Appraisal Resources and National Image: A Case Study on Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokespersons' Responses About COVID-19

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Abstract—The national image of a country is becoming increasingly important as the soft power of a country, which can be realised by diplomacy and various types of diplomatic discourses. Therefore, this study attempts to analyse, via the responses of Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokespersons to questions about COVID-19, how national images are constructed. It adopts the Appraisal Theory proposed by Martin and White and focuses on one of its systems: attitude. Attitude resources are evaluative languages that express feelings, opinions and judgements which are quite contributive to the building of a national image and they are very abundant in the the foreign spokespersons' responses. This study uses Atlas.ti as the tool to collect and code appraisal resources in order to observe the overall features of attitude, including word frequency and collocation. Together with this tool, the Critical Discourse Analysis approach is also used to analyse the meaning of attitude resources as well as the political and diplomatic contexts. The study finds that different attitude resources can contribute to the formation of different components of national images according to specific political events or international relationships, and this gives more insights into the construction of China's national image during the pandemic.

Index Terms—discourse analysis, diplomatic languages, national image, appraisal resources, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

Since COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan, China, the world has been filled with a series of conflicts in and between countries in terms of social systems, ideologies, development patterns, and race and religion issues. As the first country to carry out the dramatic reversal of lockdowns and the reopening of the country, China was at the receiving end of various global opinions which either spoke highly of its efficient strategy for preventing an epidemic or accused it of disinformation and misbehaviour. All these comments and opinions were often mentioned and asked during the regular press conferences held by the Foreign Ministry of China. In responding to these questions from both domestic and foreign media, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons made many statements and comments to brief the media on the situation, to clarify China's stances and attitudes, and to refute unfounded accusations in order to protect China's national image. A national image is closely associated with diplomacy and international relations because it can be realised by means of diplomatic discourses such as diplomatic speeches, statements and remarks (Zhang & Meadows, 2012). As Hasan (2009) pointed out, image is the semantic consequence of recurrent linguistic choices which are not accidental and have recurrent patterns in the selection of meanings. Thus, the way a country's spokespersons respond and the language they choose are crucial for constructing the image of a nation and it is worthy of more systematic study.

In order to analyse this kind of linguistic choices, this study applied the Appraisal Theory (AT) proposed by Martine and White (2005) which introduces our own judgements and desires and our own angle on the situation (Halliday, 2009). Appraisal resources are the "semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements and evaluations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations" (Martin, 2000, p.145). The choice of appraisal resources determines the stance or voice of the writer or speaker (Si, 2018). Therefore, it is expected that the features of appraisal resources could reflect the linguistic choices that help to build a national image. Although there are previous studies that discussed the relationship between language and national image, most of them simply generalised national image by using discourse analysis based on word frequency and seldom focused on specific linguistic features (Wang, 2003; Yu & Wu,

2018; Wang, 2020). In contrast, this study attempts to provide a new perspective of Appraisal which is more systematic and focused on the analysis of the linguistic resources relevant to national image, including spokespersons' stances, opinions and attitudes. This study hopes to provide answers to the following questions: (1) What are the features of appraisal resources of spokespersons' responses about COVID-19? (2) How can appraisal resources help to construct a national image?

II. NATIONAL IMAGE

Many scholars have proposed various definitions for national image. Boulding (1969, p.120) first defined national image as "the total cognitive, affective and evaluative structure of the behavior unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe". Kunczik (2000, p.9) saw it as "the cognitive representation that a person holds of a given country, what a person believes to be true about a nation and its people." Guan (2021) believed that national image is the general evaluation and recognition of the country itself, its behaviour, its activities and its achievements by the external and internal public of the country. Similar terms such as national reputation, national branding and national prestige have also been mentioned in other studies.

It can be concluded that national image is an overall evaluation of a country that is shaped by itself and other countries in the international systems, which can be affected by many different factors such as its economy, politics, culture and education level. An evaluation of this kind can be reached by viewing the factors from different aspects. Several previous studies have discussed a number of these aspects, including foreign policy such as public relations, campaign or foreign publicity (Wang, 2003; Hartig, 2016), international events such as the Olympics or the World Expo (Chen, 2012), cultural topics such as movies, fashion and food (Kinsey & Chung, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2015) or even a company or a product's brand (Anholt, 2007). However, in this study, a national image is regarded as a semantic consequence as mentioned earlier and is discussed from a linguistic perspective through diplomatic discourse.

