A Comparative Study on Media Image Construction of Overseas Chinese Students in China and Western Media

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Abstract: *With the growing number of Chinese students studying abroad, their media representation has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Drawing on Appraisal Theory, this study examines how Western and Chinese media construct the image of overseas Chinese students through evaluative discourse. Based on a self-constructed corpus of 40 news reports published between 2012 and 2022 in major Chinese and Western newspapers, the study analyzes attitude resources, affect, judgement, and appreciation, using UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 and a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. The findings reveal clear cross-media differences. Western media employ attitude resources more frequently, with a stronger tendency toward appreciation and negative, explicitly inscribed judgement, often framing overseas Chinese students in relation to vulnerability, abnormality, or moral suspicion. By contrast, Chinese media rely more heavily on positive and implicitly invoked judgement, particularly capacity and tenacity, constructing an image of overseas Chinese students as competent, diligent, and socially valuable. This study demonstrates how evaluative resources function as key linguistic mechanisms in shaping divergent media images and contributes to corpus-based cross-cultural media discourse research.*

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; Attitude Resources; Image of Chinese students; Western media.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing trend of overseas study among Chinese students has resulted in a substantial growth in their numbers, attracting sustained attention from both China and international media. According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), China was among the largest source countries of outbound internationally mobile tertiary students in 2023 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2025). Industry and media reporting further corroborates this trend, noting that more than 1.02 million Chinese tertiary students were studying abroad in 2021 and that China remained a leading source country through the 2022-23 academic year.

With the rapid development of China's economy and its growing global influence, Chinese students studying abroad have become increasingly visible in Western societies, leading to intensified media coverage of this group. In the era of mass media, people access vast amounts of information through various outlets. However, due to differences in ideological orientation, cultural background, and journalistic conventions, media outlets may present divergent portrayals of the same group, issue, or event. As an important component of China's national image, the portrayal of overseas Chinese students has implications that extend beyond individual experiences to broader international perceptions. News media, as a key channel of international communication, play a crucial role in shaping such perceptions through evaluative discourse. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how Chinese international students (also referred to as overseas Chinese students) are represented in media reports.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1978) in the late twentieth century, conceptualizes language as performing three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Among these, the interpersonal metafunction concerns how language enacts social relations by expressing attitudes, evaluations, and emotions. Although the interpersonal metafunction provides important insights into evaluative meaning, its analytical scope remains relatively limited. Appraisal Theory, as an extension of SFL, offers a more systematic framework for analyzing evaluation in discourse. It consists of three subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation. This study primarily adopts the attitude subsystem—which includes affect, judgement, and appreciation—as the theoretical framework for corpus analysis.

Due to historical and socio-political factors, China's integration into the global community has occurred relatively recently. Although the number of Chinese students studying abroad has increased dramatically over the past decade, academic research on this group, particularly from a media discourse perspective, remains limited both

domestically and internationally. In recent years, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, overseas Chinese students have become one of the most visible and vulnerable groups abroad. Media reports on this group often reflect differing national attitudes and ideological positions. Given that media discourse constitutes an important source for image construction studies, and that the image of overseas Chinese students forms a significant part of China's national image, investigating media attitudes toward this group and their underlying discursive motivations is of considerable academic significance.

This study aims to examine how Western media (specifically American and British) and domestic media report on Chinese international students. It analyzes a total of 40 news reports published between 2012 and 2022, including 20 reports from Western media outlets (*The Washington Post and The Times*) and 20 reports from Chinese media platforms (*China Daily* and *Global Times*). The study focuses on the distribution and characteristics of attitude resources employed in these reports and explores how evaluative discourse contributes to the construction of media images of Chinese international students. By examining attitude resources in media discourse, this study addresses the following three research questions:

a) What is the overall distribution of attitude resources in Chinese and Western media reports on overseas Chinese students?

b) What similarities and differences exist in the distribution of attitude resources between Chinese and Western media?

c) What images of overseas Chinese students are constructed by Chinese and Western media?

