

Beyond Neutrality: A Corpus-assisted Study of Sino-American Coverage of Middle East Peace

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Abstract: This study examines how Chinese and American media frame conflict and cooperation in the coverage of Middle East peace and shows how geopolitical positionings shape these narratives. It uses a corpus-assisted discourse-historical approach (DHA) to analyze 2,000 news reports published in *China Daily* and *The New York Times* between July 2013 and June 2023. Static co-occurrence networks and dynamic dispersion plots trace shifts in representation around key events, most notably the 2017 U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The analysis shows that both outlets focus heavily on Israeli-Palestinian relations but pursue contrasting discursive strategies. *China Daily* emphasizes multilateral solutions, institutional dialogue, and state-level cooperation, which positions China as a neutral facilitator. *The New York Times* highlights leadership, responsibility, and moral legitimacy, which aligns its coverage with U.S. foreign policy priorities. Beyond confirming these well-established contrasts, diachronic collocation patterns show that these discourses adapt to geopolitical change but sustain clear ideological boundaries between in-groups and out-groups. Drawing on the framework of the ideological square and its asymmetry analysis, the study sheds light on how media claims to neutrality in reporting global conflicts operate not as genuine impartiality, but rather as a nuanced and strategic form of discursive statecraft.

Key Words: news discourse, Middle East peace, corpus, discourse-historical approach, ideological square, asymmetry

1. Introduction

News discourse can draw group boundaries through actor portrayal and lexical strategies and can also underscore the media's role in constructing geopolitical alliances and oppositions(Chan, 2014). Such discursive practices are central to how media shape public perceptions of international relations and global power structures. Currently, much research still centers on bilateral or domestic themes, such as Sino-Western tensions, national image constructions, and nationalism vs. globalism(Song et al., 2021), rather than third-party positioning. Addressing this gap matters

because third-party positioning reveals how state-aligned media legitimize or contest global power relations beyond their own borders—a perspective that moves beyond bilateral comparison to theorize multilateral communication and strategic neutrality. Researching news discourse in multilateral contexts is more valuable because it reveals complex dynamics, strategic intentions, and global power structures that cannot be captured within simple bilateral confrontation frameworks or narratives focused solely on conflict zones (Thussu, 2018). The geopolitical centrality of the Middle East—linking the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and parts of North Africa—has made it as a discursive arena where global powers articulate their political identities and foreign-policy values through media narratives. Among these actors, the United States and China have exercised significant influence (Hoh, 2019; Xu & Sun, 2019). The United States, with its historical engagement in the region, has framed Middle East politics through themes of democracy, security, and moral responsibility, reflecting its liberal-interventionist worldview. China, by contrast, constructs the region discursively through the lenses of sovereignty, non-interference, and economic cooperation—frames consistent with its principles of “win-win development” and multilateral stability. Looking back to 2013, the Middle East stood at a crossroads shaped by the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Trump administration’s Jerusalem decision and the launch of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Over the past decade, the competing narratives of these two global powers have not only influenced regional policy but also generated distinct patterns of media representation, providing a productive site for analyzing how discourse mediates power in global communication.

Thus, the current study beckons a comprehensive discourse analysis on news reports on the Middle East peace between July 2013 and June 2023 in *China Daily* and *The New York Times*, two leading national press in China and the U.S. By taking a corpus-assisted discourse study, we combine corpus linguistic and discourse-historical approach (DHA) and examine how news agencies discursively formulate the decade-long peace process over the region. Through our analyses, we aim to shed light on the nuances of media representations and facilitate a deeper understanding of how linguistic features may represent and construct the Middle East status quo. By articulating these aims, the study moves beyond descriptive comparison to theorize how global powers discursively position themselves as mediators in protracted international conflicts.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Studies on news discourse

As one of the most influential forms of institutional communication, news discourse actively shapes public understanding of global events (Bell, 1991; van Dijk, 2005 ;Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Recent literature has explored how news narratives construct reality across diverse domains. For instance, studies on environmental reporting have shown how topic salience and affective framing influence public perceptions of climate change, particularly during moments of ecological crisis (Liu et al., 2025). In economic journalism, media narratives around market volatility and financial stability have been found to directly shape investor sentiment (Mueller et al., 2024). Meanwhile, diplomatic reporting serves as a vehicle for states to project strategic narratives and assert external legitimacy (Kaur & Arora, 2025).

Despite its professed commitment to objectivity, critical discourse scholars have long demonstrated that news texts are saturated with evaluative language and ideological positioning (Bednarek, 2009; Fairclough, 2013). Far from being neutral mirrors of reality, news reports actively reconstruct social hierarchies and political legitimacy—particularly in coverage of politically sensitive issues. For example, analyses of immigration reporting in European and British media reveal how lexical choices and narrative structures reinforce national identity and social exclusion (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). Corpus-based work further shows that vocabularies of “threat” versus “solidarity” reflect divergent national discourses on peace and security (Liebovitch et al., 2023).