Several previous studies have discussed the use of language, especially in media reports and political speeches, to construct China's national image. Wang (2003) collected relevant articles from *Beijing Review* and government working reports that were dated between the years 1958 and 2002 which had mentioned China's foreign affairs, and generalised some national images that included "a peace-loving country, victim of foreign aggression, socialist country, bastion of revolution, anti-hegemonic force, developing country, major power, international cooperator, and autonomous actor." Moreover, Wang (2020) analysed the responses of China's foreign ministry spokesperson of 2019 and summarised China's national image as a major developing country which is peace-loving, confident, responsible, independent and democratic. In addition, Guan (2021) collected and discussed the tweets posted by the Chinese embassy in the United States between July 2019 and October 2020, and also generalised some images of China. These generalised images included the defender of state sovereignty and safety, the vindicator of international fairness and justice as well as the promoter of international cooperation and development. As can be seen, the components used to construct China's national image were consistently applied with certain core elements emphasised inside, such as peace-loving, major power and independent. Moreover, new components were added to China's national image according to the different periods and specific foreign affairs issues which had arisen during that time. For example, in Wang's (2003) study, between 1958 and 2002, there was an emphasis on China as a socialist country. This is because the period covers the first decade after the establishment of China, and it also covers the Cold War which lasted from 1947 to 1991. However, in 2019, due to interference from the U.S. and other western countries on sovereignty issues regarding Hong Kong and Xinjiang (these countries criticised the issue of human rights and supported the separatists in the two areas), China constructed its national image to emphasise its desire to be seen as being democratic and as the defender of state sovereignty (Wang, 2020; Guan, 2021). This study therefore attempts to find what national image China had aimed at constructing during the special circumstances and period of the COVID-19 pandemic, by using its regular press conferences.

Previous studies which discussed the issue of national image largely depended on the aspects of language frequency and collocation and tried to generalise the term via the high-frequency words used. However, some high-frequency words are not relevant to national image. In addition, there is a limitation in the analysis of context. In this regard, this paper focuses on appraisal resources which are the linguistic choices closely related to the evaluation of a country. It also analyses the political and diplomatic contexts so that the national image can be better explained and understood.

III. ATTITUDE IN APPRAISAL THEORY

This study adopts the Appraisal Theory (AT) as the framework. AT was established and developed on the basis of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday (1973) mentioned that language is a resource to render ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning in communication, also referred to as the three meta-functions. Appraisal refers to the interpersonal meaning in language, which in turn refers to the way of interacting with others (Halliday, 2009). There are three systems of appraisal: attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude refers to the semantic resources that express our feelings, judgements and evaluations of things or behaviours. Engagement focuses on the speakers' commitment and the play of voices in the expressing of opinions, while graduation refers to the semantic resources that grade attitude, which can amplify or blur feelings. This study mainly focuses on the attitude system because it contains a large number of linguistic

resources that can most directly shape the national image. The attitude system is applied for the identification and classification of appraisal resources.

Attitude is divided into three categories – affect, judgement and appreciation – which can either be positive or negative. First, affect refers to our positive or negative feelings, which can be related to participants, processes and modal adjuncts. Martin and White (2005) grouped three major sets of affect emotions—un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction. Examples of the three sets are: (1) She was sad/happy (un/happiness); (2) She was anxious/confident (in/security); and (3) She felt bored/impressed (dis/satisfaction). Besides, dis/inclination is another subcategory of affect, which could implicate a trigger of emotion, such as a request or a longing for something. Second, judgement refers to our attitude to people and the way people behave, and it can be divided into social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem refers to normality (how unusual), capacity (how capable) and tenacity (how resolute), while social sanction refers to veracity (how truthful) and propriety (how ethical) (Martin & White, 2005). An example of social esteem is "He is clever" (capacity-positive), and an example of social sanction is "They are selfish" (propriety-negative). Third and last, appreciation concerns our performance or evaluation of things as well as with natural phenomena. There are three types of appreciation: reaction, composition and valuation (Martin & White, 2005). Reaction refers to the impact and quality of things. Composition involves balance and complexity, while valuation is related to the question "Was it worthwhile?". Examples of these three types are: (1) The scenery is beautiful (reaction-positive); (2) Their words were unclear (composition-negative); and (3) Our effort is significant (valuation-positive). The categorisation of the attitude resources is illustrated in Figure 1 and that was the framework used in this study during data collection and processing as well as for data analysis.

