

# A Comparative Study of Stance Markers in Chinese and American Mainstream Media Reports on the Belt and Road Initiative — A Focus on the Belt and Road Forum on International Cooperation

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**Abstract:** As the highest-level international event under the Belt and Road framework, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation plays an important role in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative. How the mainstream media of China and America view about the forum is also very influential in the international community, affecting many aspects. However, previous studies on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation focused on the metaphorical framework, news narrative, national image construction, critical discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor, and so on. The analysis on the stance markers of the forum by Chinese and American media is rare. Based on the self-made corpus, this thesis applies Douglas Biber's stance marker theory to make a comparative analysis of stance markers of thirty Chinese and American mainstream media reports. The similarity is that both Chinese and American mainstream media have acknowledged the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative. In terms of differences, it is found that Chinese media uses more certainty and evidentiality than American media, which indicates that China has a deeper understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, and has full confidence in the Belt and Road as a win-win situation. American media uses more hedging, affect and evaluation than Chinese media. The use of "possible" and "some" in hedging indicates the speculation and uncertainty of American mainstream media on the Belt and Road Initiative. The more use of affect shows that American media's report on the Belt and Road Initiative has a subjective tendency. The use of the evaluation shows that America does not have a deep understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, and has subjective biases and personal feelings, attempting to fabricate the idea that the Belt and Road Initiative will make China the dominant power in Asia and the wider region.

**Keywords:** stance markers, Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, media reports, comparative study

## 1. Introduction

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### 1.1 A Brief Introduction of Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

The Belt and Road Initiative is short for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It was proposed in 2013. However, after the initiative was put forward, there was a process of expression from the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” to the “Belt and Road”. In September 2013, Xi Jinping mentioned in a speech at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan that we can jointly build a “Silk Road Economic Belt” with innovative cooperation models. In October 2013, Xi Jinping mentioned in a speech at the Indonesian parliament that China is willing to strengthen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to jointly build a 21st century maritime Silk Road. In June 2014, Xi Jinping made a speech at the sixth Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. He said that when we review the history of people-to-people exchanges between China and Arab States, we would think of the Silk Road and the Maritime Spice Road and the Belt and Road. He also said that the Belt and Road is a road of win-win cooperation. And he talked about the principles, content and practices of China-Arab States jointly building the Belt and Road.

The emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative is based on the needs of China’s future sustainable development. The problems such as the slowing down of China’s economic development, the transformation of industrial structure and how to achieve development without excessive pollution of the environment by using energy have become the links that cannot be ignored in the process of further economic development. It is based on the fact that China has excess production capacity. The collision between continuous high investment and relatively insufficient domestic consumption results in excessive investment and waste of resources, which has a negative impact on the increase of output value. It is based on the efficient use of limited foreign exchange reserves considerations.

The Belt and Road Initiative refers to relying on the existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms between China and relevant countries, making use of the existing and effective regional cooperation platforms, borrowing the historical symbols of the ancient Silk Road, holding high the banner of peaceful development, and actively developing the economic cooperative partnership with countries along the routes, so as to build a community of shared interests, shared future and shared responsibilities featuring political mutual trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness. The Belt and Road routes pass through 65 countries and regions, including Mongolia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines in East Asia, and 18 countries in West Asia (including Egypt in North Africa and Greece and Cyprus in Europe), which are Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, and 8 countries in South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, and five countries in Central Asia, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, namely Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia, and 7 countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States - Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia,

Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova.

In order to make the Belt and Road construction more beneficial to people of all countries, Xi Jinping announced at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2017 that China would hold the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing to discuss cooperation plans, build cooperation platforms, share cooperation results, and find solutions to solve the current global and regional economic problems, so as to inject new energy into achieving interconnected development. The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation has been held for two sessions, which has wide influence in the academic community. Choosing the theme of the forum is not only conducive to understanding the purpose and significance of the Forum, but also conducive to deepening the understanding of the historical background, theoretical basis, co-construction principles, framework, basic connotation, development history and influence significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, and further deepen the understanding of China's diplomacy and international cooperation concept.

Previous studies on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation tend to focus on metaphor architecture, news narrative, national image construction, critical discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor, etc., while there are few studies on the stance markers, and even less studies on the stance markers in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of China and America. Starting from the theory of Biber's stance markers, this study makes a comparative analysis of the stance markers of Chinese and American mainstream media on the "Belt and Road" Initiative, which not only helps to understand the different stances and attitudes of Chinese and American media when reporting this event, but also helps to interpret the underlying interpersonal meaning in news reports.

## 1.2 Literature Review

The main research of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in the field of linguistics focuses on critical discourse analysis and critical metaphor analysis. Cheng Lihong (2018) made the critical discourse analysis of the *Guardian's* reports on "One Belt and One Road" and found that the *Guardian's* reports on China's "One Belt and One Road" were not objective and fair, and did not have a deep sense of identity with them, revealing a certain degree of bias, which was due to the influence of power and different social ideologies. Wang Yuying (2021) studied the analysis of critical metaphors in the news reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and found that there are various types of metaphors in the news reports of the Belt and Road Forum. The journey metaphor, architectural metaphor and war metaphor are the three most significant metaphors, and cognitive, political, cultural and historical factors will affect the selection and use of metaphors. From the perspective of stance markers, there are few comparative studies on the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of China and America. By studying the stance markers in the reports of the mainstream media of China and America on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, we can get a glimpse into the positions and attitudes of China and America on the Belt and Road Initiative and explore the reasons behind the differences.

