Boom or Bust: Unveiling the Media Portrayal of Confucius Institutes in America and Britain

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Abstract: *Intercultural communication institutes, such as the Goethe Institut and Confucius Institute, were established to globally promote language and culture. However, the status of Confucius Institutes (CIs), particularly those in the UK and US, has shifted. In light of these evolving perspectives, this research employed Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's systemic functional grammar as theoretical frameworks in examining the diachronic transformations in the portrayal of CIs in American and British media discourse spanning the last decade. By analyzing intertextuality and linguistic elements, such as lexical choices and the usage of modal verbs, this study discerns different images of CI constructed by the media. Before 2020, the media highlighted the cultural elements of CI.*

Keywords: Confucius Institute, Critical discourse analysis, Systemic functional grammar, Image construction, News discourse.

1. Introduction

Established in 2004, the Confucius Institute (hereafter CI) has conducted various activities to encourage communication and mutual understanding between China and the world. However, in recent years, CIs have been plagued by reputational and operational crises in some countries, especially the UK and US [1,2]. As of 2020, over 100 CIs in the US have been closed or are about to close.

Given the significance of and the current dilemma faced by CIs, many scholars indeed have examined the images of CI [3,4,2]. Some studies highlighted its positive role of CIs in language-teaching and cultural communication [5,6,7], while others have suggested their negative portrayal from the perspective of their political and academic meddling [8,9,10]. This dichotomy in the findings may be due to their analyses having been largely restricted to synchronic examinations. Against this backdrop, this study endeavored to comprehensively understand the evolving public opinion surrounding CIs in the US and UK. Adopting Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's systemic functional grammar as theoretical insight, this study examined American and British news media's portrayal of CIs. Accordingly, this study sought to investigate the following questions:

1) How do the linguistic resources in British and American news reports construct the images of CI?

2) Are there any differences in the images of CI before and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Grammar

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines social issues by analyzing discourse which is regarded as a form of social practice to disclose the hidden interests behind language choices within social and historical contexts. By scrutinizing "the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society" within the discourse [11], it unveils the implicit relationship between language, power, and ideology, and how linguistic resources are harnessed by the dominant class to control ideologies. CDA is primarily concerned with exposing how discourse is conducted and reproduced in a socio-political context., mainly examining society through linguistic analysis [12].

Although Fairclough has continued to refine the three-dimensional modal [13,14,15], his theory always maintained an intimate relationship with systemic functional grammar. Systemic functional grammar posits language as a vehicle for social interaction based on the assumption that a language system and the forms that frame it are inescapably determined by the functions they serve. Within systemic functional grammar are three major metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Among these, critical discourse analysts deem the classification and transitivity within the ideational function important. Classification concerns lexical choices, high-frequency words, keywords, and concordance, while transitivity transmits the experiential world into a manageable set of process types [16].

Underpinned by the theoretical framework of systemic functional grammar, the field of critical discourse studies has matured and become a profoundly enriched area of research. For example [17], employed a systemic functional critical discourse analytical approach to analyze the integrated theistic worldview of Pakistani social media users, revealing that legitimation strategies, condensed through lexico-grammatical choices, shaped internally cohesive identities among Pakistanis [18]. explored ideology through the transitivity process, focusing on the ideologies of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The analysis revealed that Trump's ideology was more prominent, with a higher percentage of citizen involvement, lower emphasis on national priority, policy of law, and equality in democracy, and a slightly higher focus on national unity compared to that of Clinton. Along this line of research, the present study examined systemic functional grammar as a focal point for linguistic analysis.

3. Overseas Public Opinion of Confucius Institutes

The CI is a global platform for teaching the Chinese language and promoting cultural exchange that has steadily gained prominence since its establishment. Its rapid expansion has thrust it into the international limelight, eliciting a blend of both commendation and prejudice. The shaping of the brand of CIs and social identity is intricately tied to the prevailing international media landscape, a subject of significant scholarly interest. Some studies argued that CIs were generally embraced by the US and UK from a positive standpoint [3,5,6,19]. Analyzing related news reports from the perspective of soft power, education, censorship, and academic freedom [3], found that the reports of the CIs still mainly held a more objective point of view [19]. utilized evidence from university comparisons, CI director surveys, news analyses, and website examinations and found that American universities are content with their associations with CIs, and that these institutes garnered favorable coverage in local media. However, taking an opposite perspective, another branch of studies suggested that the CIs were viewed as a foreign threat [7,8,20,21]. For example [21], argued that the US, concerned about China's growing economic and strategic competition, adjusted its policy and imposed stringent political controls on CIs [7]. held that the association of the CIs with China fosters a heightened sense of "foreignness," contributing to unfavorable perceptions. Therefore, whether the overseas image of CIs is positive or negative remains a subject of controversy.