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MEDIA IMAGE

Media image is commonly understood in two senses. One refers to the image presented by the media or communication platform itself, often termed the "media image of the communicator" (Fairclough, 1995). The other concerns the public image of individuals or social groups as constructed through media discourse, namely the "media image of the communicated." The concept of "image" generally refers to people's impressions and evaluations formed about a subject in social interaction, and these impressions are often strategically constructed through self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1997). Whether referring to individuals or objects, image construction is essentially a cognitive and social process shaped by human perception, interpretation and discursive practices (Hall, 1997). On this basis, the concept of "media image" emerges as an important analytical category in media studies.

Research on media image has a long academic tradition. In the 1920s, Lippmann introduced the concept of the "pseudo-environment," highlighting how mass media construct symbolic realities that shape public perception. In the 1960s, "media image" gradually became an established academic concept. McGuire (1986) viewed media playing a mediating role in social relations although early media research mainly focused on describing media functions and phenomena rather than fully explaining their underlying mechanisms or effects (McQuail, 2010). Later, Gitlin (1980) elaborated on the ideological functions of media image in *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, while Hall (1997) further explored the implicit meanings embedded in media discourse, laying the foundation for subsequent discourse-oriented studies on media representation and ideological signification. Such perspectives are also central to studies of news language (Bell, 1991).

Chinese research on media image has developed extensively. Zhang (2022) examined the construction of female images in the Olympic Games by analyzing structural changes in female power in modern sports discourse. Fan and Li (2024) conducted a bibliometric study on elderly communication research, showing that media images of older adults are influenced by both traditional portrayals and emerging digital media dynamics. Zhao and Xia (2025) investigated news titles about older adults on a Chinese video-sharing platform, revealing that negative frames attracted more attention but reinforced stereotypes.

In recent years, increasing attention has also been paid to marginalized groups. Ellis and Goggin (2015) analyzed the media image of people with disabilities as a "vulnerable group," aiming to raise public awareness, showing that disability is often framed through narratives of vulnerability and social dependency. Liang, Wang, and Zhang (2024) examined news reports on left-behind children, finding that media discourse often constructs these children in ways that emphasize vulnerability and social dependency, framing them as subjects in need of care from both

government and society.

Compared with domestic research, international studies on overseas Chinese students remain relatively limited. Existing research primarily adopts questionnaire surveys or interviews to investigate perceptions of Chinese students, which may involve subjective bias. Some studies have identified challenges faced by overseas Chinese students in cross-cultural communication. For instance, Ruble and Zhang (2013) found that Western students and teachers often hold stereotypes portraying Chinese students as introverted and socially passive. Bi et al. (2023) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, overseas Chinese students experienced heightened psychological distress, which was significantly associated with everyday discrimination.

Nevertheless, research concerning learning abilities and cognitive styles presents a more positive picture. Heng (2018), based on questionnaires and interviews, challenged stereotypical views of Chinese students as rote learners, demonstrating their adaptability and effective learning strategies. Similarly, Mathias, Bruce, and Newton (2013) found that Chinese overseas students tend to be reflective learners with strong independent thinking abilities. These studies suggest that non-academic motivations, such as enhancing personal competitiveness and contributing to China's international development, also play an important role in students' decisions to study abroad.

Overall, research on the image of overseas Chinese students remains relatively limited, particularly from a media discourse perspective. Existing studies focus on students' lived experiences or identity negotiation, frequently drawing on qualitative and self-reported data. Although research findings present a mixed image—both positive and negative—there is a lack of systematic analysis of how media discourse constructs such images. Moreover, relatively few studies adopt linguistic or discourse-analytical approaches to examine media representations of overseas Chinese students. Overseas Chinese students have occasionally been portrayed in media and public discourse as vulnerable individuals, potential threats, or academically underprepared learners. (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Xie, 2023)

Given China's increasing global influence, the growing number of students studying abroad, and the heightened visibility of this group in international media—especially in the post-pandemic context—overseas Chinese students have become one of the most visible and vulnerable groups abroad. However, empirical research on their media image, particularly comparative studies between Chinese and Western media, remains limited. This gap highlights the necessity of the present study, which seeks to examine the media image of overseas Chinese students through a corpus-based discourse analysis framework.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research data were collected from two Western media outlets, *The Washington Post* and *The Times*, and two Chinese media platforms, *China Daily* and *Global Times*. A total of 40 news reports published between 2012 and 2022 were selected, with 20 reports drawn from Western media and 20 from Chinese media. The selected reports cover a range of topics, including academic performance, social life, cultural adaptation, and interactions with local communities in host countries. The sampling process aimed to ensure that the corpus reflects diverse aspects of overseas Chinese students' experiences as well as the breadth of media coverage concerning this group.

