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A comparative corpus-based ecological discourse analysis of Chinese, Indian, and American news reports on the Belt and Road Initiative (2013–2022)

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Abstract: This study employs corpus-based ecological discourse analysis to explore representations of the ecological attitudes in English-language news reports on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in China, India, and the United States from 2013 to 2022. It reveals the media’s perception and attitude towards the BRI in these nations. The analysis reveals that media outlets in each country project different ecological stances using varied attitudinal resources. The Chinese media frequently deploy beneficial attitudinal resources to highlight the BRI’s achievements and advocate for broader international engagement. In contrast, the Indian media exhibit a balanced usage of beneficial, neutral, and destructive attitudinal resources, reflecting a prudent and observant attitude towards the BRI. The American media corpus displays a greater prevalence of neutral and destructive attitudinal representations over beneficial ones, suggesting a comparatively skeptical reception of the initiative. The study argues that these divergent patterns of ecological attitudes and the selection of attitudinal resources are shaped by factors such as economic development, geographical context, and social values.

Keywords: attitude system; ecological discourse analysis; news reports; the Belt and Road Initiative

1 Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), proposed by China’s President Xi Jinping in 2013, is designed to bolster economic and trade relations globally while aspiring to create a community with a shared future for humanity. As a vast infrastructure endeavor

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that extends across continents, the BRI epitomizes a route to peaceful development and echoes China's longstanding cultural tradition of harmony (McBride et al. 2023; Zhou 2022). It is recognized not only for its substantial economic prospects but also for its profound communicative and symbolic value (Apirakvanalee and Zhai 2022). Though the initiative has achieved acknowledgment and support from a multitude of countries and regions, it has concurrently encountered skepticism and misinterpretations, with some critics perceiving it as a geopolitical and economic threat (Holslag 2017; Teo and Xu 2023; Zhang and Yang 2016).

It is important to explore the media framing of the BRI in that the news reports can significantly shape readers' perceptions and influence their interpretation of China's international activities (Chen and Liu 2023). Numerous studies have scrutinized the news construction of the BRI to shed light on foreign countries' perceptions of the initiative (Afzaal et al. 2022; Akçay and Tang 2020; Apirakvanalee and Zhai 2022). Some studies have engaged in comparative analyses of how different countries' media portray the BRI (Deng 2020; Tang and Shi 2018; Teo and Xu 2023; Zhang and Wu 2017). However, these studies typically focus on brief temporal snapshots rather than the extended chronology addressed in our study. In addition, while most studies center on the news reports from one or two countries, there is scant exploration of the BRI's portrayal in Chinese, Indian, and American media. The representation of the BRI in these countries' media outlets significantly influences public perception and China's perceived global role. China, as the originator and driving force of the BRI, contrasts with India and the United States, who maintain a consistent skepticism towards the initiative (Afzaal et al. 2022). In view of this, our research adopts an ecological discourse analysis approach to examine the Chinese, Indian, and American media narratives from 2013 to 2022. We investigate the employment of ecological attitude resources in depicting the BRI, thereby unveiling the variegated recognition of the initiative across these nations.

In this study, we commence with an exposition of the theoretical framework that informs our analysis (Section 2). This is followed by a detailed presentation of corpus data and the methodological approach used in our research (Section 3). A comparative analysis of the ecological stances and attitude resources employed by the Chinese, Indian, and American media coverage of the BRI is then articulated (Section 4). We conclude with a discussion that interprets the implications of our findings, drawing out broader conclusions and potential areas for further research (Section 5).

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Ecological discourse analysis

Ecological discourse analysis (EDA) is a prominent approach within ecolinguistics that transcends mere examination of environmental discourse (Alexander and Stibbe 2014; Penz and Fill 2022). Instead, it undertakes "ecological analysis of discourse", probing

into how diverse forms of discourse influence the ecosystem at large (Alexander and Stibbe 2014). Established as a distinct research paradigm, EDA employs an ecological perspective to examine the interaction between language and the ecosystem's integrity (He and Wei 2018a; He et al. 2021). Its aim is twofold: firstly, to unveil the linguistic impact on both natural and societal environments, and secondly, to cultivate ecological consciousness among individuals. Through this heightened awareness, EDA seeks to inspire ecologically sound behavior and foster the sustainable development of the ecosystem (He et al. 2021).

Central to EDA is the concept of *ecosophy*, which serves as a guiding principle for evaluating the underlying narratives within texts (Cheng 2022; He and Wei 2017, 2018a; Stibbe 2015; Wei 2019, 2021, 2022a; Wei and He 2019; Zhang and He 2020). This *ecosophy*, rooted in normative values, norms, and priorities (Naess 1995), serves as a personalized benchmark for the analysis, reflecting the analyst's own ecological values and objectives (Stibbe 2015). Various forms of *ecosophy* are proposed, such as “ecological animalism” focused on flora and fauna (Plumwood 2007), “ecofeminism” addressing gender and ecology (Adams and Gruen 2014), “Living” concerning natural ecology (Stibbe 2015), “a sense of place” for the human and nature (He and Zhang 2017), and “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence” for the international social ecosystem (He and Wei 2018b). In this study, we adopt the *ecosophy* of “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence” as proposed by He and Wei (2018b), which underscores the imperative for peaceful co-development within natural and social ecosystems (He and Liu 2020; He et al. 2021). This chosen *ecosophy* is comprehensive in integrating both the static and dynamic aspects of culture, ecology, and society, and is inspired by traditional Chinese philosophies and modern diplomatic concepts (Wei 2022a).

