayal of China’s image in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024;
- (3) to explore the possible factors that may account for variations in China’s media image across different geopolitical settings.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)

This systematic review study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines and the reporting checklist outlined in the PRISMA 2020 statement. PRISMA is a standardized and transparent protocol for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant studies. Originally developed by Moher et al. (2009) and updated by Page et al. (2021), PRISMA ensures methodological rigor through the use of a flow diagram and a 27-item checklist to help document each stage of the review process. Stressing reproducibility, transparency, and reliability, this method has been widely applied across various disciplines (Abas et al., 2022; Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019; Cong-Lem et al., 2024).

B. Formulation of Research Questions

To ensure methodological rigor, research questions in the present study were formulated according to the PICO framework. It provides structured guidance for researchers to formulate appropriate research questions for systematic reviews (Cañón & Buitrago-Gómez, 2018; Abas et al., 2022). Originally developed in evidence-based medicine, PICO stands for Population/Problem, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome. In recent years, however, scholars in social sciences have increasingly adapted the PICO model for use in systematic reviews beyond medical domains, particularly in environmental and linguistic studies (Abas et al., 2022; Abas, 2023; Song et al., 2025). In its adapted form for the social sciences, the PICO framework encompasses three essential elements: Population or Problem, Interest and Context (Abas et al., 2022). For the present study, these elements were operationalized as follows: China’s image representation (population), news discourse (interest), and discourse analysis (context). Therefore, this systematic review examines the following questions:

- (1) What is the current status of academic research on China’s image representation in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024?
- (2) What is the overall portrayal of China’s image in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024?
- (3) What are the underlying factors that may account for the variations in China’s image represented in global news discourse from 2015 to 2024?

C. Systematic Searching Strategies

The systematic review followed a three-stage process as illustrated in Figure 1: identification, screening and eligibility assessment.

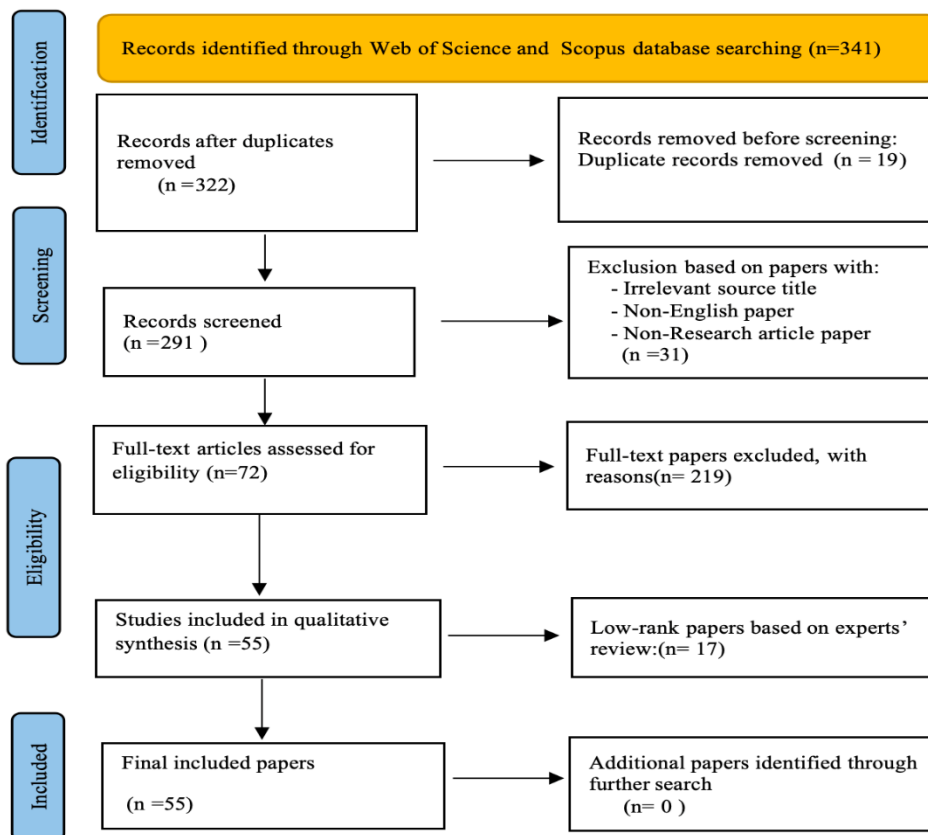


Figure 1. A Flow Diagram of the Process

(a). Identification

Identification phase in a systematic literature review is the initial stage for searching and collecting potentially relevant studies using the keywords derived from the research questions. In this study, following Okoli's (2015) approach, three keywords were generated based on the research questions. The keywords were: "China's image", "news media", and "discourse analysis". To identify potential articles, the three keywords and their synonyms were combined into a series of search strings applied to two databases: WoS and Scopus. These two databases were chosen because their rigorous editorial process guaranteed the quality of articles and helped sustain the journals' impact factor rankings (Abas et al., 2022). A total of 341 relevant articles were identified across both databases.