The concept of “stance” was first proposed by Biber and Finegan(1989). Biber (1999) defined stance as the author’s attitude, emotion, judgment and responsibility for the utterance expressed, as well as the evaluation of the presentation of information in the text. He paid attention to its grammatical and semantic classification, and proposed that the grammatical aspects include adverbs of stance, modal verbs and stance complement, etc. The semantic aspect includes three types of epistemic stance markers, attitudinal stance markers and style-of-speaking stance markers.

The basic parameters proposed by Hunston & Thompson are complementary to the attitudinal-type position markers proposed by Biber. Hunston & Thompson(2000) proposed that stance expression is the author’s or speaker’s cognition, attitude and emotion towards the actual existence of objects or propositions. Hunston (2000) pays attention to the distinction of stance objects, holding that stance objects can be either a specific evaluation entity or the proposition itself, while stance is a relatively broad concept of the author’s attitude, views and feelings towards the entity objects or the proposition itself in the discourse expressed. He also points out four parameters of stance expression: good-bad, certainty, expectedness and importance.

Hyland (2005) found the particularity of the use of stance chunks in academic papers. He emphasizes the social and communicative intention of stance, and focuses on the pragmatic functional level. He believes that stance is the voice of a discourse or the socially recognized characteristics of a discourse, which is used to express the evaluation, opinion, judgment and cognitive state. It is the personal label that the author attaches to the information expressed, and sometimes it is used to cover up his personal intervention. He put forward four classification frameworks of stance expression, which are divided according to the author’s cognition, judgment, emotion, participation and so on. They are hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions. Hedges are the language strategies used by the author to express the degree of uncertainty. The author only states the state when describing a proposition. The booster refers to the language strategy used by the author to express the certainty of a certain proposition. Attitude markers are the language strategies used by authors to express their own emotions. Self-mention refers to the first person pronouns used to refer to the author. This kind of words help to express the author’s recognition of the authority of the information and make the author’s image appear more professional.

The three scholars define and classify stance markers differently. In this thesis, Biber’s stance classification model is adopted, because Biber’s classification framework is currently regarded as a more systematic and complete position classification model.

Scholars at home are more inclined to Biber and Hyland’s classification of stance markers. The domestic theoretical research on stance markers is mostly to explain, add or supplement foreign theories. Xu Hongliang (2007) classifies stance markers into cognitive, attitudinal and textual types from the perspective of language function. This is very similar to the idea proposed by Biber et al. (1999). Long & Xu (2010) added obligatory stance markers on the basis of Biber’s classification by taking advantage of the concept of obligatory modality in semantics. Based on Hyland, Geqi Wu (2010) divided stance markers into four expressions: hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions. Based on Biber’s classification of stance markers, this thesis conducts a comparative study of stance markers in the reports of Chinese and American mainstream media on the Belt and Road

Forum for International Cooperation, which not only helps to understand the different positions and attitudes of Chinese and American media when reporting this event, but also helps to interpret the underlying interpersonal significance in news reports.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

As an important public international product proposed by China, the Belt and Road Initiative has a special strategic position in the pattern of China's external relations. As the largest developing and developed countries in the world, the relationship between China and America is also of great importance in the international community and affects many aspects. The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which covers many aspects such as economy, trade and culture, is of great significance to maintaining world peace and promoting common development. However, in the past, the linguistic analysis of the stance markers of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by Chinese and American media is insufficient, mainly limited to the study of translation strategies of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and critical discourse analysis of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation reports. Stance markers are helpful to understand the author's viewpoint, attitude and position on the topic mentioned, and to analyze the reasons according to them, which is helpful to understand the underlying interpersonal meaning in news reports. In practical sense, analyzing the stance markers in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of China and America is helpful to understand the viewpoints, attitudes and positions of the two countries on the Belt and Road Initiative, explore the underlying reasons, and deepen the understanding of the position and the relationship between the two countries.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Douglas Biber's Theory of Stance Markers**

The concept of "stance" was first proposed by Biber and Finegan (1988). Stance refers to author's attitude, emotion, judgment, and obligation towards information in the article or participants in the discourse, including the author's evaluation of the presentation modes of information in the text. (Biber et al,1999). Biber's stance marker theory has a wide influence and many domestic scholars have been influenced by it. Xu Hongliang (2007) classifies stance markers into cognitive, attitudinal and textual types from the perspective of language function. This is very similar to the idea proposed by Biber et al. (1999). Long Manying and Xu Jiajin (2010) added the category of obligatory stance markers on the basis of Biber's classification with the help of the concept of obligatory modality in semantics. In addition, since Biber's classification framework is considered systematic and complete, it is often used as a theoretical framework to conduct research on news reports.

### **2.2 Classification of Stance Markers**

Biber singled out and compared stance markers from four registers of drama, letter, newspaper, and medical article from 1650 to 1990. According to Biber, stance markers can be classified into the grammatical and semantic structure. He proposed that

the grammatical aspect includes adverbs of stance, modal verbs and stance complement, etc. From the perspective of semantic aspect, stance can be classified into three types, which are epistemic stance markers, attitudinal stance markers, and style-of-speaking stance markers. Epistemic stance markers mainly refer to comments on the certainty, reliability, or limitation of propositional content, which can be made up of certainty, hedging, and evidentiality. Attitudinal stance markers reflect the author's emotional attitude towards the proposition, such as approval, surprise, importance, agreement, etc., rather than commenting on the reliability or authenticity of the content. And they can be divided into two types, including affect and evaluation. The style-of-speaking stance markers describe the means in which the speaker or author delivers information. The classification can be illustrated by the following table.

