

# A Study on Foreign Mainstream Media's China-related Public Opinions Based on the News Reports of the 14th Five-year Plan

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**Abstract-** Based on 367 foreign mainstream media reports related to the 14th Five-Year Plan derived from Factiva Dow Jones database, this study employs AntConc and the R Programming Language to analyze the public opinions of these news reports. Results show that, the foreign mainstream media news reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan represent some basic features. The coverage focuses on changes in China's market policies, energy transition, diplomatic relations, human rights, and development opportunities, and the news reports exist problems such as preconceived ideas and stereotypes. In the future, foreign mainstream media will focus on the institutional differences between China and the West and pay more attention to China's foreign policy as well as development achievements. Therefore, China should make great efforts in a more open and inclusive manner, promote actual development to compete with foreign media for the right to speak in the world, seize the strategic opportunity to improve national image, and strive to enhance global leadership in a better international public opinion circumstance.

**Keywords-** foreign mainstream media; the 14th Five-Year Plan; China-related public opinion; international communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and opening up, the world has witnessed an extraordinary acceleration in China's development. China's every move has attracted much attention of the international community, especially the 14th Five-Year Plan. Foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan can reflect the world's views on China's future development, and can also reveal international public opinions on China in the new historical stage. During the 30th session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping stressed that it was necessary to strengthen and improve international communication, effectively carry out guidance and struggle in international public opinion, and present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China<sup>[1]</sup>. At present, given the fact that international public opinion circumstance is becoming more and more complicated, how to tell China's stories well and better convey Chinese voice to the world has become an urgent issue for China<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, taking foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan as a case study, this study analyzes relevant reports with the help of AntConc and the R Programming Language. This study summarizes the basic characteristics of foreign mainstream media reports on China, analyzes the specific features and problems of report contents, and explores the trends of foreign mainstream media coverage on China in the future. The study aims to provide references of international public opinions for China to better convey Chinese voice in the world and further improve the international public opinion circumstance.

## II. BASIC FEATURES OF FOREIGN MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S REPORTS ON THE 14TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

This study extracts relevant news from the Factiva Dow Jones News Database from October 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021 by

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employing “China’s 14th Five-Year plan” as the retrieval term. The results show that, as of 30 April 2021, 15:30 (Beijing time), there are 649 reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan in Factiva Dow Jones News Database. After excluding domestic media reports and duplicate reports, 367 reports are selected and the “Foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan” corpus of 6,053,140 tokens is established. This section will analyze the basic features of foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan based on the search results of Factiva Dow Jones database.

A. *The Wide Range of Foreign Mainstream Media Sources*

The foreign mainstream media reporting on the 14th Five-Year Plan cover developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as developing countries such as Kenya, India and the Philippines, as shown in Figure 1. The sources of foreign mainstream media are wide and varied, including international authoritative media such as Dow Jones Newswires, PR Newswire, Reuters, *The Straits Times*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, and CNN. Indeed, *Financial Times*, CNN, BBC, etc. all reported on the 14th Five-Year Plan at the first time.