TABLE I
THE SEARCH STRINGS

Database	Search Strings
Web of Science	Advanced Search
	TS=(China's image or the image of China or representation of China or framing of China) AND TS=(news coverage or news report or news media or media report) AND TS=(language study OR discourse analysis OR discourse study OR linguistic study OR linguistic analysis) Time: publication years from 2015 to 2024 Language: English
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("China's image" OR "the image of China" OR "representation of China" OR "framing of China") AND ("news coverage" OR "news report" OR "news media" OR "media report") AND ("language study" OR "discourse analysis" OR "discourse study" OR "linguistic study" OR "linguistic analysis") Time: publication years from 2015 to 2024 Language: English

(b). Screening

First, 19 duplicates were removed from the initial 341 articles. Second, the remaining 322 articles were screened to exclude books, book chapters, conference proceedings, review papers, and meeting abstracts. Only journal articles published in English were retained to ensure clarity and avoid misinterpretation. During this screening process, 31 articles were removed for not meeting the inclusion criteria, leaving 291 articles for the eligibility stage.

(c). Eligibility

In this process, the remaining 291 articles were manually reviewed by screening the title and abstract of each article to ensure the quality of the review. A total of 219 articles were removed for the following reasons: (1) they focused on China's self-image as represented by Chinese media rather than international ones; (2) although the expression "China's image" appeared in the abstract, it was only mentioned in passing. During this stage, we encountered some articles that remained ambiguous in terms of eligibility. For such cases, we read the full text again to determine whether they should be included in the final review. Following this process, a total of 72 articles remained for inclusion.

D. Quality Appraisal

To ensure the quality of the review, two reviewers participated in the appraisal process. Both reviewers have over 15 years of experience in English language studies. The quality of the articles was assessed based on the abstract, research objectives, and research methodology (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). Following Abas et al. (2022) and the methodology proposed by Petticrew and Roberts (2006), the remaining articles were categorized into three levels: high, moderate, and low. This study included only articles ranked as high and moderate levels. During the appraisal process, inclusion required consensus between both experts that an article met at least a moderate level. In cases of disagreement regarding an article's inclusion, the reviewers discussed until consensus was reached and a final decision was made. After this stage, 36 articles were rated as high, 19 as moderate, and 17 articles as low. Consequently, 55 articles remained for the review.

E. Data Abstraction and Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to identify the dominant themes and the trends in research on China's image representation in global news discourse. Thematic analysis is an analytical approach to uncover, investigate, and describe recurring patterns (themes) within research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach has been effectively utilized in prior systematic literature studies (e.g., Arifin et al., 2023; Abas, 2021; Abas, 2023). To enhance transparency and replicability, the thematic coding process adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. As a result of this process, the following six themes were identified: 1) economic development and international relations, 2) health and crisis management, 3) social and political issues, 4) integrated media representation, 5) environmental issues, and 6) culture and education.

III. RESULTS

A. Spatial and Temporal Analysis of Selected Articles

Following a rigorous selection process, 55 journal articles were ultimately included for detailed analysis in this study. When a single study analyzed news media from multiple countries or regions (such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan), each country mentioned was counted separately in the geographical distribution. For example, if an article examined newspapers from both the U.S. and the UK, it was counted once under North America and once under Europe. As a result, the total number of media affiliations exceeded the total number of reviewed articles. As demonstrated in Figure 2a, the yearly distribution of journal articles spanned from 2015 to Dec. 2024 (the search date of this review). The number of studies remained relatively low and fluctuated between two and six articles per year from 2015 to 2019. Notably, no relevant studies were identified in 2020. However, a significant increase was observed from 2021 onwards, with a peak in 2024 (12 articles).

