Media Representations of China: A Comparison of *China Daily* and *Financial Times* in Reporting on the Belt and Road Initiative

Lejin Zhang & Doreen Wu

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA: A COMPARISON OF *CHINA DAILY* AND *FINANCIAL TIMES* IN REPORTING ON THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Lejin Zhang
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9412-4826
Jiangsu Normal University, China
lizzyzlj@hotmail.com

Doreen Wu
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8812-8049
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China
doreen.wu@polyu.edu.hk

ABSTRACT

Utilising critical discourse analysis with corpus-assisted methods of analysis, this study examines the representation of China by English-language newspapers in China versus media in the UK. The study focuses on the linguistic realisation of attitudinal meanings in news reports about the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative. A sample of news reports by *China Daily* and *Financial Times*, dated between March 2015 and March 2016, was collected. Assisted by the corpora and corpus software AntConc and ConcGram, the study first investigated themes from the headlines and key paragraphs in the corpora of *China Daily* and *Financial Times* and then compared the classification scheme of the lexis using the concordance lines of key concepts in the Belt and Road Initiative in the two corpora. It was found that *China Daily*, like other Chinese mainstream media, has attempted to emphasise the initiative's positive attributes and construct positive images of China as a peace-loving nation, an international cooperator, and an emerging global economic and responsible power. Images of China as represented in *Financial Times* are mixed and conflicting: on the one hand, China is portrayed as having a significant impact on the global economy; on the other hand, images of China as an authoritarian state, a militant and obstructive force, and a geopolitical threat prevail. The paper concludes with a recommendation that China continues to develop a locally grounded and globally minded media practice, in parallel with its renewed efforts to underline the power of Chinese culture in national development and international politics.

Keywords: China's image; *China Daily*; corpus-assisteddiscourse analysis; *Financial Times*; glocalisation; media representation

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, China has increasingly embraced the notion of globalisation, not only for making advances in national economic growth but also for constructing itself as a key player and leader in world affairs. Since its accession to the WTO and the successful hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, China has been more eager than ever to demonstrate to its international counterparts its global vision and responsibilities in entering the arena of world affairs (Wu and Ng 2011). As one of such demonstrations, the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative (henceforth the Initiative) was proposed by President Xi Jinping in a speech in Kazakhstan in September 2013 (People.cn 2013). "One Belt, One Road" is the short form for "The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", launched by the Chinese government as a new economic policy and national strategy to promote domestic economic development and peaceful integration with the global economy. "One Belt" refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt, where infrastructure such as railways, roads, and gas pipelines will be developed. "One Road" refers to the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, along which ports and maritime facilities will be built from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea (Invesco 2015). The initiative was officially announced in March 2015 in a government document entitled *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* (henceforth *The Vision*). The aim is to create a modern Silk Road and to promote closer links among countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

In spite of objections from the USA, Britain chose to join the Initiative, with a host of US allies following, as *Financial Times* reported on June 30, 2015. Exactly what are the images that China has been trying to project to its cooperators and international audience via the Initiative? And how do the British perceive China and the Initiative? The present study attempts to answer these questions via an examination of how *China Daily*, the leading English-language newspaper in China, versus *Financial Times* in the UK, have reported on the Initiative and presented China in the process.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA

Journalists and politicians have long recognised the importance of the media in agenda setting and capturing the imagination of audiences. Nonetheless, while much research has been conducted on the media representation of China for the Western gaze (see, for example, Barr 2012; Cao 2014; Isaacs 1958; Mosher 1990), until recent years there have been statistically fewer studies researching how and how well China's image is being projected by the Chinese media, and also fewer studies comparing Chinese and Western media representations of China.

One of the few studies on the topic compares the national images projected by China with images of China as perceived by Americans. Based on a content analysis of *Peking Review* and *Government Work Reports* delivered to the National People's Congress between 1958 and 2002, Wang (2003) identifies the following images: a

peace-loving country, a victim of foreign aggression, socialism, a bastion of revolution, an anti-hegemonic force, a developing country, a major power, an international cooperator, and an autonomous actor. He then examined US perceptions of China based on data from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. While a number of these perceptions converge with certain images projected by the Chinese, such as China as a socialist country, as a developing country, and a major power, US perceptions diverge greatly from the other images and views projected by the Chinese government. Instead of seeing China as a peace-loving nation and an anti-hegemonic force, Americans often regard China as a militant obstructive force and as engaging in hegemonic behaviour. In addition, Americans sometimes view China as a victim of foreign aggression, but more often they see China as victimising its neighbouring countries. There is an additional image of China strongly found in US perceptions that is not projected by the Chinese government: that of China as an authoritarian state.

