

Role Construction and Discourse Competition from the Perspective of the Global South: A Discourse Analysis of CGTN's Coverage of the United Nations Climate Conference

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Abstract. The collective composed of a large number of developing countries and emerging market countries - the "Global South" - has attracted much attention in recent years and has gradually become an important force in international politics. In the face of a series of meteorological disasters caused by global climate warming, climate governance and the allocation of responsibilities have become important topics in the international public opinion arena. This article takes the news reports on the United Nations Climate Conference (COP) published on the CGTN official website as a sample, and analyzes the role construction and discourse competition of China, as a member of the Southern countries, in the international climate issues. The research suggests that in the international public opinion arena dominated by Western countries, countries from the "Global South" represented by China are attempting to challenge the dominance of Western countries in climate narrative strategies, striving for a voice and enhancing their global influence.

Keywords: Global South, Global climate governance, COP, CGTN

1. Introduction

Global warming is regarded as a common challenge faced by humanity today. The impact of meteorological disasters on human life is becoming increasingly severe, and climate governance and the allocation of responsibilities have become important topics in the international public opinion arena [1]. At present, in the context of global climate governance, the international community is generally divided into two opposing camps: developed countries and developing countries [2]. The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) has always been regarded as an important player in leading global climate governance, regulating climate conditions and resolving the North-South contradictions. However, before the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference (COP21), global climate governance was still dominated by the discourse power of Western developed countries. After the conclusion of the Paris Agreement, global climate governance has entered a new stage. This agreement responds to the demands of many developing countries for climate justice. The southern countries, which have long been in a "discourse disadvantaged position", have also begun to strive for their own international discourse power [2]. As one of the important members of the Southern countries, China, with the rise of the "Global South" forces, has attracted much attention

from the international community for its performance in climate governance [2]. In this context, as the mainstream media of China in the international public opinion arena, CGTN's reporting tendencies and discourse strategies fully reflect China's strategic stance. However, in the complex international media environment, China's reports have still been misinterpreted by some Western media that hold the dominant position in the discourse. To a certain extent, this has hindered China's international image building and the exertion of its international influence in the climate field. This article conducts a detailed study of CGTN's reports on global climate from the perspective of the Global South, exploring the construction of China's role in global climate communication and the competition of discourses. It provides strategies for China to enhance its voice in climate issues.

2. Research method

This article is guided by qualitative analysis and employs discourse analysis. It focuses on the news reports of the China Global Television Network (CGTN) English channel regarding the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (referred to as COP), including various forms of samples such as comments, news clips, and feature reports. Through keyword search, collect all relevant reports and videos from 2023 to the present. It is expected to select 30-50 core texts and 20 core videos as the samples for in-depth analysis. The author conduct in-depth interpretation of the texts, record their reporting themes, main sources, and emotional tone. The author identify the usage frequency and context of keywords such as "Global South" and "South-South cooperation", and based on the framework theory, analyze how the reports construct the narrative framework through these keywords, thereby completing the identity recognition of "China as a member of the Global South" and the role construction of "representative of Southern countries", and participating in global discourse competition. Finally, we explore how CGTN, in its coverage of the COP, employs the discourse strategies related to the "Global South" to construct China's international role and national image.

3. Research result

Based on the news reports (including comments, short news clips, and feature stories) about the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (referred to as COP) presented by the official English channel of CGTN from 2023 to 2025, this study has summarized the three types of agenda frameworks used. The proportion of each type of framework was statistically analyzed, and from highest to lowest, they were: "Responsibility Framework", "Inequality Framework", and "Common Development Framework". Meanwhile, during the text analysis process, this study focused on the relevant keywords related to the "Global South" and sorted out and analyzed their frequency of occurrence (see Table 1). From the perspective of framework theory research, Taiwanese scholar Zang Guoren classified news frameworks into three categories: ①News organization framework ②Personal cognitive framework ③Textual framework. He believes that news reports are the symbolic reality constructed by the media, through which people understand the real society; the encoding by the communicator and the decoding by the audience jointly constitute the interactive process of news dissemination; text is the carrier of news reports, and the communicator uses the text symbol system to set issues and guide public opinion [3]. Based on this theory, the various issue frameworks used in this study were symbolically interpreted to further explore the potential narrative frameworks (see Table 2).