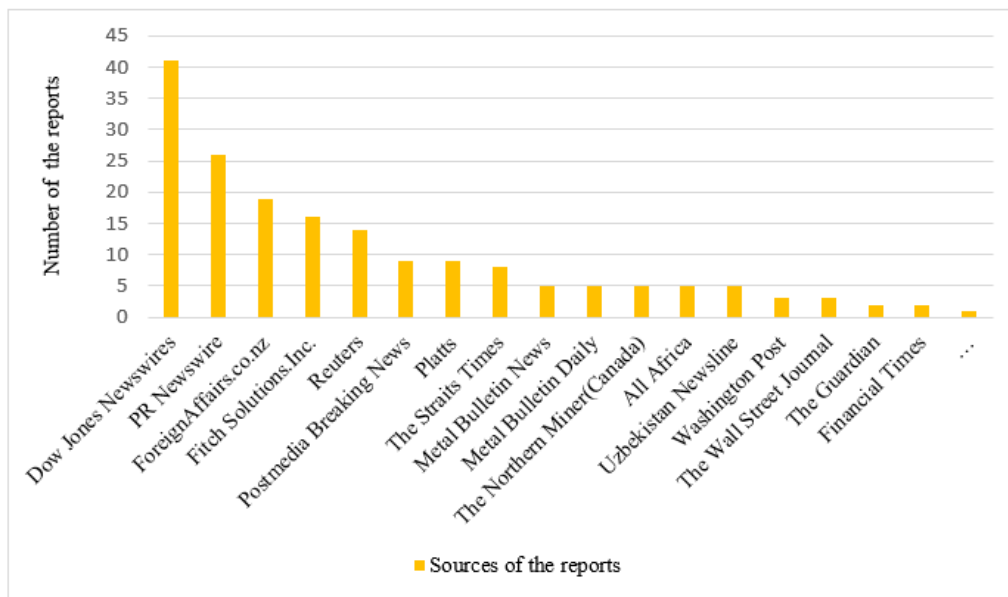


Figure 1 Foreign Mainstream Media Sources of the Reports on 14th Five-Year Plan

B. *The Continuity in Foreign Mainstream Media Coverage*

In addition to the considerable coverage on the first day when the 14th Five-Year Plan was proposed in the national conference, related news reports are released almost every day afterwards, which shows the continuity in foreign mainstream media coverage. The results of the monthly coverage by foreign mainstream media retrieved from the Factiva Dow Jones database are shown in Figure 2 below.

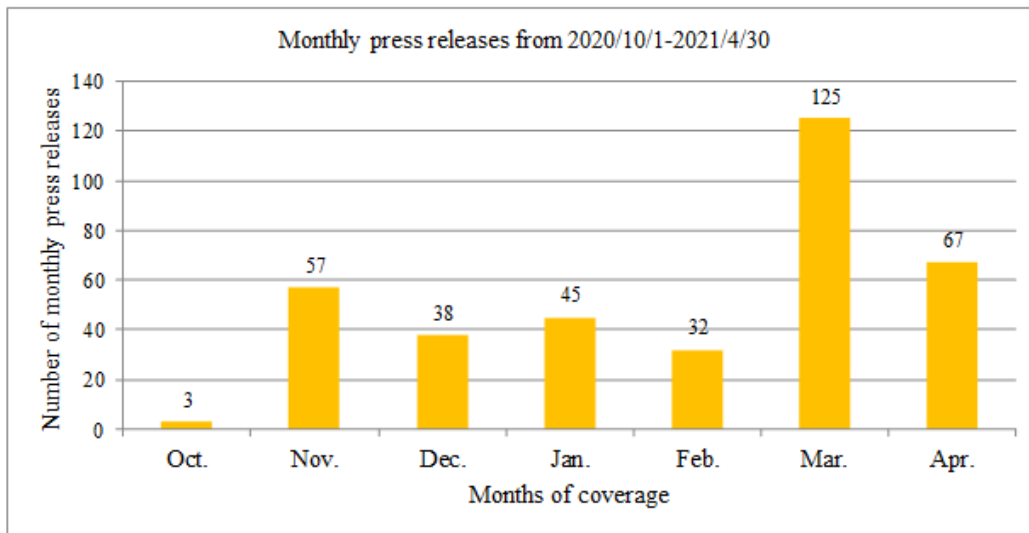


Figure 2 Monthly release volume of foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan

As can be seen from Figure 2, the time span of foreign mainstream media coverage is long, and the coverage shows continuity. From October 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021, foreign mainstream media basically reported on the 14th Five-Year Plan every month. In addition to October 30, 2020, when the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee was held, the amount of foreign mainstream media coverage was still significantly higher in November. The coverage continued until March 11, 2021, when the Fourth Session of the 13th National People’s Congress was held to vote for the adoption of the 14th Five-Year Plan. Therefore, the volume of foreign press coverage reached a new high in March 2021. After the Fourth Session of the 13th National People’s Congress, the media continued to report until April 30, 2021.

C. *The Comprehensive Coverage in Foreign Mainstream Media*

AntConc is employed to analyze the headlines of 367 retrieved foreign mainstream media reports. After categorizing the different forms of synonyms and removing meaningless words, this study takes the subject words with a frequency greater than 15 as the research object. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Analysis of subject words in news headlines

Rank	Freq	Word	Lemmas Word Form(s)
1	241	China	China 241
7	53	plan	plan 46 planned 1 plans 6
9	48	year	year 45 years 3
10	39	new	new 39
11	38	five	five 38
12	38	growth	growth 38
18	28	development	development 27 developments 1
19	28	economic	economic 28
20	27	company	companies 1 company 26
21	27	world	world 26 worlds 1
22	26	industry	industries 8 industry 18
23	25	HK	HK 25
25	24	climate	climate 24
26	24	energy	energy 24
27	24	market	market 21 markets 3
28	23	announcement	announcement 22 announcements 1
29	22	bourse	bourse 22
35	17	report	report 7 reports 10



