

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Resistance to Climate Change in China's English-Language News Media

Yating Yu^a, Mark Nartey^b, and Jieyu Chen^{c*}

^aUniversity of Macau; ^bUniversity of the West of England; ^cSouth China Agricultural University

ABSTRACT

Climate change has become a global issue, but no study has examined the discursive construction of resistance to climate change as part of crisis response in the media. To fill this gap, this study employs Wodak's discourse-historical approach to examine 82 news articles collected from China's English-language news media. The analysis reveals three themes used in the construction of a discourse of resistance to climate change: (1) climate change as a global enemy, (2) China as a leading climate change fighter, and (3) other nations as China's allies in the fight. These themes are articulated in the news stories using discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, and mitigation. The article sheds light on the language state-run news media uses to project China's image abroad and encourage international collaboration and action in the fight against climate change. It also illustrates how discourse analysis can illuminate the geopolitical and sociocultural dimensions of climate change.

KEYWORDS

China's English-language news media; climate change; discourse-historical approach; discourse of resistance; China

Introduction

Although most scientists agree on the existence of climate change, it remains a controversial issue. Climate change deniers dismiss the arguments made for climate change prevention and believe that it is a normal process that humankind can do nothing to change (Leiserowitz, 2007). As a sharp increase in extreme weather conditions and natural disasters in recent years signalled the acceleration of climate change, however, opinions have gradually converged, and in December 2016, governments and scientists declared a climate emergency (Ripple et al., 2019).

* CONTACT Jieyu Chen jieyuchen@scau.edu.cn

In the global fight against climate change, China has likewise displayed a shifting attitude. As a developing country that relies heavily on fossil fuels and coal, China emits a large amount of carbon dioxide each year. In 2006, China surpassed the United States (US) as the top emitter of carbon dioxide, the main contributor to global warming (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2010). Climate change was given little attention in China for years because the government was prioritising economic development. Despite signing the Kyoto Protocol in 1998, China insisted that environmental protection should not come at the expense of the economy (Yu, 2008). Additionally, during the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009, China refused to accept a mandatory target for emission reductions (Hollingsworth, 2017).

China's attitude towards climate change shifted owing to the increasingly adverse impacts of climate change. Under domestic and international pressure, the Chinese government decided to shift away from a carbon-intensive economy to a more sustainable model. The year 2015 marked a significant change in China's climate attitude, evidenced by the country's attendance at the opening ceremony of the Paris Climate Agreement on 30 November 2015. At the meeting, Chinese President, Xi Jinping, expressed China's commitment to addressing the challenge of climate change by hitting peak carbon emissions before 2030 and reducing the carbon intensity of the economy by 60 to 65 per cent relative to 2005 levels (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015). In the same year, China's energy-related carbon emissions dropped for the first time by 0.1 per cent (BP, 2020).

China's role became more prominent when the US ceded its leadership in the global fight against climate change. On 4 November 2019, US President Donald Trump officially announced that the US had pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, which provided China with a chance to step up as the global leader in combating climate change (Cohen, 2019; Liu & Huang, 2022). Since then, China has tried to take the lead on climate change mitigation. In September 2020, Xi Jinping made a bold pledge at the 75th Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly that China would peak in carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 (Harvey, 2020). This pledge was lauded by environmentalists as its attainment could help to slow down global warming drastically (Myers, 2020). Although some doubts arose over China's ability to fill the gap created by the US (Haas, 2017; Wong, 2017), there was an opportunity for China to play an important role in the world's fight against climate change and its transition towards a sustainable future.

As climate change has become increasingly recognised as an urgent issue in China, a body of communication research has emerged that studies language use in China's climate discourses. For instance, Han et al. (2017) investigated Chinese media reports on climate change from 2005 to 2015 and observed that frame usages are associated with the information sources. Xie (2015) compared how American and English-language Chinese newspapers reported on climate change. The study found that the American and Chinese newspapers diverged in their framing of climate change due to

their respective social realities, such as their cultural values, economic development, and political systems. The study also found some convergence in the framing of climate change between the American and Chinese newspapers, such as the increasing use of the responsibility frame over time. Wang (2020) looked at the climate change reports of a popular Chinese newspaper in China and recommended to the newspaper that they diversify their news reports for the Chinese public. The study by Su and Hu (2021) shed light on how media in China and the US report climate change and what political factors might have led to national differences.