This study adopts Appraisal Theory as its analytical framework, with particular attention to the attitude subsystem, which comprises affect, judgement, and appreciation. The attitude subsystem enables a systematic examination of evaluative meanings expressed in media discourse and is therefore well suited for analyzing the construction of media images. Data analysis was conducted using the UAM Corpus Tool (version 3.3). All selected news reports were imported into the software and manually annotated according to the criteria of Appraisal Theory. Attitude resources were identified and classified based on their lexical and grammatical realizations. Specifically, expressions of emotional states such as "happy," "sad," and "excited" were coded as affect resources; evaluations of behavior and morality, including terms such as "honest," "dishonest," and "responsible," were categorized as judgement resources; and evaluations of social value or quality, such as "valuable," "useful," and "important," were classified as appreciation resources.

Following the annotation process, the UAM Corpus Tool was used to calculate the frequency and proportional distribution of each type of attitude resource within individual reports and across the entire corpus. To examine differences between Western and Chinese media, comparative frequency analysis was conducted to determine whether the distributions of attitude resources differed significantly across the two media groups. The results were presented in tables and figures, supplemented with representative examples from the original news texts. This

analytical procedure enables a systematic and comparative examination of how overseas Chinese students are evaluated in Western and Chinese media discourse, thereby revealing similarities and differences in their constructed media images.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

Within the framework of Appraisal Theory, attitudinal meanings in discourse are realized through specific lexical choices and grammatical structures. As Martin and Rose (2003) point out, "Appraisal Theory is about evaluation, i.e., the various attitudes negotiated in the discourse, the intensity of the appreciation involved and the various ways of indicating value and allying with readers." According to this framework, attitude resources are classified into three subsystems: affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect refers to the emotional evaluation of entities, processes, or states, such as feelings of happiness, dissatisfaction, safety, or insecurity. Judgement evaluates human behavior from an ethical or social perspective, including assessments of normality, capacity, tenacity, propriety, and veracity. Appreciation evaluates things, processes, or states in terms of aesthetic qualities or social value, including reaction, composition, and social valuation (Martin & Rose, 2003). All three subsystems are widely attested in the corpus, indicating that attitudinal resources are extensively employed in media reports on overseas Chinese students.

The overall distribution of attitude resources was generated using UAM Corpus Tool 3.3. For clarity, the results are presented in the following tables.

Table 1: Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources Employed by Western Media Reports

Feature		Number	Percent
Total Units		557	100.00%
Attitude-Type	Affect	149	26.75%
	Judgement	192	34.47%
	Appreciation	214	38.42%
Attitude-Polarity	Negative	344	61.76%
	Positive	207	31.16%
	Ambiguity	4	0.72%
Explicitness	Inscribed	460	82.59%
	Invoked	97	17.41%

Table 2: Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources Employed by Chinese Media Reports

Feature		Number	Percent
Total Units		438	100.00%
Attitude-Type	Affect	78	17.81%
	Judgement	205	46.80%
	Appreciation	151	34.74%
Attitude-Polarity	Negative	171	43.15%
	Positive	249	53.88%
	Ambiguity	13	2.97%
Explicitness	Inscribed	340	77.63%
	Invoked	98	22.37%

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, both similarities and notable differences can be observed in the use of attitude resources between Western and Chinese media. In terms of overall frequency, Western media employ a larger number of attitude resources than Chinese media, with 557 instances compared to 438. This suggests that Western media tend to adopt a more evaluative stance when reporting on overseas Chinese students.