The global standing of CIs is contingent upon the international context given the significant influence of the Covid-19 pandemic and strained Sino-UK and Sino-US relations. However, most studies have approached the overseas image of CIs from a synchronic perspective. Thus, the question of whether international issues have led to shifts in the perception of CI remains unexplored.

4. Methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses was conducted. First of all, Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's systemic functional grammar were applied as theoretical frameworks in the analysis of multiple texts using a corpus-based approach. News reports from Jan 1, 2016, to Dec 31, 2023 were extracted from the Lexis Nexis database, with Confucius Institute as the searching term. To collect representative news in mainstream British and American media, four media in each country were selected based on two criteria: their influence and the number of CI-related news texts. The targeted platforms play a dominant role in both countries and possess a wealth of news reports. To conduct the diachronic comparison, this study built two corpora: Corpus A and Corpus B. Corpus A contains materials from 2016 to the end of 2019 when Covid-19 spread, while Corpus B represents the texts from 2020 to 2023. We chose the year 2020 as the dividing line for the collected data since it was the year of the full Covid-19 outbreak and also marked a new period for the development of CIs. In June 2020, CI operation was entrusted to the Chinese International Education Foundation, transforming CIs into a non-governmental public welfare organization. Therefore, taking 2020 as the dividing line facilitates the discussion of the conflict between the public opinion dilemma of CIs in British and American news media and the active internal adjustment of CIs.

Table 1: Overall Information of Corpus A and Corpus B.

	Corpus A	Corpus B
Sources	The New York Times, The Washington Post, Fox News, Los Angeles Times, The Guardian, The Economist, The Times, The Independent	
Numbers of news texts	67	91
Word tokens	43577	35501
Word types	6950	5301
Type / token ratio	15.94	14.9

The number of reports in Corpus A is fewer than that in Corpus B, indicating that the media has paid more attention to CI after 2020. Although the number of reports after 2020 surpassed those before, the word tokens and types were lower. This to some extent suggests that discussions about Confucius Institutes before 2020 were more comprehensive, diverse, and rich in content.

Antconc 4.2.3 was used to analyze the collected texts on the word and text level. From the perspective of lexical items, this study focused on lexical classification that matches Halliday's ideational function. Specifically, keywords were scrutinized as lexical classification to directly present the diachronic comparison of the reporting focus on CI. Next, modality, which corresponds to interpersonal function, was examined through the changes in using different values of modal verbs to perceive the relationship between modal values and the hidden ideologies. Then, an intertextuality analysis, belonging to textual function, of the news sources was conducted to unveil the party with more dominant discourse power. Last, sociocultural analysis was performed from the perspective of political, economic and cultural contexts to reveal the implicit relationship between language, power, and ideology.

5. Keywords Analysis

5.1 General Distribution of Keywords

Keywords are normally defined as statistically using different measures of keyness, which are the significantly higher frequency of words in a corpus when compared to a general reference one. For comparison, each corpus was set as the target corpus and the other one as the reference corpus. The keywords were sorted according to keyness using the log-likelihood ratios. The generated keyword lists will visually present the diachronic characteristics (Tables 2 and 3). Due to the limited space, this study only focuses on the top 30 keywords.

Table 2: List of the Keywords in Corpus A.

Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Rank	Keyness	Keyword
1	30.4	visit	16	12.9	family
2	27.5	xi	17	12.0	opinion
3	23.8	monkey	18	11.9	dance
4	19.4	project	18	11.9	palace
5	17.8	teacher	18	11.9	royal
6	17.4	primary	18	11.9	agent
7	15.5	festival	18	11.9	ci
8	15.2	traditional	23	10.9	pupils
8	15.2	foreigners	23	10.9	music
10	14.3	george	25	10.7	award
11	14.1	training	25	10.7	ancient
12	13.1	shaolin	27	10.5	new
12	13.1	confucian	28	10.3	london
14	13.0	languages	29	9.7	arts
14	13.0	year	29	9.7	opening

Table 3: List of Keywords in Corpus B.