A number of other studies in the fields of sociology and environmental science investigated how climate change is communicated or reported in China on social media and in other publications from various perspectives: social network analysis (Liu & Zhao, 2017; Yang & Stoddart, 2021), information and content analysis (Liu & Zhao, 2017; Zhang & Skoric, 2020), and ethnographic research (Geall, 2018). There are, however, very few studies on the role of language in climate discourses, and those that do exist, such as Liu's (2015) sociological study of the climate discourse in Chinese-language publications in China, have mostly employed frame analysis to examine climate discourses (Goffman, 1986). The process of framing involves defining and constructing a public controversy or political problem through a communication source, such as a news organisation (Nelson et al., 1997). In addition, the focus of most of the studies is on Chinese-language (news) reports or speeches. The Chinese English-language news media has a different target readership (i.e., an international audience), leading to a different discursive approach to building China's national image.

Against this backdrop, the current study analyses the news reports on climate change produced between 30 November 2015 and 26 November 2020 in the Chinese English-language news media, the messenger of the Chinese government, to illustrate how China formulates a discourse of resistance, which Zhang (2015, 365) describes as language use 'in a media story in which the nation actively resists the constructed invader'. In this article the 'discourse of resistance' is also construed to include any form of language aimed at opposing a phenomenon that a group of people consider detrimental to their well-being and welfare. It entails a fight or a struggle to overcome, eliminate, or prevent an undesirable state of affairs (Nartey, 2020b). The existing literature suggests that the discursive construction of resistance can be realised amid different crises, such as health-related and socio-political crises. For instance, using critical discourse analysis (CDA), Yu (2022b) finds that as part of China's response to the global health crisis, the state-run news media created a discourse of resistance to resist foreign hostility towards China. From a CDA standpoint, Nartey (2020b) and Mwinlaaru and Nartey (2022) also note that metaphors and membership categorisation are essential strategies in the construction of resistance in socio-political texts. Despite the insights adduced in the studies reviewed above, no study has examined the discursive construction of resistance to climate change as part of crisis response. Examining the notion of resistance in climate change discourse will not only extend existing work on climate change communication but also hold implications for

international collaboration and action in the fight against climate change, issues of international relations, and national image building. In this article, we consider climate change an ‘invader’ of a sort and argue that the language used in the Chinese English-language news reports constitutes a form of resistance discourse to highlight China’s fight against climate change. This is because such language indicates how a social group withstands the action or effect of a phenomenon that they consider undesirable.

Data

China’s English-language news reports on climate change produced between 30 November 2015 and 26 November 2020 were collected from the online archive Factiva. These dates were selected because the former was the date when China attended the opening ceremony of the Paris climate summit, a milestone event, and the latter was the date when we collected the data for analysis.¹ In 2015, President Xi gave a speech about ‘a community with a shared future of mankind’ and claimed that climate change was one of the global challenges encountered by ‘all humankind’ (Xi, 2015). After the 19th Party Congress in 2017, the concept of ‘ecological civilisation’ was officially adopted as one of the supporting principles of China’s development vision (Teng & Wang, 2021). In 2019, China’s global climate leadership became more prominent as President Trump formally announced the US’s exit from the Paris Agreement (Cohen, 2019). The search format used to retrieve the data was ‘climate change OR global warming’. To build a suitable dataset that could be used to address the research objective, the initial data retrieved was manually screened by examining the title, the lede and sometimes the entire article. Consequently, articles that mentioned ‘climate change’ and/or ‘global warming’ in passing but whose main content did not focus on climate change were not selected. That is, the inclusion or exclusion of an article was based on relevance and the article’s explicit discussion of climate change as its main subject. News reports that only referenced climate change or mentioned it briefly while discussing other issues were not selected. Based on the manual screening process, a total of 82 news articles was collected for the analysis.

The news media from which these articles were collected include *China Daily*, *Global Times*, *People’s Daily Online*, and *Xinhua News Agency*, because they are the only English-language news media ‘controlled’ by the Chinese government at the national level and represent its political stance as a homogenous group (Guo & Huang, 2002). All of the news reports are written in English by journalists who are trained to adopt ‘a pseudo-Western content style’, and the target readers are international English speakers and educated Chinese citizens (Guo & Huang, 2002). Hence, the Chinese English-language news media is an important communication platform for the Chinese government to convey its geopolitical messages to the world (Guo & Huang, 2002). By analysing the news reports collected from the Chinese English-language news media, this study gives an indication of the Chinese government’s stance on the dispute over climate change.

Analytical Framework

This article draws on insights from critical discourse analysis (CDA), an approach to critical social research that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1988; 2006). CDA thus considers ‘discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality’ (van Leeuwen, 1996). The analysis performed in the present study focuses on the discursive strategies used to construct resistance in the news reports while exploring the micro and macro structures that inform the news reports.

