# Research Article

# Mediating national identity through international broadcasting: A qualitative study of CGTN's cross-cultural

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## ABSTRACT

A key element of China's larger initiatives to strengthen soft power and influence how the world views its national identity is its worldwide media strategy. Amidst growing geopolitical rivalry and general scepticism over China's ascent, global television networks such as CGTN are essential in developing and distributing stories for viewers from many cultural backgrounds. The research that is currently available provides little insight into the real discursive mechanisms that are used to develop and transmit national identity since it frequently depends on quantitative audience surveys or generic media critique. Further interpretative research is still required to identify the precise language, images, and representational techniques used in these global broadcasts. By using a qualitative, interpretative methodology centered on desk-based textual analysis of publicly accessible CGTN English-language content, including as news items, documentaries, and promotional materials, this study fills that gap. The analytical frameworks of Soft Power Theory, Representation Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis are employed to examine how CGTN constructs and communicates aspects of China's national identity to international audiences. The study explores narrative framing that emphasizes cooperation, modernization, and peaceful development; language choices and translation practices that support cross-cultural accessibility; visual imagery and symbolism that highlight cultural heritage and technological progress; and relational positioning through which China situates itself within broader global discourses. According to the findings, CGTN uses a complex, multi-layered communication approach that gently reframes Western-dominated narratives while legitimizing China's growing influence in international affairs. These tactics engage with prevailing global narratives in a measured manner, foregrounding China's image as a responsible and cooperative actor in international affairs. The study advances knowledge of how international broadcasting functions as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and soft power projection in a fast-changing global media landscape by exposing these discursive tendencies.

*Keywords:* International Broadcasting; National Identity; Discourse Analysis; Soft Power; CGTN; Cross-Cultural Communication

## 1. Introduction

As globalization accelerates and geopolitical competition becomes fiercer, international broadcasting has turned into the prime tool for states to images for themselves, promote national interest, and practice soft power

[1]. Soft power refers to the ability to shape global perceptions and influence international behaviour through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or force. China's media strategies, exemplified by CGTN, have played a central role in projecting its soft power by offering an alternative narrative of China's role in global affairs, as seen in initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and its environmental leadership. [2]. CGTN is given a prominent role due to its strategic positioning as China's international media arm, which broadcasts in multiple languages and reaches a global audience. For example, during the 2022 Winter Olympics, CGTN's coverage showcased China's advancements in technology and its commitment to international cooperation [3]. In a backdrop characterized by a mix of global media flows, contested narratives about China's ascendancy, and a general scepticism regarding state-sponsored messaging, the accentuation on modernizing its international communication capability has become more pronounced in Beijing, not simply in countering negative perceptions but also in creating the image of China as a responsible, modern, and culturally rich global power [4,5]. This context begs the need for a better understanding of how Chinese media institutions actively construct and project national identity beyond domestic borders.

International broadcasting, the paradigm of cultural diplomacy, derives its support from China's larger soft power strategy that seeks to place beside economic and political influence enticing narratives that nurture mutual understanding and trust [6]. This strategy has grown out of various demands: persistence of stereotypes in foreign media, ideological differences with Western democracies, and need to counter the U.S.-dominated global communication networks. Nevertheless, while there is a plethora of literature regarding China's international media expansion, much of this research focuses on either the policy intentions, or funding structure, or just the grand geopolitics concerning soft power competition [7,8]. Such studies usually emphasize the extent of China's media investment, or intent to become a competitor with global players like BBC and CNN, and pay less attention to the actual content strategies that make these narratives appealing and effective for different international audiences [9,10]. A huge gap exists in understanding how such media messages are linguistically and narratively crafted to engage with cross-cultural complexities and negotiate China's national identity for global consumption.

The limitations of established research methods become eminent. Quantitative studies often emphasize audience metrics, such as viewership statistics or survey data on public opinion, which furnish some valuable but relatively superficial insight while ignoring the intricate ways in which meaning is constructed through language and storytelling [11,12]. Analyses with a policy focus quite rightly elucidate strategic objectives, but they tend to neglect the concrete communicative practices and media texts through which cultures enact the stated objectives. Qualitative work caught in the orbit of this main avenue sometimes remains constricted to very narrow institutional perspectives represented by elite interviews with media professionals or government officials, inhibiting systematic engagement with discourse itself [13,14]. It results in a methodological lacuna on how to understand the nuanced text-based strategies CGTN invokes in framing China's national identity in ways that are supposed to resonate with international audiences, find a way through cultural differences, and manage geopolitical sensitivities [15]. Closing this gap would be important to begin grasping the full complexity of China's engagement in global media and its emerging role in international communication.

In the qualitative, desk-based research, the study concentrates on English-language CGTN content-especially news reports, documentaries, and features online. Through close readings of discourse, images, and narratives of these materials, the study attempts to assess the extent to which the channel fashions and projects a world image of Chinese national identity. There is no provision in the method for any new data to be collected by way of interviews or surveys; rather, it relies on the interpretation of existing publicly available media to subsequently unravel the subtle strategies of meaning-making and cultural diplomacy that shape international perception of China.

**Research Questions**

- *RQ1-* How does CGTN construct narratives of China's national identity for international audiences?

