

A Corpus-Assisted Discourse-Historical Approach to the Reports on China's High-Speed Rail in Chinese Mainstream Media (2016-2025)

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Abstract. In recent years, China's high-speed rail (HSR) has become a vital carrier of Chinese national technological image and Belt and Road international cooperation, yet influenced by political and ideological factors, some Western mainstream media tend to avoid objective reporting on China's HSR, which hinder its global recognition. Existing studies mainly focus on HSR's economic and technological benefits and negative Western media reports, while insufficient attention has been devoted to examine how China's official media construct HSR's overseas image. Therefore, this study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to analyze English news reports of China Global Television Network (CGTN) on China's HSR from 2016 to 2025, aiming to explore its themes, discursive strategies and socio-historical contexts. The findings reveal that (1) CGTN's reports construct three core themes, namely technological advancement, domestic and global layout, and passenger travel services and operational conditions; (2) in terms of discursive practice, CGTN adopts literal and metaphorical nomination and positive predicative collocations to portray China's HSR as a landmark, pioneering and world-class infrastructure project; (3) such consistent positive framing is driven by CGTN's mission of international communication, political and economic demands, and national image communication needs. This study shed light on corpus-assisted DHA research for infrastructure diplomatic discourse, and provides perspectives for China's international media to shape credible technological national images.

Keywords: China's high-speed rail, CGTN, Mainstream media, Discourse-Historical Approach, Corpus analysis.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's high-speed rail has increasingly attracted global attention not only as a transportation innovation but also as a symbolic representation of China's technological advancement and national image. With the advancement of policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the "Going Global" strategy, and "Made in China 2025", international cooperation in China's high-speed rail sector has continued to expand. By the end of 2025, China had engaged in railway cooperation with more than 40 countries, with its high-speed rail operational mileage exceeding 50,000 kilometers, ranking first in the world. Through original innovation, integrated innovation, and the process of introducing, digesting, absorbing, and re-innovating, China has achieved rapid development of its high-speed rail technology system over the past decade, becoming one of the countries with the fastest development pace, the most comprehensive system technology, and the longest operational mileage in the world [1]. As the international influence of China's high-speed rail continues to grow, the construction of its overseas image has gradually become a significant topic in international communication studies.

Regarded as a core force that shapes global public cognition, mainstream media consist of large-scale public or private corporate institutions. Such media organizations focus on reaching extensive audiences and stand for dominant national value systems [2]. Possessing abundant resources and power, mainstream media establish unified interpretive frameworks to shape public perceptions of all social affairs [3]. These media set the standard lens through which ordinary audiences comprehend and judge major public issues. As China's official international mainstream media, CGTN undertakes the mission of "telling China's stories well" and delivering authentic narratives to global audiences.

Therefore, an analysis of CGTN's news discourse concerning China's high-speed rail can effectively reveal how official mainstream media construct technological national images in global news reports.

Existing research has largely focused on dimensions such as the technological application, economic impact, and environmental benefits of China's high-speed rail [4, 5, 6, 7]. However, limited attention has been paid to how China's own international media strategically discursively construct the overseas image of its high-speed rail in the context of global communication, even though this image is directly linked to the dissemination of national soft power and the advancement of overseas cooperation.

Dominated by the ideological logic of digital orientalism, Western mainstream and social media frequently construct oversimplified, one-sided and distorted sociotechnical imaginaries regarding China's technological advancement. These biased media narratives selectively amplify negative interpretations while ignoring its diversified industrial and infrastructure innovation [8]. Similar soft geopolitical biases can also be found in AI-produced content. Such subtle prejudice distorts public perceptions of China's technology through shifting narrative focus and omitting information selectively, instead of delivering blunt, hostile statements [9]. Some foreign media reports on China's high-speed rail exhibit a clear bias, such as distorted safety perceptions and skepticism toward its development model [10, 11, 12]. To some extent, such coverage has created a disparity between the international image of China's high-speed rail and its actual level of development. Exploring the image construction of China's high-speed rail from the perspective of Chinese media is thereby of great significance.

Based on this, this study utilizes CGTN news reports as its corpus, selects the critical phase of China's high-speed rail "going global" from 2016 to 2025 as the research period, and employs the Discourse-Historical Approach as the research methodology. Combined with corpus analysis tools, the study conducts a systematic analysis of the main content, expression strategies, and image construction of China's high-speed rail discourse in international communication. This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What themes are covered in CGTN's reports on China's high-speed rail?
- 2) How does CGTN employ discursive strategies to frame the image of China's high-speed rail?
- 3) What socio-historical factors have shaped the discursive construction of China's high-speed rail in CGTN's reports?