As there are different approaches to CDA, this study employs the discourse-historical approach (DHA), which delineates how social reality is represented in discourse and how social actors deploy discursive strategies to achieve various aims (Wodak, 2001; 2015). This approach is chosen given its emphasis on both text and text-external or extra-textual factors, which enable us to interpret the reports on climate change in the Chinese English-language news media within the sociocultural context that embeds their mediation. That is, by accounting for micro-level linguistic features and macro-level socio-historical factors, this article offers a detailed analysis of how resistance to climate change is framed in the Chinese English-language news media.

A key assumption of the DHA is that discourse is invariably linked to an ‘object’ in the past or present. Hence, it ‘attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive events are embedded’ (Wodak, 2015, 3). Additionally, it explicates the role of situational context and non-linguistic social variables in decoding the (implicit) ideologies embedded in texts. The DHA has three main levels of analysis: identifying ‘the specific content or topic(s) of a specific discourse’, investigating ‘discursive strategies’, and exploring ‘linguistic means’ (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, 93). Hence, in our analysis, we first identified key motifs (e.g., climate change as a global enemy), after which we examined the discourse strategies (e.g., nomination and predication) used to formulate these motifs as well as the linguistic resources (e.g., metaphors and phraseology) used to realise these strategies.

The Identification of discursive strategies is an essential aspect of the DHA. These strategies can be defined as a set of practices that enable social actors to accomplish their communicative and ideological goals. In the analysis of discourses, these strategies must be examined because they are systematic ways of using language (even when their usage is unintentional) that give an indication of the overt and covert intents of language users. In our analysis, we utilised four main discursive strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Wodak, 2015): nomination (how individuals, objects, and situations are named), predication (the activities, attributes, and traits ascribed to individuals), argumentation (the argumentative structures used by individuals), and mitigation (how ideas, views, and evaluations are de-emphasised). An important feature of the argumentation strategy is the notion of *topos*, which refers to argumentative schemes

used to legitimise and/or validate propositions. The topos/topoi can be linguistically realised in discourse via causal or conditional constructions. The relevant topoi used in this study are the topos of comparison and numbers. The four main discursive strategies used in this article can be linguistically realised by various mechanisms, especially membership categorisation devices and metaphors (Nartey, 2020a). A metaphor is ‘a word or phrase that causes semantic tension’, and a conceptual metaphor categorises similar metaphors into groups to settle the semantic tension (Charteris-Black, 2004). During the metaphor identification process, METALUDE (Metaphor at Lingnan University Department of English), an online archive that provides the metaphorical and literal meanings of a search term and its analogy, was employed.² Membership categorisation, on the other hand, is a device used to make sense of other people and their actions (Sacks, 1992).

Findings and Discussion

The analysis revealed three themes used in the Chinese English-language media to construct a discourse of resistance to climate change: (1) climate change as a global enemy, (2) China as a leading climate change fighter, and (3) other nations as China’s allies in the fight. They were formulated by discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, and mitigation, and highlight how language can be deployed for ideological purposes.

Climate change as a global enemy

The Chinese English-language news media construct climate change as a global enemy of humankind, achieving a personification effect and stressing the urgent need for action in the fight against climate change. President Xi gave a speech at Boao Forum for Asia in 2015, claiming that climate change is an international challenge faced by ‘all humankind’, and the solution lies in building ‘a community with a shared future of mankind’ (Xi, 2015). ‘Community with a shared future’ has been a dominant concept in China’s diplomacy since Xi Jinping assumed office in 2012 (Zhang, 2018). This philosophy holds that each country is responsible for promoting and improving global governance. According to METALUDE, comparing climate change to the global enemy indicates the conceptual metaphor ACTIVITY IS FIGHTING and serves as a nomination strategy to categorise the phenomenon of climate change (Wodak, 2015).³ By constructing climate change as a global enemy, the news media formulate a war-time rhetoric that serves the function of creating a battleline against an adversary and conceptualising climate change as responsible for a global war. For instance, metaphors such as ‘battle’, ‘fight’, ‘win’, ‘struggle’, ‘triumph’, and ‘combating’ are used to refer to human activities in tackling climate change (Examples 1, 2, 5, and 6). This finding concurs with previous studies, which indicate that the WAR metaphor is used primarily to advance a pro-climate change argument and highlight the urgency and necessity of tackling climate change (Asplund, 2011; Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017; Cohen, 2011). Other expressions such as ‘the biggest threat’ also function as a nomination and

intensification strategy to highlight the danger of climate change and heighten human emotional intensity (Example 3). The importance of human activities in tackling climate change is amplified by phrases such as ‘the benefits and welfare of all humankind’ and ‘the importance of urgent and concrete action’. These expressions can be analysed as a rhetorical strategy that foregrounds the common interests of humankind and promotes international collaboration (Examples 1 and 2). By categorising climate change as the global enemy of humankind, the news media attack it as a missile target and create a sense of solidarity among the international community (Bhatia, 2008), implying collectivism. The various WAR metaphors and the projection of climate change as an ‘enemy’ thus underscore the need for global/national actions aimed at tackling climate change issues, thereby justifying the discourse of resistance constructed against climate change. Since climate change is non-human, the global enemy construction becomes useful in motivating action against a tangible adversary and constructing a homogenous identity for people who then see themselves in a hostile relationship with their global enemy.