- *RQ2-* What discourse strategies do CGTN use to appeal to cross-cultural viewers?

- *RQ3-* How does CGTN's English-language content frame China's role in global affairs?

- *RQ4-* In what ways does CGTN contrast China's identity with that of Western countries?

- *RQ5-* How does CGTN use imagery, language, and symbolism to advance China's soft power goals?

In this article, Section 2 presents a review of the related literature to establish the study's theoretical foundation. Section 3 outlines the proposed research methodology. Section 4 discusses the results, and Section 5 concludes the paper with key findings and policy implications.

# 2. Related works

## International Broadcasting and Soft Power

Drawing on cultural diplomacy, Zhu [16] investigates how the Chinese telecaster CGTN responds to the federal government's campaign for cultural diplomacy via document analysis, comprehensive interviews, and participant observation. These qualitative approaches tend to limit themselves to analysing internal processes and, therefore, do not capture immediate public perceptions, even though they offer deep insights into policymaking and manufacture dynamics. Using an interdisciplinary case study methodology, Khan [17] seeks to understand how China builds its soft power through the Belt and Road Project by applying cultural diplomacy, such as media, education, and the arts. Although working with such approaches yields an in-depth geographical study, some of its setbacks include the inconsistent access to reliable data and the challenge inherent in generalizations across multiple political as well as cultural scenarios.

## National Identity in Media

Abbasi, Hassan, and Rasheed [18] employed a mixed-method methodology for the study of how China's official media influence opinions on its social and economic decisions by integrating a survey of 500 Pakistanis with a qualitative assessment of Chinese media coverage. While this approach grants both breadth and depth, it has the drawback that the survey results may not have been able to capture the more subtle ways in which citizens cognitively process advertisements. Huo [19] attempts to look at how China might better communicate its customs and traditions through the arena of modern media, here using successful world communication approaches as case examples. Whereas the approach is insightful, the downsides are that skills learned from particular situations were not able to sufficiently deal with the complex and ever-changing difficulties in communicating across cultures.

## Cross-Cultural Communication

Wang [20] delves into language and rhetoric employed in a broadcast discussion among FOX and CGTN hosts on the China-US trade war using Systemic Functional Languages, with special emphasis on Transitivity analysis. This language approach offers very deep yet somewhat limited insights into meaning construction: it focuses mainly on the text and thereby dismisses the listener-or larger social-meaning. Yuan and Tian [21] investigates communication tactics and aims in three rounds of discussion between FOX and CGTN, within the WGTICC and cultural game theory framework. The drawback for the theory is that it builds on conceptual understanding, which may be inadequate to project actual response complexities coming from audiences or bigger media setups-that is, the theory aids in the exposure of social processes and rhetorical techniques.

**Discourse Strategies in Media Studies**

This subject choice in foreign TV propaganda shows of China may be made to more effectively convey culture and the country's image. The research by Hou Fangying [22] is based on a discussion, conceptual approach to do the investigation. This is practically a strategic approach, but it is limited in the sense that it remains conceptual and has not been empirically verified through research or audience input. Jiang et al. [23] directed towards the study of how this national media machinery in China operates to generate content for overseas audiences and measure audience responses through views, likes, and comments, applying BERTopic machine learning analysis on more than 6600 CGTN videos on YouTube. While this approach provides an overarching view of the content strategy, the weakness this behind-the-scenes quantitative analysis faces is that it cannot reveal underlying intentional purposes or interpret potential audience reactions.

**Media Diplomacy and State Branding**

Zhang and Shaw [24] applies a qualitative discourse analysis to the CGTN-YouTube videos on the Belt and Road plan in order to understand the forms of discourse employed by China to project an image of world leadership. It has, however, the shortcoming of offering an in-depth meaning of official accounts at the expense of ignoring how audiences in the rest of the world actually comprehend or react to it. In examining the ways in which the country image is transmitted via traditional and new media, Hu et al. [25] adopts the hybrid approach applying structural-functional analysis and dialectical logic and comparing with information on online platforms. In this mode, while the full-fledged analytic system for the application of communication strategies can be seen, however, the strategy suffers from the drawbacks of not really ensuring that the consistency of messages is maintained universally, given the multidimensional nature of cultural formation and media diffusion.

**Representation Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis**

El Damanhoury, Saleh, and Lebovic [26] considers how the initial episodes of the Israel-Gaza War were treated by the BBC and Al Jazeera English, using an integrated approach and critical discourse analysis, with particular focus on linguistic choices, temporality, and interactivity. While this approach has helped understand the nature of media framing from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, it is limited to the examination of a narrowly defined textual framework, thus potentially omitting significant editorial contexts or consumers' perspectives. Wang Guenier, Xing, and Zhang [27] attempts to understand how corporate Chinese language instruction fosters cross-cultural interaction skills for the junior population through the systemic and critical approach to multimedia interaction analyses involving recorded classes, textbooks, and teaching materials used in the UK and Irish institutions. However, it tends to furnish much rich and deep insight into classroom practices while concentrating on institutional environments that may not be reflective of more generalized educational environments or the experiences of learners elsewhere.

## 2.1. Research gap

- Existing studies paid too much attention to audience size and audience surveys of CGTN, missing how CGTN actually constructs its messages [28].