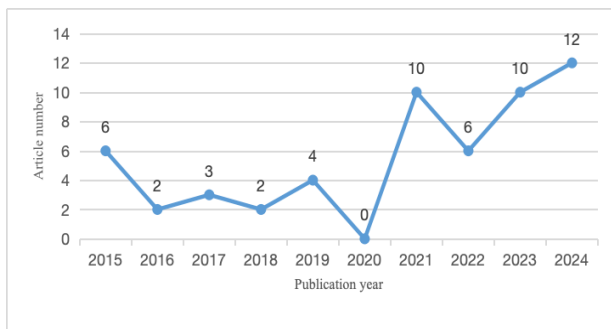


Figure 2a. Temporal Distribution of Selected Articles

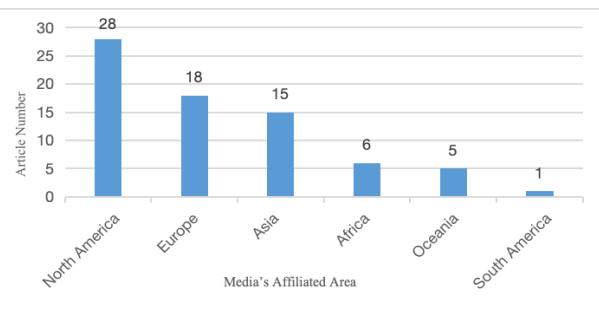


Figure 2b. Distribution of Media's Affiliated Areas

The distribution of media outlets, as shown in Figure 2b, revealed a pronounced imbalance in the global representation of China's image. Western media accounted for the majority of sources, including North America (28 articles), Europe (18) and Oceania (5). In contrast, non-Western media were significantly underrepresented with Asia contributing 15 articles, followed by Africa (6) and South America (1).

B. Research Theory

As presented in Table 2, CDA-based theories (e.g., Fairclough's three-dimensional model, Wodak's discourse historical approach, or van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach) were the most widely used theoretical frameworks, appearing

in 21 articles, accounting for 38.18% of the total. Framing theory was the second most frequently employed with 16 studies (29.1%). Meanwhile, a small number of studies employed conceptual metaphor theory (3 articles) and appraisal theory (2 articles). In addition, integrative frameworks were used in two articles that combined multiple theories such as CDA with framing theory or Systemic Functional Linguistics. Furthermore, 11 of the reviewed studies were classified as others. Among these, either no explicit theoretical framework was adopted or interdisciplinary theories were employed, drawing from fields such as political science, international relations, or communication studies.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH THEORY

Research theory	References	Number
CDA-based theories	Zhang (2022); Liu et al. (2024); Yang and Wang (2023); Wang et al. (2023); Song et al. (2021); Du (2021); Yang (2015); Xia et al. (2024); Huan (2024); Miao et al. (2023); Lü and Zhang (2023); Afzaal et al. (2019), etc.	21
Framing theory	Sun and Cheung (2022); Yi et al. (2024); Nguyen et al. (2024); Boykoff (2024); Chung et al. (2021); Ittefaq et al. (2023); Jia and Lu (2021); Xu and Cao (2019), etc.	16
Conceptual metaphor theory	Xin and Matheson (2018); Tang (2017); Shi et al. (2024)	3
Appraisal theory	Li and Yang (2018); Wang and Adamson (2015)	2
Integrative framework	Zhang (2022); Tang (2021)	2
Others	Panao (2024); Xin and Matheson (2015); Hou (2021); Hou (2023); Qi and Hu (2024), etc.	11

C. Research Approaches

Table 3 presents the research approaches utilized in studies on China's image in global news discourse over the past decade. The findings indicate that corpus-based CDA approaches have emerged as the dominant methodological choice in this field. Specifically, among the 55 studies reviewed, the most frequently employed method was a combination of corpus and critical discourse analysis, appearing in 21 articles and accounting for 38.18% of the total (e.g., Yang, 2015; Du, 2021; Hou, 2021; Liu et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2024). Content analysis was the second most common approach, adopted in 14 articles (25.45%) (e.g., Ittefaq et al., 2023; Ng, 2022; Boykoff, 2024). This was followed by corpus-based discourse analysis, employed in 6 articles (10.9%) (e.g., Xin & Matheson, 2015; Hou, 2023), and a mixed-method approach combining content analysis and discourse analysis, used in 5 articles (9.1%) (e.g., Teo & Xu, 2023; Lams, 2016). Discourse analysis accounted for 7.27%, appearing in 4 articles (e.g., Wang & Adamson, 2015; Jia & Lu, 2021), while sentiment analysis and multimodal discourse analysis were less commonly employed, accounting for 5.45% and 3.64% respectively.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH METHOD

