

# A Corpus-Based Study on China's Image in the Foreign Ministry's News Reports — A Case Study of Q&A in Regular Press Conferences

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates China's national image constructed in the Q&A texts of regular press conferences hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of the People's Republic of China. Focusing on addressing the imbalance where "external construction" of China's image outweighs "self-construction" in existing research, it adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative corpus analysis and qualitative discourse analysis based on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). A self-built corpus was constructed, comprising 5,486 Q&A exchanges from 577 regular press conferences held between 2023 and June 2025, sourced from the English website of MOFA. Using AntConc software, high-frequency words and their collocations were analyzed, revealing core terms such as "China," "cooperation," "peace," "Taiwan," and "sovereignty." These terms reflect China's emphasis on international engagement, commitment to peaceful development, and firm stance on safeguarding national sovereignty. Qualitative analysis, guided by SFG, further explored transitivity and modality systems. Material processes highlight China's proactive role in global governance, while verbal processes emphasize its clear stance on international affairs. The strategic use of high-modal words for core interests and medium-low modal words for cooperative scenarios balances firmness and flexibility in diplomatic discourse. The findings indicate that MOFA press conferences construct a multidimensional Chinese image: resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity; upholding international order as a responsible major power; advocating peace and cooperation; acting rationally, pragmatically, and trustworthy; and demonstrating confidence with global influence. This study enriches methodologies for national image research and provides practical insights for enhancing China's international communication effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** China's image, Corpus, SFG, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China has made remarkable achievements in politics, economy, culture, and other fields. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (MOFA), as an important department in charge of the country's foreign affairs, plays an important role in connecting with other countries and promoting Sino-foreign relations. Therefore, the statements made by Foreign Ministry spokespersons represent the image of the entire country and also serve as an opportunity to showcase China's achievements in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects. Currently, the outside world's understanding of China mainly comes from media reports. Thus, the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China is an important channel for shaping and displaying China's image, as well as a key window for other countries to understand China.

From the perspective of existing studies, analyses on the construction of national image mostly focus on mass media. Studies on national image construction from the government dimension mainly target activities led by the government, such as the Olympic Games and World Expo. However, research on the construction of China's national image through the analysis of news reports on the questions and answers in the regular press conferences of spokespersons on the Foreign Ministry's official website is insufficient. Moreover, previous studies have shown that in the construction of China's national image, "other-construction" far exceeds "self-construction"; in terms of research methods, most scholars adopt qualitative research, while quantitative research is relatively scarce. Therefore, this study, from a linguistic perspective, takes the news reports of questions and answers in the regular press conferences of Foreign Ministry

spokespersons as the analysis text, and adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine China's image on the Foreign Ministry's official website by analyzing specific relevant data, which has certain practical significance.

This study constructs a self-built corpus and adopts the systemic functional grammar theory to objectively analyze China's image. Currently, China has long since risen to become the world's second-largest economy, but many other countries still perceive China as being in a state of poverty and backwardness. This leads to a mismatch between China's actual image and the image understood by other countries. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an objective and comprehensive analysis of the shaping of China's national image, so as to provide strategic support for shaping a more authentic national image in the future. At the same time, combining the corpus with systemic functional grammar also provides an important research method for analyzing China's image.

This study focuses on the news reports of questions and answers in the regular press conferences of Foreign Ministry spokespersons, constructs a corpus from the questions and answers between reporters and Foreign Ministry spokespersons, and systematically analyzes the news reports in combination with systemic functional grammar to explore and sort out the main factors influencing the construction of China's image. It is concluded that the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China has shaped a multi-dimensional Chinese national image, such as resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty and loving peace.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of National Image

The concept of “national image” was first proposed by foreign scholar Kenneth Boulding in 1956. He argued that a national image is a collection of multiple perceptions, encompassing both a country’s self-perception and the perceptions of other actors toward it. Dutch scholar Joep Leerssen pointed out that the essence of an image is discourse, which refers to the psychological, verbal expressions, or opinions about an individual, group, ethnic group, or country, emphasizing the crucial role of discourse in shaping national images. Domestic academic research on China’s national image has become increasingly rich. Sun (2002) believes that a national image is the understanding and evaluation of a country’s politics, economy, and other cultural aspects by both internal and external publics. Tang (2004) noted that a national image is the overall judgment and social evaluation of a country by internal and external publics. Zhang and Xu (2007) further elaborated that it includes both the overall perception of the country by its own citizens and the overall evaluation of the country’s material foundation, policies, and other aspects by foreign publics. However, the criteria for distinguishing between “self-construction” and “external-construction” remain unclear (Xing & Yan, 2022). Generally, “self-construction” refers to the shaping of China’s image by domestic publics, media, and the government, while “external-construction” refers to such shaping behaviors by foreign publics, media, and governments. Notably, Nye’s (2004) theory of Soft Power provides a new perspective for understanding national image construction—specifically, shaping international recognition through cultural attractiveness and political values.

Swedish linguist Jens Allwood, in his work *National Images in Intercultural Communication*, analyzed the ways in which national images have been constructed from historical to contemporary times, pointing out that in communication, countries tend to emphasize their uniqueness and exaggerate differences rather than similarities between each other. Studies have shown that mainstream Western media dominate “other-portrayal”: Wu (2011) noted that media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and The New York Times profoundly influence the shaping of China’s image. Yuan (2019), through an analysis of China’s image from a German perspective, found that it is often labeled with negative images such as “lacking democracy” and “advocating threat theory.” Wang (2020) also pointed out that the construction of China’s national image is deeply influenced by Western hegemonism; the West often uses its own standards as the criterion for judgment and holds global discourse power, resulting in the influence of “external construction” of China’s image far exceeding that of “self-construction.”

This study takes the question-and-answer content of the regular press conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons as the analytical text, focusing on the “self-construction” process of China’s image. It aims to provide practical references for addressing the deficiencies in China’s national image “self-construction,” which is of practical significance.

### 2.2 Previous Studies on National Image

National image plays a vital role in enhancing national centripetal force and strengthening national cohesion (Cheng, 2007). Therefore, how to construct a positive national image has become a focus of academic attention. Existing studies, approaching from different subjects, can be categorized into three perspectives: the government, enterprises, and citizens.

#### 1) The Leading Role of the Government:

The government shapes the national image mainly through two types of approaches:

First, participating in major political, economic, and cultural activities, such as hosting international events and conducting diplomatic activities. Ai (2011), through analyzing major events like the Shanghai World Expo and the Olympic Games, pointed out that the government plays a leading role in shaping the national image, successfully presenting China as a “civilized and open” major country. Hu (2020) conducted a multi-dimensional analysis of the 2022 Winter Olympics held amid the pandemic, arguing that the government shaped a national image of being “responsible and people-oriented” through this event.

Second, releasing policies and news reports through media. Relevant studies can be divided into two categories: Domestic media targeting domestic audiences. For example, Fei & Liu (2009), by analyzing domestic media reports on the Beijing Olympic Games, found that these reports shaped a national image of “civilization, confidence, and inclusiveness.”

Scholars such as Wang (2020) and Yang (2023) analyzed the statements of Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons (responses to reporters’ questions from 2019 to 2022) and pointed out that these discourses shaped China’s multi-dimensional image of being “independent, responsible, firm in stance, and polite.”

International media targeting global audiences, such as China Daily, which undertakes both domestic media functions and international communication responsibilities. The differences in their reporting languages can reflect the diversity of target groups. Zhou (2023), through analyzing 3,028 English reports on “dual carbon” in China Daily, found that they shaped China’s image of “valuing ecology and actively responding to crises.”

#### 2) The Significant Role of Enterprises

As important subjects in shaping national images, enterprises exert their influence through industrial strength and cultural communication. Sun & Han (2015) argue that consumers’ product choices will further focus on the national brand image. Dong (2017), taking APEC costumes as an example, points out that costumes, as cultural carriers, shaped China’s image of “inclusiveness and innovation” during the 2014 APEC conference. Wang (2019) reveals the role of enterprises in shaping China’s image at the international level through an analysis of the overseas internet company TikTok. Castells (2008) put forward the concept of “networked corporate diplomacy,” noting that multinational enterprises have

become new subjects in the construction of national images.

### 3) The Micro-level Role of Individuals

While enterprises, as collective entities, showcase a country's industrial and economic strength, individuals who make up these enterprises, along with other social individuals, can also influence the national image through micro-level behaviors such as daily communication and cultural dissemination. Tan (2012) analyzed China National Publicity Film and revealed the new type of national image shaped by the creators through their work. Li (2021) and others, through studying textbooks, pointed out that textbook compilation teams, with socialist core values and national spirit at the core, convey a specific national image in textbooks. Cheng Bo explored the Chinese national image that filmmakers attempt to shape by appreciating main melody films of different eras.

## 2.3 Research Significance and Questions

This study focuses on the question-and-answer texts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons and constructs a self-built corpus. It adopts systemic functional grammar to explore the national image constructed through the questions and answers in the regular press conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons. Existing studies have shown that in the construction of China's national image, "external construction" far outweighs "self-construction." By analyzing the image construction in diplomatic discourse, this research can enrich the "self-portrayal" of national image and provide a new analytical perspective for understanding how domestic subjects (especially the official discourse system) actively shape the national image.

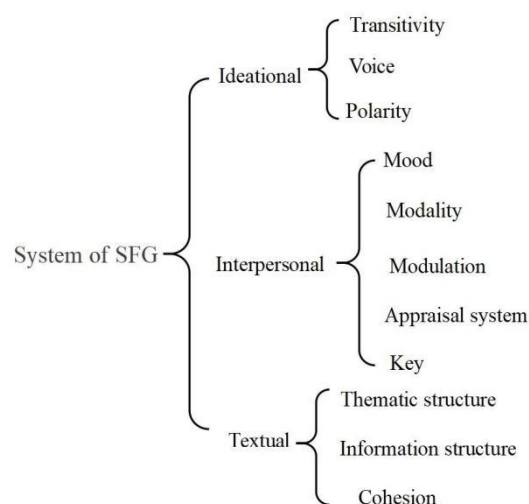
The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the high-frequency words and their collocations in the news reports of the regular press conference Q&A sessions by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson? What kind of national image do these linguistic resources construct?
- 2) From the perspective of the modality system, through which linguistic expressions do the news reports of the press conference Q&A sessions reflect China's diplomatic attitudes? What kind of national image do modality resources construct?
- 3) Based on the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) theory, how does the transitivity system in the news reports of the press conference Q&A sessions shape the national image? What kind of national image do the transitivity resources construct?

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Grammar is one of the most influential linguistic theories in the international community in the second half of the 20th century (Huang, 2001). This theory was proposed by British linguist M.A.K. Halliday (1994), abbreviated as "SFG". Later, through the efforts of Halliday and many other scholars, the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar has been widely used. Under this theory, Halliday

pointed out that language has three meta functions, namely Ideational Function, Interpersonal Function and Textual Function. The Ideational Function is used to express people's experiences and understandings of the world, and includes such subsystems as transitivity system, voice system and polarity system; the Interpersonal Function is used to maintain and establish social relationships, and it includes such subsystems as mood, modality, modulation, appraisal system and key; the Textual Function makes language a continuous text rather than isolated sentences, and it includes such subsystems as thematic structure, information structure and cohesion (Halliday, 1994). The above relationships are shown in Figure 3.1:



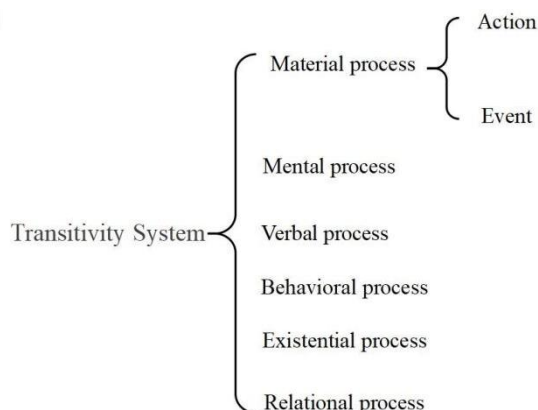
**Figure 3.1: System Functional Grammar**

This study will focus on the application of Ideational Function and Interpersonal Function.