In recent years, with enhanced awareness and concerted efforts called for by President Xi and the Chinese government to brand China globally, scholars such as Xu (2013) have proposed building China's image via contemporary literary and arts practices, defining China's literature and arts as unique, as rich objects of study, and as a system with a variety of social and spiritual representations. The representation of China in the film *Perspective* (dir. Zhu Youguang [朱幼光], 2011) is discussed by Zhang and Wu (2017), who examine the significance of the film's glocalisation approach—that is, the film integrates modernity and tradition, and global and local elements in depicting the harmonious but rich and diverse cultures of China, projecting dynamic images of China to the outside world.

As for the dynamics of China's image in Western media, Isaacs (1958) was the first to chronicle the trajectory of the evolution of the Western image of China, followed by Mosher (1990). They found an oscillation between positive and negative perceptions of China, largely corresponding with political relations in what they call different "ages" (Cao 2014). In Isaacs's model (1958, 71), there are six stages: (1) the Age of Respect (18th century); (2) the Age of Contempt (1840–1905); (3) the Age of Benevolence (1905–1937); (4) the Age of Admiration (1937–1944); (5) the Age of Disenchantment (1944–1949); and (6) the Age of Hostility (1949–1957). Mosher (1990, 20–1) further categorises the dynamics in the post-1949 period into four sub-stages, which are: (6) the Age of Hostility (1949–1972); (7) the Second Age of Admiration (1972–1977); (8) the Second Age of Disenchantment (1977–1980); and (9) the Second Age of Benevolence (1980–1989). Cao (2014) points out that more recent portrayals of China by the West contain two more stages: the Third Age of Disenchantment (1989–2001) and the Age of Uncertainty (2001 to the present). He concludes that China's image changes with each alteration in the global relationship, which corresponds with geopolitical shifts and shifts in relations between China and the West (Cao 2014, 3).

The extremely critical image of China in Western media changed after China's hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games (Guo et al. 2009). However, Qiang and Ye (2013) point out that with the rise of China, Western media have produced fearful, negative

projections, such as "China as threat" and "China as wealth and power domination". It has been found that, in general, negative images of China prevail in Western media, with heated topics including human rights, climate change, environmental pollution, trade and urban development, and so forth (Shi 2014; Sun 2009). According to Cao (2014), in the 21st century China's representation in Western media has entered an "age of uncertainty"—the depiction of China is not distinctively negative or positive, but rather mixed and varied, bound by media producers' knowledge and experiences of China. Among the conflicting images of China are "the last of the great civilizations" as opposed to "the last great Communist tyranny" (Cao 2014, 184). Portraying China as having a unique "moral order being sustained by virtue, ritual and reverence for ancestors" (Cao 2014, 184) can be interpreted, on the one hand, as an image of a romanticised Orient or as a moral example from which the West has something to learn; on the other hand it can also be understood to counter against encouraging China to join or lead the international community. Furthermore, apart from the stance based on ideology, there is a neutral, non-ideological stance which sees China and its culture as changing in the process of East meeting West (Wu 2008).

DEFINING IMAGE AND THE RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

The present study aims to examine how English-language media in China versus media in the UK project China's image in their reporting on the Initiative. Nimmo and Savage (1976, 8) define image as "a human construct imposed on an array of perceived attributes projected by an object, event, or person" which is subject to influence by messages issued by an external actor. Two further primary dimensions of national image portrayed in the media—visibility and valence—are defined by Manheim and Albritton (1984). Visibility refers to "the amount of media coverage that the country receives and valance refers to the degree to which the content that is available reflects either favorably or unfavorably on the country" (Manheim and Albritton 1984, 645). Valence here can also be termed as value, including a favourable versus unfavourable or a positive versus negative evaluation of a nation's image. "Positive references included such points of discussion as a country's progress, advances, resources, assets, strengths, continuity, stability, reliability, or dependability", while "negative references included any mention of decline, weakness, poverty, liabilities, lack of progress, instability, or unreliability on the part of a given country" (Manheim and Albritton 1984, 647).