Research approaches	Number	Percentage
Corpus-based critical discourse analysis	21	38.18%
Content analysis	14	25.45%
Corpus-based discourse analysis	6	10.9%
Content analysis and discourse analysis	5	9.1%
Discourse analysis	4	7.27%
Sentiment analysis	3	5.45%
Multimodal discourse analysis	2	3.64%

D. Thematic Analysis

(a). Overview of Identified Themes

As demonstrated in Figure 3, a total of six themes of China's image representation in global news discourse were identified: 1) economic development and international relations, 2) health and crisis management, 3) social and political issues, 4) integrated media representation, 5) environmental issues, 6) culture and education.

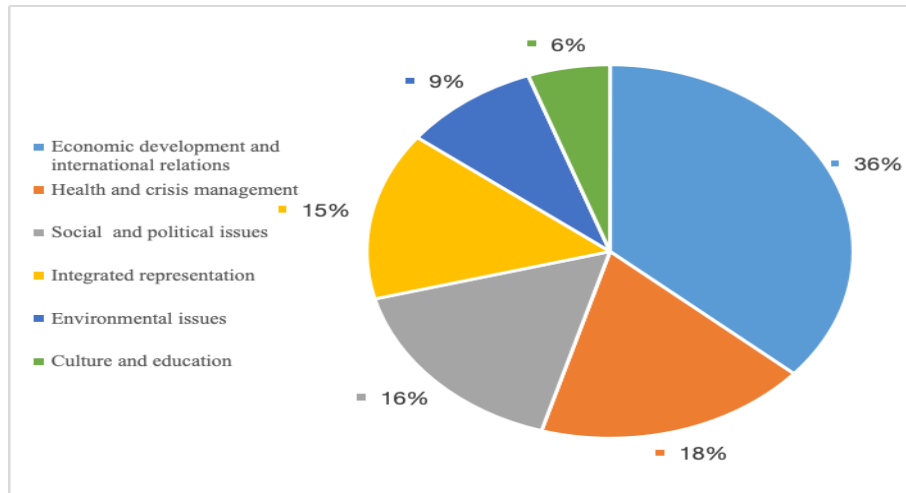


Figure 3. China's Image Representation in Global News Discourse

To be specific, the theme of economic development and international relations dominated the discourse, accounting for 36% of the reviewed studies. It included three sub-themes: China's economic rise (e.g., Tang, 2017; Song et al., 2021; Golan & Lukito, 2015), economic diplomacy (e.g., the Belt and Road Initiative), and bilateral economic relations (e.g., US-China trade war, state visits) (Ng, 2022; Fong & Chia, 2017; Afzaal et al., 2019). While these issues intersect with international relations, the media discourse predominantly emphasized China's economic growth and global economic influence; thus, they are grouped under the economic theme. The second most prominent category was health and crisis management (18%), which encompassed China's media representation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social and political issues occupied 16% of the studies, covering themes such as the portrayal of Beijing's political centrality, the Chinese Dream and stability narratives, coverage of the National People's Congress, as well as symbolic mega-events such as the 2022 Winter Olympics. Meanwhile, integrated representations (15%) encompassed studies in which China was framed through a combination of overlapping lenses, such as economy intertwined with politics or diplomacy and ideology. Environmental issues (9%) and culture and education (6%) appeared less frequently, suggesting that ecological and soft power dimensions of China's global image remained relatively underexplored.

(b). *Media Representations of China Within Each Theme*

1. *Economic Development and International Relations*

Global media portrayals of China's economic rise diverge sharply along ideological and geopolitical lines. In Western media outlets, China is often portrayed as a threat to Western dominance, with *The Wall Street Journal* framing it as a direct challenger to U.S. hegemony (Golan & Lukito, 2015) and British economic media employing bestial and militaristic metaphors to emphasize its rising power as a threat to the Western world (Tang, 2017). However, some UK coverage emphasized China's pragmatic opportunities for British industries (Song et al., 2021). By contrast, Asian media, particularly in Malaysia, framed China's economic growth in cooperative terms, highlighting mutual economic benefits (Fong & Chia, 2017; Ng, 2022), whereas Indian media maintained an adversarial stance, framing China as a strategic rival in economic and geopolitical terms (Chowdhury, 2015).

Coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) followed similar patterns. Western media often framed the BRI through the lens of suspicion: *The New York Times* used negative framing in 41% of its BRI-related headlines (Teo & Xu, 2023), whereas the BBC acknowledged the potential benefits of the BRI but emphasized its economic and environmental risks (Apirakvanalee & Zhai, 2022). In contrast, non-Western media—especially in Pakistan—framed the BRI positively as transformative, portraying China as a trusted and benevolent partner (Ittefaq et al., 2023).

Beyond the general portrayals of China's economic rise and global initiatives, media discourse in Asia often reflected country-specific bilateral relations. These portrayals often fell into a binary framing of "partner versus threat," shaped by national interests and geopolitical tensions. In ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, China was largely portrayed as an economic partner during high-level visits, though sovereignty concerns occasionally emerged (Ng, 2022; Fong & Chia, 2017). In contrast, Indian media framed China predominantly as a regional aggressor (Chowdhury, 2015).

2. *Health and Crisis Management*

Health and crisis management emerged as the second discursive theme, especially in relation to China's response to COVID-19 and vaccine diplomacy. In Western media, particularly in the United States and Australia, China was predominantly framed in negative terms, with discursive strategies such as blame attribution, stigmatization, and delegitimization to portray China as opaque and politically driven. These portrayals shifted over time—from initially blaming China for the outbreak to later criticizing its lockdown measures and global vaccine outreach (Liu et al., 2024; Liu & Baker, 2024).

In contrast, non-Western media presented China's role in the COVID-19 issue from more diverse perspectives. Russia's *RIA Novosti* depicted China's efforts positively, emphasizing its transparency and efficiency (Lü & Zhang, 2023). However, African media offered a more divided picture: while Kenyan outlets criticized China over debt issues and incidents of discrimination against Africans in Guangzhou, Ethiopian coverage framed China as a cooperative partner, shaped by state-aligned narratives and the norms of developmental journalism (Li, 2021).

3. *Social and Political Issues*

Beyond health-related narratives, social and political issues accounted for 16% of the studies. Western media often portrayed China negatively through representations of core political concepts such as the "Chinese Dream" and stability, major cities like Beijing, and symbolic events such as the Olympics. These political concepts, which were central to China's domestic discourse, were reframed in global media with contrasting ideologies. For instance, stability was frequently associated with authoritarian rule, suppression of dissent, and state repression in *The New York Times* (Wang et al., 2023) particularly in the context of the Hong Kong protests and human rights issues. Similarly, the Chinese Dream was linked to authoritarian ambition and ideological opposition to Western values (Zhang, 2022). Beijing was also depicted unfavorably in European media (e.g., *The Times*, *Le Figaro*, and *Der Spiegel*, focusing on surveillance, pollution, and political rigidity (Xu & Cao, 2019). Coverage of the 2008 and 2022 Beijing Olympics in the U.K. and U.S. further reinforced this image. British outlets emphasized political conflict and human rights issues in the 2008 Torch Relay (Yang, 2015). Similarly, coverage of the Beijing 2022 Olympics in the four most widely circulated U.S. newspapers demonstrated that the Beijing Games were seldom framed through the Rising China Frame (Boykoff, 2024).

4. *Integrated Representation of China*

This theme refers to representations of China's politics, economy, and diplomacy in specific countries or regions. In Western media, China was generally framed negatively. For example, *The New York Times* (1949-2020) portrayed China as an economic and military threat using metaphors such as war and games, disease, animals, and machines (Shi et al., 2024). Similarly, Australian media depicted China as both a security and economic threat (Huan, 2023).

In contrast, non-Western media presented a more nuanced view. In early 21st-century Zambia and Angola, China was initially portrayed positively due to anti-colonial sentiment and its economic achievements. However, growing concerns over resource extraction and cultural tensions later resulted in more critical coverage (Jura & Kałużyńska, 2023). In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (2010-2020), China was generally framed as a key economic partner, though some negative portrayals—often echoing Western narratives—were also evident (Hu, 2023). This pattern suggests a mediated ideological influence through global news flows.

5. *Environmental Issues*

As shown in Fig-3, five studies examined China's environmental image. In Western media, coverage of China's environmental issues was largely negative. For example, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* depicted China's smog crisis as an environmental disaster, highlighting health risks and government negligence (Liu & Li, 2017). Similarly, *The New York Times* framed China as prioritizing economic growth over environmental protection (Yang & Wang, 2023).