Huang (2001) once successfully applied the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar to the analysis of advertising discourses. Later, he pointed out that Systemic Functional Grammar is more suitable for discourse analysis than any other linguistic theoretical frameworks, featuring strong operability and applicability. In addition, the theory itself emphasizes the functions of language. Therefore, this theory is highly applicable to this study.

### 3.1 Transitivity System

Traditional grammar holds that "transitivity" is one of the classifications of notional verbs. According to whether a notional verb can take an object or not, notional verbs are divided into transitive verbs and intransitive verbs (He & Wei, 2016). However, the "transitivity" discussed in this study is different from "the transitivity of verbs". This "transitivity" covers processes, participants in the processes, and the circumstances in which the processes occur (Halliday). Through verbs and their collocative components, the transitivity system transforms abstract perceptions into specific and expressible linguistic structures, enabling people to express and understand various events and relationships. The transitivity system is one of the subsystems under the Ideational Function, and this subsystem includes material process, mental process, verbal process, behavioral process, existential process and relational process (Halliday, 1994). Their relationships are shown in Figure 3.1.1:



**Figure 3.1.1: Transitivity System**

Different types of texts embody different processes. Narrative texts such as news reports mostly reflect the aforementioned material process, verbal process and relational process. By analyzing various processes embodied in the news reports of regular press conferences on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this study can better sort out the characteristics of China's national image.

### 3.2 Modality System

The modality system is another subsystem within the ideational function, which lies between absolute affirmation and absolute negation. Li and Zhong (2002) pointed out that the "intermediate" type of sentences between absolute affirmation and absolute negation are "modalized sentences", which are used to express the speaker's subjective emotional attitude towards things. When expressing these "modalized sentences", modal auxiliaries must be used. Halliday classified modal auxiliaries into three levels: high, medium and low according to their modal values. Based on the research of Li and Zhong, the following table is prepared, as shown in Table 3.2.1. This study will analyze the news reports of regular press conferences based on modal values.

**Table 3.2.1: Value of Modality**

Value	Words
High	must, have to
Medium	will, would, shall, should
Low	can, may, could, might

## 4. Research Methods

### 4.1 Self-built Corpus

This study selects news reports from the regular press conference section on the English website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. The content consists of question-and-answer exchanges between Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons and participating journalists—where journalists pose questions and spokespersons provide responses. The news reports cover all regular press conferences throughout 2023, 2024, and from January to June 2025, totaling 577 conferences with 5,486 questions and answers. The participating journalists are from domestic Chinese media (Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily, China Daily, etc.), foreign official media, and international organizations (Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, etc.). Press conferences are held daily except on legal holidays, ensuring that the news reports cover

a wide range of fields, diverse themes, and are updated frequently.

After determining the source and time frame of the texts to be analyzed, a Python script was used to collect news reports from 577 conferences, including information such as time, date, and a total of 5,486 questions and answers. Irrelevant content was manually removed, and the sorted texts were imported into AntConc (Version 4.3.1) to establish a corpus for analyzing the characteristics of the press conference news reports.

### 4.2 Instrument

This study uses AntConc (Version 4.3.1) for corpus analysis. This software is suitable for data processing of small-scale documents, with core functions including "generating synonym comparison tables", "retrieving high-frequency words", "generating synonym distribution maps", and "retrieving word collocations".

### 4.3 Research Procedure

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative research methods. First, a quantitative research method is employed. The researcher constructs a self-built corpus and uses AntConc software for corpus analysis. By searching the frequency, collocation relationships, and synonym situations of "China" in the texts, the study analyzes the image of China constructed in the news reports. In the qualitative analysis phase, based on the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar, 20 news reports are selected for research and analysis. Finally, cross-validation is conducted to derive a relatively objective image of China.

## 5. Data Analysis

### 5.1 High-Frequency Words

The data in this section is obtained through analysis and data processing using AntConc software. First, AntConc is used to retrieve words with high frequency in the corpus, and a table is generated in descending order of frequency. Then, words irrelevant to the analysis of China's national image, such as prepositions and articles, are manually excluded. Finally, the top 50 high-frequency words related to China's national image are extracted, as shown in Table 5.1.1. The data in this table includes serial numbers, words, and frequencies. A larger value in the frequency column indicates a higher number of times the word is used.

**Table 5.1.1: Top 50 High-frequency Words**

Number	Words	Frequency
1	China	27420
2	countries	6492
3	cooperation	5498
4	Chinese	4892
5	foreign	4682
6	international	4635
7	development	3655
8	world	3095
9	president	3040
10	people	3013



11	global	2801
12	relations	2768
13	between	2722
14	security	2710
15	new	2582
16	Taiwan	2509
17	minister	2491
18	comment	2375
19	visit	2276
20	peace	2231
21	ministry	2017
22	Japan	1919
23	year	1871
24	community	1867
25	work	1817
26	government	1696
27	relevant	1617
28	political	1534
29	trade	1527
30	meeting	1512
31	rights	1497
32	interests	1480
33	mutual	1462
34	high	1437
35	question	1412
36	affairs	1395
37	national	1395
38	sides	1355
39	first	1351
40	law	1341
41	common	1333
42	state	1333
43	no	1323
44	strategic	1289
45	parties	1278
46	position	1275
47	important	1271
48	stop	1269
49	nuclear	1253
50	continue	1247

Table 5.1.1 collectively presents the multi-dimensional national image constructed in the international context. As the most frequently used word, “China” appears 27,420 times in the texts, running through various diplomatic expressions and becoming the core subject of the narratives. The high-frequency occurrence of words such as “countries”, “foreign”, “international”, “global” and “world” reflects China’s positioning of deeply participating in international affairs with an open attitude and closely linking its own development with the global pattern. Words like “cooperation”, “development”, “relations” and “between” highlight China’s emphasis on bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries in the world, as well as its stance of promoting international interactions with cooperation and development as the core issues. Meanwhile, words such as “mutual”, “common” and “community” further strengthen the concepts of mutual benefit and win-win results, and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

“Peace” and “security” are high-frequency value keywords, reflecting China’s pursuit of a peaceful and stable

international order. The high frequency of “Taiwan” clearly conveys China’s firm stance on safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, demonstrating its adherence to principles on issues concerning core interests. Words such as “president”, “minister”, “ministry”, “visit” and “meeting” embody China’s active promotion of international cooperation through high-level diplomacy and regular diplomatic activities. “Comment” and “question” indicate China’s response to international concerns on diplomatic occasions, showing an attitude of open communication. Words like “law”, “position”, “no” and “stop” not only demonstrate that China bases itself on laws and clear positions in international affairs, but also reflect its firm opposition to unreasonable behaviors, highlighting the resoluteness in safeguarding national interests and international justice.

Overall, these high-frequency words collectively shape an image of China that firmly safeguards national sovereignty, actively participates in global governance, advocates peace and cooperation, and pursues mutual benefit and win-win results. This image not only demonstrates the principled bottom line in domestic and foreign affairs but also conveys an open and inclusive international stance.

## 5.2 Keyword Collocations

Based on the top 50 high-frequency words in the press conference news reports, this study selects the most frequently used word “China” as the search term. The AntConc software is used to retrieve collocations of this word with nouns, verbs, and adjectives, with the collocation range limited to 5 words to the left and 5 words to the right (L5-R5). Figure 5.2.1 shows the high-frequency words collocated with “China”. The most frequent collocation is “s”. Here, it should be explained that “s” refers to “’s”, i.e., the possessive form. Due to software limitations, special symbols are not displayed. “China’s” can be regarded as an extension of the meaning of “China” and is closely related to the theme of this study. Therefore, “China’s” is also selected as a search term to explore collocations together with “China”.

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	s	1054
2	relations	3432
3	principle	1050
4	position	1020
5	comment	897
6	rights	897
7	interests	897
8	mutual	897
9	common	897
10	state	897
11	no	897
12	strategic	897
13	parties	897
14	position	897
15	important	897
16	stop	897
17	nuclear	897
18	continue	897

Figure 5.2.1: China’s Vocabulary Collocations

Table 5.2.1 shows the collocations of “China” and “China’s” with nouns respectively. This study selects the top 6 nouns with the highest collocation frequencies.

Table 5.2.1: Noun Collocations

Words	Noun Collocations
China	relations, principle, position, sea, comment, south
China’s	position, comment, sovereignty, expectation, territory

By locating the texts, it is found that “relations” is often used together with “diplomatic” and “bilateral”, and is mostly used to describe the relations between China and other countries, such as “China-US relations, China-Russia relations, China-EU relations” and so on. This indicates that China attaches great importance to developing diplomatic relations with various countries, whether bilateral or multilateral. Through actively carrying out diplomatic activities, it shows that China is a responsible major country committed to international cooperation and promoting world peace and development. The word “principle” is always collocated with “one-China” to form “one-China principle”, while the relevant expressions of “sea” often involve “East China Sea”, and “south” is mostly collocated with “South China Sea”. It can be seen that these high-frequency collocations collectively reflect China’s image of resolutely safeguarding its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Since the collocation frequencies of “position” and “comment” with “China” and “China’s” are both high, they will be discussed together in the following part.

The collocation of “China’s” with “sovereignty” and “territory” indeed indicates that China resolutely defends its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Meanwhile, “expectation” shows that China has certain influence in the international community, as people have expectations for China, and China also actively fulfills its international responsibilities.

“Position” and “comment” are common high-frequency collocative words. “Position” is often used in collocation with international affairs (as shown in Appendix Figure 1) to indicate China’s stance on a certain event, which shows that China is not a bystander on the international stage, but an important role that actively participates and clearly expresses its views. For example, on issues such as the North Korean crisis, it demonstrates China’s sense of responsibility as a major country that pays attention to international hotspots and is committed to promoting the peaceful settlement of problems, reflecting the positive role China plays in maintaining regional stability and world peace.

“Comment” mostly appears in journalists’ questions to spokespersons, used to inquire about the spokesperson’s views (as shown in Appendix Figure 2). After elaborating on their questions, the questioners specifically ask for comments, which indicates that China has significant influence in international affairs. They look forward to hearing China’s perspectives, reflecting that China actively participates in international exchanges and that its statements are valued.

Table 5.2.2 shows the collocations of “China” and “China’s” with verbs.

**Table 5.2.2: Verb Collocations**

Words	Verb Collocations
China	is, stands, does, has, view, visit
China’s	is, stated, elaborated

In analyzing the collocation of “China” with the verb “is”, the researcher searched using “China is” as the retrieval term and found that it is often followed by phrases such as “the first country” and “the biggest country” (as shown in Appendix Figure 3). This fully reflects China’s prominence and

leadership in certain fields, while also demonstrating China’s firm confidence in its own strength, shaping a confident image of China. It is worth noting that “China is” also repeatedly appears in the expression “the government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legal government” (as shown in Appendix Figure 4), which fully shapes an image of a country that firmly safeguards its own sovereignty.