2. Literature Review

Existing research on China's high-speed rail has primarily focused on its technological, economic, and environmental aspects. From a technological perspective, Zhang and Hu [4] emphasized that high-speed rail serves as a central symbol of China's infrastructure modernization and innovation capabilities. In terms of economy, studies highlighted the role of high-speed rail in strengthening inter-city connectivity and promoting coordinated regional development [5, 6]. Yao and Gillen [7] further explored the environmental benefits and sustainable impacts of high-speed rail. Overall, these studies have emphasized its practical use and value and established a relatively mature understanding of the practical significance of China's railway.

However, the symbolic significance and discursive construction of China's high-speed rail system remain to be thoroughly examined. As a flagship project closely related to China's outward expansion, high-speed rail also performs a strategic communicative function and helps to shape external perceptions of China's advancement in technology, development, and international cooperation. Existing research has not yet fully explained how these meanings are generated through media discourse, particularly on China's own media platforms.

In the limited research related to the discursive construction of China's high-speed rail, it is often interpreted within the framework of geopolitics and ideology by foreign media. Research indicates that mainstream U.S. media have used safety controversies and the Yongwen Line accident to question the quality of China's high-speed rail and politicize the issues [10, 11]. British media, despite

acknowledging its technical strengths, have also employed a negative interpretation, focusing on attributing accidents to China's high-speed rail and questioning the rationality of its development [12]. These biased narratives have distorted the international image of China's high-speed rail and also hindered overseas cooperation and exports to some extent. In summary, the research has mostly focused on negative narratives in foreign media. These reports often adopt a framework oriented by conflict and risk, which may deviate from the self-image China seeks to build in its international communications.

To address the aforementioned research gap, this study employs Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to examine how CGTN constructs the overseas image of high-speed rail through discourse. By utilizing corpus tools, this study goes beyond the media's discourse content to systematically analyse the thematic structures, discursive strategies, and contextual influences regarding China's high-speed rail discourse.

3. Methodology

This study conducts the corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis through the DHA to explore China's media representation of China's high-speed rail between 2016 and 2025. Specifically, CGTN is selected because it is the most prominent Chinese global media outlet with mission to serve for China's soft power strategy. Meanwhile, it has a large number of audiences in more than 160 countries, and its social media platform also has over 150 million followers and subscribers on its [13]. The year 2016 is a milestone in China's overseas railway cooperation because of the launch of the Jakarta–Bandung high-speed rail project, and the year 2025 represents the completion of the 14th Five-Year Plan, by which time China's international communication regarding high-speed rail had basically taken shape.

This study used “China's high speed rail”, “high-speed railway”, and “high-speed trains” as retrieval keywords to select new reports from China Global Television Network (CGTN) (www.cgtn.com). those unrelated to the China's high-speed rail system, duplicate articles, and brief news snippets were excluded. As a result, this study builds a target corpus comprising 26 complete reports with 10,263 tokens.

This study first employs corpus analysis tools AntConc 4.3.1 and LancsBox 5.5.1 to conduct corpus analysis including keywords analysis, collocation analysis and concordance analysis which can identify recurring thematic patterns and significant lexical choices. Secondly, the study conducts the DHA analysis to explore Naming strategies and Predicative strategies adopted in China's media reports through corpus analysis. Finally, these analysis results and findings are interpreted in socio-historical context.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Theme Determination

Based on the DHA analytical framework, this study first identifies the themes of the text. Using the AntConc tool to conduct a comparative analysis of the target corpus and the reference corpus, and after excluding function words, the top 20 high-frequency keywords in the target corpus were identified. The specific results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Top 20 High-Frequency Keywords.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Keyness	Rank	Word	Frequency	Keyness
1	speed	227	981.58	11	passenger	27	108.51
2	railway	157	701.23	12	hour	26	95.51
3	China	179	699.62	13	Fuxing	18	81.82
4	train	157	671.74	14	travel	26	77.84
5	high	186	535.71	15	cities	16	65.34
6	kilometers	79	341.37	16	CRRC	14	63.64
7	rail	72	327.63	17	construction	25	59.1
8	Chinese	39	139.64	18	province	15	56.3
9	network	44	131.61	19	Serbia	12	54.54
10	Beijing	26	109.87	20	operation	17	52.18