Comparative studies between Chinese and Western media underscore systematic asymmetries in framing. For example, one cross-national comparison study reveal culturally embedded journalistic norms: Chinese media often foreground institutional coordination and collective responsibility, whereas U.S. outlets emphasize individual agency and freedom (Zhao, 2021). Moreover, Zhang and Wu (2017) document how *China Daily* and the *Financial Times* frame economic and political events through distinct ideological lenses. Similarly, Lu and Yu (2024) find that metaphorical constructions in pandemic-related reporting reflect deeper governmental ideologies, while Teo and Xu (2023) show starkly contrasting portrayals of China’s Belt and Road Initiative—framed as cooperative development in *China Daily* but as a geopolitical threat in the

New York Times. Collectively, these studies confirm that “neutrality” in news discourse functions less as an empirical standard than as a rhetorical strategy through which states articulate self-representation and geopolitical alignment.

However, a significant gap remains: most existing research focuses either on domestic narratives or on bilateral relations (e.g., U.S.–China, EU–refugees). What is largely absent is systematic analysis of how great powers strategically deploy discourse when acting as third-party actors in conflicts that do not directly involve them. This omission is consequential, as such third-party positioning often relies precisely on the performance of neutrality—a discursive stance that warrants closer scrutiny as a mode of ideological action in global communication.

2.2 Studies on Middle East Peace discourse

While critical discourse analysis (CDA) has flourished in studies of Western and Asian media, the Middle East remains comparatively underrepresented—often relegated to the margins of global discourse research (Randour et al., 2020). Existing CDA work on the region tends to focus on translation practices or linguistic contrasts between English and Middle Eastern languages (Aslani, 2016; Azodi & Salmani, 2015; Bazzi, 2014). Coverage of regional conflicts—particularly those involving Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—has received more attention, yet even here, analytical depth is limited. For example, Kaur and Arora (2025) apply NLP methods to compare war versus peace journalism frames in international reporting on the Israel–Hamas conflict, but their approach prioritizes thematic or sentiment classification over the underlying foreign-policy logics driving these representations.

Crucially, the multilateral nature of the Middle East peace process—involving multiple state and non-state actors over decades—demands a diachronic and relational approach that most current studies lack. The peace process is not merely a series of isolated events but a prolonged negotiation shaped by shifting alliances, historical memory, and competing visions of regional order. It thus offers a compelling context for examining how external powers like China and the United States discursively position themselves as mediators, arbiters, or moral authorities—even as they advance their own strategic interests. To date, no systematic study has traced how representative media outlets of these two countries construct their roles as third-party observers in Middle East peace

efforts over time, nor how these discursive positions align with or diverge from evolving foreign-policy agendas.

2.3 The Current Study

The ideological square is a foundational analytical framework in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl and later consolidated in works such as Wodak & Meyer (2016). It captures how ideologies are linguistically reproduced—particularly in political, media, and institutional discourse—through systematic patterns of representation that privilege the in-group while marginalizing the out-group. Specifically, the model identifies four interrelated discursive strategies: (1) emphasizing the positive qualities or actions of “us” (the in-group); (2) emphasizing the negative qualities or actions of “them” (the out-group); (3) mitigating or suppressing the negative aspects of “us”; and (4) mitigating or suppressing the positive aspects of “them”. This asymmetrical representational logic functions to legitimize power relations, justify exclusionary practices, and reinforce social boundaries—often under the guise of neutrality, objectivity, or factual reporting (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Building on this framework, the present study investigates how global powers deploy media discourse to project an image of neutrality while advancing geopolitical interests in multilateral conflict settings. Moving beyond binary or domestically oriented analyses, we conceptualize international media coverage as a dynamic arena of strategic communication, identity construction, and ideological contestation within a complex global order. Focusing on third-party representations in coverage of the Middle East peace process, the research interrogates how the rhetoric of neutrality itself becomes a discursive vehicle through which major powers exercise influence—transcending simplistic “us-versus-them” narratives by examining the nuanced interplay of positive self-representation and negative other-representation.

Methodologically, the study employs a corpus-assisted discourse analysis grounded in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). DHA is particularly well-suited to this inquiry because it treats ideology as a historically situated and dynamically enacted system, realized through recurrent discursive strategies embedded in socio-political contexts (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). By integrating corpus linguistic tools—such as keyword analysis, collocation

profiling, and semantic preference mapping—with DHA's contextual sensitivity, the approach achieves both empirical robustness and interpretive depth (Baker et al., 2008; Egbert & Baker, 2019; Song et al., 2021). Drawing on a decade-long corpus (2013–2023) of English-language articles from *China Daily* and *The New York Times*, this study addresses the following interrelated research questions:

- How have the two newspapers constructed topical agendas around the Middle East peace process over the past decade?
- What discursive strategies—realized through predication, perspectivation, nomination and argumentation, —do they employ to position themselves and other actors?
- What ideological positions and foreign-policy orientations underlie these discursive constructions, and how do they evolve in response to shifting geopolitical contexts?