Table 2.1

*Biber's Classification of Stance Markers*

| Stance marker                    | Specific classification | Functions                                                              | Language device                    | In                      |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Epistemic stance markers         | certainty               | Express the author's conviction about the content                      | in fact, indeed, clearly           | this                    |
|                                  | hedging                 | Withhold the author's full commitment to statements                    | maybe, perhaps, some, mainly       | thesis, Biber's         |
|                                  | evidentiality           | Refer to how trustworthy the statements are                            | according to, as...said            | classifica              |
| Attitudinal stance markers       | affect                  | Express the author's attitude towards propositions                     | unfortunately, surprisingly        | tion of stance markers  |
|                                  | evaluation              | Present the author's personal evaluation and attitude towards an event | important, helpful, significant    | will be used to conduct |
| Style-of-speaking stance markers |                         | Present the speaker's comments on the act of communication itself      | honesty, frankly, general speaking | a comparat              |

ive study of stance markers in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by Chinese and American

mainstream media, and the frequency of the subcategories of stance markers will be counted according to the above table, so as to analyze the differences and explore the reasons.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Research Questions

Based on Biber's classification of stance markers, this study attempts to establish corpus from mainstream media reports on the Belt and Road Initiative in China and America. Then, by comparing the two corpora, it may be helpful to find the difference of stance of the mainstream media in China and America in the reporting of the Belt and Road Initiative, and their understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative. Through the comparative study of stance markers in two corpora, the differences between Chinese and American mainstream media in the Belt and Road report are obtained, and the reasons are explored. Based on the distribution and application features of different types of stance markers, this study aims to solve these following research questions:

- (1) What are the differences between the use of epistemic stance markers in Chinese and American media corpora?
- (2) What are the differences between the use of attitudinal stance markers in Chinese and American media corpora?
- (3) What are the differences between the use of style-of-speaking stance markers in Chinese and American media corpora?
- (4) What accounts for these differences?

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Corpus Building

In order to better conduct the comparative study between Chinese and American mainstream media on stance markers in the Belt and Road Initiative, this paper selects a total of 30 reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by four Chinese mainstream media, *the Xinhua News Agency*, *People's Daily*, *China News Service* and *China Daily*, and two American mainstream media, *Cable News Network* and *The New York Times*. *The Xinhua News Agency* has established a news and information collection network covering the world, and formed a multi-lingual, multi-media, multi-channel, multi-level and multifunctional news release system, integrating news agency contribution services, newspaper services, television services, economic information services, Internet and new media services. It is China's national news agency and the world news agency. *People's Daily* is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It is responsible for publicizing the Party's theories, line, principles and policies, major decisions and arrangements of the central Committee, publicizing the Party's propositions, promoting social integrity, communicating social conditions and public opinions, guiding social hot spots, channeling public sentiment, conducting supervision by public opinion, and timely disseminating information in various fields at home and abroad. *People's Daily* is the largest newspaper in China and was named one of the world's top ten newspapers by UNESCO in 1992. *China News Service* is a national news agency in China with foreign news reporting as its main business. It is an international news agency mainly serving overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan compatriots and foreigners with relations with China. *China Daily* is China's national English daily. As an important window for China to

understand the world and the world to understand China, it is the first choice of Chinese English media for high-end people at home and abroad. It is the only Chinese newspaper that has effectively entered the international mainstream society and has the highest reprint rate by foreign media. *Cable News Network* (CNN) provides 24/7 news programs to cable networks and satellite TV users through satellite. More than 210 countries and regions around the world broadcast CNN news, which is a world-class television organization. *The New York Times* is one of the most influential newspapers in America. It was founded in 1851 and is headquartered in New York City. The composition of the New York Times includes the global edition, the US edition, the business section, the sports section, etc., the scale is huge, with more than 1700 journalists and producers around the world. It is one of the most popular and respected newspapers in America. Therefore, this thesis chooses the above mainstream media to collect corpus, and the following table is the details of the self-built corpora.

Table 3.1

*Basic Information about the Chinese and American Corpus*

| Corpus |                 | China       | America     |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Size   |                 | 13409 words | 18944 words |
| Genre  | political news  | 6           | 5           |
|        | economic news   | 4           | 4           |
|        | diplomatic news | 3           | 4           |
|        | social news     | 2           | 2           |
| Total  |                 | 15          | 15          |

Among them, 15 articles from mainstream media in China and 15 articles from mainstream media in America. A total of 30 news corpora were collected in this paper, 15 of which were reported by Chinese mainstream media. Among the 15, 6 were political news, 4 were economic news, 3 were diplomatic news, and 2 were social news. 15 of them are reported by mainstream media in America. Among them, 5 are current political news, 4 are economic news, 4 are diplomatic news and 2 are social news. The 30 articles were used to build a corpus. The corpus was collected from May 2017 to August 2019. The two corpora contain 13409 and 18944 words respectively.