Rank	Keyness	Keyword	Rank	Keyness	Keyword
1	86.6	pompeo	16	19.7	trump
2	75.5	administration	17	19.5	federal
3	69.5	biden	18	19.4	prc
4	53.4	covid	19	18.2	speech
5	42.1	pandemic	20	18.1	us
6	41.2	communist	21	16.2	party
7	39.9	institutes	22	14.6	propaganda
8	37.3	senator	23	13.9	steal
9	32.4	ccp	24	12.9	tiktok
9	30.6	security	25	12.3	concerns
11	27.6	greenfield	26	11.9	universities
12	27.1	agreements	27	11.3	politically
13	22.6	blackburn	28	11.1	outbreak
14	21.9	pavlou	29	10.9	malign
15	21.0	commonwealth	30	10.2	accused

As the keyness value denotes the importance of certain information, three significant changes of focuses were reflected by the statistics. Firstly, more culture- and politics-oriented words appeared in Corpus A and B, respectively. Secondly, the presence of covid and pandemic in the keyword list of Corpus B reflects that the pandemic indeed affected the image of CIs. Thirdly, 17 China-related keywords appeared in Corpus A, while only 7 appeared in Corpus B, implying a shift in the perspective of the two countries' media reporting of CIs.

5.2 Images of CIs before 2020

5.2.1 The Language-teaching Center Transmitting Cultural Signs

Several keywords before 2020 were closely linked to language-teaching, such as teachers, training and languages. The major function of CI is teaching Chinese to the foreigners and thus these keywords do demonstrate that, before 2020, the US and UK media do acknowledged CI as a teaching organization.

Moreover, some keywords shared Chinese cultural characteristics, such as shaolin, monkey, and (martial) arts. These cultural symbols are integrated into the sign-system we use, as semiotics is "a science which studies the life of signs at the heart of social life" [22]. [23] narrowed down the Chinese cultural signs into six types: Chinese symbolic culture, Chinese cultural life, Chinese art, Chinese thoughts, Chinese figure, and Chinese language. With the assistance of Antconc, this study collected all the cultural signs appearing in Corpus A (Table 4).

Table 4: List of the Cultural Signs Appeared in Corpus A.

Type	Sign	Frequency
1. Chinese culture symbolic sign	(1) dragon	5
	(2) panda	3
	(3) The Great Wall	2
2. Chinese cultural life sign	(1) Chinese medicine	28
	(2) Traditional festival	13
	(3) Kung fu	2
	(4) Qipao	1
3. Chinese art sign	(1) Chinese music	8
	(2) Beijing opera	3
	calligraphy	3
4. Chinese thought sign	(1) Maoism	5
	(2) Tai Chi	2
	(3) The Analects	1
5. Chinese figure sign	(1) Xi Jinping	94
	(2) Confucius	24
	(3) Mao Zedong	5

	(4) Hu Jintao	4
6. Chinese language sign	(1) Chinese language/Mandarin	57
	(2) poem	6

The appearance of various cultural signs demonstrates that the CIs played a positive role in transmitting Chinese culture and constructing a holistic system of Chinese cultural discourse. The common appearance of Chinese language signs further demonstrates that CIs were considered as a vehicle for promoting Chinese language teaching. The most significant target of CIs is to provide qualified Chinese teaching channels. At this point, the keyword of teaching shows that establishing CIs has achieved its intended effect, as most media report on it from the perspective of language-teaching.

5.2.2 Chinese Cultural Rite Organizer

The appearance of various cultural signs demonstrates that the CIs played a positive role in transmitting Chinese culture and constructing a holistic system of Chinese cultural discourse. The common appearance of Chinese language signs further demonstrates that CIs were considered as a vehicle for promoting Chinese language teaching. The most significant target of CIs is to provide qualified Chinese teaching channels. At this point, the keyword of teaching shows that establishing CIs has achieved its intended effect, as most media report on it from the perspective of language-teaching. In the narrow sense, rite refers to the ceremony performed for religion, but it can broadly refer to all the activities that transmit ideologies or enhance community identity. Festivals, which bring separated individuals together to celebrate the shared culture, can be regarded as rites. Rites were strongly emphasized during Confucius's time as they could be used to form a harmonious order in society and to construct spiritual awareness. As evidenced by the appearance of festival, music, dance, monkey (year), and (lunar) new year in the keyword list of Corpus A, CIs also actively held festival events. Example (1) shows that CIs organized cultural events and invited the public to share the joy of Chinese new year.

(1) "We are pleased to co-host the 2016 Chinese New Year celebration with the New Orleans Chinese Association... As students, faculty, parents and the general public get together and have fun, I wish everybody all the best for 2016, the Year of the Monkey," said Yu Jiang, director of the Xavier University Confucius Institute.

5.2.3 Promoter of Chinese Cultural Ideas

Traditional, Confucian appear in the keyword list of Corpus A, which represents the role of CI in transmitting the traditional Chinese cultures and philosophies. Confucian philosophical principles influence East Asian civilizations, but are especially intertwined with Chinese national identity [24]. summed up the Confucian thoughts in five words: benevolence, righteousness, manners, wisdom, and credit. This study sorted the related concordance lines according to these five words.

(2) Across East Asia, his teachings about harmony, benevolence and righteousness have influenced everything from the makeup of political institutions to the dynamics of everyday relationships.