When “stands” is collocated with “China”, it is often followed by international affairs or the relations between China and other countries or international organizations (as shown in Appendix Figure 5). This indicates that China does not drift with the tide in the complex and changing international relations, shaping an image of a country with firm positions. “View” is often used to express China’s opinions on certain events. For example, when a journalist asked whether China would prevent Iran from closing the Strait of Hormuz, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, “China stands ready to step up communication with Iran and other relevant parties to continue playing a constructive role for a de-escalation.” This not only reflects China’s firm stance but also embodies the image of China as a country that pursues peace and lives in harmony with other nations.

By analyzing the specific texts where “visit” collocates with “China”, the researcher found that most of them describe visits to China by other countries, which are aimed at establishing diplomatic relations with China (as shown in Appendix Figure 6). The large number of involved countries and the frequent occurrence of such visits indicate that China engages in frequent diplomatic activities, shaping an image of a country willing to maintain friendly exchanges with other nations and, at the same time, an image of a country with an important status in the international community.

When “China’s” is collocated with “stated” (as shown in Appendix Figure 7) and “elaborated” (as shown in Appendix Figure 8), it is almost always used to expound China’s own positions, directly and clearly indicating China’s attitudes on various affairs, demonstrating its ability and determination to play an active role on the international stage and safeguard world peace and development. For instance, on the issue of the Palestine-Israel conflict, China has repeatedly and firmly stated its position, calling for an end to the war, shaping the image of a mature and confident major country.

Table 5.2.3 shows the collocations of “China” and “China’s” with adjectives.

**Table 5.2.3: Adjective Collocations**

Words	Adjectives Collocations
China	ready, internal, regular
China’s	internal, inalienable, territorial

When “ready” is collocated with “China”, it mostly appears in the sentence pattern “China stands ready to work with...” (as shown in Appendix Figure 9), and is often followed by international affairs. This shapes an image of China as a proactive and responsible country. “Internal” has a high collocation frequency with both search terms; to avoid repetition, the analysis of this word will be elaborated in detail later.

When “regular” is collocated with “China”, it mostly appears

in phrases such as “regular press conference” and “regular meeting” (as shown in Appendix Figure 10). This indicates that China’s diplomatic activities are carried out in an orderly and regular manner, demonstrating an image of actively engaging in diplomacy and attaching importance to the building of international relations.

“Internal” is a high-frequency collocation word shared by both search terms. In the text, it is mostly used to refer to China’s internal affairs, such as clarifying that the Hong Kong issue is China’s internal affair. At the same time, the other two adjectives “inalienable” and “territorial” collocated with “China’s” also highlight China’s determination to resolutely safeguard territorial integrity and firmly uphold national sovereignty. For example, when addressing the Taiwan issue, the spokesperson firmly states that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and conveys the expectation that other countries will respect China’s territorial sovereignty. The collocations of these three adjectives collectively shape China’s national image of firmly safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Through the analysis of the lexical collocations of “China” and “China’s”, the researcher found that the press conference news reports have shaped a multi-dimensional national image of China, mainly including the following aspects:

- 1) An image of valuing diplomacy and international cooperation: The high-frequency collocation of “China” / “China’s” with “relations”, often involving bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, reflects China’s emphasis on developing relations with other countries and its commitment to international cooperation and the peaceful development of the world.
- 2) An image of resolutely safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity: The collocation of “principle” with “one-China principle”, the reference of “sea” to the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and the collocations with words such as “inalienable” and “territorial” highlight China’s firm stance in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- 3) An image of actively participating in international affairs with clear positions: High-frequency collocations with words like “position”, “comment”, “stands”, and “view”, as well as combinations with “stated” and “elaborated”, indicate that China actively participates in international affairs, holds firm positions, clearly expresses its views, pays attention to hot issues, and promotes their peaceful settlement.
- 4) An image of confidence: Phrases such as “China is the first country” or “China is the biggest country” reflect China’s leadership and confidence in certain fields; meanwhile, the international attention to China’s “comments” and the frequent visits to China by other countries also reflect China’s international influence and important status.
- 5) An image of pursuing peace and friendly exchanges: Advocating dialogue and consultation in international affairs (e.g., issues related to Iran) and engaging in frequent diplomatic activities demonstrate China’s pursuit of peace and willingness to maintain friendly relations with other countries

### 5.3 Analysis of Modal System

Modal verbs such as “must” and “will” were used as search terms, and their frequencies of use in the text were obtained through retrieval via AntConc software (as shown in Table 5.3.1). The data in parentheses after each word represents the number of times the word appears in the corpus.

**Table 5.3.1: the Frequency of Modal Verb’s Usage**

Value	Words
High	must (374), have to (42)
Medium	will (7279), would (926), shall (58), should (1236)
Low	can (1692), may (398), could (796), might (104)

The high-modality verb “must” was used 374 times, and “have to” was used 42 times. Among them, “must” is mostly collocated with “Hong Kong”, “one-China principle” and some international affairs (as shown in Appendix Figure 11). The contents connected by “have to” involve international conflicts (such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict), environmental protection (such as opposing Japan’s discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the sea and improving domestic land conditions), and cooperation with other countries (such as joining cooperation agreements) (as shown in Appendix Figure 12). The following is an analysis of specific examples of high-modality verbs in the text:

Ex.1. Mao Ning: Any issue regarding the Taiwan region’s participation in the activities of international organizations must be addressed under the framework of the one-China principle. Taiwan has no basis, reason or right to join the UN or other international organizations that require statehood. (2023.09.05)

In Example 1, the spokesperson uses “must”. As a verb with a high modal value, it indicates China’s firm stance on the Taiwan issue, clearly conveying that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. This shapes an image of China as a country that firmly safeguards its national territorial integrity.

Ex.2. Mao Ning: China believes that all conflicts ultimately have to be resolved at the negotiating table, and the solutions to any dispute can only be found through political means. Recently, both Ukraine and Russia have expressed to varying degrees the willingness to negotiate. Although the conditions and timing are not yet ripe, we support all efforts conducive to peace and will continue to play a constructive role to enable a ceasefire and resume the peace talks. China cares about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and will continue to provide humanitarian aid supplies. (2024.07.24)

Example 2 uses the high-modality term “have to”. It emphasizes China’s attitude that hopes the conflict between Ukraine and Russia can be resolved peacefully. This highlights China’s stance of adhering to communication and negotiation as the main means to peacefully resolve conflicts in international disputes, thereby shaping the image of a peace-loving country.

The medium-modality verbs “will” was used 7,279 times, “should” 1,236 times, “would” 926 times, and “shall” 58 times. It is worth noting that “would” is mostly used by journalists in their questions in news reports. It is employed when journalists specifically seek the spokesperson’s views

on a certain issue. The use of “would” makes the questions more euphemistic and polite, which reflects the respect of various journalists for China and, from a side perspective, mirrors the national image of China as a country with an important international status. The following is an analysis of specific cases of high-frequency medium-modality verbs in the text:

Ex.3. Mao Ning: We hope the US will meet the aspiration of the people, work in the same direction with China, take concrete actions to deliver on the common understandings between the two presidents in their meeting in Bali, support exchanges and cooperation in various areas between the two countries, and bring bilateral relations back to the track of healthy and stable growth. (2023.09.04)

The word “will” in Example 3 is a medium modal verb. It reflects China’s relatively euphemistic and rational attitude when making suggestions to the United States, demonstrating that China, in diplomatic settings, not only holds clear positions but also values peaceful communication. This shapes an image of China as a rational country with diplomatic strategies.

Ex.4. Wang Wenbin: We never shy away from or fear competition, but competition should be fair and reasonable; it should be healthy and rule-based; there should be red lines and restricted zones; market economy rules and basic norms governing international relations should not be ignored; and issues bearing on core interests should not be used as tools for competition or means of provocation. (2023.09.01)

In Example 4, the spokesperson uses multiple “should” in succession. This indicates that China has a good understanding of the norms and rules governing international competition, and emphasizes the importance of abiding by principles such as fairness. It shapes an image of China as a principled and responsible country.

The low-modality verbs “can” was used 1,692 times, “may” 398 times, “could” 796 times, and “might” 104 times. Among these, since “May” (referring to the month) has the same spelling as “may” (the modal verb), “May” was manually excluded from the text. Therefore, the usage count of “may” provided here is derived from manual processing.

Ex.5. Mao Ning: As Premier Li Qiang noted in his speech at the opening ceremony of the ASEAN-China-GCC Economic Forum, cooperation is the only right way to overcome common challenges. Given everything that is going on, opportunities can be created if we join hands to meet the challenges. (2025.05.28)

The word “can” in Example 5 is a modal verb with medium-low modal value. China objectively points out the possibility of positive outcomes brought about by cooperation, neither overstating nor being overly conservative. This shapes an image of China as a rational and pragmatic country.

Ex.6. Lin Jian: China handles foreign warships’ transit through the Taiwan Strait in accordance with laws and regulations, and meanwhile we stay vigilant against any acts that might jeopardize China’s sovereignty and security.

(2024.09.24)

The word “might” in Example 6 reflects China’s consideration of potential risks, demonstrating China’s keen insight in the face of changes in the international situation. This shapes an image of China as a country with a rigorous attitude and sharp insight.

Through the analysis of the modal system, Examples 1-6 mainly shape the following national images:

1) An image of firmly safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity: This is the core and unquestionable image. On issues involving core interests such as Taiwan, China demonstrates an unwavering and uncompromising attitude, clearly conveying that the one-China principle is a red line that cannot be crossed.

2) An image of being responsible and principled: China emphasizes the importance of abiding by rules and international norms. Whether in international competition or handling international relations, China shows respect for and adherence to fairness, rationality, and rules, and opposes the abuse of competition and provocation.

3) An image of being rational and pragmatic: China demonstrates a rational, restrained, and pragmatic attitude in handling international affairs, especially relations with major powers. When putting forward suggestions or looking forward to prospects, the wording is euphemistic but the goals are clear. Communication is based on objective facts and common interests, without overstatement or excessive conservatism.

4) An image of valuing cooperation and advocating dialogue: China actively advocates solving common challenges through cooperation and emphasizes the importance of communication and dialogue. It believes that cooperation is the only correct path and expects to enhance understanding, reduce miscalculations, and reach consensus through dialogue.

5) An image of keeping commitments and emphasizing implementation: China attaches great importance to the seriousness and enforceability of agreements. After an agreement is reached, it emphasizes that both parties need to strictly abide by and implement it, showing a serious attitude toward international commitments.

6) An image of being highly strategic and insightful: China demonstrates a high level of diplomatic strategy and keen risk awareness. It pays attention to methods and approaches when expressing positions and putting forward requirements, while maintaining a high degree of vigilance against potential external threats, reflecting thorough consideration of national sovereignty and security interests.

## 5.4 Transitivity Analysis

### 5.4.1 Material Process

Ex.7. At the invitation of the World Economic Forum, Ecuador’s President Daniel Noboa was in China from June 23



to 27 for the 16th Annual Meeting of the New Champions... During the visit, the two governments signed a cooperation plan on promoting the Belt and Road Initiative. (2025.06.27)

Ex.8. During the visit, Foreign Minister Wang Yi will meet with the leader of Russia and hold talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. China hopes to work with Russia through this visit to implement the important common understandings between the two heads of state and have in-depth communication on the future development of China-Russia relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest. (2025.03.28)

Examples 7-8 belong to the material process, constructing an image of a major country that actively promotes international cooperation and practices multilateralism. Example 7 illustrates that China and Ecuador jointly signed a cooperation plan related to the “Belt and Road Initiative”, showing that China is a country willing to cooperate with other nations and share development achievements. In example 8, China had in-depth talks with the Russian President, indicating that China is a country that coexists peacefully with other countries.