- Little is there in the way of analysis of the language, framing, and storytelling employed in its English broadcasts by CGTN [29].

- Research often neglects to account for CGTN's content adaptations aimed at different international and cultural audiences [30].

- Few studies actually use a more in-depth qualitative text analysis to lay bare the media strategies behind China's national image [31].

# 3. Proposed qualitative study

Methodology section includes all matters surrounding research design and conduct so that readers may perceive exactly how this study was done and can then evaluate its trustworthiness. It describes the major approach used (qualitative and interpretive), providing the rationale for the approach's choice relative to the aim of the investigation, materials considered and their selection criteria, and an analysis pathway starting from familiarization with the data through to the coding of the data, theme generation, and finally the interpretation of the data. One would describe the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis and the ethical considerations or structions that influenced this entire process, ensuring that the research design and analysis were highly transparent, systematic, and easy to follow or critique.

## 3.1. Qualitative, interpretive approach

The research utilized a qualitative approach in its framework to understand the supplemental systems through which CGTN generates and produces narratives of Chinese national identity in different cultural contexts. It is not concerned with measuring, quantifying, or statistically substantiating patterns but rather digs into the meaning embedded in CGTN's English-language programs, with particular attention to language choice, framing, and narrative structure. Such an interpretative framework is crucial in grasping how such messages adapt to cultural differences and geopolitical sensitivities-to uncover intent and strategizing that might otherwise be missed through mere reliance on quantitative audience data. The shaping of discourse is thus analysed to reveal how the media is instrumental in advancing China's desired international image of a culture at ease with itself and assured of being responsible and modern, at least in contrast to problems of mistrust, stereotyping, and ideological conflict that have historically weighed on the global perception of China.

The very qualitative feature of this study becomes an essential part in tackling complexity and subtlety embedded in the processes of cross-cultural communications. International broadcasting does not just mean dissemination of information but a negotiated flow of meaning between cultures, where often conflicting values, expectations, and interpretations need to be settled. Through a very detailed textual and discourse analysis, this study sheds light on the finer details of how CGTN tries to face these challenges directly, portray China's role in the world, and grab a competing position in the global media arena. Such an approach results in a richer, multi-layered understanding the strategic utilization of language and narrative design in view of the specific workings of media soft power on the level of media content and meaning-making, rather than through audience-based survey studies or policy impact measurement. Such emphasis stands against regarding media as a passive site of cultural negotiation and identity construction in contemporary international relations.

## 3.2. Rationale for case study approach

The case study method is selected due to it allowing for an in-depth exploration of the unique role of CGTN as China's official international broadcaster and the consequential complexity of its issues associated with message framing in real-world situations. It enables investigations into how carefully constructed narratives of nationhood are presented and communicated for various global audiences. In contrast to broad cross-national surveys or merely statistical exercises, it will provide rich, in-depth insight into the language and techniques of framing employed in the international construction of China's image.

**Single Case Study Approach**

A single-case study approach is appropriate to facilitate inquiries for deep understanding and insights relevant to how China's international broadcaster shapes narratives relating to national identities for global audiences. Case studies have been well-accepted for their ability to examine complex social phenomena with regard to or in real-world contexts, especially when it is difficult to demarcate the boundary between the

phenomenon and the context. Narrowing the case to CGTN's English international broadcast shall permit analysing content, language, and discourse in the representation of China on the world stage. The understanding should enable the interpretative richness of structured, framed, and discursive narratives under various intensities operated for diverse sets of international audiences. A large comparative or quantitative study would simply be too blunt an instrument for this task. From this narrow focus, depth will be favored over breadth while enriching the understanding of how a state broadcaster is a place for national image construction.

**Rationale for Selecting CGTN**

CGTN is selected because it serves as China's primary international broadcaster and plays a central role in communicating China's national image to global audiences, particularly through its coverage of major international events and diplomatic initiatives. While domestic media caters to local audiences, CGTN targets cross-cultural communication in an effort to attract viewers from various cultural and political backgrounds. Thus, it becomes an apt platform to study how China goes about trying to reframe its global image against international scepticism, media criticism, and ideological discord. In this way, the overall configuration positions CGTN as a key platform within China's evolving media diplomacy, aiming to shape global understandings of China through the selective articulation of narratives concerning national identity, development, and worldview. In this regard, CGTN offers a timely case for examining the role of state-sponsored international media in processes of cultural mediation and international image construction.

**Purpose and Scope**

This case study is not meant to infer statistically generalizable results about all types of international broadcasters and audiences. Rather, analytical depth is sought in the search for theoretical insights concerning the role of state media in the symbolic constitution of national identity in global communication. It is through the close dissection of CGTN as a bounded system that one can uncover the way national narratives get constructed in language and storytelling and go through characterization and mediation. Such focus on discourse and meaning-making shifts attention toward the communicative functions of international broadcasting beyond the mere transmission of content and prominence in shaping perceptions of the nation beyond its borders. The case study, therefore, serves as an effective analytical lens for examining how China engages in global communicative practices related to voice, legitimacy, and influence, particularly at the level of observable strategies.