EDA is versatile in permitting the assimilation of various linguistic theories to unearth the linguistic patterns prevalent in discourse (He and Wei 2018a; Stibbe 2015). These include, but are not limited to, cognitive linguistics (Stibbe 2015) and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (He and Wei 2017; Lei 2021; Wei 2022a; Zhang and He 2018, 2020). In our research, we have anchored EDA in the foundational principles of SFL, which provides a robust set of analytical tools for discourse analysis (Huang and Ge 2006) and offers a semantic framework for its construction and explication (Matthiessen and Nesbitt 1996). SFL is intrinsically problem-oriented, making it not only valuable in practical applications but also a potent theoretical compass for EDA (He et al. 2021). As a form of socially accountable linguistics (Halliday 2001[1990]; Halliday 2003[1993]), SFL seeks to decode linguistic practices through an ecological perspective (Wei 2021). The metafunctional theories of SFL, such as Transitivity, Appraisal, Theme and Rheme, Cohesion and Coherence, have been integrated into EDA practice (He and Ma 2020; He and Wei 2017; He and Zhang 2017; Wei 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Zhang and He 2018). The present study utilizes the “ecological” Attitude system within SFL to analyze the representations of the BRI in news reports across Chinese, Indian, and American media.

2.2 Attitude system for EDA

The discourse analytic framework known as Appraisal offers a lens through which to examine the stances articulated in language, unveiling the prosodic meaning embedded within texts (Martin and Rose 2003; Martin and White 2005). It has been recognized for its effectiveness in interpreting news discourse, surpassing other theories in this regard (Hunston 2011). Within the Appraisal framework, the domain of Attitude is crucial for expressing emotions and encompasses three semantic areas: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. These areas are distinguished by their potential for positive and negative connotations. However, the current appraisal framework does not adequately address the ecological dimensions of discourse (Zhang and He 2018), signaling a need for the integration of ecological considerations into the Attitude network.

From an ecological perspective, Wei (2022a) establishes an “ecological” Affect, “ecological” Judgement, and “ecological” Appreciation system by incorporating the ecosophy of “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence”. This extended Attitude system articulates the ecological dimensions of emotional reactions, behaviors, and values. By integrating ecological aspects, each semantic field within Attitude is further nuanced with destructive, neutral, and beneficial variants. In our research, we amalgamate Wei’s (2022) tripartite ecological Attitude framework into a cohesive model, as depicted in Figure 1, to better capture the complex interplay between discourse and ecological implications.

Through the lens of ecological attitudes, an analysis of media discourses on the BRI reveals three distinct perspectives: beneficial, neutral, and destructive. The beneficial attitude aligns with the ecosophy, advocating for actions that promote a dynamic equilibrium within the international ecosystem. Conversely, the neutral attitude maintains a position that neither supports nor opposes the ecosophy, remaining indifferent to the promotion or impediment of ecosystem protection. The destructive attitude directly opposes the ecosophy, thereby contributing to the degradation of the ecosystem. This categorization not only sheds light on the diverse perceptions of the BRI’s ecological impacts but also underscores the importance of integrating the ecosophy into discourse analysis.

In our analysis, we aim to scrutinize media discourse concerning the BRI within the context of the ecological attitude system, highlighting its engagement with the international social ecosystem (He and Ma 2020). Within this ecological attitude system, BRI-related attitudes can be categorized into three types: a beneficial attitude, which aligns with the ecosophy, encouraging the promotion of a dynamic equilibrium within the international ecosystem; a neutral attitude, which neither supports nor opposes the ecosophy, thus neither facilitating nor obstructing efforts to protect the ecosystem; and a destructive attitude, which stands in opposition to the ecosophy, thereby deterring efforts to protect the ecosystem (Cheng 2022).