(3) SEEK "HARMONY but not sameness," advised the Chinese philosopher Confucius 2,500 years ago. Neither quality was on display when Chinese nationalists violently disrupted a rally... in Hong Kong.

Examples (2) and (3) shows that the portrayal of Confucian thoughts has three characteristics. First, most media acknowledged the profound significance and realistic value of Confucianism. Second, the understanding of Confucius's ideas was not comprehensive and mainly revolved around moral and political teachings. In fact, Confucian philosophy may vary depending on different factors such as, economy, education, history, and aesthetics. Third, the analyzed media associated Confucianism with politics and defamed China by citing Confucianism (Example (3)). As [25] said, Confucianism is the victim of journalistic simplification and becomes a label of authoritarian and hierarchical rule.

5.3 Images of CIs after 2020

The attitudes towards CIs became intertwined with politics after 2020, as demonstrated by the increasing number of words surrounding politics in the keyword list of Corpus B, which included political figures such as Pompeo, Biden, and Trump, and official authorities such as administrations and federal. After the Covid-19, western countries seem to have been rejecting international cooperation, especially with China [26], fearing it would render their national security - the exact word appearing in the keyword list - vulnerable.

5.3.1 Threatening Political Instrument

Western media tended to relate CIs with the Chinese government, as demonstrated by the high rankings of CCP, communist and PRC in the keyword list of Corpus B. [27] argued that government image represents the national image as it symbolizes the first impression of a country. Therefore, to perceive the images of China in the eyes of America and Britain, this study searched the collocation of Chinese government. The continuous mention of the same collocation can influence people's opinions towards the object discussed (Stubbs, 1996). The top five verb-noun collocations extracted by Antconc were influence, fund, control, infiltrate and violate. These negative verbs reflect an underlying sense of menace in how CIs were perceived as a political instrument through which the Chinese government could expand their influence.

The frequent repetition of negative words can influence perceptions by creating a dichotomy between the "Us" and "Them," wherein positive aspects are associated with the former and negative aspects with the latter (Van Dijk, 1988). The portrayal of China in UK and US media as an evil "Them" with contradictory interests embodies the difference in their ideologies compared to those of China. Although CIs became a total non-governmental organization after 2020, the media still heavily emphasized their political role. They claimed that CIs violated national independence and safety, decrying the funding received by the institutions and the teachers assigned to them by the Chinese government.

5.3.2 Propaganda Machine

Propaganda, the 22nd keyword, is defined as the organized dissemination to spread influence and gain support. The related concordance lines show that western media regarded the CIs as a propaganda machine that transmitted soft power and reflected China's assertive diplomacy and ambition for global influence. The typical exaggerated misunderstanding of CIs was manifested in the argument of "China threat" [1]. The fear of Chinese influenced their attitudes towards CIs, as seen in Examples (4) and (5):

(4) "Confucius Institutes are not independent centers of learning, but instruments of Beijing's overseas propaganda machine," said Senator Hawley.

(5) There are also the Confucius Institutes, purportedly just a vast network of Chinese-language teaching centers but really also an instrument of Beijing's propaganda and pressure tactics.

5.3.3 Instrument for Economic Expansion

[27] argued that international exchanges are, first and foremost, economic. However, economic or economy did not appear in the keyword list, possibly due to that the concept of the keyword being a comparative one. Moreover, the difference in the frequency of these words in both corpora was not distinct. In Corpus A, the normalized frequency of economic is 7.0, while that in Corpus B is 6.5. The small difference shows that economy was always an inevitable topic.

(6) Confucius Institute... creates a cultural footprint overseas to complement the country's rising economic might.

(7) Confucius hubs... promote educational, economic, and cultural ties with China.

Examples (6) and (7) shows that CIs were seen as an instrument for expanding cultural and economic influence. Shedding light on the economic aspects of CIs may also reflect the mostly utilitarian attitudes of US and UK media towards CIs. On one hand, establishing a CI may bring economic benefits to its surrounding location or city. On the other, if these benefits were to weaken, the evaluation of CIs is likely to decline accordingly. The rise of the Chinese economy has triggered a heightened sense of apprehension. As the media in the UK and US categorized China as the evil "Them," they began to wage resistance against China-related organizations.

6. Modality Analysis

6.1 General Distribution of Modal Verbs

Halliday (2000) divided modal verbs into three levels: high-value, median-value, and low-value. Median-value modal verbs conform to the requirements of objectivity and accuracy. High-value modal verbs convey a sense of assertiveness, often with a commanding tone or a readiness to commit to future actions. Conversely, low-value modal verbs indicate a lack of confidence in the validity of information and a tendency to seek a negotiable stance. Therefore, modality analysis is effective in reflecting the evaluative meanings of

media towards CIs. Given the significant disparity in word tokens between both corpora, this study employed a normalized frequency approach, wherein the parameter of token per 10,000 words normalizes the raw frequency.