Ex.9. As the first country to put its signature on the UN Charter, China has all along strictly followed the norms governing international relations, faithfully fulfilled its international obligations, and made positive contributions to the peace and development of humanity. (2025.06.26)

Ex.10. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 five years ago, China has shared information on the outbreak and genome sequence of the virus with WHO and the international community at the earliest time possible, and has shared with others our control and clinical experience without reservation, making great contribution to the global effort of fighting against COVID-19. (2024.12.31)

Examples 9-10 construct an image of a country that consciously abides by the international order and is highly responsible. A series of action processes such as “strictly followed” and “faithfully fulfilled” clearly demonstrate China’s positive actions in international affairs, indicating that China is a practitioner firmly safeguarding the international order and a builder actively maintaining world peace. Moreover, China’s sharing of information about the new coronavirus with the international community and its unreserved sharing of experience—this material process fully shows that China is a responsible major country.

Ex.11. As a signatory of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, China has actively observed the convention, conducted international cooperation in desertification prevention and control in a results-oriented way, and injected driving force into the green development of the Global South. (2025.06.17)

Ex.12. The two countries issued a joint statement on climate change. They said that the two sides commit to implementing the Paris Agreement in a comprehensive, complete and effective manner, and strengthening green and low-carbon cooperation. (2025.03.28)

Examples 11-12 focus on China’s active promotion of green

and sustainable development. Example 11 shows that China actively fulfills international conventions and strives to turn more deserts into oases. Example 12 indicates that China actively joins hands with other countries to carry out green and low-carbon cooperation, contributing its efforts to global green and sustainable development. These examples shape an image of China as a country committed to green and sustainable development.

Ex.13. Mao Ning: China has extended the visa-free policy to 38 countries since the end of last year and so far has realized comprehensive mutual visa exemption with 25 countries in total. We have also made Chinese visa application more efficient and easier by improving the visa application form, canceling visa reservation, expanding the scope of fingerprinting exemption, lowering visa fees and other measures. (2024.11.27)

Example 13 shapes an image of China as a hospitable, friendly, and approachable country. China’s implementation of the visa-free policy facilitates tourists from other countries to visit China, indicating that China welcomes people from all over the world to learn about the real China. This showcases China’s image as an open and friendly major country.

#### 5.4.2 Verbal Process

Ex.14. Guo Jiakun: By allowing diehard “Taiwan independence” separatist Hsiao Bi-khim to visit, the Czech Republic has seriously violated the one-China principle and its political commitment to China, and grossly interfered in China’s internal affairs. China has expressed its strong concern and firm opposition. (2025.06.27)

Example 14 belongs to the verbal process. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson fully and clearly expressed China’s views on issues related to “Taiwan independence”, with “has expressed” embodying this verbal act. It shapes an image of a country that firmly safeguards national sovereignty and adheres to the bottom line of principles.

Ex.15. Mao Ning: China is one of the world’s toughest countries on counternarcotics both in terms of policy and its implementation. China announced back in 2019 the decision to officially schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class. We are the first country in the world to do so. China has given support to the U.S.’s response to the fentanyl issue in the spirit of humanity and goodwill, and conducted counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S. side in a broad-based and in-depth way. The achievements we have made are there for all to see. We hope the U.S. will work to continue the hard-won positive dynamics in the counternarcotics cooperation. (2025.01.27)

The word “announced” in Example 15 indicates that China conveyed its anti-drug policy through an official statement, demonstrating China’s active actions in the field of anti-drug efforts. Meanwhile, China’s provision of assistance and cooperation to the United States on drug-related issues reflects China’s international responsibility and spirit of cooperation. These elements shape China’s image as a major country that actively combats drugs and acts responsibly.

Ex.16. Mao Ning: What you mentioned is Germany’s internal

affairs, and we have no comment on that. China's position on its relations with Germany is consistent. (2024.11.07)

Ex.17. Lin Jian: As Sri Lanka's friendly neighbor, China hopes to see stability and development of Sri Lanka. China is ready to play a constructive role in Sri Lanka's steady economic and social development under the principle of non-interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and with respect for Sri Lanka's will. (2024.09.23)

Examples 16-17 shape an image of China as a country that respects the internal affairs of other nations. Regarding issues involving the internal affairs of other countries, the spokesperson refrains from making comments, clearly expressing China's attitude toward the internal affairs of other states. Even when stating that it will continue to provide assistance for Sri Lanka's development, China emphasizes that such assistance will be offered on the premise of non-interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. Both cases strongly establish an image of China as a country that respects the internal affairs of other nations.

Ex.18. Mao Ning: The Yasukuni Shrine is a spiritual tool and symbol of Japanese militarists responsible for the war of aggression. The place honors 14 convicted Class-A war criminals with grave responsibilities for the war crimes committed during that war of aggression. We urge Japan to see squarely and reflect on the history of aggression, act prudently on historical issues such as the Yasukuni Shrine, make a clean break with militarism, follow a path of peaceful development, and earn the trust of its Asian neighbors and the international community with concrete actions. (2024.10.17)

The word "urge" in Example 18 indicates that China, with a serious attitude, expresses its demand, clearly pointing out that Japan needs to face up to history and oppose the glorification of Japan's aggressive past. This verbal act shapes China's image of respecting history, safeguarding peace, and not compromising on historical issues.

Ex.19. Wang Wenbin: China's opposition to Japan's ocean discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima power plant is consistent and clear. China has stated its position to Japan at the recent director-general-level consultations between the two foreign ministries. (2023.10.30)

The phrase "has stated" in Example 19 clearly conveys China's opposition to Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the sea. It demonstrates China's stance of showing great concern for the environment and human health, thus shaping an image of China as an environment-loving and responsible country.

Ex.20. Mao Ning: We urge relevant US media outlet to be truthful, objective and neutral in its reporting, and stop spreading disinformation against China. (2023.09.18)

Example 20 shapes an image of China as a country that actively safeguards its national image and values the fairness of international public opinion. The word "urge" embodies China's proactive verbal behavior. Demanding that American media report in a truthful, objective, and neutral manner

demonstrates China's attitude of pursuing truth and justice.

After analyzing the press conference news reports through material processes and verbal processes, the news reports have mainly shaped the following national images of China:

1) An image of practicing multilateralism: Through signing cooperation plans with other countries, conducting high-level exchanges, and jointly promoting green cooperation, China demonstrates its willingness to share development achievements, adhere to peaceful coexistence, and actively participate in international cooperation.

2) An image of being a firm upholder of international order and a responsible major country: By strictly abiding by international rules, fulfilling international obligations, proactively sharing information and experience on global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and showing responsibility in fields like environmental protection and anti-drug efforts, China reflects its emphasis on global public interests.

3) An image of valuing green and sustainable development: Actively fulfilling environmental conventions, collaborating with other countries in low-carbon initiatives, and contributing to global ecological governance, China has established an image of a major country committed to green development.

4) An image of being open, friendly, and respecting diversity: Through measures such as visa-free policies to welcome the world to understand China, while adhering to non-interference in other countries' internal affairs and respecting the sovereignty and development paths of all nations, China presents itself as an open and inclusive nation.

5) An image of upholding the bottom line of principles: On core issues such as national sovereignty (e.g., the "Taiwan independence" issue) and historical justice (e.g., attitudes toward Japan), China holds clear and firm positions, demonstrating its determination to safeguard national interests and common human values.

6) An image of pursuing fairness in international public opinion: Taking the initiative to speak out against false information and demanding objective and fair reporting, China shows its emphasis on national image and the order of international communication.

These images are intertwined, collectively outlining a major country image that combines principle and inclusiveness, responsibility.

### 5.5 Summary of China's Image

Through the construction of a self-built corpus and discourse analysis of 20 news reports, the co-shaped national image of China can be clearly refined. These images mutually confirm and complement each other in different analytical dimensions, jointly shaping a multi-dimensional and three-dimensional national image. The first is the national image of firmly safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The second is the national image of being responsible and

maintaining international order. The third is the national image of actively advocating peace and cooperation. The fourth is the national image of being rational, pragmatic and trustworthy. The fifth is the national image of being confident and influential.

## 6. Discussion

This study constructs a self-built corpus and combines theoretical frameworks such as the transitivity system and modal system of systemic functional grammar to conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses on the news reports of regular press conferences on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, revealing the multi-dimensional national image of China constructed by the press conference texts. This section will discuss the theoretical significance, practical value, research limitations, and propose future research directions in combination with the research findings.

### 6.1 Key Findings

Existing studies mostly analyze China's national image from the perspective of international communication, with a focus on qualitative research (such as the interpretation of media reporting frameworks). However, this study combines corpus methods with systemic functional grammar, providing empirical support from a linguistic perspective for national image research.

The study finds that the images shaped by the Foreign Ministry's press conferences, such as "resolutely safeguarding sovereignty," "open and friendly," and "green and environmentally friendly," echo the positioning of "a responsible major country" and "a promoter of peaceful development" in existing studies (as reflected in the expressions regarding "Belt and Road" cooperation and participation in global governance). Meanwhile, this study further refines the levels of the image: through the analysis of high-frequency words such as "Taiwan" and "sovereignty" and the modal verb "must," it highlights China's principled stance on issues concerning core interests; while words like "cooperation" and "mutual" and sentence patterns such as "China stands ready to work with..." strengthen the inclusive image of "win-win cooperation." This finding fills in the gap in details regarding the characteristic of "coexistence of principle and inclusiveness" in previous studies.

In addition, the application of systemic functional grammar reveals the deep-seated connection between linguistic structures and image construction: material processes (such as "signing cooperation agreements" and "sharing anti-epidemic experience") directly present China's activeness; verbal processes (such as "urge" and "state") shape initiative through the expression of positions; and the distribution of high, medium, and low modal values in the modal system (for example, "must" reflects firmness, and "will" reflects rationality) balances the tough and flexible diplomatic stance. This provides a new analytical path for exploring the shaping of China's image.

### 6.2 Practical Significance

The findings of this study have important implications for the international communication of China's national image. The frequent appearance of expressions such as "one-China principle" and "sovereignty is indivisible" in press conferences indicates that repeatedly strengthening core issues through official discourse is an effective strategy for shaping a clear national image. In the future, the international adaptability of such expressions can be further optimized to accurately convey core positions. The analysis of material processes shows that the expressions of specific actions such as "signing agreements" and "carrying out cooperation" are more persuasive than abstract slogans. Therefore, in international communication, more details of China's participation in global governance can be presented to empirically dispel misunderstandings such as the "China threat theory". The combined use of high-modal words and medium-low modal words in the modal system not only maintains the bottom line of principles but also shows the willingness to negotiate. This "combination of firmness and flexibility" discourse strategy can provide references for discourse design in other diplomatic scenarios.

### 6.3 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This study also has some limitations. Firstly, the scope of the corpus is limited. The corpus is only sourced from the English version of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official website, excluding other language versions (such as Spanish and Arabic) or reports from non-official media, which may not fully reflect the differences in images across various communication channels. Secondly, in terms of analytical dimensions, the study focuses on transitivity and modal systems, with less involvement in the textual function within systemic functional grammar. In the future, the analytical dimensions can be expanded to explore the impact of textual structure on the coherence of images.