With regard to attitude type, appreciation is the most frequently used category in Western media reports, accounting for 38.42% of all attitude resources, while affect is the least frequently used. The prevalence of appreciation resources indicates that Western media place greater emphasis on evaluating social values, environments, and broader contexts related to overseas Chinese students. Judgement resources also constitute a substantial proportion, reflecting a focus on assessing the behavior and capacities of individuals. By relying more

heavily on judgement and appreciation, Western media appear to construct evaluations through social norms and value judgments rather than overt emotional expression, thereby maintaining an appearance of objectivity. However, these evaluative resources are often employed in a critical manner. Rather than highlighting the achievements or contributions of overseas Chinese students themselves, Western media reports frequently associate these students with criticisms of Chinese society, ideology, or social systems. This tendency is further reflected in the polarity distribution, where negative attitude resources account for over 60% of the total. In addition, a high proportion of inscribed attitudes (82.59%) suggests that Western media tend to express evaluations in an explicit and direct manner, which may be related to journalistic conventions and ideological orientations in Western media discourse.

In contrast, Chinese media display a different pattern in their use of attitude resources. Judgement is the most prominent subsystem, accounting for 46.80% of the total, indicating a strong focus on evaluating overseas Chinese students in terms of their behavior, abilities, and moral qualities. This preference reflects an emphasis on rational and fact-based evaluation. Affect resources are used least frequently, comprising only 17.81% of the total. Mainstream Chinese outlets such as *China Daily* and *Global Times* tend to avoid excessive emotional expression, as affective language may introduce subjectivity into news reporting.

In terms of attitude polarity, positive resources dominate Chinese media reports, accounting for more than half of all attitude expressions. This indicates that Chinese media generally construct a positive image of overseas Chinese students, emphasizing their competence, perseverance, and contributions to society or the nation. Nevertheless, the proportion of negative resources remains considerable, and the gap between positive and negative evaluations is not as wide as might be expected. This suggests that Chinese media do not rely solely on affirmative discourse, but instead attempt to balance evaluation by incorporating critical or neutral assessments where appropriate. Regarding explicitness, although inscribed attitudes remain dominant, invoked attitudes account for a higher proportion in Chinese media than in Western media. This pattern reflects a relatively implicit evaluative style, which is consistent with the rhetorical and cultural tendencies of Chinese media discourse, where evaluations are often conveyed indirectly through contextual cues rather than overt statements.

4.2 Comparative Analysis of Attitude Resources Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

4.2.1 Comparative Analysis of Affect system Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

As the subsystem concerned with emotional responses to actions, processes, and phenomena, affect constitutes the core component of attitudinal meaning. According to Martin and White (2005), affect primarily targets participants, including individuals, social groups, and institutions. Consequently, the affect subsystem focuses mainly on human emotional states and subjective feelings as represented in discourse.

Table 3: Overall Distribution of Affect Resources Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

		Western Media		Chinese Media	
Total Units		Number N=149	Percent P=26.75%	Number N=78	Percent P=17.81%
Affect	Un/Happiness	18	3.32%	12	2.74%
	Dis/Satisfaction	32	5.75%	9	2.05%
	In/Security	57	10.23%	17	3.88%
	Dis/Inclination	42	7.54%	39	8.90%

As shown in Table 3, Western media employ a greater number of affect resources than Chinese media, accounting for 26.75% and 17.81% of total attitude resources respectively. This difference indicates that Western media place comparatively more emphasis on the emotional states and psychological experiences of overseas Chinese students. However, a closer examination of the affect categories reveals that a substantial proportion of affect resources in Western media are negative in nature. In particular, resources related to insecurity and dissatisfaction are prominent, with frequent use of expressions such as scared, _isolated_, and worried. These expressions depict overseas Chinese students as experiencing anxiety, vulnerability, or difficulty adapting to life abroad.

By contrast, Chinese media employ affect resources more selectively and with a different evaluative orientation. Although the overall frequency of affect resources is lower, the category of inclination accounts for a relatively

high proportion. These affect resources often reflect students' aspirations, motivations, and future-oriented intentions, such as returning to China, contributing to national development, or striving for academic excellence. As a result, affect in Chinese media tends to be associated with purposeful action rather than emotional distress.