### 3.3. Data source and selection

**Broadcast Transcripts and Scripts**

Wherever possible, broadcasts transcripts, and scripts are included in the study, as these items serve excellent resources for understanding the structured and deliberate use of language in CGTN broadcasts. Since transcripts reproduce verbatim the wording of newscasts and feature programs, the analysis can focus on picking apart framing devices, rhetorical strategies, and narrative structures designed to mold international perceptions of China. When obtainable, scripts provide insight into the intended communicative focus prior to live or recorded delivery, including editorial considerations related to the presentation of China's national identity. Drawing on these materials, the study examines how formal and polished language contributes to the construction of an authoritative communicative style designed for cross-cultural audiences.

**Online Video Segments**

One of the central components of the online video segments under a much broader data source is that it reflects CGTN's growing emphasis on digital distribution and multimedia storytelling to reach international

audiences. The segments existing on the CGTN websites and social media channels draw imagery, narration, interviews, and sound design to put forward rich and immersive representations of China. The study aims to examine and analyse not only the verbal linguistics but beyond that-visual symbolism, emotional appeals, and multimodal devices that parallel or extend the verbal discourse. The whole quarter becomes pertinent with the view of looking at how CGTN itself gets its hands in persuasive storytelling across cultural barriers. To use dynamic affordances of video to project China's national identity into being modern, attractive, and relevant in the world today.

**Website Articles and Features**

Website articles with features offer an important textual dimension to an international communication strategy for CGTN, which allows in-depth treatment of subjects, profiles, and analyses that work toward communicating the broadcasting message itself. Often, these written pieces are designed with an intent to complement broadcast and video content with additional context, elaboration, and framing for purposes of interpretation. Following these articles, the research can trace the ways coherent narratives on China are constructed by CGTN in history, culture, policies, and international role It is a small-market television channel and, hence, must present its narrative in an accessible format for international consumption. This analytical layer examines how narrative organization, selective sourcing, and framing techniques contribute to communicative effects such as supporting perceptions of legitimacy, credibility, and cultural understanding among diverse audiences.

**Promotional Materials and Mission Statements**

The promotional literature and mission statements developed by CGTN are one of the key sources in defining the broadcaster's self-contrived objectives, brand identity, and strategic aims in the arena of international communication. These are quite often very explicit in describing CGTN's purview as somewhat increasing China's soft power, building goodwill internationally, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue between various peoples. Through an analysis of the mission statement and marketing materials, the study gets to examine what kind of official narratives CGTN wants to pronounce about itself and what kind of values it wants to affirm. This will give us context to better understand the larger discourse strategies operating in its programming, as it lays out how CGTN was meant to be positioned as a formal channel for China to project itself internationally, as well as an instrument for foreign audiences to begin to think about Chinese national identity.

## 3.4. Textual analysis

At the Textual Analysis stage, the study takes a more intense and contemplative gaze into CGTN contents apart from videos and articles to see how China's story is being told. Words are considered for their meaning; images carry weight, and frame messages. It provides some insight into the ulterior motive behind CGTN's alleged representation of China to the outside world.

### 3.4.1. Familiarization

The first key step in the analytical process was that the analyst should have been familiar with the topic, which means that deep immersion over days or weeks would have been necessary in order to appreciate fully the content, style, and intent of communication in the materials selected from CGTN. At this point, transcripts and articles are read multiple times; one may even have to watch several clips more than once and go through promotional materials and mission statements with a fine-tooth comb to grasp not only what is being said outright but also the underlying themes, tones, and narrative structures. Being steeped in this information from various perspectives will contribute to commencing the recognition of patterns, recurrent linguistic expressions,

or even unique storytelling methods that build a national identity of China for and before the international audience on CGTN. The study then carefully considers both explicit entities in the content and subtle traces in visual representations, framing devices, and linguistic cues that might indicate cultural positioning or ideological intent. Such thorough engagement lays the groundwork for subsequent systematic analysis by building familiarity with the broadcaster's favoured genres, communicative conventions, and stylistic variations across formats.

### 3.4.2. Initial coding

Initial coding works as a systematic process whereby the familiarized data are divided into smaller, meaningful units so that key themes, patterns, and discursive strategies employed by CGTN to construct national identity for the international audiences can be identified. During this stage, the transcripts, articles, video content, and promotional materials are read and reviewed line by line or scene by scene to label segments of text and visuals with descriptive codes that point to their core communicative function or narrative role. Codes may speak to specific language features such as framing devices, metaphors, or rhetorical patterns; or they may stand for broad thematic elements, such as cultural pride, modernization, harmony, or international positioning. Initial coding really seeks not to reduce the data prematurely into fixed categories; rather, one should remain open to exploration so a great variety of ideas can suddenly emerge from the material. By producing these codes, the study begins to grapple with the strategic placement of certain values and identities in CGTN content while navigating the potential cultural contradictions or criticisms that may be raised by international viewers.