Future research can advance from three aspects: first, comparing press conference texts in multiple language versions to analyze the influence of language differences on the communication effect of images; second, combining audience research to verify whether there is a deviation between the image constructed by official discourse and the image perceived by overseas citizens; third, tracking the dynamic changes of press conference discourse in specific events (such as major international conferences and sudden diplomatic events) to explore the timeliness construction mechanism of images.

In summary, this study reveals the image construction function of the Foreign Ministry's press conferences as a "national discourse window" from a linguistic perspective. Its findings not only enrich the methodology of national image research but also provide practical references for improving China's international communication capabilities.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Core Research Findings

This study takes the news reports of regular press conferences from 2023 to June 2025 on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China as the corpus. By constructing a

self-built corpus and combining with the theory of systemic functional grammar, it adopts a method that integrates quantitative and qualitative analysis to systematically examine the national image of China constructed in the press conference texts.

Regarding the first research question, the study finds that high-frequency words in the corpus are dominated by terms such as “China,” “countries,” “cooperation,” “international,” “peace,” “Taiwan,” and “sovereignty.” Among these, “China” serves as the core narrative subject throughout; words like “countries,” “international,” and “global” reflect China’s open stance of deep participation in global affairs; “cooperation,” “development,” and “mutual” highlight the concepts of win-win cooperation and a community with a shared future for mankind; “peace” and “security” reflect China’s value pursuit for the international order; and “Taiwan” and “sovereignty” frequently reinforce the principle of upholding national sovereignty. Overall, these high-frequency words not only demonstrate the bottom-line thinking in China’s domestic and foreign affairs but also convey an open and inclusive international posture, forming the characteristic of “the coexistence of principle and inclusiveness.”

Regarding the second research question, the study found that the material processes and verbal processes within the transitivity system play a significant role in shaping China’s national image.

Material processes, through the expression of specific actions such as “signing cooperation plans”, “sharing anti-epidemic experience”, and “carrying out green and low-carbon cooperation”, demonstrate China’s image of actively promoting international cooperation, practicing multilateralism, and attaching importance to green and sustainable development. For instance, China’s signing of the “Belt and Road” cooperation plan with Ecuador, its sharing of COVID-19 virus information and prevention and control experience with the international community, and its joint promotion of green and low-carbon cooperation with other countries directly present China’s activeness and sense of responsibility in global governance.

Verbal processes, on the other hand, through discursive behaviors such as “expressing opposition”, “clarifying positions”, and “appealing for peace”, shape China’s image of firmly safeguarding national sovereignty, respecting historical justice, and pursuing fairness in international public opinion. For example, China explicitly expressed its strong opposition to the “Taiwan independence” issue, clarified its position of concerning about the environment and human health regarding Japan’s discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the sea, and demanded objective and fair reports from U.S. media to safeguard its national image, all of which reflect China’s initiative and sense of principle in international affairs.

Regarding the third research question, the study found that verbs with different modal values in the modal system reflect China’s diplomatic attitudes through diverse linguistic expressions, thereby constructing corresponding national images.

High-modal-value verbs such as “must” and “have to” are mostly used in fields involving national sovereignty (e.g., the Taiwan issue) and international conflict resolution (e.g., the Russia-Ukraine conflict). They embody China’s firm stance on issues concerning core interests and principles, shaping an image of resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as advocating peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Medium-modal-value verbs like “will” and “should” are often employed in diplomatic suggestions and emphasis on international rules. For example, suggesting that the United States promote the healthy development of bilateral relations and emphasizing that international competition should abide by fair rules. These usages demonstrate China’s rational, pragmatic, and principled diplomatic attitude, constructing an image of being responsible and emphasizing cooperation.

Low-modal-value verbs such as “can” and “might” are used to objectively analyze the possibilities of cooperation and potential risks. For instance, pointing out that cooperation can create opportunities and maintaining vigilance against acts that threaten national sovereignty. They reflect the prudence and flexibility in China’s diplomacy, shaping an image of being rational, pragmatic, and insightful.

Synthesizing the conclusions from the three research questions, it is analyzed that the news reports on the press conference Q&A sessions have shaped a multi-dimensional image of China, including:

- 1) An image of firmly safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- 2) An image of a responsible upholder of the international order;
- 3) An image of actively advocating peace and cooperation;
- 4) An image of being rational, pragmatic, trustworthy and committed to promises;
- 5) An image of being confident and having international influence.

## 7.2 Research Implications

At the practical level, this study provides specific insights for optimizing the communication of China’s national image. China needs to continuously strengthen the consistency of its core positions through official discourse, such as maintaining the stability and clarity of expressions on sovereignty issues. It should increase the proportion of “action-oriented” discourse and enhance the persuasiveness of its image through specific cooperation cases. Spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should flexibly apply modal strategies in diplomatic discourse to balance principle and flexibility, thereby improving the international community’s understanding and recognition of China’s diplomatic concepts.

## 7.3 Summary

The regular press conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as an important carrier of China’s official diplomatic discourse, have successfully constructed a great power image characterized by “upholding bottom lines, taking



responsibilities, being good at cooperation, emphasizing pragmatism, and promoting green development” through vocabulary selection, sentence structure, and functional grammar strategies. This image not only responds to the international community’s expectations of China’s role but also lays a discursive foundation for China’s participation in global governance and promotion of international cooperation. In the future, by continuously optimizing discourse strategies and expanding communication channels, the accurate transmission and international recognition of China’s national image can be further promoted.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