Example 1: In particular, he said some students feel isolated, and others sometimes act out against their host parents. (*The Washington Post*, 2016-7-6)

In this example, the adjective isolated is used to describe the emotional state of Chinese students, suggesting difficulties in social integration and adaptation to the host environment. The report foregrounds the students' emotional experience but does not provide contextual explanations for this feeling, such as institutional support, cultural barriers, or individual circumstances. Consequently, affect is presented as an isolated emotional condition, which may reinforce a generalized image of overseas Chinese students as socially insecure or maladjusted.

Example 2: "I'm *hoping to* get a great grade and go back to my country and become a university lecturer because I think there is a lot of work to do in the field of education in my country, and this is the thing I'm *excited about* it." She said. (*China Daily*, 2012-06-20)

In contrast, this example from Chinese media not only conveys the student's emotional inclination (excited) but also explicitly explains the reasons underlying this emotion. The report links affective expression with concrete goals and social responsibility, thereby situating personal emotion within a broader narrative of contribution and self-improvement. Through such representation, Chinese media construct an image of overseas Chinese students as motivated, diligent, and patriotic individuals whose emotional states are closely tied to purposeful behavior.

Overall, the comparative analysis of the affect subsystem suggests that Western media tend to highlight negative emotional experiences of overseas Chinese students, often without sufficient contextualization, whereas Chinese media emphasize affective inclination connected to aspiration and agency. This contrast reflects different evaluative orientations in media discourse and contributes to the construction of divergent media images of overseas Chinese students in Western and Chinese reporting.

4.2.2 Comparative Analysis of Judgement system Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

Within Appraisal Theory, the judgement subsystem evaluates human behavior in relation to social norms, ethical standards, and moral expectations. According to Martin and White (2005), judgement resources are typically classified as either positive or negative, depending on whether the evaluated behavior is socially approved or disapproved. Judgement belongs to the ethical domain of evaluation and reflects how individuals' actions are assessed in terms of morality and social acceptability. This subsystem can be further divided into two categories: social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem focuses on evaluations of normality, capacity, and tenacity, whereas social sanction concerns assessments of propriety and veracity.

Table 4: Overall Distribution of Judgement Resources Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

		Western Media		Chinese Media	
Total Units		Number N=192	Percentage P=34.47%	Number N=205	Percentage P=46.80%
	Normality	50	8.98%	54	12.33 %
	Capacity	44	7.90%	80	18.26 %
Judgement	Tenacity	33	5.92%	26	5.94 %
	Propriety	44	7.90 %	43	9.82 %
	Veracity	21	3.77%	2	0.46%

As shown in Table 4, Chinese media employ judgement resources more frequently than Western media, accounting for 46.80% and 34.47% of the total attitude resources respectively. This indicates that Chinese media place greater emphasis on evaluating overseas Chinese students' behavior, abilities, and moral qualities. Despite this difference in frequency, both Western and Chinese media show a similar structural preference within the judgement subsystem: social esteem resources constitute the largest proportion, suggesting that evaluations of personal qualities are prioritized over moral condemnation in both media contexts.

Among the social esteem categories, capacity is particularly salient in Chinese media, accounting for 18.26% of

all judgement resources. This pattern reflects Chinese media's tendency to highlight overseas Chinese students' academic competence, professional skills, and potential contributions to society. Through such evaluations, Chinese media construct an image of overseas Chinese students as capable, talented, and socially valuable individuals. By contrast, Western media place relatively greater emphasis on normality, often focusing on whether overseas Chinese students' behavior conforms to social expectations in host societies. Some of these evaluations are realized through invoked judgement, indirectly portraying Chinese students as vulnerable, marginalised, or socially constrained.

Although both Western and Chinese media make relatively limited use of veracity resources, Western media employ this category more frequently, and predominantly in a negative manner. Such evaluations often raise doubts about honesty or integrity, thereby contributing to a more critical portrayal of overseas Chinese students' moral character.

Example 3: Huang said many *outstanding* Chinese students have *professional dedication, bravery of innovation, outstanding academic achievement* to carry forward socialist core values. (*China Daily*, 2013-9-28)

This example illustrates the use of positive judgement resources in Chinese media, particularly in terms of capacity and tenacity. Overseas Chinese students are represented as highly competent and socially responsible, with their abilities framed as contributing to national development and social progress.