Initial coding also requires the reflexive, interpretive approach that allows one to perceive the many-layered meanings and context-specific nuances in CGTN communications. As more codes accumulate, they are subjected to comparison across genres-news reports, feature stories, documentaries, or promos-to see strategies employed common among all, as well as variations on messaging based on context. It is this multimodal environment that the analysis focuses on: multifarious images, music, and editing techniques work in coalition with spoken or written language in the construction of persuasive narratives. During initial coding, notes addressing relationships among codes, potential hierarchies, and emergent patterns that illustrate how CGTN interweaves cross-cultural consciousness into its mode of expression for advancing the Chinese preferred image at the international level are also kept.

### 3.4.3. Theme development

When theme development builds on the initial coding stage, related codes are gathered into broader, more meaningful categories representing narratives and discursive strategies through which CGTN configures identity for China in an international context. This step moves away from mere data labeling to interpretive synthesis as it asks how individual codes come together in the form of themes to repeat patterns of meaning dispersed across different material. In respect of theme, codes relating to modern infrastructure development, technological progress, and economic cooperation may point to representations of China as a contemporary and forward-looking participant in global affairs. Other thematic groupings may focus on narrative elements that highlight cultural heritage, harmony, and shared values with international partners, contributing to portrayals of China as culturally rooted and diplomatically engaged.

In other words, theme development is iterative reflection and critical comparison, repeatedly going back to the data to ensure themes do justice to the complexities and nuances of the source materials. The process also must be sensitive to differences between genres; for instance, how a theme might play out in a news report versus a feature documentary or a promotional statement as it were, while still locating the unifying messages that cut across formats. Attention is paid to what is emphasized versus what receives less prominence, that is,

to patterns of selective representation through which particular aspects of China's international image are foregrounded. From the development of themes, the analysis thus moves toward a more holistic and integrated interpretation of CGTN communication practices, wherein the focus is not just on discrete messaging tactics but on a much larger discursive architecture to negotiate cultural difference and manage geopolitical tensions towards the presentation of a vision of China as a responsible, modern, and culturally sophisticated global actor.

### 3.4.4. Discourse strategy identification

Discourse strategy identification is the analytical stage in which coded data were systematically examined to identify recurring patterns of framing, lexical choice, and narrative structure across the selected CGTN materials. At this stage, an organized inquiry would seek to show how the interplay of language with such visual elements as images and with narrative structures contributes to persuasive effect, for instance, in fostering legitimacy, fostering trust, or dealing with sensitive geopolitical issues. This involves identifying specific discursive patterns, such as the recurrent framing of China as a 'partner' through expressions like *mutual cooperation*, *shared development*, and *win–win outcomes*, rather than as a geopolitical rival. Another area of analysis may focus on processes of contrastive positioning, in which China is presented in comparatively constructive terms alongside more critical portrayals of Western actors, with selective quotation or sourcing contributing to perceptions of credibility and authority.

It should also note that this stage entails looking at both multimodal and genre-specific difference in discursive strategies. A clear case of how the same strategic objective could be achieved differently in news reports, features, documentaries, and promotional materials appears in news segments that consider important authoritative sourcing and formal language to go along with the want for credibility. Feature stories and documentaries, on the other hand, move through emotional story-telling and evocative images with personal statements to cultivate a culture of intimacy and human connection. Promotional materials would wield a more overtly branded language, emphasizing CGTN's part as a bridge between China and the world. The multifariousness of such contexts, upon which this study analyses the various strategies entailed, elevates the understanding of how CGTN modifies its communication strategies to different formats and audience expectations, thus revealing a nuanced and multifaceted view of media diplomacy. Such detailed unpacking of discourse strategies helps understand better how international broadcasting operates as a tool of soft power by conditioning not just the contents of China's global message but also the relational dynamics that form the basis upon which it would try to seek meaning, legitimacy, and influence on the global stage.

### 3.4.5. Interpretation

At this stage, the identified themes were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation Theory, and Soft Power Theory to explain how CGTN constructs meanings about China's national identity. The stage goes beyond simply tabulating strategies or composing themes to asking critical questions about what the strategies intend, why certain stories are privileged, and what they do disclose. For instance, "What do these communicative options reflect in light of such broader goals of cultural diplomacy and soft power projection?" This means situating CGTN within the critical broad geopolitical and historical frames, acknowledging China's clear, strategic self-interest in reshaping global perceptions as competition intensifies and people cast wider nets of scepticism. By linking the broadcaster's storytelling techniques to China's goals for an international policy, the analysis brings out how not only is media content not neutral, but it also creates meaning making sites that are active and purposeful in design toward influencing foreign audiences. Interpretation would involve examining relationships between value systems across cultures, political necessity, and audience expectations, which, in turn, would demonstrate how

the CGTN strive to elevate the positive national image while simultaneously serving the other side of suspicion and mistrust perceived by the audiences internationally.

## 3.5. Analytical framework

Within the Analytical Framework, the study lays out the main ideas used to understand how CGTN tells its story to the world. Different theories merge here for investigating the careful selection of words, imagery, and themes to paint China as credible and appealing. It helps explain the reported news by CGTN as actually a way of mediating the universal perception of China.

### 3.5.1. Critical discourse analysis

Using the technique of critical discourse analysis, this study explores how CGTN manipulates language and narrative construction to represent China onto the international stage. It goes beyond verbal description and imagery to explore deeper connotations of power relations, culture, and roles in the world. Thus, the study reveals how CGTN portrays China as a measured and cooperative entity, while, at the same time, gently questioning or counterbalancing Western hegemony in a manner never made explicit.