China's image refers to the image and evaluation of China and its agents and events projected by British versus Chinese newspapers in their reporting on the Initiative. The image constructs can comprise an array of attributes, ranging from positive to negative evaluation, and were approached in this study via examining the realisation of evaluative and attitudinal meanings in news reports. Specifically, the research questions for the study are:

1. How do *China Daily* and *Financial Times*, respectively, report on the Initiative?
2. What differential or varied images of China are being projected in the process of reporting?

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as represented by Fairclough (1995; 2015), was adopted for the present study. This approach maintains that as discourse is determined by social structures and has an effect upon social structures, it contributes to the achievement of social continuity or social change. Furthermore, the relationship between texts and social structures is indirect and mediated by discourse and assumptions, which produce the text and endow text features with values in social interaction, and by the social context, including institutional and societal processes of struggle (Fairclough 2015). The two mediating components are the main concerns in interpreting and explaining the text features (Fairclough 2015, 154). Following this view, the representation of China, taken as a concrete instance of social structure against an international backdrop, is determined by international diplomatic practice and media reporting practice and is the product of both. The representation of China should also be viewed as a dialectical and mediated discourse practice and process.

Text, interaction, and social context are the three elements of discourse as identified by Fairclough, and the corresponding distinctions between the three stages of critical discourse analysis he draws are *description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough 2015, 128). To explicate represented images and embedded values about China in the news reports, for this study both thematic and lexico-grammatical analyses were conducted, with the assistance of corpus linguistics.

As a corpus is very effective in generating patterns of vocabulary, themes and classification schemes of key notions are mainly analysed based on the corpus by examining frequency, collocation, and key word in context (KWIC). The software AntConc, version 3.4.4.0, and ConcGram, version 1.0.0.1, were utilised to conduct statistical and quantitative analysis by generating frequency word lists, collocations, and concordance lines of key words. This was aimed at providing evidence for the similarities and differences found in the discursive construction strategies utilised in terms of China's image by *China Daily* and *Financial Times*. Specifically, the corpus-assisted discourse analysis focused on the collocation and semantic pattern of a set of keywords such as "China", "role", "the initiative", "OBOR", and "new silk road initiative". Concordances were then extracted and analysed in order to investigate the data in a more qualitative way.

DATA SAMPLING

China Daily (henceforth *CD*) was chosen to represent English-language broadsheets in China, as it positions itself as reporting on China to the outside world in terms of

political, economic, cultural, and social information—a most important channel for China to communicate with the world. Established in mainland China in June 1981, *CD* is the first and most authoritative English-language national daily newspaper, with an average daily circulation of more than 200 000 copies in more than 150 countries and regions beyond China (Liu 2006, 74). *CD* is the first choice among China's English-language newspapers for both Chinese and foreigners, and it is also the only Chinese newspaper with access to the mainstream international community, since its reports are more frequently reprinted by foreign media than those of other Chinese newspapers (Liu 2006). Furthermore, it has a monthly special issue, entitled "China's Image Issue", launched in 1992 and issued as a clip to European, American, and Asian mainstream newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Financial Times* and distributed directly to readers at senior levels of management. This reveals the strong motivation and mission of *CD* in branding China to the outside world.

Financial Times (henceforth *FT*) is taken to represent British broadsheets in this study, as it not only covers international business and financial news—and traditionally had strong influence over the financial policies of the British government—but also has a relatively higher proportion of news reports on China as compared with the other three British broadsheets (Jiang 1998, 79). The newspaper's circulation expanded significantly during the second half of the 20th century, and its scope became global, with printing expanded to several cities in Europe, Asia, and North America. Various international versions were launched and the website debuted in 1995. By the late 1990s the newspaper's circulation figures outside the UK exceeded those within the country. Pearson purchased a controlling stake in the *FT* Group in 1957, and in 2015 the Japanese media company Nikkei purchased the *FT* Group, the holdings of which included the newspaper (*Britannica Academic* 2017).