### 3.3 Research Method

Quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis are adopted in this thesis. Firstly, statistics are made on the big categories of stance markers, and then all stance markers in the corpus are defined. These stance markers are then judged, carefully examined and removed noisy data, and all the words that express the author's attitude and evaluation are marked one by one. Then the category of each word is determined. Through this way the specific classification of stance markers is determined. Then the frequency and distribution of each marker are calculated. Then the result is combined with quantitative analysis to study. In

addition to quantitative proportion and frequency, qualitative analysis is made based on the social and historical background of news. Then, the differences and similarities between Chinese and American mainstream media in using stance markers in their reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation are analyzed.

#### **4. A Comparative Study of Stance Markers in the Chinese and American Mainstream Media Reports on the Belt and Road Forum on International Cooperation**

In this part, the collected corpus will be concretely analyzed with Biber's classification of stance markers. And various subcategories in the corpus will be analyzed with its percentage and contextual information. The attitudes and views of Chinese and American mainstream media on the Belt and Road Initiative will be analyzed.

##### **4.1 Use of Epistemic Stance Markers in Chinese and American Media**

Epistemic stance markers mainly refer to comments on the certainty, reliability, or limitation of propositional content. Epistemic stance markers can be divided into certainty, hedging and evidentiality. Certainty refers to the degree to which the author is sure of what is said. Certainty can express the author's conviction about the content. Hedging is mainly employed to make the readers get involved into the propositions by means of altering them to the author's perspective. It withholds the author's full commitment to statements. Evidentiality refers to how trustworthy the statements are. The following table shows the usage of certainty, hedging and evidentiality in the collected corpus. The stance markers in the table are listed according to the top 5 frequency. If the frequency is low, only 1 or 2, it will not be listed, so it may be top 3 or top 4.

Table 4.1

*The Usage of Certainty, Hedging and Evidentiality in the Collected Corpus*

| Epistemic stance | Country | Typical words | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Certainty        | China   | in fact       | 16        | 24    | 66.7%      |
|                  |         | indeed        | 4         |       | 16.7%      |
|                  |         | particularly  | 4         |       | 16.7%      |
|                  | America | in fact       | 12        | 19    | 63.2%      |
|                  |         | indeed        | 5         |       | 26.3%      |
|                  |         | particularly  | 2         |       | 10.5%      |
| Hedging          | China   | mainly        | 9         | 27    | 33.3%      |
|                  |         | possible      | 5         |       | 18.5%      |
|                  |         | some          | 8         |       | 29.6%      |
|                  |         | about         | 5         |       | 18.5%      |
|                  | America | mainly        | 8         | 59    | 13.6%      |
|                  |         | possible      | 27        |       | 45.8%      |
|                  |         | some          | 12        |       | 20.3%      |
|                  |         | about         | 12        |       | 20.3%      |
| Evidentiality    | China   | according to  | 94        | 114   | 82.5%      |
|                  |         | as...said     | 20        |       | 17.5%      |
|                  | America | according to  | 88        | 95    | 92.6%      |
|                  |         | as...said     | 7         |       | 7.4%       |

From the table above, it can be seen that there is little difference between the frequency of certainty used in Chinese and American mainstream media, but the frequency of certainty used in Chinese mainstream media is slightly higher than that in America. Chinese mainstream media used “in fact” four times more than American mainstream media, which is quite a big difference. Chinese mainstream media used “particularly” half more than American mainstream media.

Example 1: Xi’s blunt rebuke of US policy was echoed Tuesday by Qin, the foreign minister, who said US competition with

China is in fact all about “containment and suppression” and “a zero-sum game of life and death.” (CNN)

Example 2: Wang Yi said that the past year has proved once again that the Belt and Road cooperation has not stalled due to the impact of the epidemic. **In fact**, it has become a road of hope to enhance resilience and convey confidence. (The Xinhua News Agency)

The background of example 1 was that Chinese leaders believed that Western countries, led by America, were carrying out comprehensive containment and oppression against us, including the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative. America had a negative attitude towards China’s Belt and Road Initiative, trying to contain and suppress it so that America could be in an advantageous position in the competition. Example 2 was Wang Yi’s speech at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation Advisory Committee 2021 Annual Meeting. The impact of the epidemic had not stopped the Belt and Road cooperation. In fact, it was a road of hope and development that promotes common prosperity. It expressed China’s confidence and expectation on the Belt and Road.

Example 3: Looking ahead, we expect economic activity between the two countries to increase, **particularly** benefiting Thailand’s tourism industry, as China optimizes and adjusts its epidemic prevention policies and orderly resumes outbound travel by its citizens. (The Xinhua News Agency)

Example 4: Even neighboring India has been skeptical. The country’s finance and defense minister Arun Jaitley told reporters this month Delhi has “serious reservations” about the project, **particularly** regarding China-funded development in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. (CNN)

The background of example 3 was that on the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Thai ambassador to China gave an interview to Xinhua News Agency. He also responded to the prospects and expectations for bilateral cooperation. He believed economic activity between the two countries would increase, and Thai tourism in particular would benefit. The use of “particularly” showed that both China and Thailand had a positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative, which would bring economic benefits to China and participating countries. Example 4 was CNN’s report on the Belt and Road Initiative. America, as well as India, was suspicious of the Belt and Road Initiative, especially Chinese-funded development projects in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. America had a negative attitude towards China’s Belt and Road Initiative. By using “particularly”, America tried to throw doubt on China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

There is a significant difference between the frequency of hedging used in reports about the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Chinese and American mainstream media. Hedging was used 27 times in Chinese mainstream media, while hedging was used 63 times in American mainstream media. Hedging was used more common in American mainstream media reports than that of in Chinese mainstream media.