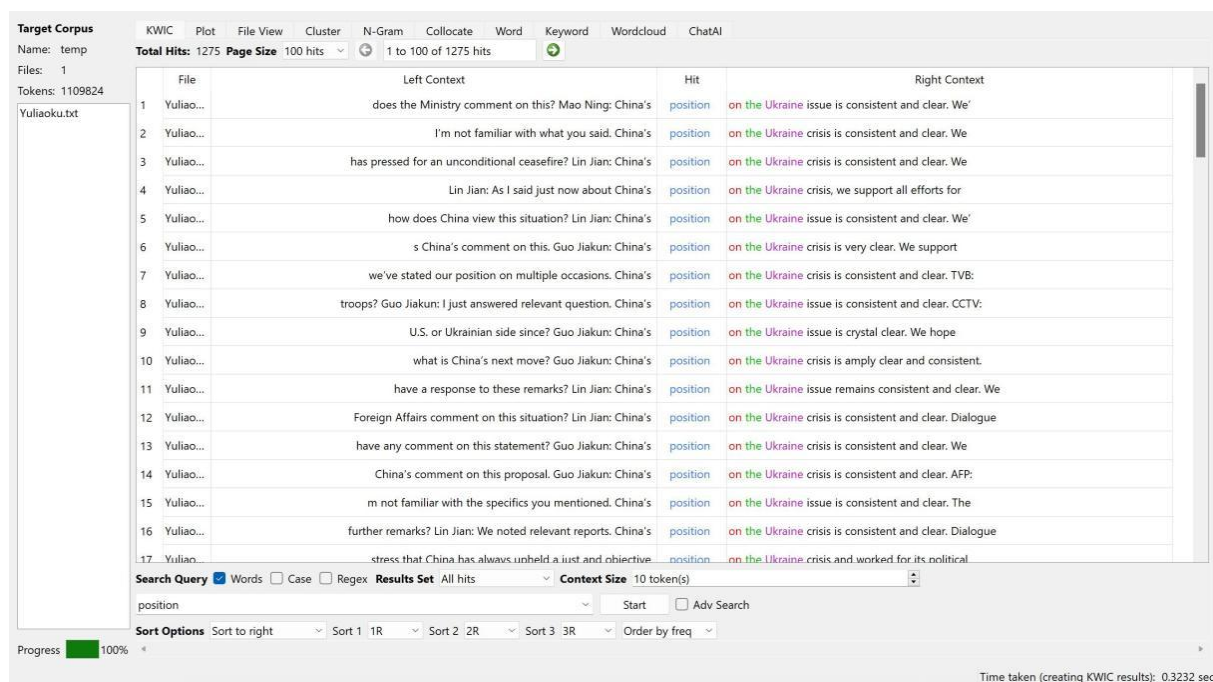


Figure 1: Contextual Collocations of 'position' in the Text

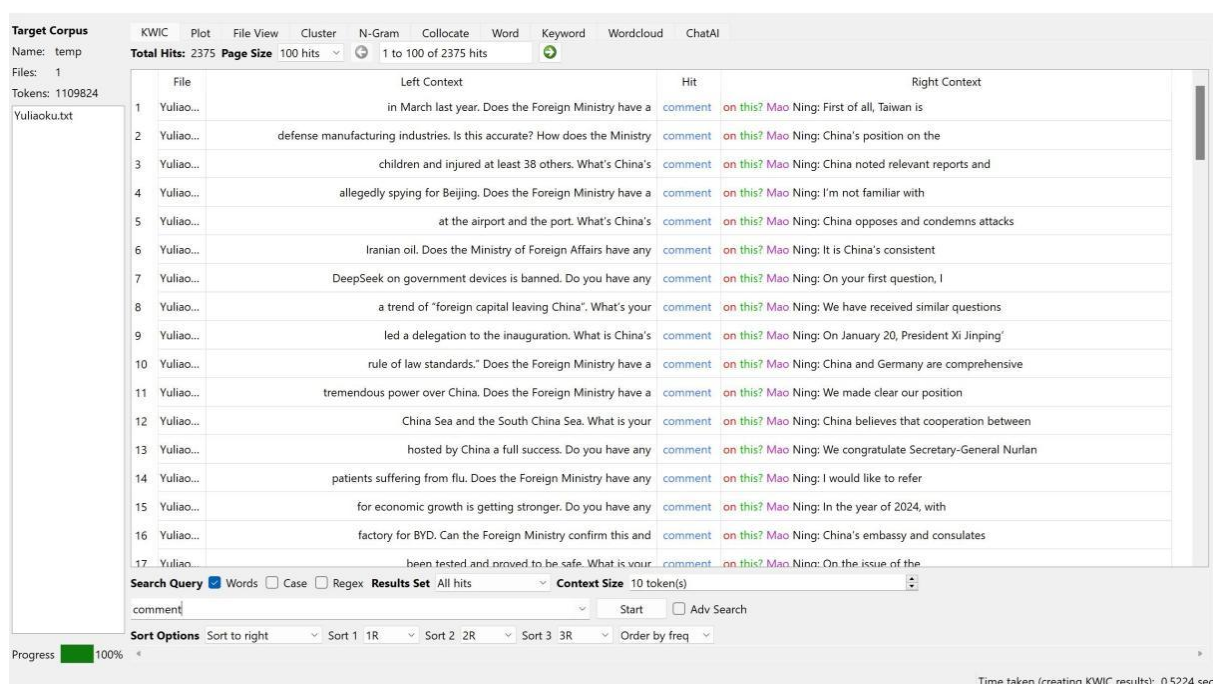


Figure 2: Contextual Collocations of 'comment' in the Text

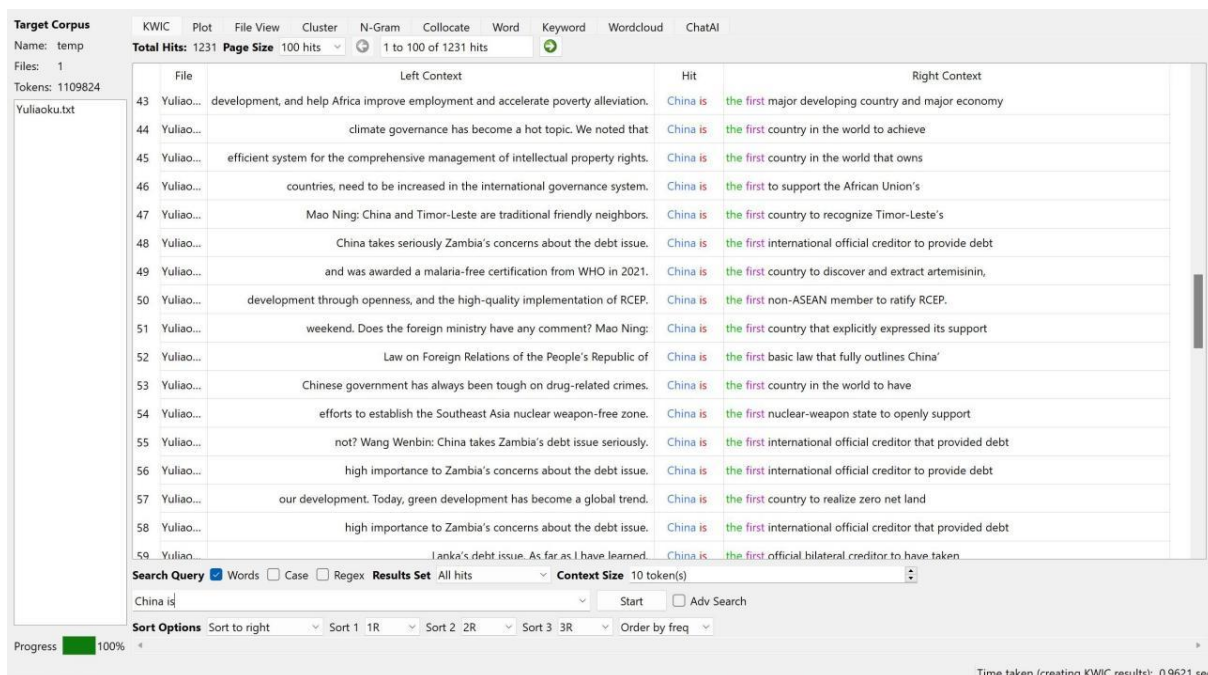


Figure 3: Contextual Collocations of 'comment' in the Text

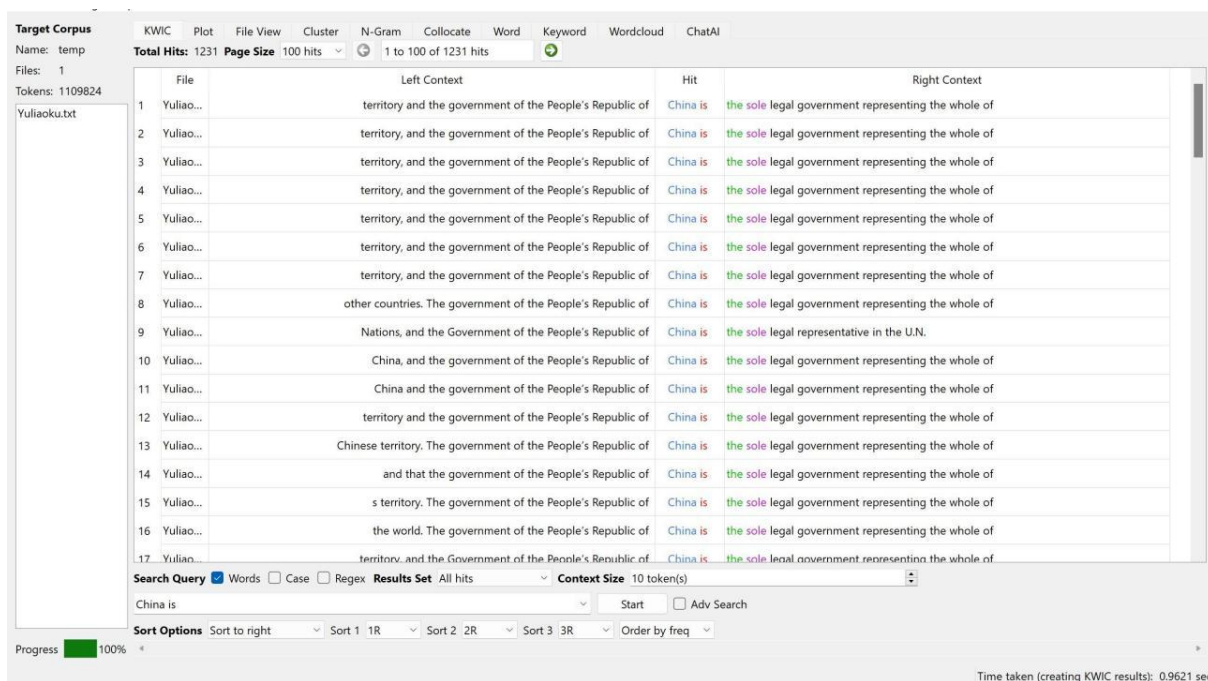


Figure 4: Contextual Collocations of 'China is' in the Text



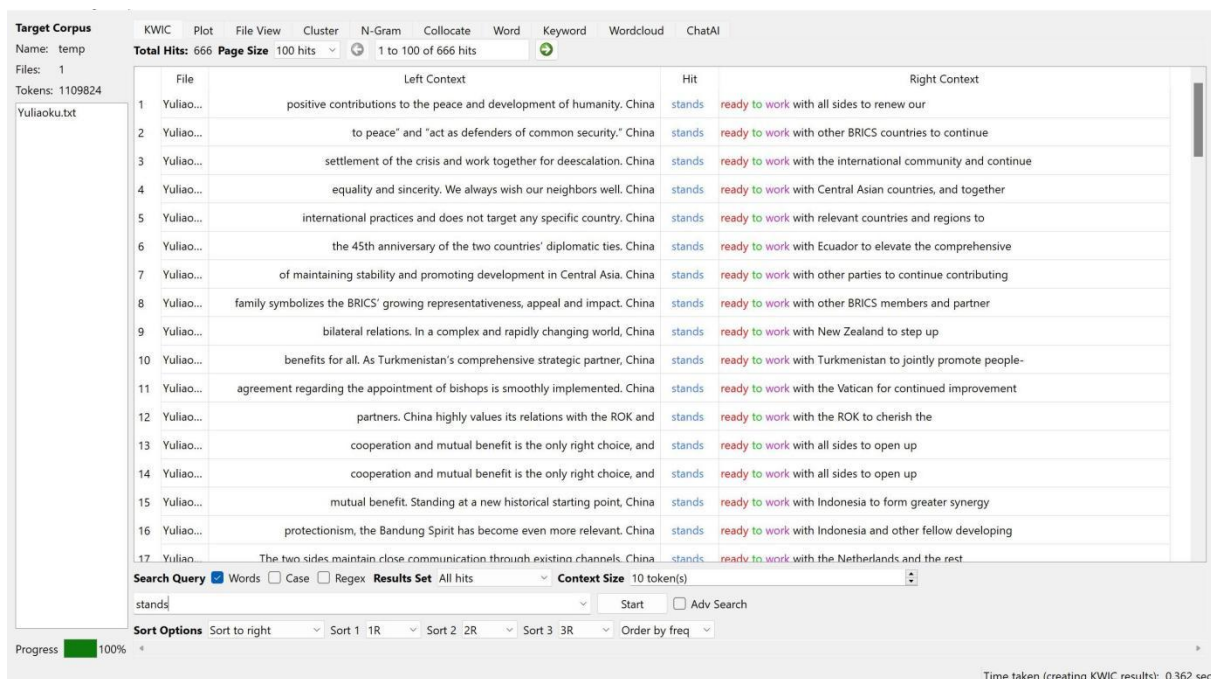


Figure 5: Contextual Collocations of 'stands' in the Text

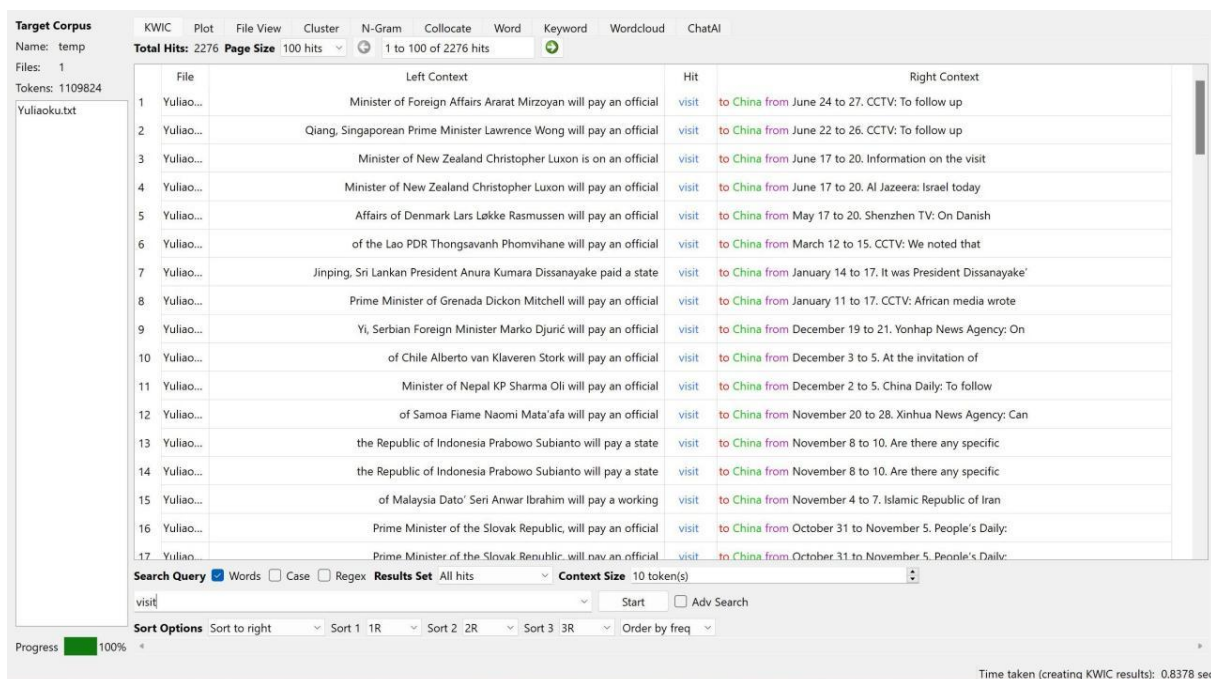


Figure 6: Contextual Collocations of 'visit' in the Text



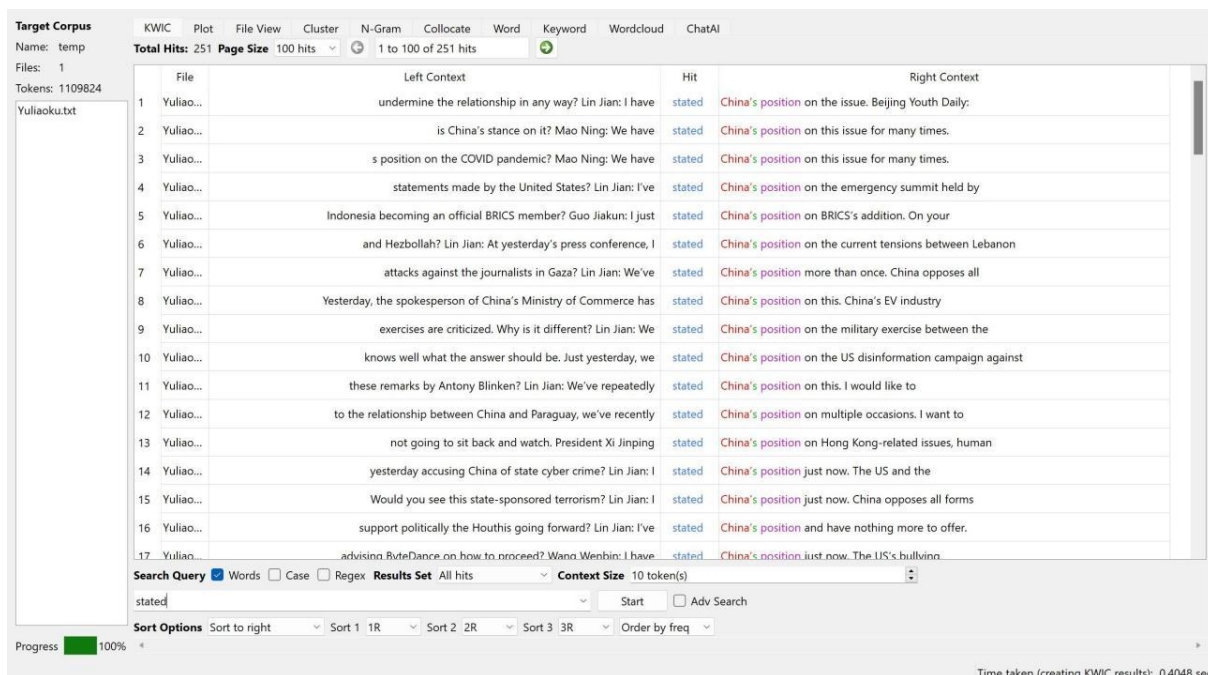


Figure 7: Contextual Collocations of 'stated' in the Text

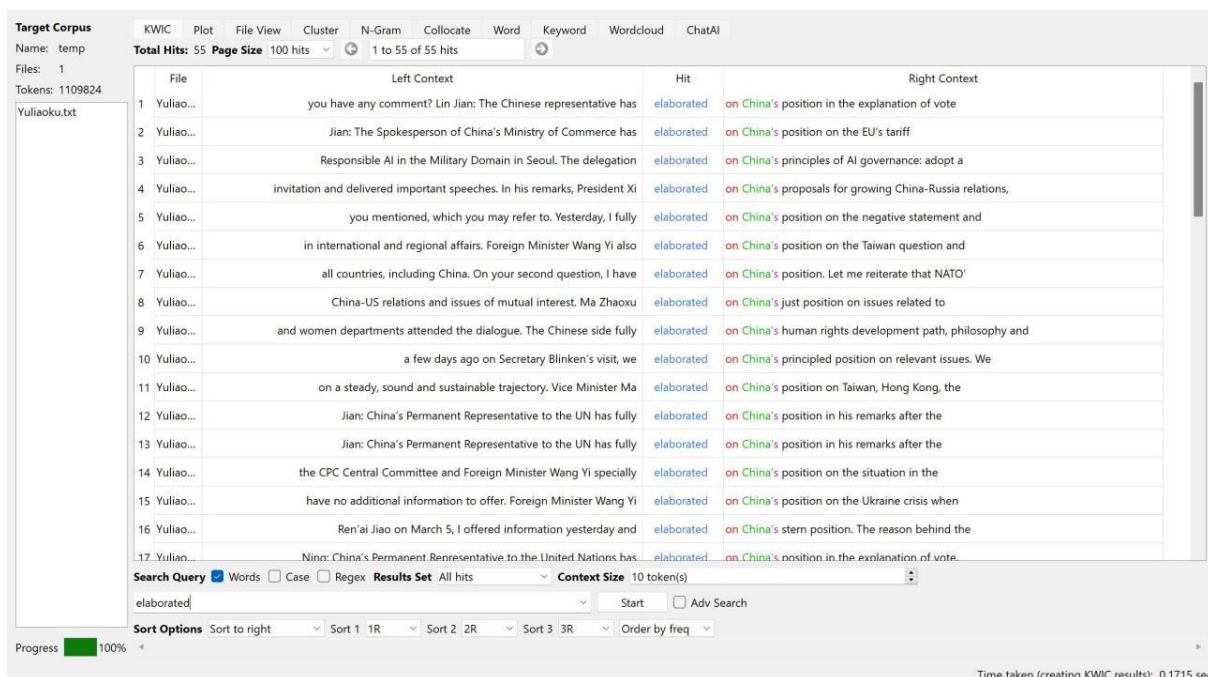


Figure 8: Contextual Collocations of 'elaborated' in the Text

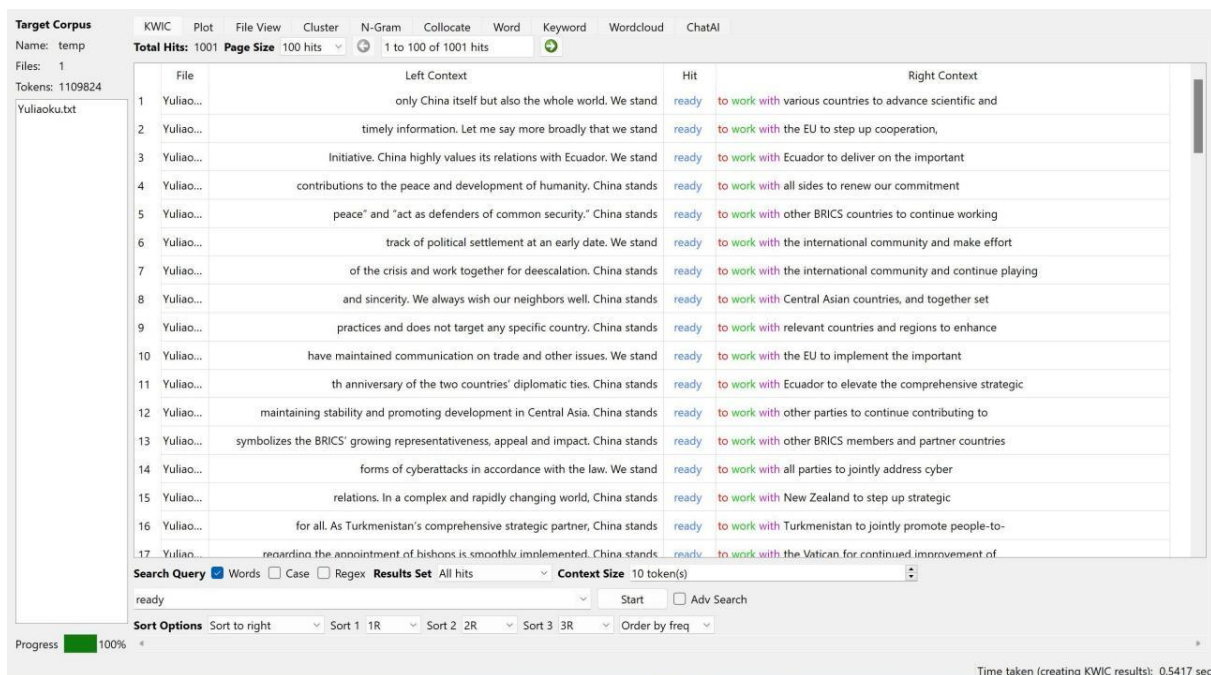


Figure 9: Contextual Collocations of 'ready' in the Text

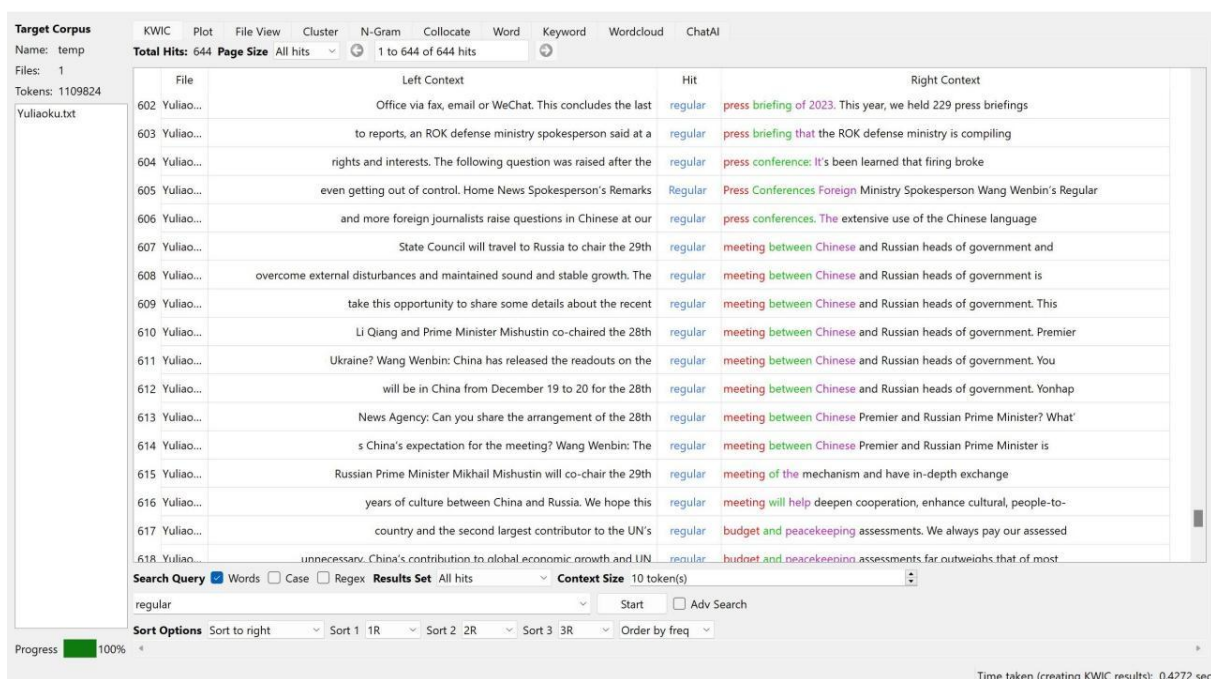


Figure 10: Contextual Collocations of 'regular' in the Text

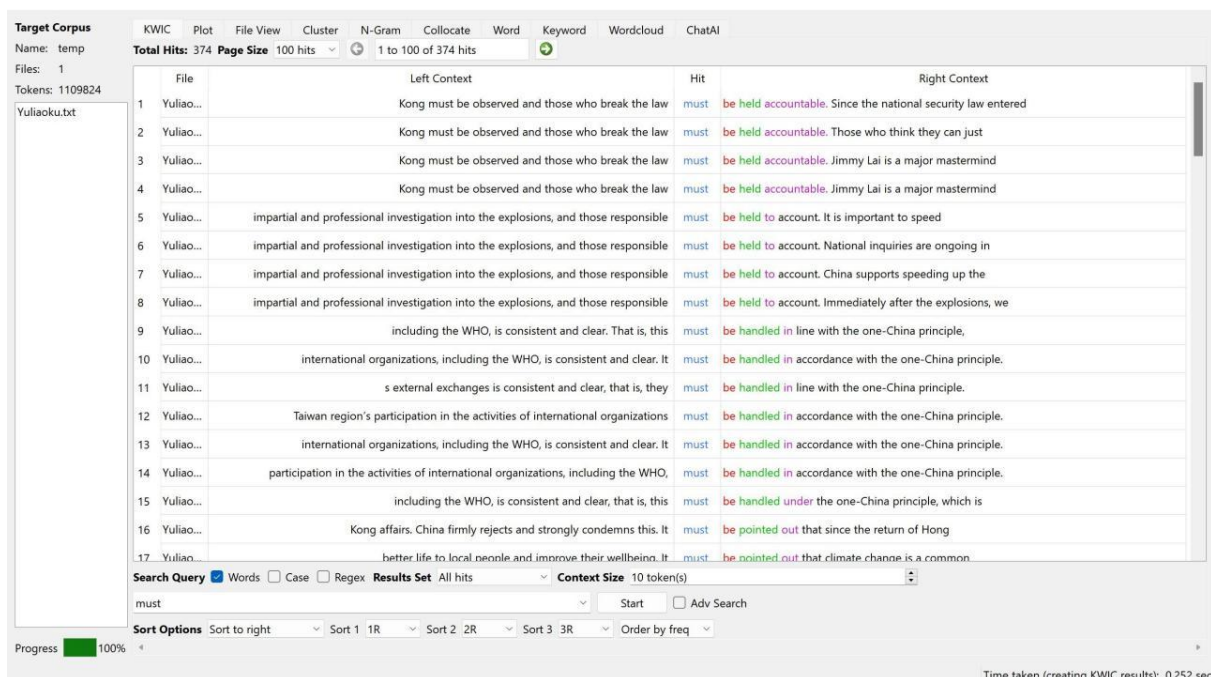


Figure 11: Contextual Collocations of 'must' in the Text

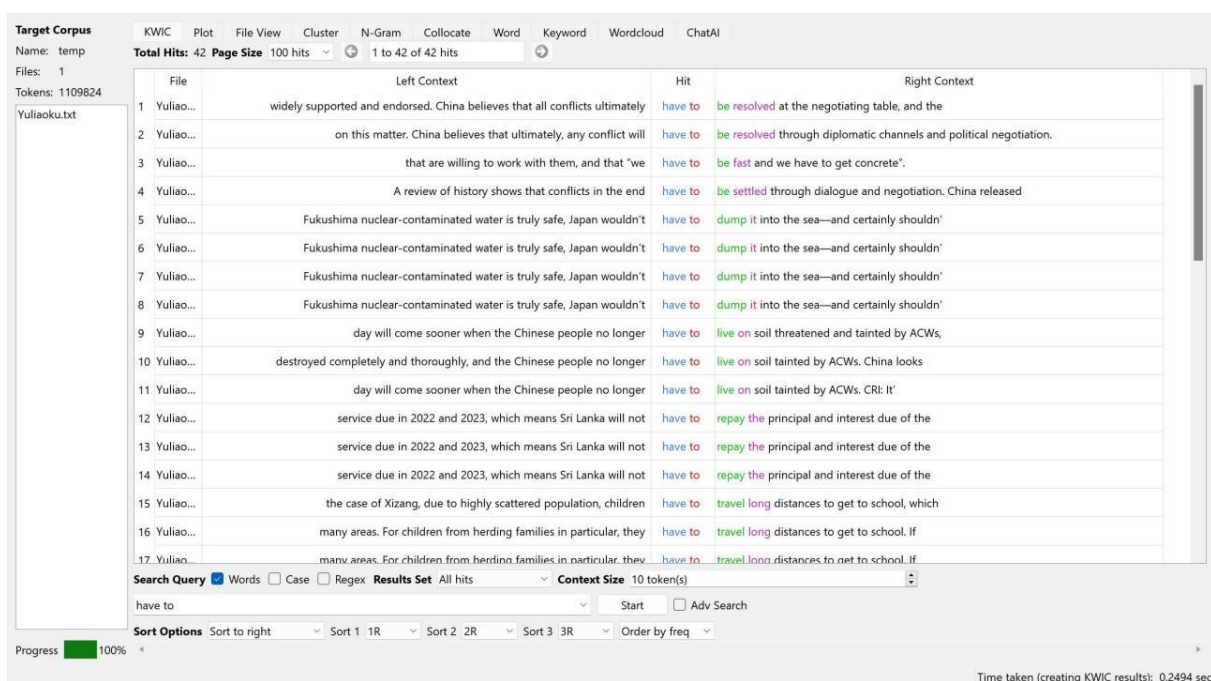


Figure 12: Contextual Collocations of 'have to' in the Text

## Appendix 2

### Twenty Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Q&A News Excerpts

Number	Sentences	Date
1	Wang Wenbin: We never shy away from or fear competition, but competition should be fair and reasonable; it should be healthy and rule-based; there should be red lines and restricted zones; market economy rules and basic norms governing international relations should not be ignored; and issues bearing on core interests should not be used as tools for competition or means of provocation.	2023.09.01
2	Mao Ning: We hope the US will meet the aspiration of the people, work in the same direction with China, take concrete actions to deliver on the common understandings between the two presidents in their meeting in Bali, support exchanges and cooperation in various areas between the two countries, and bring bilateral relations back to the track of healthy and stable growth.	2023.09.04
3	Mao Ning: Any issue regarding the Taiwan region's participation in the activities of international organizations <u>must</u> be addressed under the framework of the one-China principle. Taiwan has no basis,	2023.09.05



	reason or right to join the UN or other international organizations that require statehood.	
4	Mao Ning: We urge relevant US media outlet to be truthful, objective and neutral in its reporting, and stop spreading disinformation against China.	2023.09.18
5	Wang Wenbin: China's opposition to Japan's ocean discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima power plant is consistent and clear. China has stated its position to Japan at the recent director-general-level consultations between the two foreign ministries. The precautionary measures taken by China and some other countries in response to Japan's move to protect food safety and people's health are entirely legitimate, reasonable and necessary. After Japan dumped two batches of nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean, there is now a stronger call from the international community for an international monitoring arrangement that will remain effective for the long haul and has the substantive participation of Japan's neighboring countries and other stakeholders. Japan needs to fully cooperate in this and strictly prevent the discharge from causing irreversible consequences.	2023.10.30