The complete data set contains news reports[1] published on the Initiative over an entire year, from March 28, 2015 to March 28, 2016. The starting date of March 28, 2015 was selected because the Initiative was finalised as an official government document (*The Vision*) on that day. From then on, it was widely publicised on various mainstream media platforms. Samples were collected from the Factiva database by using "one belt, one road", "OBOR", "new silk road", "new silk road initiative", or "belt road initiative" as key words for searching. Duplicated reports with identical titles were filtered, and recorded only once in the sample collection.

Two corpora were built with the data collected: Corpus A comprises news reports in *CD* on the Initiative from March 28, 2015 to March 28, 2016, with 50 976 running words; Corpus B comprises news reports in *FT* on the Initiative from March 28, 2015

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1   In newspapers, there are generally two genres that compose the main focus, namely news reports and comments. Both news reports and comments/commentaries related to the Initiative were selected as samples of the present study. Other genres from the search results, such as poems, "thought for the weekend", or letters to the editor, and so forth, were removed from the data sample.

to March 28, 2016, with approximately 42 239 running words. In searching for OBOR news, Factiva generated a total of 65 effective items from *CD* and 56 effective items of related news reports from *FT*. An overview of the search results is shown in Table 1.

Table 1:   Corpora A and B: An overview of reports on the Initiative in *CD* and *FT*

	Corpus A: *CD*	Corpus B: *FT*
Number of reports	65	56
Running words	50 976	42 239
Number of tokens	51 369	44 272
Number of types	5 180	5 873

ANALYSIS: HEADLINES IN *CD* AND *FT*

The headline and the first paragraph are the thematic parts and gist of a news story (Fairclough 2015, 152). A glance at the headlines of articles in *CD* regarding the Initiative reveals a host of verbs, adjectives, and nouns with positive valence, such as "embrace", "hail", "welcome", "boost", "pivotal", "grand", "green approach", "vision", "trade boon", "brighter future", and "growth". Following are some illustrations of headlines from *CD*, with emphasis added:

> *Green approach* attracts Europeans (March 25, 2015)
>
> Belt, Road could *stabilize* vast area (August 3, 2015)
>
> Belt plan *spotlights* Central Asia (May 8, 2015)
>
> China, France *in historic nexus* (June 19, 2015)
>
> "One Belt, One Road" initiative *offers a great deal* to our youth (August 21, 2015)
>
> Bloomberg *hails* One Belt, One Road plan (September 17, 2015)

We can observe that the images of China projected by *CD* here include what Wang (2003) has described as the national images the Chinese government has tried to establish in the post-Mao period, such as "a peace-loving nation" (as seen in the use of "stabilize") and "an international cooperator" (as seen in the expression "in historical nexus"). The image of China as an international cooperator is often elaborated on in reports. The following are extracts from such reports, with emphasis added:

> Belarus, while in Eastern Europe, is typical of nations that want to use their location to reap rewards from the new Silk Road. "*The ancient Silk Road connected China with Europe, and we believe that this time our country will play its due role in the new one*," says Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich. ("Belt plan spotlights Central Asia." May 8, 2015, *CD*)
>
> Xi's ongoing visit to Southeast Asia strikes a strong note in China's peripheral diplomacy, which has always had an important role in China's interaction with the outside world. It is beyond doubt that *China will honor with concrete deeds its solemn pledge of building a community of*

common destiny with all ASEAN countries. ("Neighborhood visits to share friendship fruits." November 6, 2015, *CD*)

Furthermore, we observe that the image of a "great global responsible power" also emerges, not only in the use of the phrases "offers a great deal", "green approach", and "hails" in the headlines illustrated earlier, but also from the following paragraphs (emphasis added):

> The entry of AIIB, together with "One Belt, One Road", is a much discussed issue not only in our city, but around the globe. It aims to enhance regional connectivity and integration. *China as a responsible world power* proposed the "One Belt, One Road" development strategy in 2013. This will link China with Europe through Central and Western Asia by land and connect China with Southeast Asian countries, Africa and Europe by sea. This grand vision involves nearly 60 countries and regions covering over 4 billion people. ("AIIB will benefit HK." April 1, 2015, *CD*)

> When opponents of the Kra Canal say that if it is such a good idea it would already have been built, they seem to be unaware that new factors have created an entirely new situation: the 21st century *Chinese return to centrality* accompanied by the great leap outward of *global China* provides the means and the need to realize the Kra dream now. ("Grand canal is a vision of the future." August 24, 2015, *CD*)