Table 5: The Distribution of Modal Verbs in Corpus A.

Modal Value	Modal Verb	Frequency	Normalized Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. High	must	17	3.9	10.7
	need	13	2.9	
	have to	8	1.8	
	ought to	0	0	
2. Median	will	100	22.9	55.5
	would	50	11.4	
	should	46	10.5	
	shall	0	0	
3. Low	can	51	11.4	33.8
	could	28	6.4	
	may	25	5.7	
	might	16	3.6	
Total	10	354	80.5	100

Table 6: The Distribution of Modal Verbs in Corpus B.

Modal Value	Modal Verb	Frequency	Normalized Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. High	need	25	7.0	17.1
	have to	16	4.5	
	must	12	3.4	
	ought to	3	0.8	
2. Median	would	72	20.3	53.4
	should	53	14.9	
	will	49	13.8	
	shall	1	0.3	
3. Low	could	31	8.7	29.5
	can	29	8.2	
	may	24	6.7	
	might	13	3.6	
Total	12	328	92.2	100

The higher total normalized frequency of modal verbs in Corpus B than in Corpus A indicates that more attitudes or judgments are expressed when mentioning CIs. The frequently used median value modal verbs reflect that the media appears to have adopted an objective and neutralized way to report the news that meets the requirement of news reporting. Among the median value modal verbs, will was the most frequently used in Corpus A, while would appeared the most frequently in Corpus B, followed by should, which only ranked third compared to its counterpart. For low-value modal verbs, can was more commonly used in Corpus A and could ranked first in Corpus B. Among the high-value modal verbs, must was used more frequently before 2020.

6.2 Median-value Modal Verb

The changes in attitudes can be discovered through the different choices of median value verb. Significance test on the frequency of will shows that the p value was .000 (less than .05), indicating that the frequency of will in Corpus A was significantly higher than that in Corpus B. Moreover, the frequency of would in Corpus A was notably lower than that in its counterpart (p = 0.021).

6.2.1 Before 2020: Using "will" to Express the Bright Future that CIs Bring

The two major functions that will plays are probability and inclination, both of which can indicate the positive or negative attitudes of the speaker. According to [28], will can express

speakers' prediction of the future and assertive judgment towards an issue. In the following examples, will mainly reflects the speaker's assumption about the positive influence of CIs and his willingness to welcome them, as CIs build up the cultural and language bridge and promotes economic exchanges. Before 2020, the UK and US media largely acknowledged the positive potential of CIs and conveyed an inclination to promote them through the use of will.

(8) I am confident that it will serve as a bridge of friendship and better understanding.

(9) Our students will benefit as the center will enhance the way we teach Chinese.

6.2.2 After 2020: Using "would" to Convey Gloomy Prognostications about CIs

Similar to will, would also expresses probability and inclination but is more indirect and softer, indicating a euphemistic tone to convey uncertainty and undertake fewer modal responsibilities. In Corpus B, more than two thirds of the use of would reflected negative appraisals. Those who held those views feared that the CIs may violate academic freedom in universities, threatening national safety. Moreover, the use of would also introduces the potentials of establishing stricter regulations on the CIs that would counteract its threatening effects, as can be seen in the following examples:

(10) Anyone involved with these centers faces background checks. Anything else would be an abdication of our national security efforts.

(11) The Department of Homeland Security has dropped plans... that would have required American schools and universities to disclose agreements with Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes.

The source of modality is another factor that deserves special attention. According to [29], every modality possesses a source that is either directly from or a reference to the speaker. In the concordance lines, foreign scholars, who understood how CIs function generally emphasized their practical benefits and value in boosting mutual understanding and achieving a win-win situation. However, government officials who did not directly experience its environment mostly took opposite stances. They argued that CIs jeopardize national democracy and safety, and threaten universities' academic freedom.

6.3 Low-value Modal Verb

Although the general proportion of low-value modal verbs ranked second in both corpora, the specific ranking differed. Could ranked first among low-value modal verbs in Corpus B, but only ranked second in Corpus A. Additionally, the frequency of can in Corpus A was significantly higher than that in Corpus B (p = 0.023). Between these two modal verbs, could is softer and more modest than can, which paves the way for their divergence in the reflected attitudes.

6.3.1 Before 2020: Using "can" to Convey Polarized Appraisals

[30] recognized can as a subjective modal verb expressing ability and potentiality. Ability reflects the speaker's view about the functions that CIs play, while potentiality indicates their possible influences. However, both words reflect the value assessment of CIs, be it positive or negative.