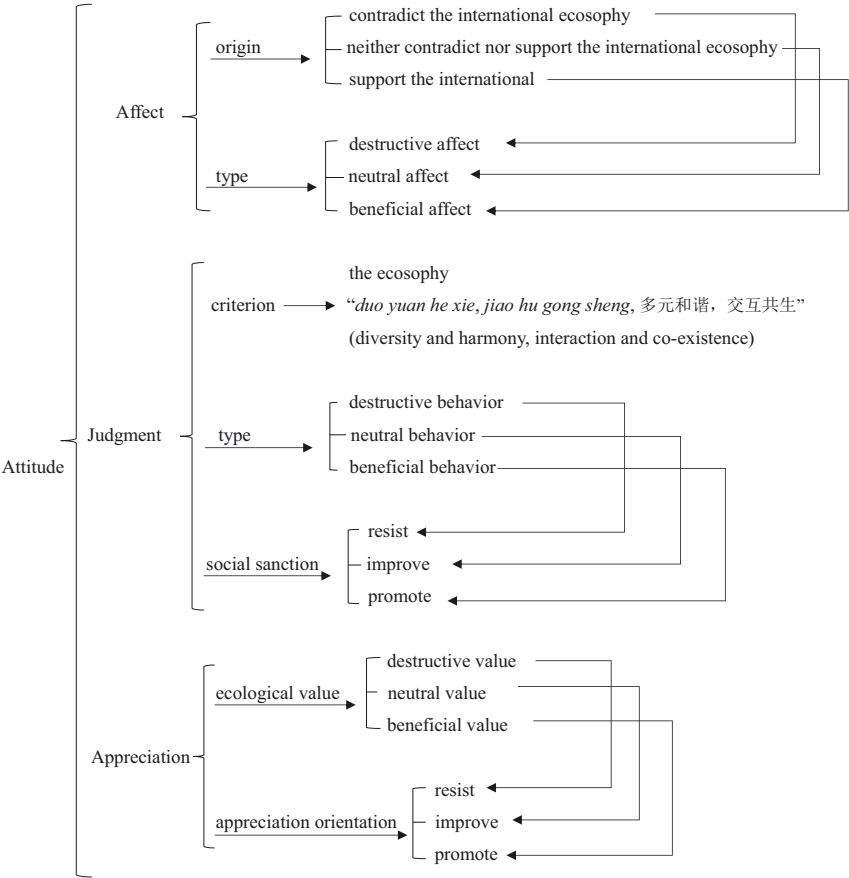


Figure 1: Ecological attitude system (adapted from Wei 2022a: 218–224).

3 Data and methodology

3.1 Data collection

The present analysis is based on three self-built corpora representing media discourse on the BRI from China, India and the United States: the Chinese corpus, the Indian corpus, and the American corpus. These corpora were developed by employing the search term “belt and road” to extract relevant news articles from the LexisNexis database, with the collection period spanning from 1 September 2013 to 31 October 2022. This timeframe encompasses the initial proposal of the BRI to the point of data collection.

Table 1: Summary of the Chinese, Indian, and American corpus.

Corpus	News texts	Tokens
Chinese	20,871	14,554,843
Indian	1,990	1,544,671
American	1,478	2,882,880

The Chinese corpus consists of all news texts reporting “belt and road” in *China Daily*, which is recognized as China’s most authoritative and influential English-language newspaper (Deng 2020; Zhang and Wu 2017). The Indian corpus is composed of news from six Indian newspapers that most frequently covered the BRI, specifically *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *New Delhi Times*, and *The Sunday Guardian*. Lastly, the American corpus comprises pertinent news reports from three major American newspapers known for their coverage of the BRI, including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The USA Today*. The details of the Chinese corpus, Indian corpus, and American corpus are summarized in Table 1.

3.2 Methodology

This study adopts a corpus-based discourse approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Baker et al. 2008). Initially, with the corpus analytic tool Wordsmith 8.0, the three corpora were compared with a general reference corpus, the British National Corpus (BNC). This comparison aims to identify keywords associated with the BRI in English, leveraging the concept of “aboutness” as described by Scott and Tribble (2006: 55) to highlight the most prevalent English expressions equivalent to “一带一路”. Through this process, four prominent terms emerge as central to the discourse on the BRI: “the Belt and Road Initiative”, “One Belt and One Road”, “BRI” and “OBOR”.

Subsequently, to carry out a thorough evaluative analysis of the BRI, it is imperative to meticulously examine the contexts surrounding frequently used BRI-related terms. Concordance analysis is a method that reveals rich contextual information to shed light on meanings and characteristic uses within the text(s) studied (Scott and Tribble 2006). This methodology is employed to examine the contexts of terms such as “the Belt and Road Initiative”, “One Belt and One Road”, “BRI”, and “OBOR”. This study focuses on analyzing attitudes toward the BRI and seeks to uncover how the initiative is evaluated in Chinese, Indian, and American news outlets. To this end, concordance lines that feature appraisal patterns with the

Table 2: The concordance lines of the BRI-related terms in the Chinese, Indian, and American corpus.

Corpus	Concordance lines	Pertinent lines
Chinese	53,756	7,980
Indian	4,412	2,042
American	3,952	2,316

BRI serving as the subject of appraisal are carefully selected and extracted by hand. The findings from this meticulous selection process are presented in Table 2.

Finally, within the framework of the ecological Attitude system, which incorporates the Attitude system and the ecosophy of “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence”, we undertake an analysis of ecological attitudinal representations within all pertinent concordance lines associated with the BRI across the Chinese, Indian and American corpora. This comprehensive approach enables us to scrutinize the nuanced ways in which the BRI is perceived and evaluated from an ecological perspective, revealing the multifaceted attitudes toward the initiative and its alignment with the ecosophy in diverse media landscapes.

4 Findings

4.1 An overview of corpus findings

Figure 2 offers a comparative representation of ecological attitude features within the Chinese, Indian, and American media corpora. The data reveals that the Chinese corpus demonstrates a higher percentage of beneficial attitude resources (82.50 %), which is in stark contrast to the Indian corpus (40.67 %) and American corpus (24.74 %). Conversely, neutral and destructive attitudes are more prevalent in the Indian and American corpora. Specifically, the American corpus has a relatively high proportion of neutral attitudes (48.7 %), exceeding those found in both the Indian corpus (35.39 %) and the Chinese corpus (14.49 %). Additionally, the Indian and American corpora contain higher occurrences of destructive attitudes (23.94 and 26.55 % respectively) in comparison to the percentage in the Chinese corpus (3.01 %).