“Journeying forward with new development goals”, *The star* underscores that China’s economy is deeply integrated into the global economy and no country can develop well in isolation<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### B. *Stressing China’s Energy Transition and Emissions Plans*

China’s carbon emission and energy transition plans have attracted the attention of many foreign mainstream media. With “energy” becoming a buzzword in foreign mainstream media reports, some media express their affirmation for China’s commitment in carbon emission control. For example, *The Age* argues that China’s actions to address climate issues may be serious, although its carbon emission targets are so close to America’s climate ambitions. Among other things, Myllyvirta, principal analyst at CREA, also notes that, China has yet to violate any of its climate commitments, despite coal construction is surging in this country<sup>[4]</sup>. In addition, some foreign mainstream media are negative about China’s carbon emission commitments. In *The Financial Times*, Fatih Birol, the director general of the International Energy Agency, expressed doubts about China’s commitment to reducing carbon emissions. He argued that China’s economic development plan in 2021 would tell the world whether Chinese government is truly committed to meeting its carbon commitments, which is also a major test for Beijing<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### C. *Underlining the Changes in Sino-US Diplomatic Relations*

As the world’s two largest economies, the changes in diplomatic relations between China and the United States will, to a certain extent, determine the world’s economic development. At this stage of the escalating trade war between the U.S. and China, global media pay much attention to whether the adoption of the 14th Five-Year Plan will lead to changes in global economic market, and how the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China will develop. *The Daily Signal* cautiously analyzes the impact of China’s 14th Five-Year Plan on U.S.-China relations, arguing that the strategy “dual circulation” in the 14th Five-Year Plan will fundamentally exclude American products from Chinese market, and is therefore opposed by the United States and other countries. In addition, key tasks in the 14th Five-Year Plan, such as the military reform and the “Made in China 2025” strategy, will widen the gap between the U.S. and China, thereby increasing tensions between two countries<sup>[6]</sup>.

#### D. *Highlighting the Human Rights of China*

Relevant news reports in foreign mainstream media often set developing countries as “other” groups, associating them with backwardness, chaos, etc<sup>[7]</sup>. Most media have started by demonizing China from Hong Kong, spreading rumors that “China has no human rights”. *The Straits Times* in Singapore condemned China for the human rights by covering a series of riots in Hong Kong with selective news graphics. *The Guardian*, for example, in its article “China adopts new laws to ensure only ‘patriots’ can govern Hong Kong”, consistently uses the expression “protest for democracy” to justify the riotous crimes against public order and facilities in Hong Kong. *The Guardian* uses the term “crackdown” to describe the Beijing government’s uncompromising response, and dismisses the Hong Kong government’s jailing of rioters as an overreaction<sup>[8]</sup>. These foreign mainstream media cover up the truth, misinterpret China’s relevant policies, further demonize China through unbalanced news reports, and convey to the international community the illusion that China has no human rights.

#### E. *Emphasizing the Opportunities that China Will Bring to the World*

China’s 14th Five-Year Plan proposes to build a “dual circulation” development pattern, i.e. to expand domestic demand and stimulate external demand at the same time. The growth of external demand will bring new development opportunities to many countries. Whether countries can grasp this development opportunity has also become a hot topic in foreign mainstream media. The Philippine newspaper *Business World* objectively discusses the implications of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Philippines, in which former CNN Beijing Bureau Chief Jaime A. FlorCruz says that, the Philippines should maintain good relations with China in order to take advantage of China’s economic growth and technological innovation. He argues that the 14th Five-Year Plan is an excellent technology development and investment opportunity for the Philippines, as China will promote more sustainable economic and social development, which will directly or indirectly benefit the Philippines. However, foreign policy expert Richard J. Heydarian disagrees, saying that the agreement with China could be more restrictive and detrimental to the Philippines<sup>[9]</sup>. Other foreign media outlets, such as *The Independent*, have also provided detailed analysis and speculation on the opportunities that China will bring to the world in the future.

#### IV. THE PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE 14TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

##### A. *Evaluating China's Social System with Preconceived Ideas*

The 14th Five-Year Plan emphasizes the full implementation of the principle of “one country, two systems”, thereby promoting the long-term prosperity and stable development of Hong Kong<sup>[10]</sup>. Among them, the policies proposed in the 14th Five-Year Plan to benefit Hong Kong are habitually interpreted by most foreign mainstream media as oppression under the dictatorial central government. *The Guardian* used negative words such as “rubber stamp” to describe Chinese National People's Congress, criticizing the policies enacted by China to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity and stability as a step backwards in democracy<sup>[8]</sup>. Most foreign mainstream media tend to evaluate China's social system with their preconceived ideas when reporting on issues related to Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and the relevant reports lack journalistic independence and objectivity to a certain extent.