Example 4: But when asking about Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) they *are utterly oblivious of* anything. (*Global Times*, 2018-3-26)

In this instance, Chinese media employ invoked judgement to acknowledge certain shortcomings among overseas Chinese students, specifically a lack of familiarity with Chinese history or culture. Rather than explicitly condemning the students, the report subtly signals a deficiency in cultural knowledge, thereby maintaining a relatively balanced evaluative stance.

Example 5: They have been acting as *a remote-controlled pawns* of the Chinese government. (*The Times*, 2015-8-21)

This example demonstrates explicit negative judgement in Western media. The metaphor remote-controlled pawns directly challenges the normality and autonomy of overseas Chinese students, portraying them as lacking independence and agency. Although the judgement appears to target students' behavior, it simultaneously conveys a broader ideological critique of the Chinese political system, thereby extending the negative evaluation beyond individuals to the national context.

Example 6: On SAT day, the firms have people sit for the test at Asian sites in time zones several hours ahead China, memorize the first few items, then them take a *"bathroom break"*, from which they call or text information to their superiors. (Global Times, 2015-7-8）

Through the use of quotation marks and contextual framing, this report invokes negative judgement related to veracity, implying dishonest behavior without making a direct accusation. Such indirect evaluative strategies contribute to the construction of an image of overseas Chinese students as lacking integrity, while allowing the media to maintain a degree of deniability.

Overall, the comparative analysis of judgement resources reveals that Chinese media primarily construct overseas Chinese students as competent and socially valuable, while allowing limited space for implicit self-critique. In contrast, Western media tend to emphasize issues of normality and veracity, frequently associating overseas Chinese students with moral suspicion or ideological concerns. These divergent evaluative patterns play a significant role in shaping contrasting media images of overseas Chinese students across different media contexts.

4.2.3 Comparative Analysis of Appreciation system Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

The appreciation subsystem is primarily concerned with the evaluation of processes, objects, and states rather than human behavior. However, as noted by Martin and White (2005), human participants may also be evaluated through appreciation when the assessment does not directly target moral responsibility or behavioral correctness.

Appreciation is commonly divided into three subcategories: reaction, which concerns emotional impact and quality; composition, which evaluates balance and complexity; and social valuation, which assesses the social usefulness, worth, or significance of an entity.

Table 5: Overall Distribution of Appreciation Resources Employed by Western Media Reports and Chinese Media Reports

		Western Media		Chinese Media	
Total Units		Number N=214	Percentage P=38.42%	Number N=151	Percentage P=34.74%
Appreciation	Reaction	70	12.57 %	56	12.79 %
	Composition	47	8.44 %	19	4.34 %
	Social-Valuation	97	17.41 %	76	17.35 %

As shown in Table 5, appreciation resources are frequently employed in both Western and Chinese media reports. Western media make slightly greater use of appreciation resources overall, accounting for 38.42% of all attitude resources, compared with 34.74% in Chinese media. This indicates that Western media tend to extend evaluation beyond individual actors to include broader processes, environments, and social contexts associated with overseas Chinese students.

At the level of subcategories, both Western and Chinese media display similar distributional patterns. Social valuation constitutes the largest proportion of appreciation resources in both corpora, while composition is the least frequently used category. However, a notable difference lies in the proportion of composition resources, which is substantially higher in Western media than in Chinese media. This suggests that Western media are more inclined to evaluate the internal structure, coherence, or systemic relationships of objects or phenomena related to overseas Chinese students, rather than focusing solely on outcomes or social significance.

Example 7: It is *promising* that China will further establish a *sound* system and *favourable* policies for the returnees, including visa, residence, medical care, insurance and housing. (*China Daily*, 2015-5-4)

In this example, promising functions as a reaction resource, expressing optimism and positive expectation. Meanwhile, sound and favourable serve as composition resources, implicitly emphasizing the completeness and rationality of the policy framework. Through such evaluations, Chinese media highlight the institutional support provided for overseas Chinese students, constructing an image of these students as valued and encouraged by their home country.