By analyzing the 20 high-frequency keywords in Table 1, this study extracts three themes covered in CGTN's reports on China's high-speed rail: (1) the technological advancement of China's high-speed rail. This theme is reflected by keywords related to its technology and facilities such as "speed", "railway", "train", "high", "rail", "kilometers". Meanwhile, the term "Fuxing" further highlights the achievements of China's high-speed rail in technological innovation and capacity; (2) the domestic and global layout of China's high-speed rail. This theme is vividly presented by these keywords: "China", "Chinese", "Beijing", "cities", "province", "network" and "construction" embody the domestic construction and layout of China's high-speed rail. Likewise, terms including "Serbia" indicate that China's high-speed rail has gone global and carried out cooperation projects overseas; (3) the passenger services and operational conditions of China's high-speed rail. It is illustrated in keywords such as "passenger", "operation", "travel", "hour" and "CRRC", indicating that China's high-speed rail prioritizes efficient travel and professional operations.

4.2. Discursive strategies

Discursive strategy is the intentional plan of practices aimed at achieving particular social, political, and other goals. It includes nomination strategy, predication strategy, argumentation strategy, perspectivization strategy, and intensification strategy [14].

4.2.1. Nomination Strategy

Within the framework of DHA, nomination strategy denotes the discursive construction of social actors, entities and phenomena via linguistic mechanisms including categorization and rhetorical devices [15]. It is achieved through a series of identity deixis and symbolic representations, thereby shaping the social image and status of high-speed rail. By utilizing the Word List function of Antconc, this study first examines the naming pattern of China's high-speed rail in the selected corpus to detect the nuance behind it.

Table 2. The Naming Pattern of High-Speed Rail

Pattern	Frequency
high-speed railway	173
train	155
high-speed rail	72
HSR	8

As can be seen in Table 2, high-speed railway (173) is the most frequently used term, followed by train (155), high-speed rail (72), and HSR (8). The preference for "high-speed railway" suggests that the news discourse tends to present high-speed railway as an infrastructure system rather than a means of transport. The relatively high frequency of "train" and "high-speed rail" emphasizes its function as an entity and may include common trains. The appearance of "HSR" suggests that its use is mainly found in technical or international contexts.

Metaphorical expressions are also used to refer to high-speed rail in the corpus. These expressions go beyond identification of high-speed rail and carry explicit evaluative meanings. This study next analyzes the metaphorical nomination of high-speed rail by using the Concordance (KWIC) function, thereby recognizing the social image and status of it behind the discourse.

Table 3. Classification of Metaphorical Nomination.

Pattern	Examples	Frequency
N/Adj+project	A landmark project	11
	one of the flagship projects	
	A joint project	
	a nation-wide project	
superlative adjective	fastest	6
	first	
	largest	
	breakthrough	
other nouns	superstar	4
	world bests	

As shown in Table 3, the metaphorical nomination of China's high-speed rail is primarily classified into three categories. The following section selects representative concordance lines from each category for closer examination.

1. The Hungary-Serbia railway is a landmark project of the Belt and Road Initiative jointly constructed by China and Central and Eastern European countries.

(October 17, 2023. China's 200 km/h high-speed EMUs exported to Europe for first time)

2. Indonesia broke ground on Thursday on its first high-speed railway, a *joint project* with China that will link the capital Jakarta with the industrial city of Bandung.

(January 21, 2016. Indonesia breaks ground on first high-speed railway with China)

When "project" is preceded by modifiers such as "landmark", "flagship", "joint", or "nation-wide", it puts high-speed rail into the field of national planning. In contemporary China, high-speed rail is becoming a prime example of "mega-projects", which have large-scale investment, long construction periods, advanced technologies, and exert profound impacts on national development [16]. Modifiers collocate with "project", producing an effect that high-speed rail is a combination of politics and ideology, a combination of national plan and strategy.

3. China's *fastest* cross-sea high-speed railway, which boasts a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour, began operation on Thursday.

(September 28, 2023. China opens first 350km/h cross-sea high-speed railway)

4. By the end of 2020, China's high-speed rail network reached 38,000 kilometers, accounting for more than 70 percent of the world's total, making it the *largest* high-speed rail network on the planet.