These differences in ecological attitudes suggest a more contentious perception of the BRI within Indian and American media compared to Chinese media. Although the beneficial stance is the most dominant in both Chinese and Indian representations, the degree to which it is emphasized varies significantly, with the Chinese

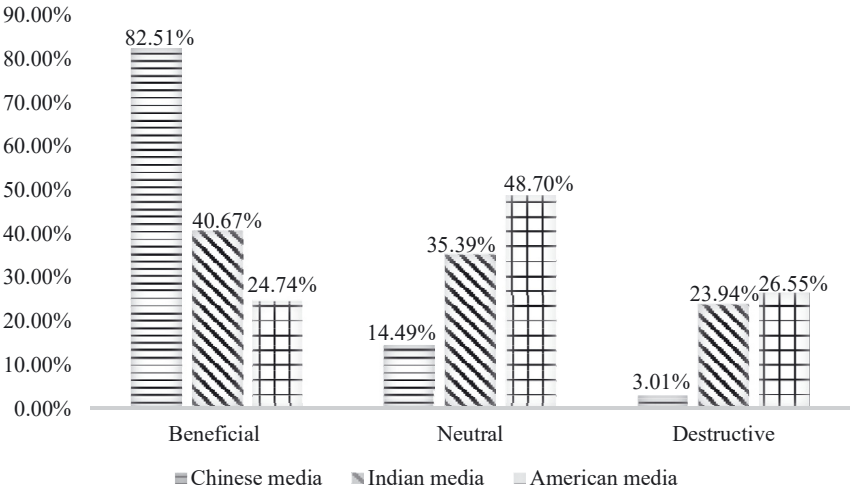


Figure 2: Comparing ecological features in Chinese, Indian, and American corpora.

corpus exhibiting a much larger proportion. In contrast, the Indian corpus presents a higher frequency of neutral and destructive attitudes relative to its Chinese counterpart. The American corpus is characterized by a balance among ecological attitudes, with neutral attitudes being the most common, yet accompanied by comparable proportions of destructive and beneficial stances.

Figure 3 delineates the utilization of Affect, Judgement and Appreciation resources within the three media corpora concerning the BRI coverage. It reveals a predominant use of appreciation resources in the Chinese and American media, which suggest a preference for evaluating the BRI in terms of its quality and significance rather than expressing emotional responses, as indicated by their less frequent use of Affect markers. In contrast, the Indian corpus stands out for its higher employment of Affect resources and fewer use of Appreciation ones, indicating a greater focus on emotional responses to the BRI and a less emphasis on evaluative commentary of the initiative’s value compared to the Chinese and American corpora. The distribution of these Attitude resources is instrumental in shedding light on the author’s viewpoints, emotions and judgements, thereby facilitating an investigation into how ideology manifests within the discourse (Yang 2003: 13).

The different preferences for ecological Attitude patterns across the Chinese, Indian, and American news reports offer valuable analytical insights into discerning the ecological stances held towards the BRI. Leveraging these findings, the study proceeds to delve into the ecological evaluative resources depicted in the three corpora, aiming to examine the media’s ecological perceptions and attitudes concerning the BRI in the BRI in these countries.

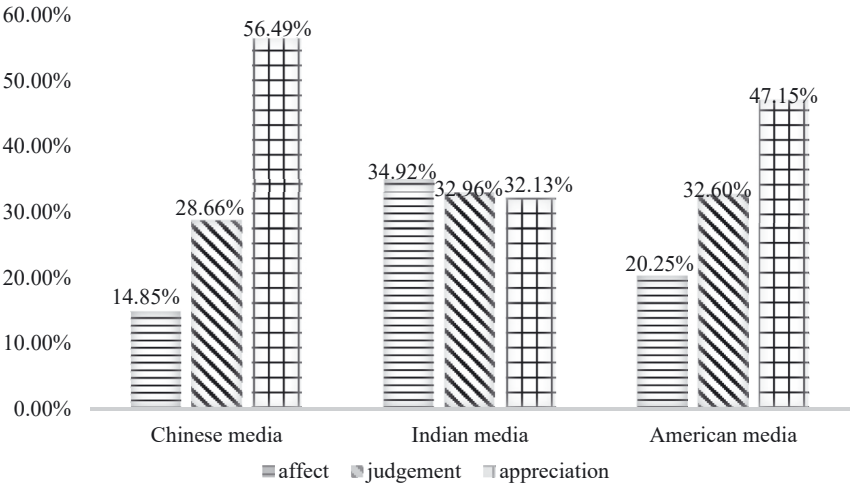


Figure 3: Distribution of attitude resources in Chinese, Indian, and American corpora.

4.2 Beneficial attitude resources in the Chinese, Indian and American media

The appraisal framework, as previously discussed, is an instrument for dissecting evaluation resources within discourse (Si and Pang 2018; Wang 2004). Figure 4 is set to present the frequency of beneficial attitude resources in the Chinese, Indian, and American media.