6	Mao Ning: China believes that all conflicts ultimately have to be resolved at the negotiating table, and the solutions to any dispute can only be found through political means. Recently, both Ukraine and Russia have expressed to varying degrees the willingness to negotiate. Although the conditions and timing are not yet ripe, we support all efforts conducive to peace and will continue to play a constructive role to enable a ceasefire and resume the peace talks. China cares about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and will continue to provide humanitarian aid supplies.	2024.07.24
7	Lin Jian: As Sri Lanka's friendly neighbor, China hopes to see stability and development of Sri Lanka. China is ready to play a constructive role in Sri Lanka's steady economic and social development under the principle of non-interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs and with respect for Sri Lanka's will.	2024.09.23
8	Lin Jian: China handles foreign warships' transit through the Taiwan Strait in accordance with laws and regulations, and meanwhile we stay vigilant against any acts that might jeopardize China's sovereignty and security.	2024.09.24
9	Mao Ning: The Yasukuni Shrine is a spiritual tool and symbol of Japanese militarists responsible for the war of aggression. The place honors 14 convicted Class-A war criminals with grave responsibilities for the war crimes committed during that war of aggression. We urge Japan to see squarely and reflect on the history of aggression, act prudently on historical issues such as the Yasukuni Shrine, make a clean break with militarism, follow a path of peaceful development, and earn the trust of its Asian neighbors and the international community with concrete actions.	2024.10.17
10	Mao Ning: What you mentioned is Germany's internal affairs, and we have no comment on that. China's position on its relations with Germany is consistent.	2024.11.07
11	Mao Ning: China has extended the visa-free policy to 38 countries since the end of last year and so far has realized comprehensive mutual visa exemption with 25 countries in total. We have also made Chinese visa application more efficient and easier by improving the visa application form, canceling visa reservation, expanding the scope of fingerprinting exemption, lowering visa fees and other measures.	2024.11.27
12	Since the outbreak of COVID-19 five years ago, China has shared information on the outbreak and genome sequence of the virus with WHO and the international community at the earliest time possible, and has shared with others our control and clinical experience without reservation, making great contribution to the global effort of fighting against COVID-19.	2024.12.31
13	Mao Ning: China is one of the world's toughest countries on counternarcotics both in terms of policy and its implementation. China announced back in 2019 the decision to officially schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class. We are the first country in the world to do so. China has given support to the U.S.'s response to the fentanyl issue in the spirit of humanity and goodwill, and conducted counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S. side in a broad-based and in-depth way. The achievements we have made are there for all to see. We hope the U.S. will work to continue the hard-won positive dynamics in the counternarcotics cooperation.	2025.01.27
14	Guo Jiakun: During the visit, Foreign Minister Wang Yi will meet with the leader of Russia and hold talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. China hopes to work with Russia through this visit to implement the important common understandings between the two heads of state and have in-depth communication on the future development of China-Russia relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest.	2025.03.28