- (1) Dealing with climate change is associated with the benefits and welfare of all humankind. It is a tough battle that needs all countries to fight ‘joint-handedly’ to win (*People’s Daily Online*, 1 December 2015).
- (2) For Luis Alfonso de Alba, the special envoy for the United Nations Climate Action Summit, nothing outdoes the importance of urgent and concrete action in the struggle with climate change (*Xinhua News Agency*, 27 August 2019).
- (3) Climate change is probably the biggest threat facing humanity today (*Global Times*, 4 September 2019).
- (4) The United Nations (U.N.) said on Tuesday that the leaders of small island developing states, senior government officials and experts will meet next week to affirm the global trade policy’s role in fighting the climate crisis (*Xinhua News Agency*, 3 September 2019).

As already indicated, knowledge about historical sources and background information is essential in DHA; hence there is the need to contextualise the use of the term ‘climate crisis’, which is a rather controversial expression (Example 4). According to Yoder (2019), in 2018, only 50 out of 1,400 of national television news media (3.5 per cent) used the words ‘crisis’ or ‘emergency’ to refer to climate change. Public Citizen, an environmental advocacy group, wrote a letter to major American news media demanding that they use the phrase ‘climate crisis’ instead of ‘climate change’ or ‘global warming’ to evoke a stronger emotional response from the public. Although this term might help create a sense of urgency, it can also be counter-productive since it can lead to alarmist outpourings and a backlash effect (Hodder & Martin, 2009). This two-fold effect of the use of ‘crisis’ further strengthens the resistance discourse evident in the news articles because it instrumentalises climate change as a dangerous threat to ‘us’ (the world) while constructing human beings as the suffering masses and

vulnerable victims. Such framing encourages vehement resistance to the actions that cause climate change to nullify this threat.

In the face of the danger posed by climate change, leaders and senior officials of 196 state parties negotiated and approved the Paris Agreement at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference. Again, such contextual information is essential and is emphasised within DHA. To highlight the importance of the Paris Agreement, the news media quote several world leaders, including Ban Ki-moon, who compared this agreement to ‘a monumental triumph’ in the global war against climate change and encouraged the international community to ‘stay united’ in the fight (Example 5). By stating the institutional affiliation (United Nations), title (Secretary-General), and full name (Ban Ki-moon), the news article emphasises the credibility and authority of Ban Ki-moon (Example 5) as one of the key proponents of climate change prevention. Expressions such as ‘monumental triumph’ and ‘we must stay united’ reinforce the view that the battleline between humanity and climate change has been drawn and humankind is on course to win. Hence, there is a need for humans to close ranks and form a solid phalanx to take decisive action against climate change (in this case, the implementation of the Paris Agreement).

- (5) World leaders and senior officials have made positive comments to applaud the global pact to fight climate change adopted by nearly 200 nations at the 21st U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP21) [which] closed in Paris on Saturday. The following are major comments on the pact from some world leaders and senior officials: ‘History will remember this day.’ ‘The Paris Agreement on climate change is a monumental triumph for people and planet.’ ‘Now we must stay united ... and bring the same spirit to the crucial test of implementation,’ – U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (*Xinhua News Agency*, 13 December 2015).
- (6) China is now more willing to put forward new ideas in the global climate debate, which has been welcomed by many countries and regions. Such ideas include combating climate change with the ultimate aim of forging a community with a shared future for mankind and promoting ecological civilization. They also include protecting developing countries’ right to development, ensuring their contribution to mitigating climate change is based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and giving climate justice the importance it deserves (*China Daily*, 24 September 2019).

China also advocates combating the global enemy of humankind – climate change (Qi & Wu, 2013). The news media highlight that one of the rationales for fighting against climate change is to build ‘a community with a shared future for mankind’ (Example 6), which echoes the new concept in China’s diplomacy – ‘Community with a shared

future' (Zhang, 2018) – that calls for shared responsibility from each country in dealing with international challenges. By highlighting this diplomatic concept, the Chinese English-language news media can be viewed as an important communication channel for the Chinese government in sculpting a positive identity for international readers via the promotion of the principles of collectivism.