3 Methodology and Data

3.1 Data collection and corpora set-up

The current study portrayed the discursive representation of Middle East peace over the past decade in *China Daily* and the *New York Times* by synergizing the corpus tools and the DHA. Both media are representative national news producers that convey the ideologies and interests of each side. The self-compiled corpora were derived from the online archive LexisNexis, a well-established database that has been extensively utilized in news and political discourse studies (Baker et al., 2020; Chen & Wang, 2022; Pei et al., 2022; Song et al., 2021), with “Middle East peace”, “Israel-Palestine conflict” as the search term for texts between 1st July 2013 and 31st June 2023. Next, raw files were filtered manually according to the framing functions of news (Entman, 2006): to define problems in the Middle East peace, to diagnose the causes of problems, to make moral judgments, and to suggest remedies. Texts without any frame were discarded. After removing meta information and advertisements, we obtained a corpus for *China Daily* (CD) and a corpus for the *New York Times* (NYT), with each further segmented into ten sub-corpora (P1 – P10) by a year-long period (see Table 2). The rationale for annual segmentation of a decade's data was to capture temporally sensitive shifts in discursive patterns that may correlate with annual geopolitical events, policy changes, or media strategies. Furthermore, based on the two troughs in the token distribution chart of *The New*

York Times (in 2016 and 2019), the decade-long research span was divided into three periods—T1 (P1-P3), T2 (P4-P6), and T3 (P7-P10) — to facilitate diachronic study.

Table 2. Token Counts of CD and NYT corpus

	Timeline	Token Count	
		NYT	CD
T1	2013.07-2014.06 (P1)	94,747	9,308
	2014.07-2015.06 (P2)	47,337	10,311
	2015.07-2016.06 (P3)	25,195	23,035
	Total	167,279	42,654
T2	2016.07-2017.06 (P4)	74,859	10,674
	2017.07-2018.06 (P5)	86,048	21,076
	2018.07-2019.06 (P6)	82,674	14,988
	Total	243,581	46,738
T3	2019.07-2020.06 (P7)	48,648	7,671
	2020.07-2021.06 (P8)	68,068	4,230
	2021.07-2022.06 (P9)	28,325	5,999
	2022.07-2023.06 (P10)	17,598	7,757
	Total	162,639	25,657
Total		573,499	115,049

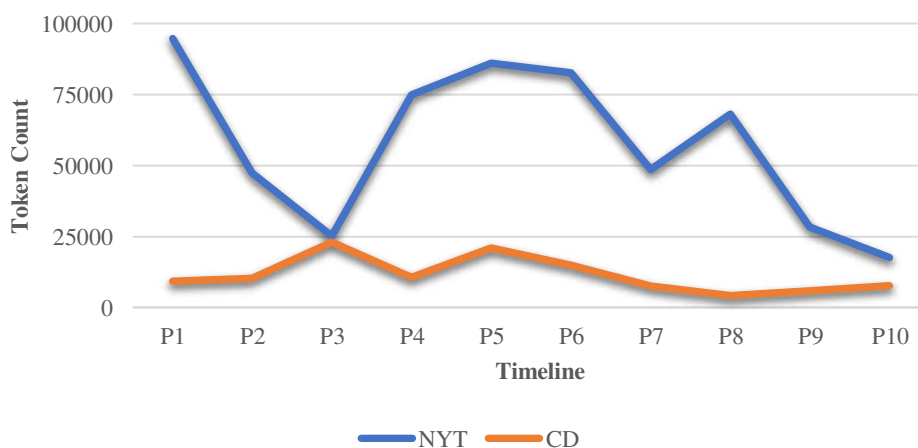


Figure 1. Token Trends of CD and NYT corpus

The Token Count demonstrated that NYT outnumbered CD in all periods, reflecting the American media attached much greater importance to the Middle East peace. However, while the numbers of tokens in CD remained relatively stable over the decade, with only two small spikes around 25,000 occurring at P3 and P5, those in NYT witnessed more obvious fluctuations: the count plummeted from its starting point of nearly 100,000 to the peak of more than 25,000 in 2016(P3);

following this plunge, there was a considerable rise to P6 (in 2019); the rest of the timeline saw a decline, with an exception of a spike at P8. This pattern reflected that China's attention to the Middle East peace had been stable while the American media's interests in the topic had been ever-changing. Spike-plunge pairs at P3 and P7 were also noticed. Our data analysis investigated the two corpora at the macro and micro level. Three key events were found to align with spikes and plunges in the Token Trends (Figure 1): 1) Xi's state visits to Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt between 2015 and 2016 (T1); 2) Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital at the end of 2017 (T2); 3) Trump's attempt for re-election in 2020 (T3).