(December 22, 2020. China's high-speed rail network hits 38,000 km in 2020)

Superlatives like "fastest", "first", and "largest" show the leading role of high-speed rail in certain aspect. In Example (3), "fastest" is used to highlight technological superiority in terms of speed. And "largest" in Example (4) displays the unbeatable scale of the network. They shape China's high-speed railway as the unique benchmark, reinforcing its global competitiveness.

5. What makes China's high-speed train a historic *breakthrough*?

(October 10, 2020. Faster, safer and more comfortable—Amazing technology behind China's high speed trains)

6. The high-speed rail (HSR) is the *superstar* of China's development in the recent decade.

(August 25, 2020. Why China can make such great progress in high-speed rail)

"Breakthrough" and "superstar" are different from the previous categories. They do not anchor high-speed rail to measurable dimensions like speed or scale. Instead, they raise it into the realm of symbolic value. "Breakthrough" presents an advance beyond previous limits of it; and "superstar" personifies it, turning a railway network into a certain character. These lexical choices deliver positive

national messages to global audiences and construct a brilliant image of high-speed rail, and by extension, the whole country.

In sum, these naming strategies, whether literal or metaphorical nominations referring to China's high-speed rail, collectively construct a multifaceted and positive portrait of it.

4.2.2. Predication Strategy

Predication strategy is a discursive strategy that assigns evaluative qualities and stereotypical attributes to social actors and phenomena through various linguistic means including predicates, predicative nouns, adjectives, and pronouns [15]. This section analyses the predicates and other predicative elements surrounding search terms related to China's high-speed rail to determine how descriptive strategies are employed in the text.

Based on the collocational analysis results derived from LanksBox, the top five labeling associated with China's high-speed railway are selected as samples, namely successful, biggest, largest, effective and available. The frequency of use of these words is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 4. Collocation of High-Speed Railway.

Word	Freq (coll.)	Freq (corpus)	MI
China's	15	73	5.4
network	9	43	5.4
first	8	29	5.8
development	6	20	5.9
cross-sea	5	5	7.7

As shown in Table 4, China's (15) is the word with the highest collocation frequency that collocates with high-speed railway as the searched word in context, followed by network (9), first (8), development (6) and cross-sea (5). These high frequency-collocations are further analyzed through concordance lines to explore how CGTN constructs the discourse of China's high-speed rail. Representative concordance extracts are displayed below:

1. China's high-speed railway network has reached a new milestone, with its total length extending to 47,000 kilometers.

(December 27, 2024. China's high-speed railway network expands to 47,000 kilometers)

2. China's high-speed railway network has greatly compressed time and space, enabling faster flows of people, goods, information, and capital.

(December 27, 2024. China's high-speed railway network expands to 47,000 kilometers)

3. Statistics from the International Union of Railways show *China's* close-looped high-speed railway security system is also the safest in the world.

(July 26, 2021. From pursuer to front-runner: How do China's high-speed railways make it?)

The concordance extracts above consistently frame high-speed railway as a landmark national infrastructure initiative of China. These news texts were produced in a global wave of cross-border infrastructure competition, when many countries were rolling out their own rail development plans. Against such an international backdrop, the repeated use of the possessive term "China's" distinguishes China's independent railway breakthroughs from other nations' transport projects. By constantly highlighting the national ownership of high-speed rail, CGTN shapes a unified image for global audiences, demonstrating the country's independent capacity in large-scale infrastructure construction.

4. But the importance of this railway link goes far beyond the two cities, it lies in that this marks Hong Kong's integration with the mainland's high-speed railway *network*, which is the longest in the world and also the most extensively traveled.

(September 26, 2018. China Railway Network: Rail links Hong Kong & Mainland more closely)

5. The original railway could not meet travel demand or requirements, which promoted the development of our high-speed railway technology and *network* construction.

(December 30, 2019. China leads the world in high-speed railway development)

6. The growth of China's high-speed railway *network* is further enhancing regional economic connectivity.

(December 27, 2024. China's high-speed railway network expands to 47,000 kilometers)

The above concordance extracts reveal that *network*, as a significant collocation of high-speed rail, primarily functions to attribute positive qualities to it. As shown in Examples (4) through (6), “*network*” co-occurs with words regarding high-speed rail like “*integration*”, “*longest*”, “*construction*”, and “*enhancing connectivity*”, which label high-speed rail as an infrastructure of integrative capacity, scale superiority, and economic benefit. The term “*network*” not only refers to physical track connections but also embodies the national and regional integration and coordination.