(12) Looking ahead, the Institute can make new and greater contributions to human progress.

(13) That level of access can stifle academic freedom and provide students... with an incomplete picture of Chinese government actions.

Examples (12) and (13) show polarize attitudes towards CIs. Those who think highly of CIs believed that they can promote cultural exchange and build an intimate relationship between China and their country. The arguments around CIs mainly revolved around two aspects: the source of financial support and the fear of academic freedom.

6.3.2 After 2020: Using "could" to Express more Criticisms

The statistics of modal verbs demonstrate a narrowed gap between the normalized frequency of can and could and the media favored using could more frequently to express probability. The concordance lines present that could with a euphemistic tone is inclined to convey negative attitudes as seen in Examples (14) and Example (15). Could is commonly used to belittle the possibility and importance of certain issues that are unfavorable or disapproved of by the speaker [31].

(14) The decision followed a review of the scheme which discovered no evidence of "actual political influence" but felt there was a sense that "the institute is or could be facilitating inappropriate foreign influence."

(15) Such issues could fuel anxieties about China's global influence.

In Example (14), the speaker was aware that CIs do not have "actual political influence," but still assumed that "the institute is or could be facilitating inappropriate foreign influence." According to [29], "what the modality system does is to construe the region of uncertainty between 'it is' and 'it isn't'." The change from is to could indicates that the speaker's understanding that the assumption may be wrong and thus lacks confidence in the statement. In this way, he can transmit ideologies without bearing the responsibility of ensuring the validity of information.

6.4 High-value Modal Verb

Among high value modal verbs, must ranked the first in Corpus A, while need was used far more frequently in Corpus B (p = 0.003). These two modal operators can both express necessity and obligation, and thus can be used to strengthen the reactions they should make towards the supposedly malign effects of CIs. Although these two modal verbs fulfill the same function, must conveys a more powerful tone. The opinions towards CIs were generally positive before 2020 and those who aroused vigilance against them may prefer to use a stronger modal verb. According to [29], "the verbal form must carries a subjective loading—it is the speaker's own judgment

on which the validity of the proposition is made to rest." Therefore, must performs better in establishing the speaker's authority and convincing the public to conform to his/her opinions.

7. Intertextuality Analysis

Intertextuality reflects the productivity of texts and the way that the present texts transform previous texts and then generate new ones based on the existing conventions [32]. The more cogent the news sources are, the more objective and reliable the news reports. Thus, the reporters would choose to specify the news sources at best but keep some blurred at the same time to deliver the ideologies they represent by deciding whose voices and what could be heard. Therefore, intertextuality analysis unveils the relationship between discursive choices and social background, establishing the bridge between text and social practice.

7.1 Validity of News Sources

The validity of news sources refers to the clarity of quoting others' words. Normally, news media would require reporters to explicitly disclose the identity of the speakers. However, somesourved are withheld sources to propagate and reinforce the reporter's opinions. [33] divided the news sources into three types according to their validity. Firstly, specific and definite news sources clearly identify the sources. Secondly, implicit news sources do not have a direct speaker but only hints about his/her identity. Last, unmentioned news sources give no reference to the sources. This study used [33]'s classification to explore the varying degrees of validity of news sources.

In face of the huge multitude of concordance lines, researchers should randomly select 30 concordance lines at a time for observation, summarize the patterns, then repeat this process until no new patterns can be observed [34]. This study used ConcSampler, which was developed by Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), to randomly extract concordance lines containing Confucius Institute. A total of four extractions were done to obtain 120 random samples. Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of the news sources.
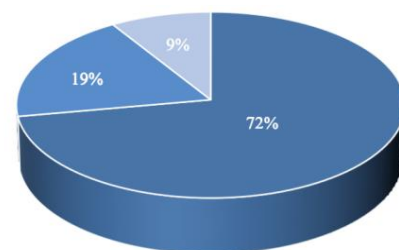
Figure 1: Percentage of News Sources per category
Note: Number of specific and definite news sources = 57, number of implicit news sources = 15, number of unmentioned news sources = 7.

Specific and definite news sources comprised the largest proportion, reflecting the professionalism of the media. Most news outlets adhere to rigorous editorial guidelines that mandate transparent citation unless compelling reasons dictate otherwise. Thus, the media can avoid unnecessary

misunderstandings and enhance the credibility and objectivity of the information. This meticulous approach to source referencing not only bolsters journalistic integrity but also provides a mechanism for presenting nuanced perspectives within the bounds of journalistic ethics.