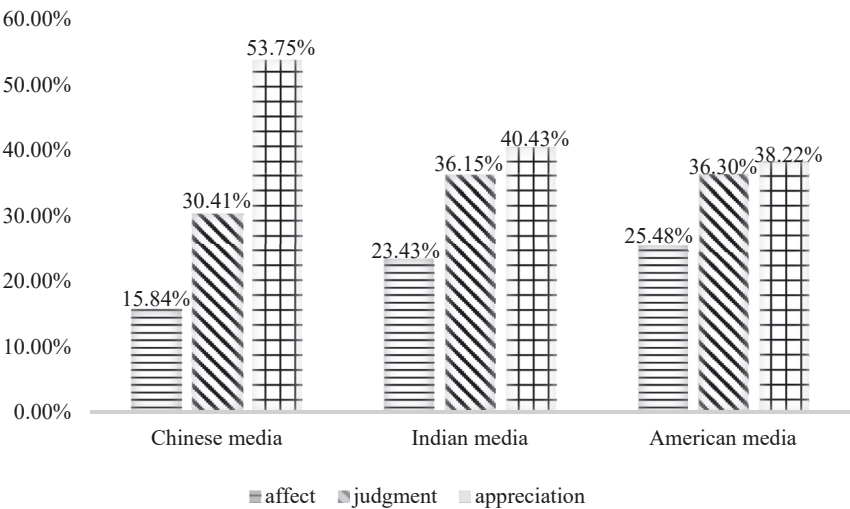


Figure 4: Distribution of beneficial attitude resources in Chinese, Indian, and American corpora.

In general, the three media corpora use beneficial Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation resources to articulate favorable stances on the BRI, with Appreciation resources being the most prevalent, indicative of a strong valuation of the BRI's impact. This is succeeded by Judgement and Affect resources, although the Chinese corpus shows a relative restraint in utilizing beneficial Affect markers, suggesting a tendency to highlight the BRI's accomplishments rather than overtly extolling them.

According to Martin and White (2005), the domain of Appreciation assesses the value and significance of things, with its pronounced representation in all three corpora pointing to the media's emphasis on the BRI's global worth. The Chinese corpus, in particular, places a strong emphasis on Appreciation resources, followed by Judgement and Affect resources. These beneficial resources position the BRI as a significant global contributor and invite wider participation to foster global prosperity. This sentiment is encapsulated in the subsequent examples, which demonstrate the media's constructive portrayal of the initiative.

- (1) The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is very **interested** in China's "Belt and Road" initiative, and would like to join Beijing in promoting their strategic partnership to even higher levels, said China's envoy to the country. (*China Daily* 06/29/2015)
- (2) Cambodian Minister of Tourism Thong Khon said on Wednesday that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will greatly **contribute** to the development of tourism for all participating countries. (*China Daily* 11/02/2017)
- (3) "One Belt and One Road' is a **huge** and **inclusive** platform, which aims to combine the rapidly expanding Chinese economy with the benefits of all parties involved," Xi said. (*China Daily* 11/06/2014)

In Example (1), the Affect marker "interested" demonstrates the United Arab Emirates (UAE)' keen enthusiasm towards the BRI and its eagerness to participate in the venture. This marker captures a positive emotional response to the BRI and signifies the amicable ties between China and the UAE. Such a beneficial Affect marker highlights the BRI's importance and its capacity to bolster bilateral relations and foster global unity. Example (2) employs the Judgment marker "contribute" to depict Cambodia's recognition of the BRI's value. This evaluative word conveys a positive evaluation, accentuating the BRI's contribution to the harmonious progression of the international community. It lauds the BRI as a catalyst for unity, drawing disparate nations together in pursuit of collaborative progress and tangible benefits (Teo and Xu 2023). In Example (3), the Appreciation markers "huge" and "inclusive" reflect a high regard for the BRI as a "huge platform" that accommodates an array of projects. The term "inclusive platform" implies that the BRI's scope extends beyond China, offering advantages to the global economy and all participating entities. This

lexical choice suggests the BRI's intention to serve as a global collaborator, promoting shared prosperity and strengthening international relations (Zhang and Wu 2017).

In the Indian corpus, instances of beneficial Appreciation outnumber those of Judgement and Affect, with a more substantial presence in the Chinese corpus. These beneficial attitudinal resources serve to echo the favorable views of other nations toward the BRI, as illustrated in Examples (4)–(6):

- (4) “It is necessary for the SCO to further strengthen economic cooperation, and Central Asian countries **welcomed** the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which gives more impetus to the economic cooperation among SCO member states,” Vasily Kashin, a senior fellow at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, told Xinhua. (*Hindustan Times* 06/11/2017)
- (5) It also said the development of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative was **strengthening** ties between Pakistan and China. (*Hindustan Times* 09/20/2019)
- (6) Abbasi also talked at length about the **benefits** of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the Nepalese leaders and urged them to take advantage of the connectivity project. (*Hindustan Times* 03/07/2018)

In Example (4), the Affect marker “welcomed” expresses the positive attitude of Central Asian countries towards the BRI, suggesting their satisfaction with the economic benefits the BRI offers participation countries and the region. This is resonant with the ecosophy adopted in the current study, which emphasizes harmonious relationships within the ecosystem. In Example (5), the beneficial Judgment marker “strengthen” underscores the BRI's role in fostering ties between Pakistan and China, praising the initiative for its contribution to international societal harmony. The BRI is portrayed as “a Chinese call on the international community to work jointly toward a ‘harmonious and inclusive’ world” (Casarini 2016: 98), indicating a beneficial stance towards global collaboration. Furthermore, the Appreciation marker “benefits” in Example (6) highlights the BRI's advantages, as evidenced by Abbasi's invitation to join in the initiative to enjoy enhanced connectivity. This instance emphasizes the BRI's and signifies the speaker's high recognition of its benefits. These attitudinal representations resonate with the goal of achieving win-win cooperation and fostering a peaceful phase of international community development.