Example 8: This award-winning high-tech team dedicated to Transport, a smart app for passengers, and *great contribution to* the society. This team has seen an *increasing influence* in US higher institutions, which also reveals China *growing national strength*. (*China Daily*, 2017-4-9)

This example illustrates the use of social valuation resources to emphasize the contributions of overseas Chinese students. Their achievements are framed not only in terms of academic or technological innovation but also as indicators of broader social and national significance. Through such discourse, Chinese media link individual success with collective progress, reinforcing a positive and socially valuable image of overseas Chinese students.

Example 9: At Columbia, half of nearly 12000 international students are from China. This is *all very good* for student variety and universities' coffers. But it's also *worrying* for the American government for I thinks Chinese students and agents are responsible for great deal of intellectual-property theft. (*The Washington Post*, 2020-3-28)

In this example, Western media employ appreciation resources to acknowledge certain instrumental benefits brought by Chinese students, such as increasing student diversity and financial income. However, these positive valuations remain superficial and are quickly offset by negative social valuation, which associates Chinese students with intellectual property theft. As a result, their presence is framed as economically useful yet politically or socially problematic.

Example 10: The director of FBI believes that the scrutiny of Mainland Chinese students provides a valuable *counterweight* to academic "naivety". (*The Washington Post*, 2020-3-28)

Here, counterweight functions as a composition-related appreciation resource, evaluating surveillance as a

necessary structural balance within the academic system. This evaluation implicitly constructs overseas Chinese students as a potential risk requiring regulation. Rather than highlighting their academic contributions, the report frames them as a factor that disrupts institutional equilibrium, thereby reinforcing a negative and securitized media image.

Overall, the comparative analysis of appreciation resources demonstrates that Chinese media tend to emphasize the positive social value and institutional support associated with overseas Chinese students, while Western media adopt a more ambivalent evaluative stance. Although certain benefits are acknowledged, appreciation in Western media frequently shifts toward systemic concern and risk management. These contrasting patterns contribute to divergent constructions of the media image of overseas Chinese students, with Chinese media foregrounding value and contribution, and Western media highlighting structural tension and perceived threat.

5. CONCLUSION

Grounded in Appraisal Theory, this study investigated news reports on overseas Chinese students published between 2012 and 2022 in two Western media outlets (*The Washington Post* and *The Times*) and two Chinese media platforms (*China Daily* and *Global Times*). By examining the distributional patterns and functional characteristics of attitude resources, the study offers a systematic account of how media discourse constructs the image of overseas Chinese students across different cultural and ideological contexts.

In response to the first research question, the findings reveal clear cross-media differences in the overall deployment of attitude resources. Western media employ a higher frequency of evaluative language, with a marked preference for appreciation resources that are frequently associated with negative assessments. By contrast, Chinese media rely more heavily on judgement resources and display a greater proportion of positive and implicitly invoked evaluations. These divergent patterns suggest distinct evaluative strategies in media reporting, which may be attributed to differences in journalistic conventions, communicative purposes, and underlying ideological orientations.

Addressing the second research question, the comparative analysis indicates that although both Western and Chinese media prioritize social esteem within the judgement subsystem, their evaluative emphases differ substantially. Western media tend to foreground negative affective states such as insecurity and anxiety, often framing overseas Chinese students as vulnerable or struggling with social adaptation in host societies. In contrast, Chinese media place greater emphasis on affective inclination related to aspiration and agency, highlighting students' academic motivation, professional ambition, and willingness to contribute to social and national development.

With regard to the third research question, the study demonstrates that Western media predominantly construct a critical media image of overseas Chinese students by emphasizing abnormality, vulnerability, and moral suspicion. Such evaluations are frequently embedded within broader ideological or political narratives, thereby extending individual representations to the level of national or systemic concern. Conversely, Chinese media generally present a more affirmative image, portraying overseas Chinese students as capable, diligent, and socially valuable individuals, while allowing limited space for implicit self-reflection or moderated critique.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how evaluative language functions in the media representation of overseas Chinese students and underscores the explanatory power of Appraisal Theory in media discourse analysis. By revealing how attitude resources shape divergent media images, the research offers insights into the discursive construction of group and national identities. Future research may extend the corpus to include a wider range of media outlets or longer time spans, and further explore how contextual factors such as geopolitical relations and patterns of international mobility influence media representations of international students.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.

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