In the reports of Chinese mainstream media on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, “mainly” was used most frequently, reaching 9 times. In the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream

media of China and America, the difference in frequency between “possible” and “some” was quite significant. American mainstream media used “possible” and “some” significantly more often than Chinese mainstream media. American mainstream media used “possible” 27 times and “some” 12 times in their reports, while Chinese mainstream media used “possible” 5 times and “some” 8 times in their reports. It showed that hedging words were used more frequently in American mainstream media.

Example 5: All this is **possible** to create an opportunity for Washington to step forward and work with willing partners in need of financing. But major questions hang over the extent to which the US can deliver, both in terms of mobilizing billions and driving infrastructure – areas in which China has long excelled. (The New York Times)

Example 6: This is the fundamental reason why this initiative can be gradually accepted and then welcomed by the outside world, so that it can continue to play an important role in the future, and more countries and organizations are **possible** participate in it. (China Daily)

The background of Example 5 was that America generally criticized China’s Belt and Road funding projects, and at that time, the Belt and Road construction was in a period of instability. Together with economic challenges at home and changes in the global financial environment, all of this could create opportunities for Washington to work with willing partners in need of financing. The hedging term “possible” expressed speculation and uncertainty here. Such criticism based on Chinese funding projects was not absolutely objective and fair. Example 6 illustrated the fundamental reason why the Belt and Road Initiative is gradually accepted and welcomed by the outside world. The fundamental reason was that the core values of the Belt and Road Initiative embodied the distinct characteristics of peace, love, inclusiveness and civilization, which were in line with the common aspirations and consensus of all countries, so more countries and organizations were likely to participate in it. This was pointed out by *The European Times* and has been tested over time. Example 6 illustrated a cause and predicted a result based on a cause. The hedging term “possible” also had a speculative meaning here, but increased the degree of caution for the sake of accuracy.

Example 7: Even as the initiative has had an impact on a number of countries, funding shortfalls and political pushback have stalled **certain** projects, and there is public concern in **some** countries over issues like excess debt and China’s influence. (The New York Times)

Example 8: Recently, **some** countries have put forward new international cooperation initiatives on infrastructure and regional economic framework agreements. (The Xinhua News Agency)

Example 7 was reported by the New York Times. As U.S. President Joe Biden pushed a pledge to provide hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to poor countries, a largely unspoken motive loomed in the background: competition with China. Blinken, US Secretary of State spook about American policy towards China during an event hosted by the Asia Society Policy Institute at George Washington University in Washington, DC. He criticized the Belt and Road Initiative, saying infrastructure deals were corrupted and coercible, as well as abusing workers and exacerbating the debt problems of participating countries. Some countries were concerned that some projects of the Belt and Road Initiative had been stalled, but it was not specified here and only

mentioned in passing. So, the use of hedging “certain” and “some” was fuzzy, intending to criticize the Belt and Road Initiative without detailed evidence. Example 8 was Wang Yi’s speech at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation Advisory Committee Meeting, where he pointed out what China would do together with its partners. He used hedging term “some” to emphasize the cautiousness of the data, guaranteeing the accuracy.

In the frequency of use of “mainly”, Chinese mainstream media was higher than American mainstream media. Chinese mainstream media used “mainly” 9 times and American mainstream media used “mainly” 8 times, with little difference between the two.

Example 9: China is North Korea’s chief ally and is seen by **many** as the **main** means for applying greater pressure on Pyongyang regarding its weapons programs. (CNN)

Example 10: At the forum “Hong Kong: A Hub Connecting the ‘Belt and Road’ and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area”, Sun Yu, Vice chairman and president of Bank of China Hong Kong, said that the current use of digital RMB is **mainly** for daily consumption purposes, but in the long run, the application of digital currency in trade and finance has great potential. (The People’s Daily)

Example 9 was reported by the American mainstream media, saying that many people saw China as the main means to put more pressure on Pyongyang over its weapons program. Hedging terms “many” and “main” were vague here and were not clear. Example 10 illustrated the main uses of digital RMB. Using a hedging term “mainly” strengthened the reliability.

Chinese mainstream media used “about” 5 times, compared with 12 times in American mainstream media. The difference between them is significant.

Example 11: On average, during the first five years of the initiative from 2013 to 2017, China spent **about** \$85 billion financing overseas development projects per year, more than twice as much as any other major economy. (CNN)

Example 12: Since 2013, China has been Thailand’s largest trading partner for 10 years in a row. Last year, the bilateral trade volume between Thailand and China was **about** 135 billion U.S. dollars. (The Xinhua News Agency)

Example 11 was about the amount spent in the first five years of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, which was calculated by America. It used hedging term “about” to emphasize the cautiousness of the data, guaranteeing the accuracy. Example 12 was about the trade between China and Thailand since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Last year, the bilateral trade volume between Thailand and China was about 135 billion U.S. dollars. The hedging term “about” was also used to emphasize the cautiousness of the data, guaranteeing the accuracy.

From these examples, it can be seen from the use of hedging that the mainstream media in America does not have a clear and accurate understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, and may be biased in their reports. But at the same time, it also avoids the problem of some language errors caused by insufficient understanding. Mainstream media in China also use hedging to increase caution in their reporting.

Evidentiality refers to how trustworthy statements are. As can be seen from the table, there is little difference in the frequency of evidentiality about the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by mainstream media in China and America, and both of them used evidentiality with a high frequency. Among them, Chinese mainstream media used them more often than American mainstream media. Chinese mainstream media used “according to” 94 times, while American mainstream media used “according to” 88 times. In addition, the Chinese mainstream media used “as said” 20 times, while the American mainstream media used “as said” seven times. The difference between them is significant.