According to the definition and content of attitude, attitude resources can be inferred to be closely related to the linguistic choices one makes to reflect a national image. This is because attitude resources can be used to express the feelings or political positions of a country regarding specific diplomatic events or speeches. They can also be used to evaluate the country's behaviour and performance as well as those of other nations'. The linguistic markers of attitude include, but are not limited to, adjectives, nouns, verbs and relevant phrases. However, not every attitude resource can be recognised by linguistic markers because there are inscribed and invoked attitudes (Martine & White, 2005). An inscribed attitude can be recognised by linguistic markers directly. On the other hand, an invoked attitude is not observed by any particular attitude markers but is realised by using a combination of various lexis or expressions, and it can only be analysed according to the context (Ross & Caldwell, 2020). It is indirectly expressed and more difficult to analyse (Munday, 2012). The definition of 'invoked attitude' is quite helpful for the identification of attitude resources, especially when attitude is implicitly expressed without certain linguistic markers.
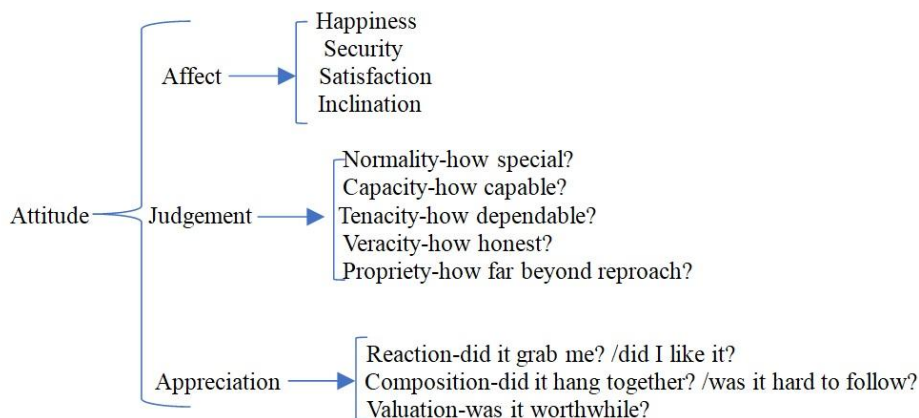

Figure 1. Attitude System Based on Martin & White (2005)

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study applied the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach (Fairclough, 1988) to analyse the attitude resources of Chinese foreign ministry spokespersons' responses because CDA provides methods for the study of relations between discourse and social practice in different social domains (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). According to Fairclough (2000), CDA is carried out in three stages: description, interpretation and explanation. Description refers to the analysis of textual elements of texts. Interpretation is the processing analysis that deals with text production and text understanding, while explanation refers to the social analysis which is concerned with the influence of social structure on discourses and the reproductive effects of discourses on those structures. Therefore, this study first carried out the text analysis of the identification of attitude resources, then the processing analysis of understanding the meaning of attitude resources in the context, and finally the social analysis of the effects on national image.

A. Data Collection

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly holds a press conference on every working day. Only one spokesperson hosts the daily press conference every time and answers questions about foreign affairs asked by both domestic and foreign media personnel. Foreign affairs spokespersons are people who speak for their own countries. They are usually in charge of declaring diplomatic policies and explaining diplomatic events and situations. Guided by certain diplomatic principles, spokespersons present the national interests and the diplomatic stances taken when they speak, instead of expressing personal opinions or feelings. Although there are three foreign ministry spokespersons who represent China, data was collected from all of them since the foci of their responses in this study are the shared stances and diplomatic purposes embodied in their choice of language, and not their personal ideas or speech styles.