The news stories furthermore foreground a crucial idea upheld by the Chinese government, which advocates that different countries should adhere to the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) (Example 6). This principle was enshrined in the 1992 UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) treaty but has remained controversial. The controversy lies in the different responsibilities that rich and poor countries have to assume in combating climate change (Carbon Brief, 2015). The original UN climate treaty divided countries into 'Annex I' and 'non-Annex I' in reference to developed and developing countries respectively. 'Annex I' countries are expected to take greater responsibility than 'non-Annex I' countries for tackling climate change. Recently, many developed countries have rejected this principle and emphasised that the dichotomy between developed and developing countries is no longer a credible way to define different responsibilities (Carbon Brief, 2015; Wang et al., 2022). Since the 1990s, many of the world's poor countries have developed significantly in terms of both economy and emissions, and China is a case in point. Consequently, nations at Durban COP in 2011 proposed to negotiate a new agreement that would be 'applicable to all' (Carbon Brief, 2021). As a leading developing country by gross domestic product, however, China regards the CBDR principle as the premise for participating in any international climate negotiations. In 2018, Xie Zhenhua, China's Special Representative on Climate Change Affairs, reiterated the CBDR principle in implementing the Paris Agreement and argued that some developed countries had failed to keep their promises to offer financial and technical support for climate change initiatives (Jie, 2018). This article argues that China's adherence to the CBDR principle is strategic as it offers China the chance to combine economic development and climate mitigation. Adhering to this principle can also be an effective mechanism in rallying other developing countries in the fight against climate change.

China as a leading climate change fighter

Before the Trump administration withdrew from the Paris Agreement, the US was categorised by the news articles as a leader alongside China in the fight against climate change, serving as a nomination strategy and achieving a personification effect. The conceptual metaphor underlying this comparison is A COUNTRY IS A LEADER/GENERAL. For instance, the news articles use a nomination strategy to describe the U.S. with phrases such as 'a global leader', and they use expressions such as 'a key role' in qualifying its actions, realising a predication strategy (Examples 7 to 8). When Donald Trump took office in 2017, however, his administration withdrew from the Paris Agreement to fulfil its campaign promise of protecting the fossil fuel

industries in the US. Example 8 uses ‘the United States’ as a subject for the actions of both playing a key role in adopting the Paris Climate Pact and withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. These two actions were taken by two different American presidents – Barack Obama and Donald Trump – but by drawing a simplistic link between the two contradictory actions of ‘the United States’, the news article highlights the US’s inconsistent climate policy. Actions such as ‘not making efforts to resolve a non-partisan global issue’ are assigned to Trump, serving as a predication strategy, and implying that he dedicated himself to partisan issues and politics rather than contributing to the fight against climate change, which is a nobler act given its ramifications for all humankind (Example 7). Similarly, actions such as ‘withdrawn from the agreement’ and ‘doesn’t have to fulfil its global climate commitments’, as well as attributes such as ‘being the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases’, are assigned to the US. This assignation also functions as a predication strategy that negatively evaluates the actions of the US (Example 8). The lexical choices used to refer to the Trump administration can be analysed as a membership categorisation mechanism used to classify it as an out-group that is opposed to climate change mitigation and consequently to the sustainability of societies and the welfare of the world.

- (7) Trump, as president-elect, cannot afford to dent the U.S.’s status as a global leader by not making efforts to resolve a non-partisan global issue (*China Daily*, 22 November 2016).
- (8) China has made the decision because fighting climate change is the common responsibility of humankind and, by doing so, it will promote sustainable development and help build a community with a shared future for mankind. Unfortunately, the United States, which along with China played a key role in the adoption of the Paris climate pact, has withdrawn from the agreement so that it does not have to fulfil its global climate commitments despite being the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases (*China Daily*, 5 November 2020).

Although the Trump administration decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, China continues to play a key role in combating climate change. China’s intentions to play a critical role in climate change mitigation can be traced back to 2014, when President Obama and President Xi made a historic US–China Joint Announcement on Climate Change (White House, 2014). The US’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement gave China a good opportunity to transition into a global leader in combating climate change (Cohen, 2019). China’s key role in the battle against climate change is amplified by the news media in our data. Phrases such as ‘leading role as climate fighter’, ‘leadership role’, and ‘a strong leader’ are used to describe China. Such phraseology functions as a nomination strategy aimed at reinforcing China’s contribution to the fight against climate change and hence enhancing the country’s image to the international community (Examples 9, 10, and 11). Also, actions such as ‘promote sustainable

development', 'help build a community with a shared future for mankind', 'fill the void that the United States is leaving', and 'move this process forward' are attributed to China. This serves as a predication strategy that further strengthens the desirable image constructed for China. It can thus be inferred from the lexicalisation above that China belongs to an in-group that receives a positive presentation owing to the country's stance against climate change. We contend that the different reactions of China and the US to climate change highlighted by the media distinguish an in-group from an out-group. This foregrounds the positive image of China as a country genuinely interested in the sustainability of societies and the welfare of the world via membership categorisation, thereby forming a topos of comparison (Sacks, 1992; Wodak et al., 2009). To strengthen the 'us' (China) vs 'them' (US) dichotomy, the news media quote Pulgar-Vidal, former Peruvian environment minister, who implicitly compares China with the US. It can be deduced from his quote that negatively evaluated ideologies such as 'denialism' and 'polarization' are indirectly attributed to the US, and are used to assert that some politicians in the US deny the reality of climate change to shirk their responsibilities and resort to binary political and partisan ideologies.