In contrast, environmental reporting related to China from the Global South, particularly Zimbabwean media, presented a more contested and layered portrayal of China. According to Yin (2024), Zimbabwean state-owned media presented China as a positive force for economic development. However, private media in Zimbabwe highlighted the negative environmental damage caused by Chinese mining activities.

6. *Culture and Education*

As shown in Fig-3, three articles focused on the representation of China's culture in the global news media, particularly the Confucius Institutes (CI), established by the Chinese government as platforms for cultural communication and Chinese language learning worldwide. Global media representations of the Confucius Institutes tended to be ambiguous and controversial. As Wang and Adamson (2015) demonstrated, U.S. media portrayed CI not only as platforms for cultural exchange but also as tools of Chinese soft power, raising concerns about national security and academic freedom.

Likewise, media representations of CIs in the Global South were often shaped by the Western media. Although some news reports in developing countries presented CIs in neutral or slightly positive terms—such as promoting cultural understanding, fostering educational cooperation, and building bridges between nations—there was still a tendency to frame CIs with suspicion (Huang, 2023).

IV. DISCUSSION

A. *Overall Status of Studies on China's Image in Global News Discourse*

(a). *Spatial and Temporal Distribution*

According to the spatial and temporal distribution shown in Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b, despite minor variations from year to year, research on China's image in news media has generally been on the rise. This upward trend in the post-2020 period suggests a growing scholarly interest in how China's image is constructed in global news discourse, possibly driven by geopolitical developments such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rising China-US tensions, and the global expansion of BRI.

However, nearly 80% of the studies on China's media image focused on the Western news media, such as the U.S., U.K., and Australia. Studies on the representation of China's image in non-Western media (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) were underexplored. This imbalanced distribution highlights a gap in the literature, underscoring the need for further research into how non-Western media represent China.

(b). Discussion on Research Approach and Theory

As shown in section 3.3, the most commonly used approach was the synergy of corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) that was labeled as corpus-assisted or corpus-based discourse analysis (Baker et al., 2008). Many studies (e.g., Afzaal et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2024) employed tools like AntConc, WordSmith, and SketchEngine for keyword extraction, collocation, and concordance analysis. These techniques provided insight into lexical salience and recurring patterns and semantic preferences, which helped examine discursive strategies and uncover embedded ideologies adopted in news discourse. Content analysis (14 articles) remained a popular method, particularly for identifying frames, recurring themes, and key patterns of China-related narratives over time. Nevertheless, it often focused on surface-level content and may fall short in revealing the ideological mechanisms underlying discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Fairclough, 1995). To address this limitation, some scholars (Lams, 2016; Teo & Xu, 2023) combined content analysis and CDA or corpus-based approaches to explore power relations and ideological structures embedded in news discourse that shape China's image. While most of the studies in the past decade focused on textual discourse, only a few adopted emerging methods such as sentiment analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, highlighting a potential direction for future research.

In terms of research theory, most studies adopted CDA-oriented theories or framing theory to examine power relations, ideological positioning, and discursive strategies, illustrating how media selectively highlighted certain aspects of China-related events to shape public perception (e.g., Liu et al., 2024; Yang & Wang, 2023; Yi et al., 2024). Additionally, a smaller group of scholars (e.g., Zhang, 2022; Tang, 2021) combined multiple frameworks, such as CDA with framing theory, corpus linguistics, or systemic functional linguistics, to triangulate findings and gain a more holistic understanding of the discursive construction of China's image. Furthermore, several studies (e.g., Ng, 2022; Hou, 2023; Xin & Matheson, 2015) drew on theories from political science and communication studies, reflecting a growing trend towards theoretical diversity and interdisciplinarity in this field.

B. Discussion on the Themes

After reviewing the media representations of China across six thematic categories, the findings reveal a complex and often contrasting image of China in global news discourse. In Western media, particularly in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, China is predominantly portrayed in a negative light, frequently constructed as a threat or a strategic rival. In contrast, non-Western media tend to present China more positively, though negative representations also exist. Economically, China is frequently framed as a key trading partner or trusted ally. However, on issues related to geopolitical and territorial disputes, non-Western media often adopt a more cautious or skeptical tone. These differences suggest that China's image in global media is shaped by diverse factors, including national interests, ideological positionings, cultural and geopolitical dynamics, and patterns of international media flow.