The entire month of May 2020 was chosen by this study as the time period during which data collection was conducted at all the regular press conferences held in that month. This was because in early 2020, China had closed its borders in an effort to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and it only reopened its borders in late April 2020 when the pandemic was controlled. However, after late April 2020, the global pandemic situation became increasingly more serious. Thus, in May 2020, many questions were asked by both domestic and foreign media at the regular press conferences. They sought to obtain information on China's anti-epidemic measures, its experiences and its comments in response to doubts expressed by others regarding its reported fast reversal on the situation. China's spokespersons also had to address any blame levied at the country for allegedly issuing disinformation and for wrong behaviour in its attempts to prevent a pandemic from spreading. All the questions and answers were uploaded in text form in English on the official website of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that facilitated our collection of data. When selecting the questions, we searched for words such as COVID-19, virus, pandemic and epidemic, and also carried out searches on relevant issues such as disease prevention and vaccine. In all, we collected 71 pairs of questions and responses about COVID-19 during May 2020, which came up to a total of 20,527 words. It should be clarified that we only identified and analysed the attitude resources in the responses, not those in the questions. However, the questions were used to select responses that were relevant to COVID-19 and they helped to facilitate better understanding of the issues involved.

B. Data Processing

This study used Atlas.ti as the tool to identify attitude resources and help with relevant searches and analysis. First, the selected questions and answers were input into Atlas.ti. Then, we coded the attitude resources sentence by sentence according to Martin and White's (2005) categorisation of attitude as presented in Figure 1. When the coding was completed, Atlas.ti helped in the calculation of frequency of the attitude resources, as well as in the search for collocation and context of the specific attitude resources or markers. Two examples of how to code attitude resources using Atlas.ti are given below; both sentences were selected from the response which China's spokesperson made to the question asked by a journalist from TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System), which was: *President Trump just mentioned yesterday that China either made a terrible mistake or probably it was incompetence. Do you have any comment for this?*

1) China, among the first group of countries hit by the virus, took **forceful** and **effective** measures at the earliest time possible… (capacity+; valuation+)
2) I **hate** to make that comparison, but you, my media friends, have pressed us to do so. (happiness-)

Note: "+" stands for positive, "-" stands for negative

Although Martin and White's (2005) categorisation is, on the whole, quite clear and precise, some portions are vague and caused difficulties during the process of identifying and classifying of the attitude resources. The authors therefore discussed all the ambiguous parts in order to reach an agreement among themselves. First, some subcategories of judgement and appreciation were difficult to distinguish. For example, the adjectives *open* and *transparent* which appeared many times could be categorised as veracity of judgment that shows honesty. However, they could also be categorised as composition of appreciation to describe an item of information as being clear and lucid. Although double coding is allowed according to Martin and White (2005), the authors chose not to do it because the final purpose was to find out how these linguistic resources build the national image. Thus, in this study, the criteria focused on whether these linguistic resources were used to describe the character and behaviour of a person or a country (which can be judged by social esteem and social sanction) or to describe things and performances that we make. As a result, the abovementioned two adjectives are identified as veracity in this study because they were used to declare that China did provide true and reliable information in the face of accusations that it was dishonest and was issuing disinformation.

Moreover, the study found many verbs and relevant phrases – such as *shifting blame*, *finger-pointing*, *blame-dumping*, *bullying*, *scapegoating* and *smear*, among others – which referred to the behaviour of some western countries, especially the U.S. and its politicians. These words and phrases are regarded as invoked attitudes which can manipulate the reader by seeming to be incontestable and they are often used to present the writer's opinion as being categorical statements of fact (White, 2004). In this case, these verbs and their collocates invoked a negative judgement of their behaviours in claiming that smearing China or shifting blame to China was immoral and unfair, and that such actions should be reproached by the international community. Readers of such reports and comments were expected to accept these claims as incontestable factors.