Example 13: **According to** the Beijing Gongmei Group, the design team started planning the gifts a month prior to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum held in Beijing in November 2014. (CNN)

Example 14: And the money will be used not only to fund diplomatic trips. **According to** China’s Ministry of Finance, the umbrella term “diplomatic expenditure” covers a wide range of areas, from budgets for the Foreign Ministry, Chinese embassies and consulates, to China’s participation in international organizations, foreign aid and external propaganda. (CNN)

Example 15: **According to** the General Administration of Customs, China’s foreign trade with countries along the Belt and Road reached 2.07 trillion yuan in the first quarter, up 3.2 percent year on year. (People’s Daily)

Example 16: **According to** the quantitative trade model of the World Bank research group, the Belt and Road Initiative will increase the GDP of “developing East Asian and Pacific countries” by 2.6-3.9 percent on average. (China Daily)

From these examples, some of the data and analysis reported by American mainstream media came from Beijing Gongmei Group and China’s Ministry of Finance. The design team’s planning of gifts and the contents covered by diplomatic expenses were introduced respectively. The relevant data and analysis reported by Chinese mainstream media came from the General Administration of Customs and the quantitative trade model of the World Bank research group. They respectively introduced the impact of China’s foreign trade with countries along the Belt and Road. The Belt and Road Initiative would make the GDP of “developing countries in East Asia and the Pacific.” It can be concluded that the reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of China and America are based on certain official data and experts’ remarks, and both have a certain degree of credibility.

Example 17: **As Yang Jiechi said**, it is timely for China to host the Summit. An outstanding feature of this forum is the large number of participants and strong representation. (CCTV)

Example 18: “What we hope to create is a big family of harmonious co-existence,” **as Xi said**, adding that all countries were welcome to take part in the project. (CNN)

Yang Jiechi’s words were reported in example 17. It was timely for China to host the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Xi Jinping’s words were quoted in example 18 as saying that China hoped to create a harmonious family for the Belt and Road Initiative and welcomed all countries to join. Since both Yang Jiechi and Xi Jinping can represent the government, the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by mainstream media in China and America have certain degree

of credibility.

#### 4.2 Use of Attitudinal Stance Markers in Chinese and American Media

Attitudinal stance markers reflect the author's emotional attitude towards the proposition, such as approval, surprise, importance, agreement, etc., rather than commenting on the reliability or authenticity of the content. And they can be divided into two types, including affect and evaluation. The table below shows the usage of affect and evaluation in the collected corpus. The stance markers in the table are listed according to the top 5 frequency.

Table 4.2

*The Usage of Affect and Evaluation in the Collected Corpus*

| Attitudinal stance | Country | Typical words | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Affect             | China   | surprisingly  | 1         | 1     | 100%       |
|                    | America | surprisingly  | 1         | 3     | 33.3%      |
|                    |         | unfortunately | 2         |       | 66.7%      |
| Evaluation         | China   | would         | 58        | 89    | 65.2%      |
|                    |         | important     | 27        |       | 30.3%      |
|                    |         | helpful       | 4         |       | 4.5%       |
|                    | America | would         | 73        | 100   | 73%        |
|                    |         | important     | 24        |       | 24%        |
|                    |         | helpful       | 3         |       | 3%         |

As can be seen from the above table, affect is rarely used in reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by mainstream media in China and America. It can be seen that the reports of the mainstream media in America on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation involve “unfortunately” two times. Therefore, American mainstream media involved personal likes, dislikes and emotions when reporting the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and did not report and interpret from an objective perspective.

Example 19: **Unfortunately**, while tracking investments across a wide range of players, and without a central, public Belt and Road data source, is difficult work, there are signs that China's efforts, especially big-ticket projects, have been slowing in recent years and since the pandemic. (CNN)

The context for example 19 was Yang Jiechi's call at a trade forum on August 14 for the Belt and Road Initiative to “promote early recovery and growth of the global economy.” And mainstream media reports in America said there were signs that China's efforts, especially large projects, had been slowing down in recent years and since the pandemic. The affect term “unfortunately”

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showed that America mainstream media's reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation were inconsistent with the actual situation and had subjective tendencies.

Both mainstream media in China and America used the evaluation a lot of times in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation with a high frequency, and there was little difference between them. Chinese mainstream media only used the evaluation 7 times less than that of in America. In addition, in the evaluation, the term "would" was used most frequently by mainstream media in China and America, 58 times and 73 times respectively. Chinese mainstream media used evaluation term "would" to express expectations, affirming the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the use of evaluation term "would" by American mainstream media indicated that America did not have a positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative. In their reports, there were facts contrary to the purpose of the Belt and Road Initiative and there were misunderstandings about it.

Example 20: The Belt and Road Initiative **would** bring greater economic benefits to all parties involved and make our world stronger, Olga Romanova, senior editor of the international department of the Russian newspaper Soviet Belarus, told Xinhua. (CCTV)

As can be seen from example 18, Chinese mainstream media has positive comments on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, and is full of confidence in the forum and have high expectations for it. It believes that the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation will benefit not only China but also other countries. As the polite effect of hedging, "would" makes both sides willing to communicate actively, actively and efficiently.