- (9) This is a global race, as all of us are affected by climate change and the worsening environment. Many countries have risen to the challenge, with China's leadership role being vital to the struggle (*China Daily*, 10 February 2017).
- (10) Pulgar-Vidal, former Peruvian environment minister, said China's commitment sends a strong message and could fill the void that the United States is leaving by withdrawing from the 2015 Paris Agreement, the landmark deal to cut emissions of planet-warming gases. 'We are in a time in which unfortunately there is some kind of denialism and some kind of polarization in the political debate, so we need to have China as a strong leader to move this process forward. That's why the message of the Chinese president is really important,' he said (*Xinhua News Agency*, 29 September 2020).

While the news stories highlight China's contribution as a leading climate fighter, they also downplay China's pollution and dependence on coal. The news media use phrases such as 'lags far behind the large array of developed countries' as a mitigation strategy to highlight China's low per capita emission rate compared with developed countries. According to DataBank (2020), China was the 51st-largest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in the world in 2016. In reference to this statistic, the phrase 'hyped up' is used to suggest that the image of China as 'the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter' has been exaggerated and is therefore misleading (Example 11). Conversely, the articles highlight the view that the country's policymakers have acted to transform the mode of China's economic growth from a black energy (coal-fired power) economy to a green energy (clean and renewable energy) economy. One concrete piece of evidence of China's willingness to lead the climate fight is its investment in renewable energy (Cohen, 2019). Sales of new energy vehicles (NEVs) in China started in 2011

and grew so rapidly that the stock of NEVs in China is the world's largest (He & Jin, 2021). The news articles praise China's green economy and underscore the point that China is the world's biggest producer of renewable energy and green technologies. For instance, Example 12 uses statistical evidence such as 'more than 4 million', '50 percent of the world's total', 'more than 25 million', '80 million', and 'more than 160 million' to highlight China's strong production of new energy vehicles via the topos of numbers. Although China has contributed significantly to the production of renewable energy and green technologies, it is worth noting that its renewable energy only provides 26 per cent of its energy consumption and it still relies heavily on coal power plants to provide most of the remainder (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2022). This information is not, however, mentioned in the news article.

- (11) Leading role as climate fighter: China's status as one of the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters has always been hyped up despite its low per-capita emission rate which lags far behind the large array of developed countries. However, the environmental woes and necessities to transform the country's economic growth mode increasingly prompt its policy makers to make efforts to address the issue of climate change (*Xinhua News Agency*, 14 December 2015).
- (12) China is also developing new-energy vehicles. It already has more than 4 million new-energy automobiles, accounting for more than 50 percent of the world's total. And it expects to have more than 25 million new-energy vehicles by 2025, 80 million by 2030, and more than 160 million by 2035 (*China Daily*, 5 November 2020).

Interestingly, important information about China's motivation for combating climate change (i.e., domestic and international pressure) is absent from the news stories. This information can, however, be extrapolated from historical sources and available background information as recommended within DHA. Several studies have indicated that China has intensified its efforts to tackle climate change due to domestic and international pressure (Geng et al., 2012; Tambo et al., 2016; Zhang, 2016). Domestically, China has witnessed serious air pollution and environmental damage in the process of urbanisation and industrialisation (Jiang et al., 2013; Tambo et al., 2016). Consequently, the Chinese government faced growing public dissatisfaction with its insufficient measures to protect citizens' health (Tambo et al., 2016). Under this pressure, the Chinese government had to initiate policies to address environmental issues and strengthen regulations on pollution (Geng et al., 2012). Internationally, a gap has emerged between China's ambition to combat climate change and the expectations of the international community (Li, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Domestic and international challenges made China's leaders realise the significance of transforming the conventional development path of a developing economy and placing environmental issues higher on the agenda (Zhang, 2016). Yet none of the four newspapers in our dataset mentioned these issues when they elaborated on China's motivation for fighting climate change. The absence of this information can be attributed to concerns about

undermining the position ascribed to China as a climate change warrior, hence casting doubt on its leadership role. This illustrates how the mass media function ideologically in the messages they accentuate or attenuate.

