DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: A COMPARATIVE CDS STUDY OF CHINESE AND WESTERN MEDIA

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Abstract. *This study examines how Chinese and Western mainstream media represent cultural heritage. It uses Cultural Discourse Studies and corpus analysis to compare English news reports from China Daily, The New York Times, and the BBC from 2020 to 2025. AntConc 4.3.1 was used to identify high-frequency words, reported speech, and purpose structures. The findings show that Chinese media tend to connect cultural heritage with national identity, historical continuity, traditional culture, and tourism development. Their reports are mainly official and policy-oriented. Western media also value heritage protection, but they give more attention to global issues, conflicts, public debate, and individual experience. These differences reflect different cultural traditions, media systems, and historical understandings of heritage. The study suggests that Chinese cultural heritage communication can become more effective by combining national narratives with local voices, personal stories, and shared global concerns.*

Key words: *cultural heritage; cultural discourse studies; corpus analysis; news reports; international communication*

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is a carrier of historical memory, cultural identity, and social values. It includes tangible heritage, such as monuments, museums, historical sites, and cultural relics, and intangible heritage, such as festivals, craftsmanship, languages, and folk customs. In globalization, cultural heritage is closely connected with tourism, cultural diplomacy, public education, and national image building.

News media play an important role in this process. They select certain heritage objects, quote certain voices, and explain heritage through particular values. These choices influence how audiences understand heritage. Existing studies have discussed heritage value, digital preservation, tourism promotion, and identity construction, but fewer studies compare how Chinese and Western mainstream media construct cultural heritage in English news reports. This study uses Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS) as the main framework. It asks three questions: what themes appear in Chinese and Western heritage reports; what discourse subjects and communicative purposes are used; and what cultural and historical relations explain these differences.

2. Methods

This study uses a mixed qualitative and quantitative design. The data were collected from China Daily, The New York Times, and the BBC. China Daily represents Chinese official English-language media, while The New York Times and the BBC represent influential Western mainstream media. The sampling period was from January 1, 2020 to January 1, 2025. The keyword used for retrieval was “cultural heritage”.

After duplicate and irrelevant texts were removed, two comparable corpora were constructed. The Chinese Heritage News Corpus (CHNC) included 1,000 reports from China Daily. The Western Heritage News Corpus (WHNC) included 1,000 reports from The New York Times and the BBC. Non-news materials, advertisements, hyperlinks, image descriptions, and repeated texts were removed.

Corpus	Media source	Period	Reports
CHNC	China Daily	2020-2025	1,000
WHNC	The New York Times and BBC	2020-2025	1,000

Table 1. Corpus sources and scale

AntConc 4.3.1 was used to extract high-frequency words and concordance lines. First, high-frequency words were examined to identify themes. Second, say and its forms, such as said, says, and saying, were searched to identify discourse subjects. Third, purpose structures, including in order to and so as to, were examined to explore communicative purposes. The interpretation was guided by five CDS dimensions: discourse subject, content form and social relations, purpose and effect, cultural relations, and historical relations.

3. Results

3.1 Thematic content

Both Chinese and Western media attach importance to cultural heritage. Words such as culture, heritage, world, museum, history, and national appear frequently in the two corpora. However, their thematic focus is different. In China Daily, frequent words include China, Chinese, province, city, development, intangible, traditional, tourism, ancient, tea, local, festival, village, protection, and relics. These words show that Chinese reports often connect heritage with national history, local culture, tourism development, and the protection of traditional resources.

In the Western corpus, frequent words include people, museum, president, government, country, video, rights, Ukraine, political, war, public, foreign, military, law, and security. These words show that Western media often place cultural heritage within wider social and international issues. Heritage is connected with war, rights, public debate, law, museum ethics, and cultural property disputes.

Overall, China Daily presents heritage mainly as cultural continuity and national memory, while The New York Times and the BBC present heritage more as a public issue and global cultural resource.