Example 21: Governments on the continent, however, **would** welcome more sources of funding to meet shortfalls, and there is a perception that the US is more transparent and it has an advantage when it comes to soft power, according to Isike. (The New York Times)

Example 22: The move sparked fears China **would** use similar defaults in other countries to acquire a host of new infrastructure, with both potential economic and military benefits - leapfrogging rivals in the region such as India and the US. (CNN)

Example 23: The Belt and Road Initiative was supposed to be Xi's signature project, one that **would** drive China back to its traditional position of power and dominance both in Asia and wider afield. (CNN)

From examples 21, 22 and 23, it can be seen that the mainstream media of America has not a positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and misunderstands the Belt and Road Initiative. "Would" can avoid being too absolute and make it relatively euphemistic. And it can also be able to set aside space for discussion. Example 21 Compared the Belt and Road Initiative with America, and showed America was more transparent and had more advantages. The background of example 22 was that Beijing acquired a 99-year lease to Sri Lanka's Hambantota port - located in a key strategic position on the Indian Ocean - in return for forgiving some of the billions of dollars the South Asian country owed China. That was groundless remarks that China would take advantage of similar defaults by other countries to gain access to vast amounts of new

infrastructure with potential economic and military benefits, outstripping regional rivals such as India and America. Example 23, in particular, showed that the Belt and Road Initiative would make China dominant in Asia and wider afield because the Belt and Road Initiative projects Chinese power, influence and trade across much of the world. However, the purpose of the Belt and Road Initiative is to enable relevant countries to cooperate with each other and achieve better development, so that people in relevant countries can live a better and happier life.

In the evaluation, the term “important” was also used very frequently by mainstream media in China and America, 27 times and 24 times respectively.

Example 24: The meeting held that since its inception eight years ago, the Belt and Road Initiative has yielded tangible results and promoted global poverty reduction, trade and economic growth. It has become an **important** international public good and global economic cooperation platform with guiding ideas, cooperation mechanisms and practical projects, and has broader prospects for development. (The Xinhua News Agency)

Example 25: Since the first BRF and during the second one, national governments, local authorities and enterprises reached a series of cooperation agreements, **important** measures and practical results. (The New York Times)

Example 26: In a communique announcing a new trade deal with China Thursday, the US said it “recognizes the **importance** of China’s One Belt and One Road initiative.” (CNN)

As can be seen from example 24, the Belt and Road Initiative has become an important international public good and global economic cooperation platform with guiding ideas, cooperation mechanisms and practical projects. As can be seen from example 25, local authorities and enterprises reached a series of cooperation agreements, important measures and practical results since the first BRF and during the second one. Example 26 showed that America recognized the importance of China’s One Belt and One Road Initiative. Therefore, the mainstream media of China and America agree that the Belt and Road Initiative is very important, which has important influence not only on China, but also on the world.

### 4.3 Use of Style-of-speaking Stance Markers in Chinese and American Media

Style-of-speaking stance markers primarily present the speaker’s comments on the act of communication itself. The table below is the frequency of style-of-speaking stance markers used by mainstream media in China and America used style-of-speaking markers in their coverage of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The stance markers in the table are listed according to the top 5 frequency. If the frequency is low, only 1 or 2, it will not be listed, so it may be top 3 or top 4.

Table 4.3

*The Usage of Style-of-speaking Stance Markers in the Collected Corpus*

| Style-of-speaking | Country | Typical | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-------|------------|
|-------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-------|------------|

| stance            |         | words      |   |    |       |
|-------------------|---------|------------|---|----|-------|
| Style-of-speaking | China   | seriously  | 8 | 11 | 72.7% |
| stance markers    |         | inevitably | 3 |    | 27.3% |
|                   | America | claim      | 7 | 10 | 70%   |
|                   |         | serious    | 3 |    | 30%   |

As can be seen from the table above, the number of style-of-speaking markers used by mainstream media in Chinese and America reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is similar, with 11 and 10 markers respectively. In addition, among the counted style-of-speaking markers, the term “seriously” was used the most in the reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by Chinese mainstream media, which reached 8 times. In the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of America, the term “claim” was used the most frequently, reaching 7 times.

Example 27: Michael Nyilenda, former president of the Zambian Association of Business and Industry, said that Africa’s economy is relatively fragile and the epidemic will **inevitably** affect the economic development of African countries, so “now African countries should **seriously** think about how to better cooperate with China after the epidemic.” (People’s Daily)

Example 27 showed the former president of the Zambian Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s thinking on the economy and the epidemic, and said that African countries should seriously think about how to better cooperate with China after the epidemic. This showed that African countries had confidence in China and the Belt and Road Initiative. Because it was a quote from the former president of the Zambian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which had nothing to do with China or the United States. So, the reporting style of Chinese mainstream media on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was rigorous and objective. The style-of-speaking stance marker “seriously” indicated that African countries attach importance, seriousness and caution to the Belt and Road Initiative.