15	Guo Jiakun: The two countries issued a joint statement on climate change. They said that the two sides commit to implementing the Paris Agreement in a comprehensive, complete and effective manner, and strengthening green and low-carbon cooperation. When the global climate governance comes under headwinds, the statement sends a positive message of the joint and firm response by China and France to climate change, which matters a lot to lifting confidence in global climate cooperation and promoting the multilateral process on climate change.	2025.03.28
16	Mao Ning: As Premier Li Qiang noted in his speech at the opening ceremony of the ASEAN-China-GCC Economic Forum, cooperation is the only right way to overcome common challenges. Given everything that is going on, opportunities can be created if we join hands to meet the challenges.	2025.05.28
17	Tackling the ecological crisis of the Aral Sea is an epitome of China's contribution to the global efforts to combat desertification. As a signatory of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, China	2025.06.17



	has actively observed the convention, conducted international cooperation in desertification prevention and control in a results-oriented way, and injected driving force into the green development of the Global South. We stand ready to deepen cooperation in ecological and environmental protection with Central Asian countries and the rest of the world to jointly create more miracles of turning desert into oasis.	
18	As the first country to put its signature on the UN Charter, China has all along strictly followed the norms governing international relations, faithfully fulfilled its international obligations, and made positive contributions to the peace and development of humanity. China stands ready to work with all sides to renew our commitment to the founding mission of the UN, observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, practice true multilateralism, jointly strengthen the role of the UN, improve global governance, safeguard international fairness and justice and create a better future.	2025.06.26
19	Guo Jiakun: At the invitation of the World Economic Forum, Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa was in China from June 23 to 27 for the 16th Annual Meeting of the New Champions. President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee Zhao Leji met with him respectively. The two sides agreed that over the past 45 years of diplomatic ties, China-Ecuador relations have maintained a sound growth momentum, achieved fruitful outcomes in practical cooperation, and delivered tangibly to the two peoples, and it is in the common interests of both countries and peoples to deepen the China-Ecuador comprehensive strategic partnership. The two sides expressed willingness to enhance cooperation in areas of economy and trade, science and technology, culture, education and youth for the benefit of the two peoples. During the visit, the two governments signed a cooperation plan on promoting the Belt and Road Initiative.	2025.06.27
20	Guo Jiakun: By allowing diehard "Taiwan independence" separatist Hsiao Bi-khim to visit, the Czech Republic has seriously violated the one-China principle and its political commitment to China, and grossly interfered in China's internal affairs. China has expressed its strong concern and firm opposition.	2025.06.27