7. Indonesia broke ground on Thursday on its *first* high-speed railway, a joint project with China that will link the capital Jakarta with the industrial city of Bandung.

(January 21, 2016. Indonesia breaks ground on first high-speed railway with China)

8. In 2008, China rolled out its *first* high-speed railway at a speed of 350-kilometers per hour.

(July 26, 2021. From pursuer to front-runner: How do China's high-speed railways make it?)

9. Meanwhile, this line will be the first high-speed railway operating in mountains in China to have 4G network coverage the whole way.

(November 22, 2017. New high-speed railway: Xi'an-Chengdu HSR completes first full-line trial operation)

The term “*first*” frequently collocates with high-speed rail, highlighting its pioneering role. According to Mei and Zhang [17], catching up in the field of complex products and systems (CoPS) requires more than mastering individual technologies; it demands strong capabilities in systems integration. Example (7) presents the Indonesian project as a joint endeavour with China, Example (8) records the launch of China's first 350 km/h line, and Example (9), is an example of high-speed rail's extension into challenging terrain. Across these contexts, “*first*” collectively constructs high-speed rail as a forerunner that pushes boundaries in engineering, speed, and international cooperation, reinforcing the discourse of China's global leadership in this sector.

10. The development of the high-speed railway network also plays a significant role in stimulating investment and industrial growth.

(December 27, 2024. China's high-speed railway network expands to 47,000 kilometers)

11. It was also the time when China's high-speed railway entered a period of *development* that new crew, new trains and new sections of railway emerged from.

(May 29, 2021. High-speed railways: A source of pride for China)

12. The original railway could not meet travel demand or requirements, which promoted the *development* of our high-speed railway technology and network construction.

(December 30, 2019. China leads the world in high-speed railway development)

It can be seen that “*development*” is not an independent concept; it is always attached to a specific driver or consequence—industrial growth, renewal, inadequacy of earlier infrastructure and so on. In this sense, the repeated use of “*development*” does not only simply track progress of China's high-speed rail; it is always responding to new demands and generating new outcomes, ultimately driving economic revitalisation.

13. China on Thursday started constructing a *cross-sea* high-speed railway, dubbed the Yong-Zhou Railway, connecting Ningbo and Zhoushan cities in Zhejiang Province.

(November 3, 2022. China builds ‘world-class’ cross-sea high-speed railway)

14. China's fastest *cross-sea* high-speed railway, which boasts a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour, began operation on Thursday, connecting cities including Fuzhou and Xiamen along the west coast of the Taiwan Straits.

(September 28, 2023. China opens first 350km/h cross-sea high-speed railway)

Unlike more general terms like “*network*” or “*development*”, *cross-sea* projects are by definition exceptional. They involve extended bridges and tunnels over open water, demanding engineering solutions that go beyond standard railway construction. Over the past decade, as China's inland high-speed network has taken shape, the focus has gradually shifted toward more challenging terrain,

including coastal and island regions. “Cross-sea” in this context carries symbolic connotations that represents the ambition of linking the places that were once disconnected.

Overall, such a narrative perspective and approach adopted by CGTN not only highlights the merit of China’s high-speed rail, but also shapes a national image that is confident, progressive and influential.

4.3. Social and Historical Context Analysis

From 2016 to 2025, China’s high-speed rail has been continuously constructed through positive discourse in news reports of CGTN, which is the result of multiple social and historical forces.

From the perspective of media institution, CGTN is an international official media organization directly affiliated with China Media Group. The official media are the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, the government and the people, whose function is to serve the country and its strategies [18]. Meanwhile, as an external propaganda platform, CGTN undertakes the mission of “telling China’s story well” to the world, aiming to present China as an Eastern power with good government, a developed economy, national unity [19]. In the context, China’s high-speed rail, as one of China’s most renowned infrastructure feats, naturally emerges as a symbolic carrier to advance this national endeavour. The use of “breakthrough” and “superstar” in CGTN’s news coverage is exactly the reflection of such communicative pursuits. Visible, tangible, and globally celebrated, high-speed rail projects provide intuitive and credible resources for international interpretation and understanding. It enables overseas audiences to perceive the progress and excellence of China’s modern development through specific and concrete achievements.