In addition, some words were found to be rather neutral and difficult to identify and categorise. As an example, the word *scientific* which appeared many times, was mostly used to claim that the research and investigation of the origin of the virus is a scientific issue. Although it is a high-frequency adjective in this study, it is merely a word used to define and describe the process of tracing the origin from a neutral viewpoint, and it is also a word that is hard to categorise into any

subcategory of attitude. Thus, *scientific* is not identified as an attitude resource here. Another example is the word *cooperation*, which is also regarded as a neutral word at the beginning. However, it was categorised as a propriety of judgment in Munday's (2012) study when identifying the attitude resources in the inaugural speech of Barack Obama. Therefore, it was decided in this study to use Munday's categorisation as reference and identify *cooperation* as propriety when it is mentioned as one of the measures taken by countries or international organisations.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After coding all the subcategories, Atlas.ti was used to calculate the frequency of attitude resources, as illustrated in Table 1. As can be seen, the frequency ratings of affect, judgement and appreciation differ a lot, which reflects a preference for linguistic choices. Thus, we used Atlas.ti to search for the specific linguistic choices of each category and tried, by understanding the context, to analyse the national image embodied behind these choices.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF ATTITUDE RESOURCES

Types of attitude	Positive	Negative	Total
Affect	38	17	55 (11.8%)
Judgment	114	109	223 (47.9%)
Appreciation	154	34	188 (40.3%)

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF AFFECT RESOURCES

Happiness	Security	Satisfaction	Inclination
7	14	18	16
12.7%	25.5%	32.7%	29%

A. Affect

As we can see in Table 1, the frequency of affect is the lowest among the three categories with only 11.8% in total. This infers that spokespersons seldom expressed their feelings in such diplomatic discourses, an inference that is drawn especially from the subcategory of happiness which has a frequency of only 7 (see Table 2). Most of the happiness markers express sympathy for deaths caused by or related to COVID-19 and these include the words *mourn, grim, sympathies* and *saddened*, all of which are negative feelings. Two examples are: "We *mourn* for the lost lives" and "We are truly *saddened* by those lost lives in the US". The frequency ratings of security, satisfaction and inclination are rather similar. The security resources mentioned in Table 2 mainly express the country's confidence and belief that China will win the fight against COVID-19, and also its determination to safeguard people's lives (see Examples 2 and 3 below). The representative markers include *confidence, believe* and *safeguard*. Satisfaction resources show several cases when others praised China (see Example 4 below) as well as some situations that China welcomes or condemns (see Example 5 below) which include markers such as *speak highly of, deplore* and *welcome*. In addition, the inclination subcategory in Table 2 shows China's willingness to undertake actions, mainly indicated by the expressions *is ready to* and *stands ready to* (see Example 6 below). The following are the examples of affect emotions mentioned above:

1) China always loves peace. (happiness+)
2) We believe that as long as all members of the international community work together…, we will surely achieve a full victory …(security+)
3) We have safeguarded the lives and health of the Chinese people. (security+)
4) China deplores and opposes such slanderous actions. (satisfaction-)
5) Heads of the UN, WHO and many countries … all spoke highly of China's swift, strong and effective response. (satisfaction+)
6) China is ready to continue to work with the international community….(inclination+)

In view of the above, what kind of national images do these choices of affect markers indicate? Since not every marker is relevant to the construction of a national image, this study mainly paid attention to the words or phrases that helped to describe China's character or to evaluate China's performance. This principle was also applied in the analysis of judgement and appreciation which followed next. First, as shown in Example 1, the phrases *loves peace* and *peace-loving* were mentioned twice as happiness markers, which directly offers an image of a peace-loving nation. In addition, the negative happiness markers that expressed sympathy for the lost lives showed a spirit of love and humanity, and this also contributes to the image of a peace-loving country. Second, among the security markers, *safeguard* was used several times to stress that China prioritises the lives and health of Chinese people. Thus, the word constructs the image that China is reliable and responsible to its people. Furthermore, 15 out of the 16 inclination markers were about China's willingness to take certain actions. In terms of the context and collocation aspects, it can be summarised that China is willing and ready to *work with international community, share experience, increase support for WHO, promote international cooperation, support hardest-hit countries* and *safeguard global public health security*. As a result, these inclination markers reflect the image that China is quite supportive, cooperative and responsible as one of the major countries in the world.