While implicit and unmentioned news sources did not take up a large percentage, they are still worth analyzing as they indicate reporters' hidden attitudes and ideologies. Implicit and unmentioned news sources appeared 22 times in the samples, in which negative attitudes toward CIs account for four-fifths of the total.

(16) "It helps us to have a focus on Chinese culture here. It makes us settle quickly," one woman said.

(17) DeVos and Pompeo echoed longstanding complaints from academic groups that say schools give China too much control over what's taught in Confucius Institute classes.

(18) Critics said that the sanctions were an attempt to stifle academic scrutiny of the ruling Communist Party.

Examples (16) to (18) indicate how the news sources are not directly referred to but blurred using words such as critics and academic groups. This may be due to the following three aspects. Firstly, some information providers prefer anonymity for privacy or security reasons. For instance, Example (16) was taken from a news report about the protest on the issue of Hong Kong held in 2019 at The University of Queensland where one student directed his anger at the CI on campus. Therefore, local students who supported the CI would rather remain anonymous for safety reasons. Secondly, when the speakers' identity is highly generalized, such as academic groups, reporters are able to reinforce and propagate their ideologies. To readers, the parties represented behind the names are more important than the actual names [34]. Thirdly, unmentioned identities such as critics can leave the impression that several people hold similar views, rendering the public more willing to echo the majority opinion.

7.2 Identities of News Sources

The diverse identities of speakers reflect a comprehensive and neutral perspective; otherwise, it indicates a one-sided view dominated by a strong voice with more discourse power. This study divided the identities into four types: government, experts/scholars, media and the public and further classifies them by nationality (Table 7).

Table 7: Statistics of the Identities of News Sources.

News sources	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
1.Chinese government	9	13.2	
2. Chinese media	3	4.4	
3.Chinese experts/scholars	5	7.4	17
4. Chinese public	0	0	
5. The UK and US government	25	36.8	
6. The UK and US media	0	0	
7. The UK and US experts / scholars	19	27.9	51
8. The UK and US public	7	10.3	

Table 7 indicates that western media suppressed the voices from China by the power of manipulating the number of news sources, putting China in a disadvantageous position. The

sources from China were not even half as many as its western counterparts. CIs employ both Chinese and western staff, but reporters are more inclined to publish the words of a spokesman from the side of their own country (Examples (19) and (20)). This further demonstrates that the voices of Chinese faculties in the CIs are underrepresented.

(19) Voss is also executive director of the Business Confucius Institute at the University of Leeds, which promotes understanding of Chinese culture and the Mandarin language.

(20) The article, in the state-run Jiefang Daily, quoted Xu Lin, China's top official in charge of Confucius Institutes, saying she had told university officials she was ready to walk away from the arrangement.

Moreover, western media also assert their power by using overwhelmingly superior news sources, as seen by the frequent citations from the side with more power, such as experts (27.9%) and the government (36.8%). Officials representing authority and responsibility must ensure the reliability of the news as they are vulnerable to the consequences of lying [35]. Of particular interest are news sources from Chinese media, which take up 25.0% of the Chinese news sources. When western media refer to these (Example (20)), they emphasize the state-owned property of Chinese media to indicate the political stance and decrease the objectivity.

8. Discussion

By analyzing keywords in related reports, this study reveals a significant change in the focus of UK and US media regarding CIs. Before 2020, UK and US media acknowledged the function and operation of CIs as a language-teaching organization transmitting Chinese cultural signs, cultural rite organizer, and promoter of Chinese ideas. Likewise, having examined news media coverage from developing countries, [7] indicated that the CI "is still largely recognized for language teaching and cultural dissemination activities." Thus, given the present study's finding, [7]'s claim still holds true in developed countries. Although CIs were viewed from an educational and cultural perspective in the media before 2020, they were not widely welcomed. The analysis revealed that the relationship of CIs with the Chinese government was criticized as being contradictory to Confucian principles, which they should be promoting. This finding is supported by [36], who argued that CIs could not represent the true idea of Confucius.

After 2020, the UK and US media tended to report on the malign effects of CIs, such as their impediment to academic freedom and political security. The media perceived CIs as a threatening political instrument, propaganda machine, and an instrument for economic expansion. This hostile attitude reflects "a country-specific and government-oriented image of public opinion towards Confucius Institutes" [7]. This finding aligns with that of [10], who concluded that CIs were portrayed as a political institution that disseminates ideology and impedes academic freedom. The appearance of words such as communist and ccp (Chinese Communist Party) in the keyword list suggests that ideological differences played a role in the portrayal of CIs in the media. As [37] stated,

anti-communism is an important control mechanism in and has become a religion in American news media, making criticism of communism subconscious. Moreover, the image of the CI as an economic instrument has also been discovered by [20]. In the recent decade, the rapid rise of China has stirred up anxiety over its economic strength. America branded China as a strategic competitor and initiated a trade war. A series of anti-China policies during the Trump administration has led to a steady deterioration in Sino-US relations since 2020. Especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the unfavorable ratings of Americans towards the Chinese have increased to 66% [38]. As a China-related organization, CIs were heavily criticized after 2020. The appearance of Covid and pandemic in the keywords list further shows that Covid-19 indeed influenced the status of CIs. This finding supports that of [21], who argued that Covid-19 intensified the hatred towards CIs. They further concluded that CIs are one of the barometers for international political relations.

