

# Comparative Analysis of Attitude Resources in Chinese and American News Reports on 2020 China's Two Sessions from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

Lulu Wang<sup>1, a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of South China, Hengyang, Hunan, 421200, China

<sup>a</sup>Email: Wanglulu1202@163.com

## Abstract

Today the world is undergoing great changes unprecedented in a century, and the international situation is becoming increasingly complex. As the world's largest developing country, China's political events are of significance to global development. In the context of the normalization of epidemic prevention and control, the 2020 National People's Congress was held successfully, attracting worldwide attention. However, few scholars in China have studied the news reports of the two sessions. Therefore, this paper puts its base on attitude system in Appraisal Theory and analyzes the quantity and distribution features in ten news reports from China Daily and CNN. It also explores the differences between Chinese and American mainstream media in shaping China's national image and the ideology hidden behind the political news discourse. Setting foot on current China-US relations, this paper is of great significance in providing a new perspective for western media on China's political news and advancing the development of China-US relations in the post-epidemic era.

## Keywords

Appraisal theory; Attitude resources; China's two sessions in 2020; News reports; U.S.-China relations.

## 1. Introduction

2020 is an extraordinary year in the process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which is not only the closing year of the 13th Five-Year Plan, but also the decisive year for building a well-off society and achieving poverty eradication goal. In the face of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Third Session of the 13th National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China and the Third Session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference were held successfully in 2020 at a special historical point, which drew the attention of media at home and abroad. The mainstream media in China, represented by China Daily, and the mainstream media in the United States, represented by Cable News Network, have provided extensive coverage of China's Two Sessions of 2020.

News report is to report objective facts for the purpose of conveying information to a certain group, and its most essential characteristics are authenticity and timeliness. Today, there are few studies on China's Two Sessions both in China and abroad, and almost no scholars have ever analyzed news reports of the Two Sessions from the perspective of linguistics. Therefore, under the framework of systematic functional linguistics, this paper focuses on the attitude system in appraisal theory and adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze the characteristics of the distribution of attitude resources in the news reports of China Daily and CNN about the Two Sessions of 2020.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Appraisal Theory(AT) was first proposed by Martin, White and their associates for the study of interpersonal function of Systemic Functional Grammar. Appraisal theory is a further development of interpersonal function, and is concerned with “the attitudes negotiated in discourse, the intensity of the emotions involved, and the ways in which surface values are allied to readers” (Martin, J.R. & D. Rose. 2003). AT mainly studies how the speaker expresses his own subjective attitude, emphasizes the rhetorical choice of language resources, and constructs a large and sophisticated system to study how the user gives the language value to its object and forms his or her own opinions on a specific discourse. AT consists of three subsystems, namely attitude, engagement and graduation, among which attitude system is the core(Wang Zhenhua, 2001), and the focus of this paper is the subsystems of attitude which includes affect, judgement and appreciation. Up to now, AT has been widely applied into many discourse analysis, such as ads, movies and novels. In China, Li Zhanzi writes a paper to summarize the relevant studies of AT. She mainly exemplifies its application in the process of discourse analysis.

Attitude refers to the psychological impact on human behavior, text/process, and phenomenon of the ruling and appreciation. Attitude is all about evaluating things, people, character and the way of their feelings. Attitude resources can be further divided into affect, judgment, and appreciation. According to Martin and White, attitude always involves the man’s positive or negative feelings. Affect is divided into three situations, namely, quality, process and commentary. The emotional performance of evaluation attitude may be positive or negative, direct/indirect expression or explicit/implicit implication. In short, the deep intentions behind the speaker’s statements are a good expression of his true feelings and positions. According to psychologists, affect is a concept not only about linguistic or communicative, but also includes emotions, moods, drives, and motivations. Judgement deals with attitude towards behavior that we admire or criticize, praise or condemn. There are two categories in judgement subsystem: social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem refers to the possibility of lower or raise the evaluation in the esteem of the community while social sanction can be judged in accordance with rules or regulations in a specific culture. Appreciation is about analyzing a discourse from the level of its interpersonal meaning. It refers to describing the emotional impact of discourse on the reader/listener/viewer, and evaluating them on the basis of impact or quality of a product or process. Appreciation can be seen as thing-oriented. It is related to the value that is under the heading of aesthetics.

## 3. Data Collection and Analysis

China Daily and CNN are influential media in the global news industry and largely represent the attitudes and tendencies of the mainstream media in China and the United States. Therefore, in order to ensure that the statistics are as accurate as possible, this paper determines the scope of the corpus search as the above two media.

This paper sets its time period of news report selection from May 14th, 2020 to May 28, 2020, and uses the Gale Greenr database software to search for reports related to the key words “2020 China sessions” and “2020 Two Sessions”, and finally collected 5 news reports in China Daily and 5 news reports in CNN, and used the UAM Corpus Tool to mark the attitude words in the selected reports.