Normality	Capacity	Tenacity	Veracity	Propriety
4	31	17	76	95
1.8%	14%	7.6%	34%	42.6%

B. Judgement

Judgement has the highest frequency of 47.9% among the three categories of attitude. Table 3 above presents the respective frequencies of the five subcategories, in which propriety ranks first at 42.6% and veracity has the second highest frequency (34%). In contrast, the frequencies for normality, tenacity and capacity are much lower, especially normality which only has a frequency of 1.8%. The low rating recorded in the normality subcategory found in the responses of foreign spokespersons indicates some special traits of people, such as *sharp-eyed person* and *famous scientists*. The frequency of tenacity is also very low, which mainly implies China's dependability with the choice of the phrases *work hard* and *actively participate*, while the frequency for capacity (14%) is a little bit higher. Most of the capacity markers describe China's competence as well as that of international organisations' with words such as *leading, powerful, swift* and *professional*, all of which appear several times. On the other hand, some negative markers of capacity (such as *fail, failure, misleading* and *incompetence*) reflect the incompetence of some other countries or state leaders. The following are the examples of tenacity and capacity:

7) China has been **actively participating** in the global fight against COVID-19. (tenacity+)
8) We **are leading** the world in COVID-19 treatment and vaccine research. (capacity+)
9) Some in the US have **failed** their people's trust in the fight against COVID-19…(capacity-)

Veracity has the second highest frequency. The reason that veracity resources are widely used is that many questions focused on the blame levied by other countries at China, accusing it of disinformation about the pandemic. For example, the U.S. accused China of spreading disinformation or refusing to open up and share information on the pandemic. The U.S. and some other countries also accused China of hiding information regarding human-to-human transmission by the virus. In order to declare that China was telling the truth, words such as *open*, *openness*, *transparent, transparency, facts* and *objective* were repeatedly used by China's spokespersons. Moreover, some negative markers were used to put the blame on other countries for being dishonest in their comments. China's spokespersons often used words such as *lies, lying, groundless, baseless, fabricating* and *disinformation*, to accuse these countries of distorting facts, shifting blame and misleading the public (see Examples 10 and 11).

10) We have been acting with **openness, transparency** and responsibility and providing epidemic updates to WHO…(veracity+)
--Responding to the question about President Trump's letter to the WHO
11) As is seen by all, he is merely telling the same old **lies**. (veracity-)
--Responding to the question that the US Secretary of State said that the virus originated in Wuhan and the Chinese government did not act fast enough to share the information

Finally, as the subcategory with the highest frequency, some propriety resources show that China's behaviour was appropriate and it should be far beyond reproach. The positive markers of propriety included words such as *impartial, impartiality, responsible* and *responsibility* which were chosen in response to the groundless accusations from other countries. However, there were much more negative markers than positive ones, and these numbered 73 out of the 95 markers found. These negative markers mainly criticised the inappropriate and immoral behaviours of other countries since many questions were asked about the speeches and comments that attacked and blamed China. The often repeated words include *shift blame, selfish, mistake, smear, stigmatise* and *scapegoating*. Examples 12 and 13 illustrate propriety resources:

12) The measures are open, **impartial** and transparent. (propriety+)
--Responding to the comment that the U.S. said China's flight demands violate bilateral aviation agreements
13) Certain U.S. politicians have been busy **shifting the blame** to China…(propriety-)
--Responding to the question that the head of the U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) said that the Chinese government was using Twitter to push disinformation and propaganda regarding COVID-19

During the analysis of the meaning of judgement resources and the relevant context, it found that there were several national images that could be generalised based on these resources. First, some resources of tenacity, such as *work hard* and *actively participate* build a national image of being dependable and responsible because these words show that China had been working hard to solve problems during the pandemic and had also actively taken part in the global fight against COVID-19, as shown in Example 7 above. Second, positive capacity resources present a capable and powerful image because such words as *swift, powerful, leading* and *successful*, indicated that China had taken powerful and swift measures in disease control and was leading the world in disease treatment and vaccine research, as presented in Example 8 above. Moreover, as there were many voices that accused China of delayed response as well as of spreading disinformation, the spokespersons used many positive markers of veracity to build the national image of China being open and honest. They also used the positive markers of propriety resources to construct the image of China being a responsible nation, as presented in Examples 10 and 12 above. On the other hand, the spokespersons used many negative markers of veracity and propriety to criticise the improper behaviours and statements made by other countries, especially the U.S.