Example 28: Chinese officials have denied **claims** that they are considering providing lethal military aid to Russia, but US officials have maintained that China would face "real costs" if they went forward with the support. (CNN)

Example 29: At the same time, however, Richardson said China’s investments do not actually benefit countries in the region and **claimed** Beijing is “taking advantage” of South American nations by pushing them into a “debt trap associated with the multiple loans” they provide. (CNN)

Example 28 was American claim that China was considering providing lethal military aid to Russia, Chinese officials said that China did not provide lethal military aid to Russia, but American side did not believe it. America thought China has had this idea before and said it would suffer some losses if it continued to do so. America was sticking to its own opinion and showing subjective bias against China. As an indirect speech, claim add its own consideration and integrate its own feelings when

paraphrasing others' words. American mainstream media's reporting style on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was not objective, with subjective bias. In example 29, America argued that Chinese investment had not actually benefited South American countries. Beijing was "taking advantage" of South American countries and pushing them into a "debt trap related to multiple loans," which was also evaluated with subjective bias. The Belt and Road Initiative pursued win-win cooperation, and there was no such thing as taking advantage of other countries. The following claim was Richardson's own quote, expressing a lack of understanding and bias towards China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese mainstream media used "inevitably" 3 times. American mainstream media used "serious" 3 times.

Example 30: Xi Jinping announced at the closing ceremony of the Roundtable summit that China will host the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019. I am confident that with the concerted efforts of all, the beautiful vision of the Belt and Road Initiative will **inevitably** be realized. (China News Service)

Example 31: In unusually direct remarks Monday, Xi accused the US of leading a campaign to suppress China and causing its **serious** domestic woes. (CNN)

From example 30, China had a positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative. Xi Jinping announced that China would host the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and expressed confidence that the beautiful vision of the Belt and Road would be realized. The background of example 31 was that China would host the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, but America suppressed China's Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Chinese leaders blamed America for this behavior, which caused serious difficulties in China. America had a negative attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative and had suppressed it.

#### 4.4 Factors for differences

There are many differences in the stance markers of Chinese and American mainstream media in their reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The main reasons are as follows. First of all, it is influenced by different social ideologies. "China Threat Arguments" has been filled with Western media for a long time. In addition, the capitalist media environment in America is easy to be controlled by capital. Therefore, the American media have misunderstandings about the Belt and Road Initiative and lack in-depth understanding and objective cognition. With the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's rising international status has caused anxiety and panic in America. Therefore, American media sometimes show biases when reporting the Belt and Road Initiative. Moreover, it is influenced by the different positions of the two sides. Both Chinese and American mainstream media view the Belt and Road Initiative from the standpoint of their own countries and represent the interests of their own countries. In addition, the two sides view the issue from different perspectives. From the perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative for China itself and participating countries, the mainstream media of China considers what influence the Belt and Road Initiative will bring to China, participating countries and the whole world in terms of politics, economy and culture. The mainstream media of America, on the other hand, start from America itself and consider what kind of influence the Belt and

Road Initiative will bring to America and whether it will affect the national status of America. Next, the two sides have different understanding of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. When reporting relevant news about China, Chinese mainstream media must go through field investigation and a lot of analysis, so they have a better understanding and are easier to grasp the key points when reporting, which is different from America. When reporting the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the mainstream media in America did not go through very detailed investigation and research, but relied more on past experience and showed subjective bias. Moreover, the difference of news reports between two sides. China's news coverage is mainly positive, while American news coverage is mostly characterized by change, anomaly and conflict.

## 5. Conclusion

The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is the highest-level international event under the Belt and Road framework. It is the highest-level and largest multilateral diplomatic event initiated and hosted by China since the founding of the People's Republic of China. It is also an important international cooperation platform for all parties to discuss and build the Belt and Road and share the fruits of mutually beneficial cooperation. Stance markers can express not only the propositional meaning of words, but also the feelings, attitudes and value evaluation of the speaker or author. The stance markers involved in the coverage of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of China and America also serve this function.

By collecting news, building a corpus, searching stance markers in the corpus, and then conducting a comparative analysis, it is found several differences between Chinese and American mainstream media reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The first is difference in the use of epistemic stance markers in Chinese and American media, which involves three aspects. The frequency of certainty used in Chinese mainstream media is slightly higher than that in America. Hedging is used more common in American mainstream media reports about the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Both of Chinese and American mainstream media used evidentiality with a high frequency. By analyzing the different uses of hedging, Chinese mainstream media's reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation are more certain and positive. The mainstream media in America does not have a clear and accurate understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, and may be biased in their reports.

The second is the difference in the use of epistemic stance markers in Chinese and American media, which includes two aspects. Affect is rarely used in reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by mainstream media in China and America. The reports of the mainstream media in America on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation involve "unfortunately" two times. Both mainstream media in China and America use the evaluation a lot of times in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation with a high frequency, and there is little difference between the two. Therefore, American mainstream media involves personal likes, dislikes and emotions when reporting the Belt and Road Forum for

International Cooperation and does not report and interpret from an objective perspective. The mainstream media of China and America agree that the Belt and Road Initiative is very important, which has important influence not only on China, but also on the world.

The third is the difference in the use of style-of-speaking stance markers in Chinese and American media. The number of style-of-speaking markers used by mainstream media in Chinese and America reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is similar. However, the term “seriously” was used the most in the reports on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by Chinese mainstream media, which reached 8 times. The term “claim” was used the most frequently in the reports of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation by the mainstream media of America, which reached 7 times. The reporting style of Chinese mainstream media on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is rigorous and objective. American mainstream media’s reporting style on the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is also rigorous, but not objective, with subjective bias.

These differences are mainly due to the different national positions of China and America, the different historical and cultural backgrounds, and the different perspectives on the issue, the different levels of understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the difference of news reports between two sides.

The main limitation of this thesis is that the length of selected news reports is small, a total of 30. In addition, due to the energy and time limit of the author, the established corpus is also relatively small, and in the future study more data can be included to consolidate the study.

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