### 3.1. Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources

**Table 1.** Total Attitude Resource Statistics

	China Daily		CNN	
Affect	41	21.35%	46	27.71%
Judgement	87	45.31%	79	47.59%
Appreciation	64	33.33%	41	24.69%
Total	192		166	
Polarity				
Positive	171	89.06%	53	31.92%
Negative	21	10.93%	113	68.07%

From the above table, it can be seen that China Daily and CNN used a large number of attitude resources in their news reports. In terms of the total number of attitude resources, China Daily is slightly higher than CNN, but they have two common points in the distribution of attitudinal resources. The first common point is that judgment resources account for highest proportion, which shows that attitude resources are mainly reflected by judgment resources in news reports of political events. This is because political news often evaluates the behavior of the state, exploring whether the state's behavior is reasonable and in line with the regulations, etc. The second common point is that less affect resources are used, which is determined by the objectivity and seriousness of political news itself -- political news should avoid subjective emotional words. In terms of subsystems, there is a clear difference in the distribution between the two media, with China Daily using more judgment (45.31%) and appreciation (33.33%) resources, while CNN mainly uses affect (27.71%) and judgment (47.59%) resources, which indicates that the two media have different focuses in their coverage of the 2020 China's Two Sessions. China Daily focuses on the policy and measures proposed in the Two Sessions, while the American media emphasizes more on China's role in its new policies and the actions it will take. In terms of attitude polarity, China Daily's attitude resources are overwhelmingly positive, accounting for 89.06%, with less use of negative evaluations, while CNN, on the contrary, has 68.07% negative attitudes, and positive ones are in minority. This indicates that China Daily, as a Chinese media, tends to take a praising and supportive attitude when reporting on major political events related to its own country, in order to convey positive messages about China to readers and to build a positive image of the country. For the American media under a different social system, on the other hand, their news reports of political events in China aims to portray a negative image of China. This difference is closely related to ideology and reflects the different value orientations of the mainstream media in China and the U.S. when reporting on Chinese political events.

### 3.2. Comparative Analysis of Affect

**Table 2.** Comparing the distribution of impact resources in the 2020 Two Sessions report

	China Daily		CNN	
unhappiness/happiness	9	21.95%	7	15.21%
insecurity/security	21	51.21%	26	56.52%
dissatisfaction/satisfaction	11	26.82%	13	28.26%
Total	41	21.35%	46	25%
Polarity				
Positive	36	87.80%	15	32.60%
Negative	5	14.63%	31	69.56%

Affect refers to the speaker's emotional feeling, tendency and psychological reaction to something, and is the most subjective and direct linguistic resource in the attitude system. Table 2 compares the distribution of affect resources in the reports on the 2020 Two Sessions. According to the data in the table, this paper finds that the frequency of affect resources is similar in both China Daily and CNN, and the number of affect resources is small. This reflects that both Chinese and American media tend to express their sentiment towards the Two Sessions and related policies from the perspective of individuals. However, in terms of the polarity of attitudes, the Chinese and U.S. media are exactly opposite, with China Daily having a positive attitude of "security" with 51.21% and CNN having a negative attitude of "insecurity" with 56.52%. For example, in China Daily's report, words like "confident" and "believe" are frequently used to show Chinese people's trust in the policies of the Two Sessions and China's confidence in its future development; while in the U.S. reports, words such as "uncertain", "worry" and "puzzle" are repeatedly used, indicating that the U.S. media are skeptical and negative about the Two Sessions' policies.

### 3.3. Comparative Analysis of Judgment

**Table 3.** There are still significant differences between Chinese and American media in judging the distribution of resources

		China Daily		CNN	
Social esteem	Normality	7	8.04%	5	6.32%
	Capacity	44	50.57%	34	43.03%
	Tenacity	22	25.28%	19	24.05%
Social sanction	Veracity	2	2.29%	8	10.12%
	Propriety	12	13.79%	13	16.45%
Total		87	45.31%	79	47.59%
Polarity	Positive	76	87.35%	27	34.17%
	Negative	11	12.64%	52	65.82%