These comments (see Examples 9, 11 and 13 above) by China's spokespersons alluded to the national images of some foreign countries as being dishonest and irresponsible.

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF APPRECIATION RESOURCES

Reaction	Composition	Valuation
41	38	109
21.8%	20.2%	58%

C. Appreciation

At 43%, appreciation has the second highest frequency among the three categories. As shown in Table 4, the two subcategories of reaction and composition show a small difference in frequency, at 21.8% and 20.2% respectively. The reaction resources indicate whether spokespersons like or are grabbed by certain performances or speeches. Positive reaction markers which include *good, friendly, close* were observed several times to show China's recognition of the bilateral communication and international cooperation that it has with other countries, found in phrases such as *good communication* and *friendly cooperation*. In addition, there were negative markers (that include high-frequency words like *frivolous, boring* and *ridiculous*) which expressed the spokespersons' disdain and dislike of the lies and nonsense by those who accused China of making mistakes and being incompetent in its handling of the COVID-19 epidemic. This study also found that composition resources mainly help to express that China's statements, responses and measures are clear, consistent and quite easy for the public to follow and understand. Most of the composition markers, such as *clear*, *consistent, comprehensive* and *simple*, are positive. The following are some examples of reaction and composition:

14)   China has maintained **close** and **good** cooperation with WHO. (reaction+)
15)   It is high time they stopped playing such **ridiculous**, **boring** finger-pointing game. (reaction-)
16)   China has been **consistent** and **clear** about this all along. (composition+)

Valuation, the third subcategory, is the most observed subcategory in appreciation and it has the highest frequency (58%). In addition, the number of its positive markers has an overwhelming superiority compared with the negative ones, which is 105 out of 107. This high frequency is caused by the high percentage of two kinds of questions. The first kind refers to the questions about China's efforts and comments on international cooperation since China had been attending many international conferences, giving speeches and proposals and providing medical supplies in order to join the global anti-epidemic response. The second kind refers to the questions which focused on the blame that other countries put on China for its alleged misbehaviour and incompetence. In responding to these questions, positive valuation markers were largely used to stress the important role of certain international organisations and partners as well as on China's contribution in terms of carrying out effective measures, making significant progress and giving aid to other countries. The high frequency markers include *important, contribute, significant, timely, effective, sacrifice* and *leading role*, as shown below in the examples of valuation:

17)   The SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is a regional organisation of **important** influence. (valuation+)
--Responding to the question about how China sees the outcomes of the video conference of SCO and its significance for the joint global response to COVID-19
18)   We have **timely** updated WHO and other countries on the epidemic. (valuation+)
--Responding to the question about Donald Trump comparing the coronavirus situation with the coronavirus to the attack on Pearl Harbor and also the 9/11 attack
19)   …every family and every citizen nationwide **have been contributing** their strength in this fight against COVID-19. (valuation+)
--Responding to the question about President Trump's letter to the WHO.

Regarding the appreciation subcategory, China's national image is mainly embodied in valuation resources. According to the large number of positive markers, we can infer that the spokespersons aimed at shaping an effective national image of China because words such as *timely* and *effective* were repeatedly used to show that China had shared information in a timely manner and taken effective prevention and control measures. Moreover, a contributive image was also constructed by using the words such as *contribute* and *contribution*. These were the most repeated markers that helped the spokespersons to emphasise again and again that China had made or was willing to make contributions to the global fight against the epidemic, to global health security and world peace, and to development in terms of sharing experience, offering supplies and vaccine research.