First, the varying representations of China in global news discourse may be primarily driven by ideological, cultural, and geopolitical factors. Media discourse is not entirely objective: it is shaped by specific ideologies and sociopolitical forces (van Dijk, 2006). As Zhang (2022) noted, although NYT is globally recognized, it often reflects a US-centric orientation. When reporting on China's sociopolitical affairs, the NYT tends to adopt a morally superior stance, interpreting others through US values. For example, the Chinese Dream was negatively framed with highly nationalist ideology by employing lexical items like "a vaguely defined promise," "so-called," "elusive," and "bombastic." Such portrayals exemplify an "othering" frame to reshape the original connotations of the Chinese Dream (p. 623). The othering perspective involves denying others and presenting non-Western states as the other in news discourse on the basis of one's own sociocultural norms, political systems, and ideologies. This US-led othering frame reveals how Western media construct China's image in accordance with their own geopolitical worldview.

Second, the degree of media autonomy may be another contributing factor to the diverse representations of China in global media coverage, particularly in government-controlled versus privately owned news outlets. Ng's (2022) study on Malaysian TV coverage of Najib Razak's 2016 visit to China found that state media portrayed China positively in both Malay and English outlets, highlighting themes of close friendship and economic importance. In contrast, private outlets such as *8 TV Mandarin News* framed China in a more balanced and neutral manner, focusing on business-related topics. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, state media framed China as a socially and environmentally responsible partner supporting the government's 2030 agenda, while private media emphasized grassroots criticisms of Chinese mining activities. These cases reveal that the degree of state control and audience orientation are important factors shaping China's image across different media systems.

Third, international news flow is another factor contributing to the contrasting representations of China in the global news coverage. Global news circulation continues to be dominated by Western or Eurocentric news agencies. As Eke et al. (2023) argued, the global information structure remains imbalanced, with agencies like Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), and Agence France-Presse (AFP) serving as primary gatekeepers. This dominance creates both quantitative and qualitative imbalances. Developing countries are underrepresented, and when covered, narratives frequently center on

conflict, disease, or instability (Ekeanyanwu, 2007). Hu (2023) also found that the negative portrayal of China in English-language newspapers in the GCC often originates from Anglo-American news sources, including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Guardian*, and *Reuters*. In addition, employing network analysis, Guo and Vargo (2017) confirmed that international news primarily flows from North to South, with the US and the UK playing leading roles. These Western countries control the intermedia agenda-setting and dominate the global news supply, while developing nations remain passive subjects, frequently presented through negative or stereotypical frames and relegated to the periphery of the global news system (Ekeanyanwu, 2007).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study systematically reviewed 55 peer-reviewed articles published between January 1, 2015, and December 17, 2024, that examined China's image in global news discourse. The findings reveal a steady increase in academic interest during this period, with most research focusing on China-related issues in Western media. In terms of research methodology and theory, corpus-based CDA emerged as the dominant approach, often supported by framing theory, critical discourse analysis, and, in some cases, interdisciplinary frameworks from political science and communication studies. Regarding China's media portrayal, the analysis shows that Western media, particularly in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, tend to frame China negatively, often as a threat or a strategic rival. In contrast, non-Western media presented more varied images, highlighting China's role as an economic partner, though skepticism persisted in geopolitical contexts. These divergent representations appear to be shaped by multiple factors, such as ideological positioning, national interests, cultural and geopolitical dynamics, and patterns of international media flow. However, a notable geographical imbalance persists: existing studies focus predominantly on Western media, leaving the perspectives of non-Western countries relatively underexplored.

This systematic review paper reveals several notable limitations and gaps in the study of China's image in news discourse. First, existing studies overwhelmingly focus on China's image as represented in Western media, leaving media narratives in non-Western media, such as Southeast Asia, relatively underexplored. Second, most studies center on text-based news articles, with limited attention given to visual content such as photographs and colors. Visual elements are a crucial component in meaning-making in media discourse and can significantly shape readers' perceptions through emotional framing. Therefore, future research is encouraged to consider how textual and visual modes interact in constructing China's image in media. Moreover, national image is inherently an abstract and interdisciplinary concept, shaped by a variety of social, political, and cultural factors. While many existing studies have adopted corpus-based CDA as the primary lens, future research would benefit from integrating approaches or theories from other disciplines such as international relations, media studies, or cultural studies.

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