##### B. *Viewing China's Development Progress in Stereotypes*

Some foreign mainstream media have stereotyped China's development progress, arguing that China's economy grows at the rate of its current economic model will lead to more and more turbulence in global economy. *The Age*, an Australian newspaper, commented on Beijing's latest industrial policy with the headline “China's five-year plan is a risk to global economy”. It said that China's 14th five-year plan could put more pressure on the global economy as it tries to recover in the post-epidemic era, which reminds the world that it should be wary of China's future developments<sup>[11]</sup>. Foreign mainstream media generally view China as a threat and tend to view China's development progress in a stereotypical light, worrying that China's vigorous development is aimed at conquering the world.

#### V. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT TREND OF CHINA-RELATED REPORTS IN FOREIGN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Based on the previous analysis, this study believes that, in the face of China's rapid development, new trends will emerge in foreign mainstream media coverage of China

##### A. *Focusing on China's Foreign Policies*

Changes in international relations have always been a hot topic for the global media, so as the changes in China's foreign policy. China's foreign policy, to a certain extent, affects the contrast of international power, so foreign mainstream media will focus on China's foreign policy in the future. For example, during the trade war between China and the U.S., the problem of “backlash against globalization” is intensifying, so the 14th Five-Year Plan has received close attention from all over the world since it was proposed, especially China's foreign policies.

##### B. *Highlighting China's Development Achievements*

China will take a series of measures to achieve the 14th Five-Year Plan, and whether China can achieve its goals through practical actions will attract the attention of foreign mainstream media in the future. In the next five years, China plans to achieve innovation-driven, high-quality development, utilize resources more efficiently, promote more low-carbon development, and reach peak carbon emissions by 2030. Whether China can achieve these goals and succeed in achieving corresponding development will determine the future course of international public opinion, because foreign mainstream media often measure the success or failure of China's development model by the final outcome. Therefore, foreign mainstream media will pay more attention to the future development results achieved by China than to specific issues such as whether China will make more contributions to the international community and what kind of great power responsibilities it will undertake.

##### C. *Underlining the Institutional Differences Between China and the West*

China is playing an increasingly important role on the world stage. As the advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics are emerging day by day, its road of peaceful rise has broadened the path of developing countries towards modernization, providing reference and guidance for those developing countries in the world that wish to accelerate development while aspiring to maintain their independence<sup>[12]</sup>. The outbreak of novel coronavirus in early 2020 being rampant, China quickly contained the epidemic with its strong institutional advantages, while the epidemic in the United States and other developed



Western countries has intensified, which prompts foreign mainstream media to reflect on the differences between the Chinese and Western systems. For example, an article headlined “China’s stock market shows it is winning the pandemic” on *The Daily Telegraph* reports that China has largely recovered from the epidemic and its economy is still going strong, compared with the current economic conditions in the West. Besides, *The Daily Telegraph* holds that China has won in many ways<sup>[13]</sup>. It can be seen that the current changes in global economy have already drawn the attention of some foreign mainstream media to the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Foreign mainstream media, to a certain extent, have realized the comparative advantages of the China’s political system. In the future, foreign mainstream media will continue to focus on the differences between the Chinese and Western systems to compare and analyze the respective advantages of the two systems.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Based on 367 foreign mainstream media reports related to the 14th Five-Year Plan derived from Factiva Dow Jones database, this study employs AntConc and the R Programming Language to analyze the public opinions of these news reports. This study summarizes the basic features of foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan, analyzes the detailed features of the report contents, explores the problems of the news reports, and discusses the development trends of foreign mainstream media reports on China in the future. Results show that, foreign mainstream media reports on the 14th Five-Year Plan are continuous and comprehensive, with wide range of media sources. The coverage focuses on changes in China’s market policies, energy transition, diplomatic relations, human rights, and development opportunities, and the news reports exist problems such as preconceived ideas and stereotypes. In the future, foreign mainstream media will focus on the institutional differences between China and the West and pay more attention to China’s foreign policy as well as development achievements. Therefore, in the face of the severe and complex international public opinion circumstances, China should adhere to the important statements of the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping, and combines practical experiences and actual problems in international communication. China should deeply comprehend and precisely implement the concept of precise communication to convey China’s voice in international community<sup>[14]</sup>. China should seize the strategic opportunities to construct national image and gain a voice in international discourse with actual development results. With tireless support and efforts, we believe that we will present a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic view of China to the world.

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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