While the keywords analysis indicates the reporting focus of the media, the analysis of modal verbs reflects the attitudes and judgments expressed by the media. This study found that, before 2020, the media were more in favor of using the median value modal verb will to express the bright future that may be ushered in by CIs. [39] found that will, which is a future tense and expresses a higher degree of certainty, was used more commonly in news reports. After searching the related concordance lines, this study discovered that, before 2020, the media were content about CIs enhancing cross-cultural interactions but the more frequent use of can among the low-value modal verbs conveyed a polarized attitude towards CIs. Some prized CIs for their functions on language education and cultural communications, while others argued that they can impede academic freedom and independence. This finding is in line with that of [40], who claimed that CIs were generally accepted but still criticized for their interference on political and academic issues. [41] also stated that CI-related reports could be divided into two parts: the role of CIs as a Chinese language-teaching and cultural center, and the CI as an instrument for promoting public diplomacy and soft power.

After 2020, the attitudes towards CIs were basically negative after 2020. This diachronic finding refutes the assertion of [40] that public opinion towards CIs were either neutral or positive. In terms of median- and low-value modal verbs, reporters tended to use more indirect and softer modal verbs, namely would and could. The reason why would and could outnumbered their counterparts is partly because these two words can reduce the responsibility of ensuring the accuracy of the statements. In this way, the reporters can more euphemistically and indirectly express critical attitudes, which to some extent expands the negotiation space for interpersonal meaning.

After an intertextuality analysis of the related concordance lines, this study finds that the news sources in the analyzed reports were mainly specific and definite. However, it is noteworthy of those implicit or even unmentioned sources, as these sources mainly expressed negative attitudes towards CIs and reflected the hidden opinions and ideologies of the media. Moreover, most specific news sources were from the UK and US government or scholars who possessed more power and

represented ideology. These voices can manipulate public knowledge by dominating the social discourse and deciding which kind of information can be given to the public through mass media [42]. The news media can secretly or openly convey the ideology of political figures by giving them discursive power, then establishing public understanding that conforms to their perspectives [43]. The stifled voice from China and the overwhelming news sources from the UK and US sides reflect the hidden ideology that the news media represents. And the hegemons who possess more power of discourse can dertermine their interpretations of CI [25] and turn these interpretations into "knowledge" which is not the objective reflection of truth but is presented as turth with power in practice [44].

Throughout this study, a diachronic overview of the media portrayal of CIs in two periods is provided, which updates the perception of the images of CIs in the UK and US. It becomes evident that the different perceptions of CIs can be unveiled through linguistic resources of news media that represent the underlying ideologies. This further proves that discourse is the vehicle for delivering and reinforcing ideologies.

9. Conclusion

This study utilized Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Halliday's systemic functional grammar as the analytical framework for analyzing the diachronic changes in the images of the CI in the American and British media. This analytical approach encompasses a multi-layered exploration, ranging from micro-level language features to macro-level text production, extending further into the socio-cultural context that transcends the confines of the textual material.

This study reveals a negative transformation of the images of CIs from 2016 to 2023. Before 2020, the attitudes are combined with positive and negative, while after 2020 media express more criticisms towards CIs. The tendency to use more indirect and uncertain modal verbs implies that reporters are more likely to use a euphemistic tone to express the negative ideas. Furthermore, in constructing the image of the CI, US and UK media exercised greater dominance in the discourse arena, which resulted in a significant imbalance in the representation of news sources. This discrepancy is indicative of the stifling of Chinese voices in both media. In addition, to indirectly reinforce their ideologies, the media would obscure news sources to transmit negative appraisals without assuming full responsibility.

The scope of the present study leaves several gaps to fill in the future. First, considering the limited space, this study only focused on UK and US media because these two countries have a considerable number of CI locations, significantly influence the international situation, and possess more discursive power in the international media arena. The geographical scope of future research should be expanded and a comparative study can be conducted to acquire global images of CIs as portrayed by media. Second, this study mainly analyzed on the media portrayal of CIs. Future researchers can make more significant contributions to investigating the influence of media portrayal on public opinion by conducting in-depth interviews or surveys.

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