Other nations as China's allies in the fight

In the discursive construction of action against climate change, the news media portray China and other nations of the world as allies, serving as a nomination strategy and achieving a personification effect. The conceptual metaphor underlying this comparison is NATIONS ARE ALLIES. For instance, the news media quote French President, Emmanuel Macron, who described China as an 'ally' of France in the global war against climate change (Example 13). By quoting Emmanuel Macron, the news media, acting as a communication platform for the Chinese government, reaffirm the bond between France and China in tackling climate change. France is indeed one of China's allies in the fight against climate change. After the 2017 UN Climate Change Conference, France and China committed to enhancing their collaboration with the aim of taking concrete steps to realise 'the full, effective and timely implementation of the Paris Agreement' (United Nations Climate Change, 2018). Following the US's announcement that it would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, Emmanuel Macron and Xi Jinping issued a joint statement reaffirming their support for the Agreement (Reuters, 2019). If we situate our analysis in the contextual information provided above as advocated within DHA, the inference that can be made from the news reports is that climate change is a global fight that requires massive input and a comprehensive solution. Hence, global leadership is demonstrated in the ability to rally other countries and/or recruit support for a common cause as the media suggest China has done/is doing. China's distrust of Western countries regarding climate change mitigation can be observed in Liu's (2015) investigation of Chinese publications. This observation does not necessarily conflict with our finding of China's rallying different countries in global climate combat because Liu's (2015) study focused on publications before 2015, which was before China flagged a shift in its climate attitude.

- (13) French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday called China an 'ally' of France in the fight against climate change. 'From the signing of the Paris Agreement to the confirmation of her involvement, it is a radically new and profoundly structuring choice that has been made by our Chinese ally on this subject,' Macron said in a speech to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year at the French presidency (*Xinhua News Agency*, 16 February 2018).

The news reports also portray people in the US who support the fight against climate change and the Paris Agreement as China's allies. For instance, former California Governor, Jerry Brown, is depicted as China's ally (Example 14). The collaboration between California and China can be regarded as an instance of fighting for a common future regardless of borders. When Donald Trump expressed his intention to withdraw

the US from the Paris Climate Accord in 2017, California indicated that it would partner with China on a range of climate efforts to fill the gap left by the US (Martina, 2017). Two years later, Jerry Brown launched the California–China Climate Institute along with Xie Zhenhua, China’s Special Representative for Climate Change Affairs (Berkeley California–China Climate Institute, n.d.). The institute has been tasked with conducting research on environmental issues ranging from zero-emission vehicles to agricultural techniques.

(14) In response to the federal government’s retreat, philanthropic organizations and local authorities in the U.S. have stood up and voiced their continuing support for the agreement, with Michael Bloomberg committing up to \$15 million to support the operations of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change Executive Secretariat in June. At the same time, California Governor Jerry Brown is looking to foreign **allies** [emphasis added by authors], including China, to cooperatively tackle climate change (*People’s Daily Online*, 9 June 2017).

(15) The retreat from those organizations and agreements demonstrates the U.S. is not a trustworthy partner and allows the world to observe U.S. unilateralism and its arbitrary, irresponsible, and hegemonic image. Although the Trump administration has filed paperwork to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, the majority of U.S. society share a different opinion on the issue of climate change. A 2018 survey by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that 77 per cent of Americans believed the U.S. should remain in the Paris Agreement, including 60 per cent of Republicans. Among registered voters, 66 per cent said they opposed Trump’s decision to pull out of the Paris deal (*Global Times*, 12 November 2019).

The American allies who support the fight against climate change are referred to using positive phrases such as ‘stood up and voiced their continuing support for the agreement’, ‘support the operations of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Executive Secretariat’, and ‘cooperatively tackle climate change’ (Example 14). This serves as a predication strategy intended to reiterate their commitment to a noble cause. To highlight the large number of American allies who support the fight against climate change and are against the US’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the news media use the topos of numbers realised by statistical evidence in surveys such as ‘77 per cent of Americans’, ‘60 per cent of Republicans’, and ‘66 per cent’ (Example 15). Positively evaluated phrases such as ‘believed the U.S. should remain in the Paris Agreement’ and ‘opposed Trump’s decision to pull out of the Paris deal’ are also assigned to these US citizens (Example 15). To lend credibility to the percentages mentioned, ‘the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication’ is referenced. Although the total number of people who participated in the survey is not stated and hence one is unable to ascertain the survey’s impact, it is nonetheless used as an

exemplification mechanism to buttress the point that in China's attempt to address climate change issues it considers global support and an international alliance to be crucial.