Table 1. Frequency analysis of keywords related to "global south" in CGTN COP reports

Keyword	Frequency	The framework to which it belongs	Sample text	Function Analysis
Developing country	44	Framework for Joint Development	"For the vast majority of developing countries, this mechanism largely depends on the mobilization of resources and financial support."	Developing countries have become China's identity label in the international public opinion arena. This keyword has established the basic stance and discourse camp of CGTN's reporting.
Climate justice	27	Unfair framework	"Realizing climate justice is the core task of this Conference of the Parties."	As a responsible country, CGTN has imbued the climate issue with a moral dimension and emphasized the legitimacy of the demands of "southern countries".
Historic responsibility	21	Responsibility framework	"Developed countries must recognize their historical responsibilities."	The discourse tends to point the blame for the current climate predicament towards developed countries.
South-south cooperation	17	Framework for Joint Development	"South-South cooperation has provided a new model for global climate action."	Propose the Chinese solution
Financial support	14	Unfair framework	"We hope that more developed countries will provide financial support for the protection of biodiversity."	Focus on the most fundamental contradiction point

Table 2. Analysis of the reporting framework of CGTN COP based on the three-level framework theory

Framework level	Core analysis issue	Specific analytical dimensions of the "Global South" narrative	Framework presentation	Textual evidence
High-level framework (theme definition)	The topic of the report was set up	Core issue definition: Define the COP conference as "a negotiation platform for climate justice" Construction of narrative strategy: Emphasizing "responsibility and obligation" among nations Tone of the statement: From a moral perspective, "oppose injustice and hope for cooperative development"	Unfair framework	The current discussion aims to explore how different fields can collaborate with each other to enhance the dissemination of climate information, increase public awareness and participation, and promote relevant measures both domestically and globally.
Intermediate-level framework (problem presentation)	Agenda-setting strategy	Attributing the core issues of global climate change to the historical responsibilities of developed countries Advocate South-South cooperation and criticize the empty promises made by Western developed countries Propose the Chinese solution and advocate that developed countries provide financial and technical support	Responsibility framework, unfairness framework, common development framework	This agreement will provide 300 billion US dollars in funds annually until 2035, thereby strengthening the previous commitment made by wealthy countries to provide 100 billion US dollars in climate financing annually by 2020.
	The symbolic representation of the framework	The symbolic representation of the framework Main source: Extensive quotations from the speeches of representatives from developing countries	Inequitable framework, liability framework	Last year, just a few weeks before the Conference of the Parties was held, one-third of Pakistan was affected by floods.

Table 2. (continued)

Low-level framework (symbolic/emotional tone)	Emotional strategies within the framework	Moral Criticism: Utilizing condemnatory language to criticize the negative attitudes of some developed countries towards climate issues, expressing anger over the unfair distribution of international discourse power. Sympathy and compassion: List the disaster situations of numerous countries and express sympathy for them.	Unfair framework	"Only talking without taking any action." "The drought in South America has caused rivers - important transportation corridors - to dry up, affecting people's livelihoods. The rainfall in Spain and the United States has triggered floods, resulting in hundreds of deaths and causing billions of dollars in economic losses."
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3.1. The construction strategies for identity: "comrades" and "responsible state"

In the process of global climate governance, China has always emphasized its status as a "member of the developing countries" and a "responsible country of the Global South" [1]. As the mainstream media of China in the international public opinion arena, the reporting style of CGTN reflects China's strategic stance and international image. Based on the frequency analysis of key words (as shown in Table 1), the two key words "developing countries" and "South-South cooperation" are important components of the "common development framework" [4]. Before the COP28 conference was held in Dubai, a report by CGTN on the predicted outcomes of the COP28 conference repeatedly used the pronoun "we" as the subject, referring to the countries in the Global South. The use of this inclusive pronoun effectively portrayed China's policy stance as an expression of the collective will of the Global South, thereby dispelling any perception of unilateral actions. When exploring the attribution of climate issues, the report naturally took the perspective of developing countries and focused on the statements of representatives from developing countries [5]. At the same time, it clearly pointed out that climate issues are the common historical experiences of developed and developing countries and are also the historical responsibilities left by Western countries. Against the backdrop of the global shift towards addressing climate issues, facing and resolving climate problems has gradually become a consensus among the southern countries [6]. CGTN reported that as the world's second-largest economy, China should assume the role of a "responsible country" and "leader" for the global south, forming a natural alliance with these countries, reconstructing the responsibility chain, and challenging the existing climate governance order [4].

3.2. The construction of the framework: "critics" and "leaders"

The United Nations Climate Change Conference has long been regarded as an important player in leading global climate governance, regulating climate conditions and resolving the North-South conflict [7]. However, while promoting global climate justice to the public, there is insufficient emphasis on the responsibilities of the global northern countries [2]. In a report on greenhouse gas emissions, CGTN stated that "developed countries must recognize their historical responsibilities", and conducted detailed data statistics on the current greenhouse gas emissions of developed countries [8]. By establishing a binary opposition framework of "historical responsibility" and "current situation", it attributed the historical issues of climate governance to the "empty promises" made by developed countries over the years. It also protested against developing countries like Pakistan, which have been severely affected by climate disasters for many years: emphasizing that one-third of Pakistan's regions suffer from floods all year round, and calling on those developed

countries with the most significant historical emissions to pay for these losses. By focusing on the specific hardships of Pakistan, the report personified the abstract "climate justice" debate, linking the historical responsibilities of developed countries with specific human tragedies, thereby enhancing its critical emotions and moral weight [9]. In the process of participating in global governance, China emphasizes the significance of principles such as "common but differentiated responsibilities", fairness, and the capabilities of each country [1]. The construction of the "unfair framework" in the report represents China's critical discourse against the mainstream narrative on climate issues in the international public opinion field [10]. Then, by constructing the "responsibility framework", it transforms the "critic" identity into that of a "leader". The function of this discourse strategy lies in its attempt to subtly shift the focus of international public opinion from "China's responsibility for emission reduction" to "the historical responsibility of developed countries", thereby defending China's own position from a moral perspective and integrating identity recognition with the construction of a responsible major country image.