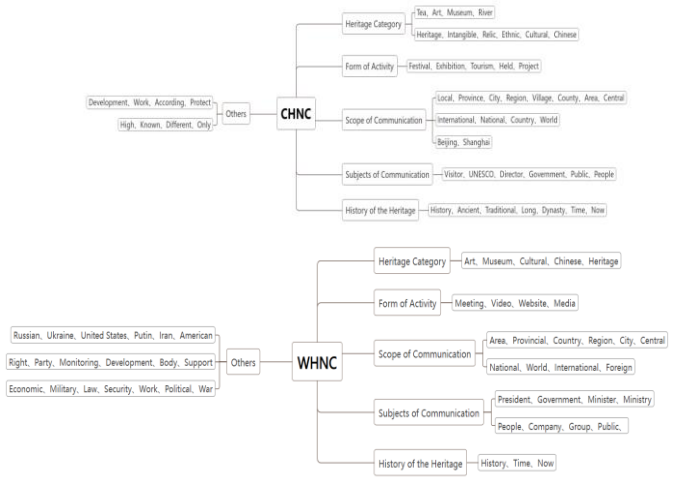

Figure1 - 2 Topic Category of Top 50 High Frequency Words in CHNC and WHNC

3.2 Discourse subjects and communicative purposes

The analysis of reported speech shows clear differences. In China Daily, quoted voices are mainly officials, government departments, experts, scholars, museum workers, and cultural inheritors. These actors are presented as authoritative interpreters of heritage value. Their voices explain policies, protection measures, exhibitions, festivals, and tourism projects. This pattern reflects an official and expert-centered discourse structure.

In Western media, experts and officials also appear, but the range of voices is wider. The reports more often quote international organizations, activists, local residents, artists, community members, and named individuals. These speakers describe personal experience, social tension, legal debate, or cultural memory. As a result, Western heritage reporting tends to construct a more pluralistic narrative.

The purpose structures also differ. In China Daily, communicative purposes are often related to protecting heritage, promoting culture, supporting tourism, encouraging inheritance, and improving public awareness. These purposes are consistent with China's policy discourse on cultural confidence and the integration of culture and tourism. In the Western corpus, purposes are more varied. They include protecting heritage in war, defending cultural rights, returning artifacts, supporting communities, obeying laws, and promoting peace. These purposes are more issue-based and event-based.

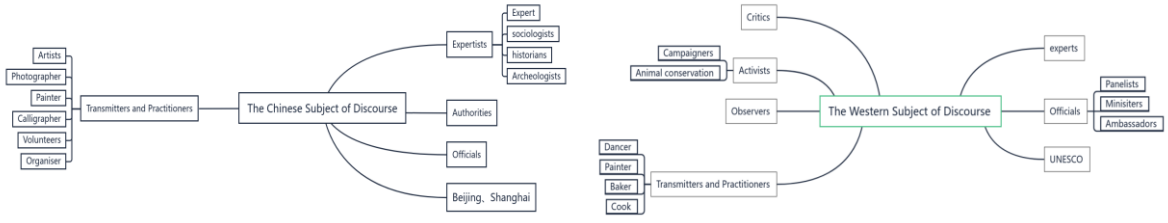

Figure 3-4 : Subjects of Discourse in CHNC and WHNC

4. Discussion

The differences between Chinese and Western heritage reporting are rooted in different cultural traditions, media systems, and historical experiences. Chinese media tend to emphasize cultural continuity and collective identity. In China Daily, words such as ancient, history, dynasty, traditional, and national show that heritage is often treated as a symbol of civilizational continuity.

The frequent presence of official and expert voices also reflects the important role of the state in organizing and explaining heritage communication.

Western media place more emphasis on contemporary relevance and social function. Their reports often connect heritage with public rights, legal debates, museum ethics, colonial history, war damage, and individual memory. This approach reflects a more decentralized media environment and a stronger preference for public debate and individual storytelling. Heritage is therefore not only a symbol of the past, but also a field where contemporary social values are discussed.

For international communication, these findings suggest that Chinese cultural heritage communication can further improve its international reception by adding more individual stories, local voices, and transnational connections. Reports can show how cultural heritage matters to ordinary people, international audiences, and shared global challenges. This may help Chinese heritage narratives become more relatable in cross-cultural communication.

This study has limitations. The corpus is limited to three media outlets and to English-language news reports from 2020 to 2025. Future research could include local media, social media, and multimodal materials such as images and videos. Despite these limits, the study shows that corpus-based CDS can help explain how media discourse constructs cultural meaning across cultures.

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