### 3.5.2. Representation theory

Representation theory helps to elaborate on how CGTN constructs and represents China's national identity by paying attention to stories, images, and symbols chosen for international viewing audiences. While doing so, it studies how the broadcaster would provide an image of China-as-modern-yet-traditional, cooperative-yet-strong-so that this image would be positively perceived, ideally accepted, and trusted by global audiences as a simple metaphor for culture and politics.

### 3.5.3. Soft power theory

Drawing on Nye's concept of Soft Power (Nye, 2004), this study explores how CGTN functions as a medium of cultural diplomacy by promoting attraction, trust, and legitimacy rather than coercion. It will study how the content of the channel will build up some measure of trust and goodwill among foreigners by focusing on shared values, cooperation, and inter-lateral respect between parties-well-interpreted as a spotlight to the international audience in attraction towards China's rise-uplifting and benevolent.

# 4. Results and discussion

This study provides a qualitative interpretation based on systematic textual and visual analysis of CGTN's English-language broadcasts and online materials. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation Theory, and Soft Power Theory, the analysis seeks to identify thematic strategies employed by CGTN in shaping international communication, advancing cultural diplomacy, and articulating China's global image. The findings indicate recurring patterns of narrative framing, language use, and symbolic representation through which China is differentiated from Western actors, guiding cross-cultural interpretation and contributing to CGTN's broader soft power objectives.

## 4.1. Narrative Framing: China as peaceful, modern, and cooperative

CGTN's international communication strategy consistently constructs an image of China as peaceful, modern, and cooperative, which functions as an alternative to dominant Western portrayals. News segments, documentaries, and features are anchored on diplomacy, development, and multilateralism and are used to portray China's participation in international organizations, environmental protection measures, and developing infrastructure projects of gargantuan proportion abroad. While emphasizing China's commitment to dialogue, mutually beneficial partnerships with other countries, and China's economic growth and technological innovations, CGTN frequently frames China as willing to share development opportunities with

the world, for example through references to infrastructure cooperation, Belt and Road projects, and international partnerships. Rich visual content includes scenes of the bustling modern city, high-speed rail networks, green energy projects, and international summits, reinforcing the image of a sophisticated and responsible power. By foregrounding cooperation with the Global South, investments in infrastructure through initiatives like the Belt and Road, and participation in climate action, CGTN's messaging weaves a cohesive and appealing image designed to resonate with international audiences. Rigid thinking will give rise to feelings of threat or aggression as individuals look at China's rise through the prisms of peace, shared prosperity, and sustainable development-rightly accepted values throughout the world-so we can envision China in the eyes of other countries as a constructive force in this increasingly interlinked world.

> "Building a community with a shared future for mankind."
> "Promoting win-win cooperation and mutual benefit."
> "China remains committed to peaceful development."
> "China offers solutions for sustainable development."
> "Symbols of friendship and cooperation through infrastructure projects."
> "Leading the way in innovation for a greener future."

**Interpretation**

Thoughtfully structured in effect, this framework of narrative functions as one of the soft power strategies to cultivate international perceptions of China's national identity in more favorable terms. By repeatedly emphasizing peace, modernity, and cooperation, CGTN constructs an image of China as a responsible and well-intentioned actor in global affairs. This image operates alongside prevailing Western-centered discourses that have often portrayed China in more critical ways. The continued usage of strings of phrases like "win-win cooperation" and "community with a shared future" indicates that there is a belief in China aligning its own foreign policy option with generally accepted global norms of partnership and mutual respect, thus rendering it less threatening and more collaborative. Another part of this soft power strategy involves the application of Representation Theory, whereby culturally resonant symbols and values are selected that can bridge cross-cultural gaps motivating identification with China's vision of global order. At the same time, Critical Discourse Analysis indicates that these discursive practices frame China's expanding influence as legitimate and constructive within existing global arrangements. In showcasing development successes, technological advances, and diplomatic endeavours, CGTN's narrative invites international audiences to view China not as a competitor to the existing world order, but an essential partner in meeting common challenges, thus enhancing its soft power appeal and supporting wider diplomatic objectives.

**4.2. Language choices and translation strategies**

These strategic linguistic selections and adaptations of translations are geared towards penetrating the global audience regarding the Chinese political concepts, values, and policies that keep CGTN English international broadcasts politically savvy. The content also adjusts ideological terminology by rephrasing concepts that may appear abstract or unfamiliar, for instance by presenting "socialism with Chinese characteristics" as a development path suited to China's conditions, which facilitates comprehension across different audiences. And the vocabulary used or translated would always tend to favour diplomatic language over confrontational or adversarial like differences instead of conflicts and dialogue preferable over criticisms to allude a commitment towards mutual understanding. Additionally, CGTN`s scripts and voiceovers greatly reduce technical or bureaucratic tricky language into clear-cut yet generally understandable constructions without losing the inherent flavour intended in them. Such translation options would be representative of sensitivity towards the local cultural context in which the content is to be relayed via idioms and metaphors as

well as proximity to familiar references. So they are, inclusive of onscreen graphics and subtitles, a reading format with an authoritative tone while ensuring clarity. Overall, therefore, these language and translation strategies reflect attentiveness to diverse cultural contexts and contribute to a communicative style that balances clarity and authority, enabling CGTN's narratives to resonate across varied linguistic and cultural settings.