In the American corpus, the prevalence of beneficial Judgment and Appreciation markers over those of Affect suggest an emphasis on the BRI's prospects and value, as highlighted by the American media. These beneficial attitudinal representations

often picture a bright future for the BRI, reflecting various countries' positive attitudes towards the initiative and their eagerness to pursue development under its auspices, as shown in Examples (7) through (9).

- (7) Panama has said it **supports** China's Belt and Road Initiative, the **ambitious** network of global infrastructure projects [...]. (*The New York Times* 10/20/2018)
- (8) **Hoping** that China's Belt and Road Initiative will **improve** connectivity with its neighbor, Laos is preparing for a new wave of Chinese investment in its property sector. (*The New York Times* 09/25/2018)
- (9) "One Belt, One Road is a **brilliant** strategy," said Cheung, because it may have economic **benefits** as well as **strategic** upsides, pulling China's neighbors closer into its orbit. (*The Los Angeles Times* 09/23/2015)

In Example (7), the Affect marker "supports" indicates Panama's favorable view of the BRI. The term "ambitious" serves as an appreciation marker, acknowledging the extensive scale of the BRI's global infrastructure projects, which aligns with the vision of building a shared future for humanity. Example (8) includes two evaluative markers such as Affect marker "hoping" and Judgement marker "improve". The former demonstrates Laos's optimistic expectation for the BRI, and the latter evaluates the initiative's potential to enhance economic connectivity. In Example (9), the Appreciation markers "brilliant" "benefits" and "strategic" underscore the BRI as an initiative that delivers "economic benefits" and "strategic upsides" to the participant countries (Zhang et al. 2022). These attitudinal resources highlight the BRI's contribution to the international community, echoing the ecosophy "diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence".

4.3 Neutral attitude resources in the Chinese, Indian, and American media

As illustrated in Figure 5, an analysis of the Chinese, Indian, and American media reveals a commonality in the prevalence of neutral Appreciation markers, surpassing those of Affect and Judgment.

In the Chinese corpus, neutral Appreciation representations are more frequent, reflecting China's role as the initiator of the BRI and its focus on the initiative's development and influence. Through Examples (10)–(12), we observe how Chinese media employs the Attitude system in discourse semantics to articulate feelings, judgements, and appreciation.

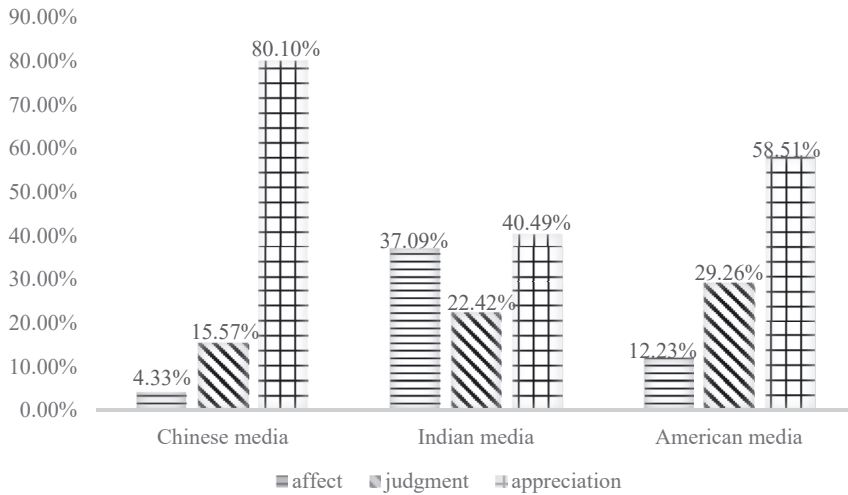


Figure 5: Distribution of neutral attitudinal resources in Chinese, Indian, and American corpora.

- (10) “With 66 countries and a total population of 4.3 billion, this region boasts great business opportunities. I **believe** the ‘Belt and Road’ will become a new growth pole for China’s economy,” Ma told *China Daily*. (*China Daily* 03/26/2015)
- (11) As ambitious ideas go, the Belt and Road Initiative is still relatively **young**. We have been following its birth and subsequent progress with great interest. (*China Daily* 11/27/2018)
- (12) Greening the Belt and Road is a **long-term** project that requires immediate action. (*China Daily* 04/26/2019)

Martin and White (2005) identify “believe” as a token of “security” within the Affect dimension. In Example (10), “believe” indicates the speaker’s confidence in the BRI’s positive impact on China’s economic progress. This confidence, centered solely on China’s development, represents a neutral attitude. Conversely, the negative lexical token “young” in Example (11) is reinterpreted as neutral within the ecosophy, indicating the BRI’s ongoing development phase and sustained efforts to reach its long-term goals (Zhang and Wu 2017). Similarly, “long-term” in Example (12) acts as a neutral Appreciation marker, acknowledging the BRI’s potential challenges and the need for sustained commitment.