At the political and economic level, the period from 2016 to 2025 marked a critical decade in which China’s high-speed rail shifted from domestic construction to international export. During this time, high-speed rail was incorporated into the national “Going Global” strategy and the BRI. Nowadays, China’s high-speed railway is seen as a strategic component of the BRI and a national symbol the country’s global infrastructure strategy [20]. In 2016, the launch of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway was approved, marking the first overseas export of China’s high-speed rail as a means of international cooperation and connectivity. However, China’s high-speed rail exports were also in a situation of geopolitical competition. Pavličević and Kratz [21] points that China’s efforts of high-speed railway projects in Southeast Asia have been interpreted in the perspective of the “China Threat” and often portrayed as part of Beijing’s agenda to alter the regional balance of power. In this sense, Chinese mainstream media’s positive discourse is as a strategic response to offset international scepticism and to present China’s technological rise in a favourable light.

The actual economic contributions of high-speed rail also provide a basis for its positive media discourse. Studies have confirmed that high-speed rail significantly promotes regional economic growth. Wu et al. [22] demonstrate that high-speed rail networks significantly promote the agglomeration of the tertiary industry (services). Ou et al. [23] find that high-speed rail plays a significant role in promoting coordinated regional economic development and that the establishment of high-speed rail stations increases local per capita GDP by an average of 3,390 yuan. These economic outcomes provide empirical support for the recurring labels in the discourse such as “connectivity”, “economic integration” and “growth”, and further empower CGTN to frame such affirmative coverage of China’s high-speed rail.

Global perceptions of China are often shaped by Western ideological perspectives and mainstream media narratives. Western discourses continuously produce stereotypes and labeled images of China, which inevitably leads to unfair and biased overseas understandings of China’s modern development [24]. Under such circumstances, the national strategic initiative of “telling China’s stories well” has become an essential guideline for China’s international publicity, aiming to cultivate a positive, credible, and multidimensional international image that fully displays China’s achievements in culture, sports, science, technology, and social progress. As a technological breakthrough independently developed and widely applied in China, high-speed rail represents the country’s advanced manufacturing, innovative and technological level, serving as an indispensable component

of China's contemporary technological image in global public discourse [25]. In order to make up the insufficient cognition of external audiences and correct biased public impressions, authoritative media platforms such as CGTN actively construct diversified and objective discourses centred on high-speed rail development and achievement. By systematically disseminating a series of narratives regarding high-speed rail construction, technological innovation, and operational capabilities, CGTN effectively demonstrates that China owns mature technology and development strengths in modern transportation engineering. Meanwhile, the frequent use of "China's" emphasizes its belonging, shaping high-speed rail as a vital pillar of China's national profile. Thereby, continuous and positive media coverage of high-speed rail can mitigate external prejudices and deliver a well-rounded image of China.

5. Conclusion

This study adopts corpus-assisted Discourse-Historical Approach to examine CGTN's English news reports on China's high-speed rail from 2016 to 2025 and focuses on three research questions regarding the themes, discursive strategies, and socio-historical contexts that shape the overseas image of China's high-speed rail. Three main findings are derived from the analysis. First, CGTN's coverage constructs three main themes: the technological advancement of high-speed rail, its domestic and global network layout, and its passenger services and operational conditions. Second, through nomination strategies, CGTN employs both literal terms (high-speed railway, train, HSR) and metaphorical labels (landmark project, superstar, breakthrough) to construct a multifaceted positive image; through predication strategies, the five most prominent collocates, namely China's, network, first, development, and cross-sea, collectively frame high-speed rail as a nationally owned, systemically integrated, technologically pioneering, continuously advancing and geographically ambitious project. Third, these discursive constructions are shaped by multiple socio-historical factors, including CGTN's institutional role as China's official media, the political and economic missions of China's high-speed railway, China's demands on countering international scepticism and the goal of shaping a positive national technological image.

However, this study also has limitations. First of all, the corpus comprises news reports from a single media outlet, CGTN. While CGTN is China's flagship media organization, the involvement of only one source may lack representativeness of the findings. A more comprehensive representation could be obtained by incorporating reports from more than one media outlet. In addition, this study did not select foreign media to conduct a comparison between Chinese media and foreign media's reports on China's high-speed rail, which fails to explore the differences and similarities in discursive strategies between them. Therefore, future research should expand the scope of data through selecting more mainstream media reports which can enhance the representativeness of the data. Meanwhile, future studies also can conduct comparative analysis on media representation of China's high-speed rail between Chinese and foreign media, which can provide a more comprehensive picture of China's high-speed rail.

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