> "A development path suited to China's conditions."
> "Resolving differences through dialogue."
> "Promoting mutual understanding and respect."
> "Working together for a better future."
> "Contributing to global development while respecting diversity."
> "Ensuring clarity for all audiences through simplified language."

### Interpretation

Language and translation strategies constitute an important yet understated dimension of CGTN's soft power practices, functioning to facilitate the accessibility of China's official narratives within international discourse. Through the careful reframing of politically sensitive or culturally specific terms into more widely recognizable and neutral expressions, CGTN seeks to minimize the likelihood of misunderstanding or interpretive distance among foreign audiences. From the perspective of Soft Power Theory, such linguistic choices contribute to presenting China's policy orientations as pragmatic, reasonable, and adaptable rather than rigid or prescriptive. Critical Discourse Analysis suggests that this form of linguistic moderation does not operate in isolation but participates in shaping how China's growing international presence is framed as cooperative and non-confrontational within existing global structures. Representation theory further emphasizes that these are not merely technical decisions of language use, but culturally situated practices through which a more broadly acceptable image of China is articulated for international audiences. By calibrating its language to resonate across cultural contexts, CGTN's communicative strategy supports trust-building, reduces oppositional readings, and offers audiences interpretive frameworks through which China's perspectives on global affairs may be more readily understood.

### 4.3. Imagery and symbolism

The international output of CGTN depends more heavily on engaging pictorial richness, sometimes underscored by symbolism, to address and reinforce China's national identity within the imagination of world audiences in very evocative pictures. The programming features compelling scenes with modern infrastructure, particularly sleek high-speed trains and futuristic cityscapes lit up at night, fresh expanses of green energy farms-all meant to display China as technologically advanced, innovative, and future-oriented. Interspersed with these would be more traditional cultural symbols-such as ancient temples, calligraphy, lantern festivals, and the Great Wall-invoking a sense of historical depth, cultural pride, and continuity that resonate with viewers from across the world. In fact, documentaries and publicity materials often feature heart-warming, wonderful images of Chinese families celebrating cultural festivals together, farmers working in lush fields, and children playing in modern parks, reinforcing the image of a single, stable society. International segments are usually characterized as depicting foreign partners visiting these sites or shaking hands with Chinese officials at some symbolic landmark, driving home the messages of friendship, corporation, and mutual benefit. Bright warm colour palettes and high-production cinematography make further contributions in bringing memory and emotionality in this imagery. Altogether, these visual strategies are not merely served as aesthetic choices; they are powerful communicative tools to make the messages of China more potential, enticing, and persuasive to different international audiences.

> "Scenes of high-speed rail gliding through scenic landscapes."
> "Beautiful shots of the Great Wall at sunset."
> "Images of international leaders shaking hands with Chinese officials."
> "Families celebrating the Lantern Festival with glowing red lanterns."
> "Drone footage of green energy farms and solar panels."
> "Colorful markets and cultural performances symbolizing rich heritage."

**Interpretation**

Indeed, for these imagery and symbolism strategies, the soft power of China presents the prime task of forming a dual narrative of modernity and tradition in a way that appeals emotionally and intellectually to an international audience. This visual storytelling painstakingly puts forth a picture of China that is technologically advanced and economically booming, but culturally rooted, morally upright, and socially harmonious, all at the same time. Critical Discourse Analysis examines how these aesthetic choices are ideologically embedded to contribute to the normalization of narratives surrounding China's domestic developments and international positioning, presenting them as broadly positive and appealing, while simultaneously downplaying internal diversity of perspectives and external areas of contention. Representation theory helps explain the selection and construction of photographic images. Through familiar themes of development, family, and heritage, a coherent and convincing identity is crafted in a cross-culturally favourable way to elicit identification and sympathy. Simultaneously, intermixed with modern innovation is this ancient cultural continuity, which positions CGTN to suggest that ancient civilization state China is best fitted to globally provide wisdom and stability for resolving challenges, thus laying a subtle claim above its dignity of being a world leader. Therefore, beyond decoration, a strategy for visual translation was undertaken as a deliberate articulation of meaning intent on winning the hearts and minds of partners across the globe, reinforcing international alliances discouraged rules supporting China's broader diplomatic and cultural diplomacy goals on the global stage.

## 4.4. Representations of China vs Other

CGTN's international broadcasting strategy places particular emphasis on discursive framing that distinguishes representations of China from those of other international actors, especially Western countries, with the aim of constructing a coherent and intelligible account of China's positioning in global affairs. In its English-language output, China is frequently portrayed as pragmatic, cooperative, and development-oriented, with recurrent references to dialogue, mutual respect, and shared interests, while news coverage often foregrounds China's participation in international mediation, development cooperation, and contributions to global health and environmental initiatives. By contrast, Western actors are at times approached through more critical or problem-oriented frames, particularly in discussions of unilateral policy approaches, military involvement, or debates surrounding cultural difference. These discursive tendencies are reinforced through audiovisual strategies that highlight Chinese officials in settings of diplomatic exchange and formal negotiation, while coverage involving Western leaders more often emphasizes moments of disagreement, public scrutiny, or domestic contestation. In documentaries and extended news features, references to historical experiences and contemporary geopolitical dynamics provide additional context for these representations, encouraging comparative interpretations of international partnerships. Taken together, such recurring narrative and visual strategies contribute to a relatively consistent discursive environment in which China's international engagement is presented as constructive and predictable, while alternative perspectives on the existing Western-centered international framework are made visible to global audiences.