- (16) While showing China's resolve to address the challenge, Xi's speech also displayed the wisdom of reaching an agreement with the 'win-win' mentality. 'For global issues like climate change, a take-more-give-less approach based on expediency is in nobody's interest,' Xi said, calling on all countries, the developed ones in particular, to assume more shared responsibilities for win-win results. Observers said Xi's proposal of rejecting the narrow-minded 'zero sum game' mentality and creating a future of win-win cooperation with each country making a contribution to the best of its ability provided inspiration to reaching a major global climate agreement (*Xinhua News Agency*, 11 December 2015).
- (17) 'We will, in a spirit of win-win cooperation, contribute and share, with other countries, our experience and technology, and provide Chinese nuclear energy solutions accordingly,' he added (*Xinhua News Agency*, 8 October 2019).

To echo the assertion that China and other nations are allies in the fight against climate change, the news articles amplify Xi Jinping's message on 'win-win cooperation' while denouncing the 'take-more-give-less approach' and 'narrow-minded 'zero-sum game' mentality' (Examples 16 and 17). Win-win cooperation is viewed as entrenched in Chinese culture and is consistent with the concept of mutual benefit (Chen, 2017). China's win-win strategy can be traced back to 2002 when the 16th CPC Central Committee initiated the implementation of the win-win strategy of opening up (Chen, 2017). In 2014, the win-win concept was brought to the fore as China put forward a new type of international relations characterised by win-win cooperation (Chen, 2017). Phrases such as 'to the best of its ability' reiterate the point that the nations of the world should adhere to the principle of CBDR in the fight against climate change and aim to build a community with a shared future for humankind (Example 16). Moreover, phrases such as 'contribute and share with other countries' and 'provide Chinese nuclear energy solutions' highlight China's caring attitude (Example 17). The net effect of all of the above is that the value of cooperation and international collaboration is given prominence in the discourse of resistance to climate change and, more importantly, China is cast in the mould of a selfless country leading the way in forging such alliances.

Conclusion

Drawing on Wodak's (2001) DHA, this study has examined the discursive construction of resistance to climate change in the Chinese English-language news media. The analysis reveals that the discourse of resistance constructed in the news media centres

on three themes: (1) climate change as a global enemy, (2) China as a leading climate change fighter, and (3) other nations as China's allies in the fight. These themes are articulated in the news stories via discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, and mitigation. They are inextricably linked to the wider discursive and geopolitical contexts and highlight how language can be deployed for ideological purposes.

Discursive practice plays an important role in shaping the discourse of resistance associated with climate change. In China, all of the media are controlled by the Chinese government through censorship, ownership, and licence requirements (Guo & Huang, 2002). Hence, they are an important communication channel for the Chinese government to convey its geopolitical messages to the international community. Given that China has received harsh criticism of its climate policy, the Chinese English-language news media's construction of climate change as a global enemy of humankind helps to underline the significance of cooperation among nations and the urgent need for action in the fight against climate change among the international community. This discursive construction can also be viewed as a diplomatic strategy to cast China in a positive light, thereby shifting global attention from China as the top emitter of carbon dioxide to its global efforts as a leading climate fighter and reliable ally.

The wider geopolitical context is another important element that shapes the discourse of resistance associated with climate change. The Chinese government's initiatives in tackling climate change, as highlighted by the Chinese English-language news media, are linked to its proposed model of global governance (building a community with a shared future for humankind) characterised by common interests, collectivism, and a win-win cooperative effort (Yu, 2022a). The Chinese government's proposed model contrasts with the traditional nation-state governance of Western capitalist nations that is characterised by self-interest, individualism, and zero-sum games (Zhang, 2018). The adverse impacts of climate change in recent years have triggered the alarm and motivated world leaders to take it seriously instead of only focusing on national economic growth. In contrast to the US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement due to concerns for economic growth, the Chinese English-language news media convey the idea that the Chinese government prioritises climate change issues. The article thus argues that climate change offers Beijing an opportunity to demonstrate the legitimacy and effectiveness of its global governance and leadership role.

As stated at the outset of the study, no study in the climate change literature has examined the discursive construction of resistance as part of crisis response in the media. Hence, this study extends this scholarship by demonstrating the value of critical discourse analysis in this field of inquiry. It also throws more light on the important role of language/discourse in climate change communication and illustrates how discourse analysis can illuminate the geopolitical and sociocultural dimensions of the climate change issue. Further, the insights derived from this study are valuable in

highlighting the role of the state-run news media in enhancing China's image and encouraging international collaboration and action in the fight against climate change.

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Notes

- ¹ Factiva can be accessed at <https://professional.dowjones.com/factiva/>.
- ² METALUDE is accessible at www.ln.edu.hk/lle/cwd/project01/web/introduction.html.
- ³ Conceptual metaphors are capitalised following the practice of conceptual metaphor theory.