However, in contrast to *CD*, in the headlines found in *FT* negative and conservative attitudes override favourable attitudes towards the Initiative. Expressions such as "new empire", "fearful", "hurdles ahead", "struggle for", and "mere grandstanding" can be observed, as in the following examples of such headlines from *FT* (with emphasis added):

> China *casts cloud and silver lining*—over EM (September 29, 2015)
> China's *Great Game: Road to a new empire* (October 12, 2015)
> "One Belt One Road" plan *greeted with caution* (November 20, 2015)
> China and Myanmar's SEZs: *strategic partnership* or *can of worms*? (November 20, 2015)
> China's *struggle* for a new normal (March 23, 2016)

We can observe that a prominent image of China represented in *FT* involves uncertainty, as seen in the expression "China casts cloud and silver lining …" and in the frequent use of question marks related to events and stories about China in headlines. Furthermore, the image of China as an authoritarian and hegemonic state is well represented, as evidenced in the expression "a new empire".

Mixed images of China as a threat—that is, as victimising neighbouring countries—versus China as benefiting other countries can be observed in the following two reports (emphasis added):

> *Moscow is already uncomfortable in the role of junior partner in the Sino-Russian relationship*. With good reason it is *nervous* about China's move into the former Soviet Republics.

Estrangement from the west has obliged Mr Putin to sell Russia cheaply. ("Now China starts to make the rules." May 29, 2015, *FT*)

The Pakistani government is delighted with China's new strategy, and one senior Pakistani official described the visit as "a game-changer for us, for Pakistan-Afghanistan [relations], for this region as a whole". Alluding to the sometimes awkward relationship with the US, one Pakistani minister said *China had treated Pakistan with respect*, "unlike some other countries". Mr Xi, in a gesture rarely extended to foreign visitors, is due to address Pakistan's parliament today. ("Xi visit tests Beijing's regional economic strategy; Pakistan: Strengthening ties." April 21, 2015, *FT*)

CONCORDANCE LINES OF "NEW SILK ROAD", "ONE BELT, ONE ROAD", AND "OBOR"

Concordance is "a collection of the occurrences of a word form, each in its own textual environment" (Sinclair 1991, 32). The analysis of concordance lines is useful for describing recurrent patterns while simultaneously examining individual lines involving interesting uses of a particular search word (Kim 2014, 230). It is therefore postulated that examining the key terms "new silk road", "one belt, one road", and "OBOR" and their concordance lines can indicate each newspaper's reporting focus and evaluation of the policy, and consequently the construction of China's image.

The results of the instance numbers of the three terms for the Initiative that occur in *CD* and *FT* are listed in Table 2. The Initiative has a higher visibility in the corpus of *CD* (285 instances) than in the corpus of *FT* (143 instances).

Table 2: Number of instances of "new silk road", "one belt, one road", or "OBOR" in the corpora

	"new silk road"	"one belt, one road"	"OBOR"	Total
CD	59	173	53	**285**
FT	54	70	19	**143**

Further analysis was conducted of the top 20 co-occurring verbs, nouns, and adjectives with the three key terms ("new silk road", "OBOR", and "one belt, one road"). The concordance lists and frequency of each classification scheme was confirmed with the aid of two-word concgrams.

From the classification schemes of the Initiative, we can observe more commonalities than differences in the representation of the three key terms in *CD* and *FT*. Both corpora relate the Initiative to nouns such as "initiative", "vision", "strategy", "programme", "policy", "plan", "role", "opportunity", and so forth. Both corpora also use adjectives, such as "ambitious" and "huge", and verbs such as "build", "expand", and "construct", though with varying degrees of frequency, to describe the entities and activities involved in the Initiative. This demonstrates that both *CD* and *FT* share similar perceptions of the

nature of the Initiative, namely, it is a grand mission that requires sustained efforts and devotion and that may generate great gain in the long run.

However, it should be noted that among these top 20 co-occurring words related to the topic of the Initiative, "co-build" and "connect" are present in the *CD* corpus but are absent in the *FT* corpus, whereas "push" is present in the *FT* corpus but absent in the *CD* corpus. This again indicates that while China is enthusiastically promoting its image as an international cooperator, aiming at mutual benefits and relations with its neighbouring countries, the British perceive China as being aggressive.