D. Invoked Attitude

Since invoked attitude cannot be recognised by certain markers, this section will explain how it is identified and understood, based on specific examples. The selected examples below are some of those which helped to build China's national image:

20) …despite the daunting task of prevention at home, China has been **providing** other countries with anti-virus **supplies to the best of its ability**. (valuation+)

21)   We also hope other countries will join China in promoting international cooperation and mutual trust, rather than **say something nice while doing the opposite**. (judgment-)

In Example 20 above, the spokesperson's comments were made in response to a question on a report that the US fuelled hostility towards China during the pandemic which may result in a military conflict between the two countries. The response compared the measures taken by China and by the U.S. during the pandemic and highlighted China's efforts. As mentioned in Example 20, the expression "*providing supplies to the best of its ability*" suggests that China has been helpful in trying to prevent the epidemic from spreading to the rest of the world. It is identified as a positive valuation here and helps to construct the contributive national image of China. In the other case, Example 21 is an extract from the response to the question about whether China's restrictions on beef imports from Australia was linked to Australia's push for an independent international review of COVID-19 sources. The response stressed that restrictions were placed on imports because of the repeated violations of inspection and quarantine requirements, and that China opposed political manipulation including the so-called independent international review of COVID-19. This extract is taken from the end of the response that called for international cooperation. Moreover, although there are no direct attitude markers, the expression "*say something nice while doing the opposite*" carries a negative judgment of Australia. In effect, the expression accused Australia of not fulfilling its own promise to undertake effective anti-epidemic measures, which implied that Australia was being irresponsible and hypocritical, a national image which China's spokespersons constructed for Australia.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the basis of AT, this study applied the CDA approach to find out how the appraisal resources of diplomatic responses help to construct a national image. It specifically focused on the attitude system of appraisal and some features were found and summarised after collecting the data. The findings of this study are presented below:

First, among the three categories of attitude, the frequency of affect is the lowest and is much lower than the other two categories, which means China's spokespersons seldom share personal feelings in diplomatic responses. The subcategories that help to construct the national image are happiness and inclination, which reflect the image of a peace-loving, cooperative and responsible nation. Second, the judgment category has the highest frequency because there were many questions about the accusations made against China on its alleged spread of disinformation, and these questions and their responses mostly fell into the two subcategories of judgment, which are veracity and propriety. All the subcategories of judgment, except normality, help to construct China's national image and build the image of a dependable, responsible, powerful and honest nation. Third and last, appreciation has the second highest frequency rating and valuation is the most observed subcategory of appreciation with much more positive markers than negative ones. Valuation helps to build the effective and contributive national image of China.

Therefore, it can be concluded that attitude markers are closely related to the construction of a national image. The analysis of meanings and contexts of attitude markers is targeted at and useful for the generalisation of a national image. National images of China generalised from attitude markers include *peace-loving*, *cooperative*, *responsible*, *dependable*, *powerful*, *honest*, *open*, *effective* and *contributive*. By forming these images, the spokespersons aim to show that China is responsible for its people's lives and is also taking the responsibility as a major country to help the world with public health security. China is honest and open with the data and information. Moreover, China has taken effective measures and made contributions in preventing the spread of the epidemic at home and abroad. On the other hand, the spokespersons also tend to use many negative markers of attitude to construct immoral and dishonest national images of the countries which accused and attacked China. This also helps to highlight China's positive image by way of contrast.

In addition, the findings of this study prove that the national image in diplomatic discourse can have different emphases according to different periods and events, as mentioned earlier in this study. Compared with the national image of China in previous studies, the image that China's spokespersons tried to emphasise had obviously changed from being a developing and independent country which is stable and united, to one that is honest and effective and contributes to the good of the world. The national image of being a responsible country was consistently stressed, but the images of being peace-loving and powerful were much less mentioned, hence these qualities were not emphasised during the pandemic.

For future studies, it is recommended that the other two systems of engagement and graduation should also be taken into consideration to find out what their impacts are on the construction of national images. Using a wider scope of data is also recommended. In addition, the invoked attitude still remains a challenging subject for analysis. As it is quite possible that researchers could neglect this, more attention should be given to it.

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