The Indian corpus contrasts with the Chinese corpus in its use of neutral attitudinal markers, exhibiting a higher frequency of Affect but fewer Appreciation

resources. Despite this difference, both corpora convey a neutral viewpoint on the BRI's need for improvement. Notably, the Indian corpus emphasizes the initiative's benefits for China, as in the following Examples (13)–(15):

- (13) China is sending huge funds to Pakistan under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but the project's safety is of paramount **concern** for the Chinese government, given recent terror attacks against Beijing's interests there. (*The Sunday Guardian* 07/02/2022)
- (14) The budget clearly implies that the "Belt and Road Initiative" will be **vigorously pushed** along with the leader's goal of "rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation" by 2021, in both of which the PLA has a major role. (*The Sunday Guardian* 04/14/2018)
- (15) For the Chinese the project is an important link to their **grandiose** Belt Road Initiative and there are at least three major interests for China in the CPEC. (*HindustanTimes* 12/02/2017)

Martin and White (2005: 50) posit that the emotional response to discourse is influenced by the active role individuals assume in the activities being discusses. This theory offers a lens through which to examine the nuanced media representation of the BRI, especially in terms of the Affect and Judgment markers used. For instance, the Affect marker "concern" in Example (13) exemplifies this, portraying China's apprehension regarding the BRI's challenges (Jiang 2018). This choice of Affect maker, while reflecting concern, dose not undermine the principles of ecosophy or disrupt the international ecological harmony, thereby qualifying as a neutral discourse element. It reflects the Indian journalist's impartial stance towards the BRI's difficulties, illustrating a balanced evaluation rather than a biased critique.

In Example (14), the word "push" serves as a Judgment marker by the Indian media to highlight China's proactive efforts to promote the BRI's objectives. The accompanying adverb "vigorously" signals the journalist's recognition and appreciation of these efforts. Similarly, in Example (15) "grandiose" is employed as an Appreciation marker, acknowledging the BRI's ambition from China's perspective and its connection to other significant Chinese projects. The use of these markers, which primarily focus on China's internal perspective and efforts without directly addressing the interests or concerns of other nations, exemplifies neutral discourse within the media coverage.

In the American corpus, neutral Appreciation markers predominate, with fewer instances of neutral Affect markers. This trend suggests that the BRI must demonstrate more significant achievements to enhance its appeal and encourage broader participation, as in the following Examples (16)–(18):

- (16) In 2018, he released a song called “Chinese Dream,” **praising** the Belt and Road development plan. (*Los Angeles Times* 07/10/2019)
- (17) Still, unlike many of China’s earlier “going out” initiatives that saw Chinese firms encounter friction as they ventured to places such as Africa and South America in search of natural resources, One Belt, One Road is being **approached** with a greater degree of **sophistication** and **patience**, Kelly believes. (*Los Angeles Times* 05/01/2016)
- (18) This accommodation was made in context of China recognizing that the Belt and Road Initiative is **less popular** than China wished it was. (*The New York Times* 04/16/2019)

In Example (16), “praising” reveals the artist’s neutral sentiment towards the BRI, lauding it as the grand “Chinese dream” and highlighting its significance for China. However, it omits any discussion of the BRI’s impact on the international community. In line with the ecosophy in this research, this omission positions the sentiment in the realm of neutral Affect. Example (17) features “approached” as a neutral Judgment marker concerning the BRI, alongside “sophistication” and “patience”, to assess the initiative’s resilience and strategic approach to challenges. This portrayal, focusing on the BRI’s operational aspects without reference to the ecosophy of “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence”, is classified as neutral discourse. In Example (18), the American media employs the word “popular” with the modifier “less” as an Appreciation marker, suggesting the BRI’s current struggles and setbacks. This characterization implies that the BRI’s development trajectory requires reinforcement and consolidation. These discussions, detached from the ecosophy guiding the ecosophy, are thus deemed neutral discourses.

4.4 Destructive attitude resources in the Chinese, Indian and American media

Figure 6 illustrates the different frequencies of destructive attitudinal resources utilized in the Chinese, Indian, and American corpora when discussing the BRI.

In the Chinese corpus, there is a notable emphasis on destructive Judgment resources, which are mainly projected from external sources. These resources are employed to critically assess the BRI and express concerns about its potential adverse effects on other countries’ interests. This trend suggests a media narrative that is attuned to international apprehensions regarding the BRI’s implementation and its implication for global dynamics, as in the following Example (19):

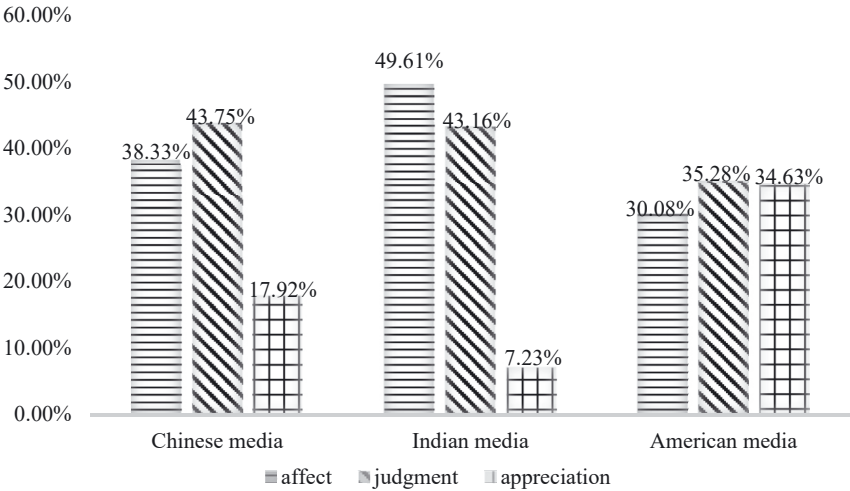


Figure 6: Distribution of destructive attitudinal resources in Chinese, Indian, and American corpora.