COLLOCATION LIST OF "CHINA" AND "ROLE"

To triangulate our understanding of the media representation of China, a collocation list of two-word concgrams of "China" and "role" was also generated. The two-word concgram has generated many instances with meaningful associations, portraying varied images of China presented by *CD* and *FT*. Following are some illustrations from the *CD* corpus, with emphasis added:

> Through projects including a $40 billion (37 billion euros) Silk Road Fund, and the $100 billion AIIB now taking shape, he says ***China's role** is to take the lead and convince the world it will work.* "China will also show the world how it can work by carrying out pilot projects." ("No blind curves on Silk Road routes." May 29, 2015)

> The RMB Internationalization Report said *that **China's** increasing **role** in world trade has helped the yuan to become a more prominent global currency*. ("One Belt, One Road could help lift yuan globally." October 9, 2015)

> Vincent Carre, Renault SA's sales and marketing director of its electric cars department, said *collaboration with **China** plays an essential **role** in terms of exploring the green commuting market.* ("China, France in historic nexus." June 19, 2015)

> Moreover, **China** has played a leading **role** in other regional financial *organizations such as the East Asian Foreign Exchange Reserve Pool, the BRICS Development Bank, the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Development Bank.* ("Change in use of forex reserves takes shape." April 24, 2015)

> Clearly other actors, whether it is countries or international institutions, are not going to sign up to a new vision of order where they are going to be disadvantaged compared to the present scenario. Therefore, *if **China** is taking a leadership **role** in this, it has to think very carefully and very strategically about how it can bring that about*. ("Belt, Road built on reciprocity." May 8, 2015)

> "Although ... the world's largest gold producer and consumer, **China** has *never played a major role in the global gold fixing*," the Wall Street Journal quoted Yu Sun, BOC's UK general manager, as saying. ("Bank of China: A bridge among businesses." September 28, 2015)

> Xi's ongoing visit to Southeast Asia strikes a strong note in **China**'s peripheral diplomacy, which has always had an *important **role*** in **China**'s interaction with the outside world. ("Neighborhood visits to share friendship fruits." November 6, 2015)

> Working with Thailand, **China**, which built the 1,776 km Grand Canal 1,300 years ago, obviously *has a key **role** to play in the realization of a new trade nexus* but it would be in the interests of both countries to remain open to other sources of investment and expertise. ("Grand canal is a vision of the future." August 24, 2015)

> The "One Belt, One Road" strategy is divided into two components—Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. *Both routes played a prominent **role** in **China**'s ancient communication with Eurasian countries*. ("'Belt and Road' is way forward." July 28, 2015)

> Fan said many are concerned about the **role** of **China**'s state-owned enterprises. "*The SOEs do play an important **role** in the Chinese economy. However, we have a lot of private enterprises*." ("'Belt-Road' to exchange goodwill with trade." April 21, 2015)

From the collocation lists generated from the *CD* corpus, we can observe that all the roles China was reported as playing are positive, including being "key", "important", "leading", "crucial", "active", "big", "special", "prominent", "due", "major", or "essential" roles. Primarily, the leading role China is portrayed as playing here is in matters related to the global economy.

However, more mixed images related to China and its role are portrayed in the *FT* corpus. In *FT* reports, on the one hand, China is sometimes represented in the role of "donor", as "constructive" to financial matters in the related regions; on the other hand, images of China as a force of "wealth and power domination", as a "militant obstructive force", and as a "geopolitical threat" are also present. This is clear from the following examples, which show China being portrayed as a fearsome partner to Russia and the perception of China's goals and activities in terms of global economic gain and expansion as revealing China's long-term geopolitical strategy (emphasis added):

> In it, the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to existing international financial institutions and pledged to "further strengthen the World Bank" as well as regional banks in Asia, Africa and Latin America. "*China intends to meaningfully increase its **role** as a donor in all these institutions*," the joint statement said. ("White House declares truce with China over AIIB." September 27, 2015)

> Beijing has a point when it says that things cannot stay the same. Its strongest argument is also the simplest: the world has changed. The range and complexity of **China**'s economic and security interests have multiplied. Like other great powers, *it must assume a **role** in policing the global commons*. ("China must learn how to be a great power." November 6, 2015)