> "China promotes mutual respect and win-win cooperation."
> "Offering aid without political conditions."
> "Rejecting unilateral sanctions and interference in sovereign affairs."
> "Providing solutions for global challenges through dialogue."
> "Respecting cultural diversity and opposing hegemonism."
> "Building a community with a shared future for mankind."

**Interpretation**

This particular representational strategy, central to CGTN's soft power project, serves as a tool for self-representation and engagement with competing global narratives. While projecting an image of China as peaceful, respectful, and development-oriented, CGTN simultaneously positions Western actors in a more critical light. In doing so, CGTN not only enhances China's perceived normative standing but also offers international audiences an alternative interpretive framework alongside dominant Western perspectives. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this contrast operates not only at a descriptive level but also through discursive patterns that organize international relations around broadly framed moral distinctions, such as cooperation and restraint. Representation Theory helps to illuminate how such discourse contributes to the articulation of a coherent and affirmative national identity for China, while simultaneously shaping understandings of relational difference. This process often draws on culturally salient references, including historical experiences of colonialism, principles of non-interference, and narratives of shared development with the Global South. Through these representational practices, China is framed as an engaged participant within existing international frameworks, while alternative viewpoints receive comparatively less emphasis. In this way, CGTN's representational strategies are consistent with wider soft power objectives, presenting China's international role as reasonable, normatively grounded, and compatible with prevailing discussions of global leadership.

## 4.5. Discussion

According to the findings of qualitative research, CGTN employs a multi-layered as well as highly coordinated discursive strategies to construct among other things how China communicates its national identity to international audiences. The broadcaster develops the themes systematically through narrative framing such that China is perpetually engaged as an actor called peaceful, modern, and cooperative in all matters pertaining to global development, environmental sustainability, and diplomatic engagement. Language use and translation strategies serve to mellow ideological content, rendering politically sensitive concepts more accessible and relatable within the scope of international audiences through shared global values of mutual respect and partnership. Additionally, rich visual symbolism and curated imagery complement these messages in forging dynamic contrasts between striking scenes of advancement and emotive figures rooted in cultural heritage, to convey a dual narrative of modernity and tradition. Conversely, CGTN keeps a clear distinction in its representational focus, presenting China as an ethical, stable, and collaborative actor, which encourages international audiences to reconsider existing global frameworks and to view China as a trustworthy partner.

Cross-cultural communication strategies: The analysis reflects that these cross-cultural communication strategies are not incidental, but rather form part of media diplomacy that contributes to China's soft power and influences perceptions of its global role. CGTN addresses concerns regarding geopolitical ambition by situating China's growing importance on the world stage within generally accepted global norms and shared human values. Through language, imagery, and narrative framing, China is presented as both a modern technological leader and a guardian of cultural tradition, appealing to rational assessments of capability as well as emotional connections to heritage. Engagement with Western discourse introduces

alternative perspectives without overt confrontation. Together, these strategies illustrate how international broadcasting functions as cultural diplomacy, shaping how China is perceived abroad and the context of global engagement.

# 5. Conclusion and future works

In conclusion, this research highlights CGTN's international English-language broadcasting as a structured platform that contributes to the construction of national identity across different cultural contexts. Through narrative framing around themes such as peace, modernity, and cooperation; language choices and translation strategies aimed at mitigating ideological differences; the use of evocative imagery and symbolism; and contrasts between China and other global actors, CGTN presents a particular vision of China's role on the international stage. These findings suggest that the broadcaster functions as an instrument of soft power and media diplomacy, illustrating how discourse strategies can shape international audiences' perceptions of China's participation in global governance. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation Theory, and Soft Power Theory, this qualitative research study further presents a deeper understanding of the ideological and cultural work taking place as part of international media technologies, in the context of the contemporary geopolitical competition and multipolar communication flows.

The future investigations might very well build upon this study and, by contrasting CGTN`s practices with those of other state-sponsored international broadcasters, say, BBC World, KBS World, or RT International, delineate the narrative similarities, differences, and contests in the global arena of media diplomacy. Divergent reception and interpretation patterns of audiences across cultural and regional contexts might provide some insight on the efficacy of communication strategies as contemplated in practice, thus moving beyond the ever so at-textual realm to look at how meanings are made across context. Interdisciplinary studies can also look into how technological changes are reshaping power dynamics of international broadcasting and public diplomacy-from AI-generated news content to algorithms of social media platforms. Such investigations would expand our understanding of changing national identity, power, and cultural diplomacy in a complex contested global communication environment. Thus, generating upon the findings of this study may assist researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand the negotiations of cultural identities and geopolitical relationships by international media in the 21st century.

# Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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