Judgment refers to the speaker's evaluation of people's character and behavior according to certain ethical and moral standards or laws and regulations. The evaluation of whether things or behaviors are true or appropriate is called social sanction, and the evaluation of whether following the rules, being capable and reliable is called social esteem. All these types can be positive or negative, that's to say, such evaluation can be admiration or condemnation, praise or criticism. It is known from Table 1 that judgment resources account for the largest proportion of attitude resources in both Chinese and American media reports, 45.31% and 47.59% respectively. However, Table 3 shows that there are still significant differences in the distribution of judgment resources between Chinese and American media. In China Daily's report, capacity accounts for the largest proportion, nearly half, followed by veracity, and in terms of polarity, the majority are positive, with a proportion as high as 87.35%. Therefore, it can be inferred that Chinese media mostly start from the capacity of Chinese government and Chinese people in reports on the Two Sessions by using words like "can", "complete", "succeed", "fulfill", "achieve" to indicate the action power of the country, government and people, and shape the image of Chinese government as one that is bold and unrelenting, and committed to its words and actions. On the other hand, the U.S. media uses more negative attitudes, questioning the policies proposed in the Two Sessions and denying the ability of China and Chinese government to lead its people to overcome the epidemic and win a moderately prosperous society, for example, in the sentence "The circumvention of Hong Kong's Basic Law

would accelerate the death of Hong Kong's rule of law," CNN uses the word "death" to define the implementation of Hong Kong's Basic Law, and express its opinion that the measures of the Two Sessions on the implementation of Hong Kong's Basic Law will accelerate the demise of Hong Kong's rule of law society.

### 3.4. Comparative Analysis of Appreciation

**Table 4.** Distribution of Appreciation Resource Types

	China Daily		CNN	
Reaction	18	28.12%	11	26.82%
Composition	9	14.06%	13	31.70%
Valuation	37	57.81%	17	41.46%
Total	64	33.33%	41	22.28%
Polarity				
Positive	59	92.18%	11	26.82%
Negative	5	7.81%	30	73.17%

Appreciation refers to the speaker's evaluation of the thing itself and its value according to aesthetic principles, including reaction, composition, and valuation. Reaction identifies things from the emotional connection between things and people, i.e., evaluating things from the perspective of what feelings or emotions they evoke; composition evaluates things from the perspective of their structure and composition; and valuation evaluates things from the perspective of their social role and value. Table 1 shows that compared with American media, Chinese media used more appreciation resources, accounting for 33.33%, which is only slightly less than its judgment resources, indicating that Chinese media is more willing to focus on the Two Sessions itself. In contrast, the frequency of attitude resources in the U.S. media reports is Judgment > Affect > Appreciation in descending order, which indicates that the U.S. media are more inclined to provoke readers' emotional feelings when reporting on the 2020 Two Sessions, such as using words like "fear", "anxiety" to deliberately exaggerate the oppression of the Two Sessions' policies, which is correspondent to the China threat theory that the U.S. media has been promoting. Table 4 shows the distribution of the types of appreciation resources. According to the data in the table, it can be seen that reaction and valuation account for a larger proportion of the Chinese reports, especially valuation, which appear most frequently, indicating that Chinese media emphasizes more on evaluating the social significance of the Two Sessions. In the U.S. reports, composition and valuation appear more frequently, which indicates that when covering the 2020 Two Sessions, the U.S. media focus on discussing the composition of the Two Sessions and its social significance and value, which is the same as the Chinese media.

In addition, positive appreciation resources account for the majority of Chinese reports with 92.18%, which indicates that Chinese media have a positive attitude toward the social significance and value of the Two Sessions, and consider the 2020 Two Sessions to be important in the process of China's winning the overall moderate prosperity and successfully concluding the 13th Five-Year Plan. It is worth mentioning that although the majority of the appreciation resources used by the U.S. media are negative, some of them are positive, which indicates that the U.S. media still recognizes the significance of the 2020 Two Sessions in some aspects.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the Chinese and American mainstream media, represented by China Daily and CNN, have used various attitude resources to express their positions in their reports of the 2020 China's Two Sessions. Therefore, when reporting the 2020 China's Two Sessions, the Chinese and American media differed in the distribution of systems of attitude resources. Chinese media used more judgment and appreciation resources to evaluate Chinese government's actions in the policies related to the Two Sessions from the political event itself, with a view to conveying to the world China's determination to fight against the epidemic, achieve overall prosperity, deepen reform and opening-up, and make contributions to the world, highlighting that China is a country with international responsibility. In terms of attitude polarity, the U.S. media use a lot of negative attitude resources and hold a skeptical and negative attitude toward the 2020 China's Two Sessions, which can be ascribed to the fact that the U.S. media convey the ideology and values of its country. In the context of globalization, the differences between China and the U.S. become increasingly apparent and their conflicting interests sharpen, thus the U.S. media inevitably brings a subjective tone to its coverage of political events in China, attempting to portray a negative image of China and guide public opinion.

In the post-epidemic era, the virus epidemic and information epidemic are overlapping, and the international public opinion environment is becoming increasingly complex. Therefore, media from all countries should adhere to the principle of objectiveness and impartiality, set aside differences and conflicts, and restore the facts as much as possible. With the goal of promoting friendly development of relations among countries around the world, media workers should avoid deliberate misinterpretation and smearing, make joint efforts to promote a peaceful development of international community, and promote the a world of a shared future.

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