- (19) The US has **criticized** China’s Belt and Road Initiative as a foreign policy tool used by Beijing to further its influence around the world. (*China Daily* 11/25/2021)

The word “criticized” in Example (19) demonstrates the emoter’s dissatisfaction with the BRI, highlighting external dissatisfaction with the BRI, particularly emphasizing the U.S.’s view of the initiative as a tool for Chinese dominance. This narrative, which casts the BRI in a negative light due to its fears of geopolitical influence and damage to international harmony, aligns with concerns over the initiative’s potential to undermine the ecosophy of mutual benefit and cooperation.

Similarly, the Indian media’s extensive use of destructive Affect and Judgment resources reflects deep-seated concerns over the BRI’s geopolitical implications, particularly regarding territorial sovereignty and the fear of unequal competition. This excessive concerns lead to the Indian negative attitude towards the BRI (Huan and Deng 2021), even discrediting the initiative to convey destructive stances, as shown in Example (20).

- (20) This move is being seen as a counter to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been blamed for **creating unsustainable** projects and **placing** countries **in a debt trap**. (*Hindustan Times* 05/25/2022)

In Example (20), the verbs “create” and “place” are used by Indian journalists to assess the BRI, highlighting its unethical behavior and harmful impacts, which may

evoke dissatisfaction in other countries. However, this discourse has failed to acknowledge the positive significance and objectives of the BRI. Such a destructive representation and recognition are likely to hinder the development of cooperation between countries under the BRI, thereby being categorized as a destructive representation. Despite that the BRI primarily focuses on economic considerations and infrastructure development rather than security concerns (Casarini 2016), these stigmatized discourses contradict the ecosophy of “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence”, thus falling under the destructive dimension.

The American corpus demonstrates a balanced employment of destructive Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation resources, indicating a comprehensive critique of the BRI’s execution and its perceived negative impacts (Afzaal et al. 2022: 16), as in the following Examples (21):

- (21) China, pushing its **aggressive** Belt and Road initiative, is **threatening** U.S. hegemony in Latin America dating from the Monroe Doctrine. (*The Los Angeles Times* 06/06/2022)

Example (21) comprises two dimensions of Attitude – Appreciation and Judgment. The term “aggressive” serves as an Appreciation marker, describing the ambitious and strategic significance of the BRI. In addition, the term “threaten” as a destructive Judgment evokes feelings of insecurity, indicating the US’s resistance to the BRI and falsely accusing its hegemonic behavior (Zhang and Wu 2017). This representation contradicts the development goals of the BRI and poses a threat to global peace. Therefore, from the perspective of the ecosophy “diversity and harmony, interaction and co-existence”, the Attitude markers demonstrate a destructive stance and contribute to destructive discourses.

5 Discussion and conclusion

This study illuminates the ecological attitudinal patterns and resources reflected in the media coverage of the BRI across the Chinese, Indian, and American outlets from 2013 to 2022. It reveals an ecological spectrum of attitudinal representations, from beneficial, neutral, to destructive, each encapsulating the media’s ecological orientations and underlying perceptions of the BRI. While acknowledging the initiative’s achievements (Liu 2022), these narratives also underscore the diverse and sometimes conflicting geopolitical and economic interests at play.

The analysis underscores the significant influence of cultural and social values, economic priorities, and geopolitical considerations on media representations of the BRI. For instance, the Chinese media’s emphasis on beneficial discourse aligns with the social value of harmony, reflecting a desire for win-win cooperation in international relations. Conversely, the American media’s predominance of destructive

attitudes mirrors concerns over the BRI's implications for global power dynamics, informed by a worldview often characterized by competition and zero-sum outcomes. The Indian coverage, marked by a high use of Affect resources, reflects nuanced concerns about sovereignty and geopolitical positioning, highlighting the complex interplay between geography, national interests, and media narratives.

This study's findings point to the critical role of the media in shaping public and international understanding of major initiative like the BRI. However, given the BRI's expansive reach, involving 152 countries and 32 international organizations (Parenti 2023), further research should broaden its scope to include media narratives from a wider array of participating countries. Such analyses could offer deeper insights into the global consensus or divergence regarding the BRI, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on international cooperation and development.

Moreover, further typological analysis could elucidate the diverse considerations and aspects of the BRI in various socio-political contexts, enriching our understanding of how global initiatives intersect with local values, interests, and aspirations. By extending the analytical framework beyond the media landscapes of China, India and the United States, future research can uncover the multifaceted narratives that shape our global ecosystem, contributing to a more nuanced dialogue on international relations and cooperation in the 21st century.

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