4. Discussion

4.1. The construction strategies of identity: "comrades" and "responsible state"

By summarizing the research results, it was found that CGTN adopted a complete strategic narrative logic of "identity recognition → discourse criticism → role leadership" in the international climate discourse competition [11]. International relations scholars such as Miskimmon have pointed out that strategic narratives are an important way to understand soft power. They define strategic narrative as "a tool used by political actors to expand their influence, manage expectations, and change the discourse environment in which they operate". Therefore, the study of strategic narratives itself demonstrates that political actors enhance a country's soft power through the construction of attractive narratives in their external communication [5]. Firstly, by establishing a sense of identity with numerous countries in the Global South, a foundation for cooperation and development is established, thereby enabling China to gain support in international public opinion, thus allowing China to enhance its international discourse power [12]. Secondly, by focusing on the keyword "climate justice", a "unfair framework" is constructed. By criticizing the "empty promises" of developed countries regarding climate change, the "carbon colonialist logic" behind the climate change policies of the Western countries is broken, and the unequal power structure within the international climate governance system is re-examined, and the existing rights discourse is deconstructed [4]. Finally, on behalf of the vast majority of southern countries, a call was made and a Chinese solution was proposed to clearly define China's role and leadership position in the international arena.

4.2. The underlying communication motivations behind CGTN's discourse strategy

As the mainstream media of in the international public opinion field, CGTN's strategic stance in international communication is highly consistent with our country's political strategic stance. With the increasingly tense international situation, China is now facing an increasingly severe international environment. However, China always pursues global fairness and justice, actively seeks peace and development, guards against risks and challenges, engages in in-depth dialogue with the world, and consistently adheres to the diplomatic concept of promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. In international communication, due to the lack of international discourse power, a large number of developing countries have long been in a

disadvantaged position in terms of discourse [6]. As a responsible country in the South, our country is committed to enhancing its international discourse power, seizing the initiative in shaping international public opinion, and breaking the monopoly of Western discourse. Therefore, the entire discourse system of CGTN, especially the strategic narrative logic of "identity recognition → discourse criticism → role leadership", is a narrative project that serves the national strategy.

4.3. The advantages and challenges of CGTN's narrative construction

Compared with other media in the international media landscape, CGTN's coverage of the COP mainly focuses on China's contributions to climate governance, government negotiations around the world, assessment of global measures, and other climate-related events that are highly relevant to developing countries [7]. CGTN is capable of skillfully identifying the moral high points in the Global South, seizing the opportunity to assert its voice in a timely manner. Through reporting on China's actual actions, it helps to build consensus among the South and shape China's image internationally. Nevertheless, there are still certain challenges in its narrative construction and discourse strategy: In the international media landscape dominated by the West, a complete set of strategic narrative logic is very likely to be regarded by the audience as "political propaganda". In the complex international media environment, its reporting discourse may be distorted or undermined by other media based on their own positions [8]. For the international audience of its English channel, the communication effect will be significantly weakened. Therefore, CGTN still needs to consider how to resonate with its audience? After seizing the moral high ground of "the Global South", how can we prevent this position from being regarded as a "propaganda platform exclusively controlled by China"?

5. Conclusion

5.1. Research summary

This study conducted an in-depth discourse analysis of CGTN's reports on COP, based on the three-layer framework theory proposed by Zang Guoren. It revealed a complete set of strategic narrative logic adopted by CGTN in participating in international discourse competition. Under this logic, China successfully constructed its role in the international public opinion field and gained discourse support. The report defined the COP conference as a forum for discussions on "climate justice", attributing the climate issue to the historical responsibility of Western countries. It used words like "unfair" and "empty talk" to hold Western developed countries accountable, and proposed the "South-South cooperation" solution, thereby securing a certain degree of discourse power for the Global South.

5.2. Research limitations and future prospects

Although this study aimed to conduct a research on CGTN's climate discourse strategies from the perspective of the Global South, based on framework theory and the operational analysis of the Global South, there are still several limitations. Firstly, the research sample failed to adequately cover CGTN's series of reports targeting language regions beyond its English channel, making it difficult to comprehensively present CGTN's various climate discourse strategies. Secondly, with regard to the "Global South" perspective, specific analysis of the climate discourse in the "Global North" was not conducted, preventing a more distinct comparative study, which might lead to subjective biases in the narrative of the northern countries. In the future, the scope of language

coverage for media reports can be expanded to reach a wider range of regions around the world. Comparative studies in both horizontal and vertical directions can be conducted globally, thereby enabling a more comprehensive exploration of CGTN's discourse strategies from the perspective of the Global South.

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