> As **the country**'s economic interests expand abroad, *its massive security apparatus and military will probably be pulled into a greater regional **role***. **China** has no foreign military bases and steadfastly insists that it does not interfere in the domestic politics of any country. But a draft antiterrorism law for the first time legalises the posting of Chinese soldiers on foreign soil, with the consent of the host nation. ("China's Great Game: Road to a new empire." October 12, 2015)

> Grass roots resistance presents a formidable obstacle to all of Myanmar's planned SEZs. There is *growing public opposition to the perceived domineering **role** of **China** and other foreign governments in SEZ megaprojects and to the land acquisition processes that typically accompany them*. ("China and Myanmar's SEZs: Strategic partnership or can of worms?" January 21, 2016)

Such a broad agglomeration of aims has made *the goal of winning a global **role** for **China's** currency revealing of Beijing's long-term geopolitical strategy.* In the words of Michael Power, strategist for Investec Asset Management, Beijing hopes to spur the "transformation of Shanghai into one of the principal fountainheads of global capital". ("China renminbi goal needs open markets." July 29, 2015)

"With the US adjusting its role in Afghanistan, ***China** will play a larger constructive **role** in the region, mostly in safeguarding social and political stability*," said Fu Xiaoqiang of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations. ("Xi visit tests Beijing's regional economic strategy; Pakistan: Strengthening ties." April 21, 2015)

CRCC said financing for its rail project had not been finalised but last week state media reported that ***China's** central bank would use the country's foreign exchange reserves to inject $62bn in fresh capital into the country's non-commercial "policy banks", which are expected to play a key **role** in supporting the New Silk Road initiative.* ("China rail group signs $5.5bn in Africa deals." April 28, 2015)

Moscow is already uncomfortable in the **role** of *junior partner* in the Sino-Russian relationship. With good reason it *is nervous about **China's** move into the former Soviet Republics*. ("Now China starts to make the rules." May 29, 2015)

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the perception and representation of China's international activities by the Chinese media itself in contrast to the perception and representation of these activities by other countries, such as the UK. It was found that positive values and attitudes are fully expressed in the *CD* reports. In reporting on the Initiative and its related activities, China's official media (*CD*) enthusiastically continued to portray China as a peace-loving nation and an international cooperator. These two images converge with what Wang (2003) found as the images the Chinese government had tried to project between 1958 and 2002 (during the Mao and post-Mao period). Nonetheless, in emphasising the mutual benefits of international collaboration and national development in the sphere of economic activities, a new image of China has also emerged and been represented in *CD*: China as a great global responsible power.

In contrast, while Britain chose to join the Initiative by China and shared a similar perception of the nature of the Initiative in terms of mutual economic engagement and benefits, their perception and representation of China have been doubtful and uncertain, as also pointed out by Cao (2014). We can observe that, on the one hand, China is portrayed as having a significant impact on the global economy, but, on the other hand, images of China as aggressive, as an authoritarian state, as a militant obstructive force, and as a geopolitical threat prevail in reports on the Initiative by *FT*. In fact, such images of China have been found not only in the news reports of Britain-based *FT* but also in reports reflecting US public opinion (see Wang 2003).

Sociologists and psychologists have long noticed that people do not treat all incoming information equally. People will much more readily accept information that is consistent with their existing perceptions than information that contradicts their perceptions. Furthermore, while it is easy to maintain an old negative image or to construct a new negative image, it is extremely difficult to build a new positive image (see Wang 2003, 61). Apparently, a great deal more work and effort are required in order for China to develop a new image as a great global responsible power. Efforts to build a locally grounded but globally minded media practice (see Jiang 2017; Wu and Ng 2011) must continue and develop sustainably, together with China's renewed efforts to underline the power of culture in national development and international politics.

This paper has taken only a modest step towards understanding China's image building via its news reporting of the Initiative and the discrepancies between China's projected image and British perceptions of China. A great deal more remains to be done. The evidence collected in this study is indirect and limited to the description, interpretation, and explanation of reports by *CD* and *FT*. Future studies could collect larger samples of data and examine how other countries, such as China's neighbouring countries and regions, perceive and represent China in their media. Furthermore, ethnographical research with interviews and case studies should be encouraged in order to unearth more direct evidence of image perception and projection and to study how image formation interacts with other factors.

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