3.2 Macro-level analysis and tools

The macro-level analysis involved the visualization of the overall topic and the identification of possible search terms for concordance observation, which was realized by KH Coder and AntConc 4.1.1. KH Coder is an open-source corpus tool for computational linguistics, which focuses on quantitative content analysis and text mining. This software supports the processing and analysis of textual data powered by Stanford POS Tagger, R language, and MySQL. This powerful NLP toolbox enables researchers to generate statistically based quantitative exploration of texts through various approaches, including co-occurrence networks, clustering, KWIC concordance, collocation statistics, etc., with options for visualization. Such competence could contribute to the theme analysis and the concordance description of the current study. AntConc 4.1.1 is a free corpus retrieval tool with a user-friendly and straightforward interface, making it accessible for linguistic explorations. Developed by Laurence Anthony (Kaur & Arora, 2025; Liebovitch et al., 2023), it offers a range of functions, including keyword lists, concordance, N-gram analysis, concordance plots, and word lists, among others. In this study, AntConc is primarily utilized for keyword analysis and concordance analysis, helping to determine the theme of corpora and contextual information. Since each corpus was arranged by the timeline, the Plot function in Antconcord could visualize the diachronic distribution of key lemmas and allowed us to find patterns.

The Co-occurrence Network visualized by KH Coder focuses on lemmas that constitute topics. Frequently co-occurring groups constituting topics are displayed in lemma clusters, with the size of circles representing the absolute frequencies. We selected the top 200 strongest co-occurring

lemmas in both corpora, with a stop word list from NLTK, an open-source Python package for natural language processing. The ranking of each subgraph accorded with the statistical significance of the topic. The keyword analysis depicts the relatively salient keyword lists by taking one corpus as the reference against the target. Specifically, we pick the top 50 keywords with the greatest Log-likelihood value for semantic analysis.

3.3 DHA strategies and annotations

Within the framework in Wodak & Meyer (2016), the current study focuses on four key strategies—nomination, predication, perspectivization, and argumentation—each operationalized in relation to the research questions (see Table 3). By exploring clues from the strategies, diachronic changes concerning how discourses react to sociopolitical status can be explored. The micro-level analysis would delve into the DHA’s discursive strategies.

Table 3. DHA discursive strategies adapted from Wodak & Meyer (2016: 33)

Discursive Strategies	Questions to the Middle East peace	Linguistic Resources
Predication	What characteristics or qualities are attributed to the Middle East peace	Predicate collocates
Perspectivation	From what perspectives are the Middle East peace expressed?	Name collocates of reporting verbs
Nomination	How objects, processes, and actions in the Middle East peace are referred to?	Noun phrases denoting processes and actions
Argumentation	How justification and questioning of claims of truth are constructed?	Formal and content-related topoi

Predication strategy refers to the discursive qualification of entities in discourses, including properties and attributes placed on social actors, objects, events, processes and so on, which can be achieved by using predicates in which nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are all possible to denote evaluative features (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Since the current study focuses on the depiction of the peace process in the two media, we particularly take the query expressions used in data collection, namely “Middle East peace”, and “Israel-Palestine conflict”, as the linguistic entities for the current study. To reach this end, 3-grams surrounding these node words were investigated through AntConc’s N-gram function in the respective corpora. Next, we manually filtered all

instances in which the wildcard (*) can denote predicate properties and features with more than one case, discarding those cases formed by functional tokens (such as articles and conjunctions) and with low frequencies.

Perspectivation strategy deals with how speakers or writers express their viewpoints, positions, and involvement in the discourse by foregrounding or backgrounding particular actors or voices (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In this study, perspectivation is examined by identifying the sources to whom speech acts are attributed, primarily through the analysis of 3-grams containing the reporting verb “said”. Specifically, we generated concordance lines around “said” in each corpus and extracted its direct collocates, typically person names or institutional agents (e.g., “Xi said”, “Trump said”, “UN Secretary-General said”). The AntConc Concordance and Word List tools were used to rank the most frequent attributions across the corpora and periods.

Nomination strategy focuses on the referential and labeling practices used to name social actors, groups, or events, thus reflecting underlying ideological stances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). This study investigates how the two media nominate the Israel–Palestine conflict and associated actors by analyzing noun phrases and adjectival compounds such as “*Israeli-Palestinian*” versus “*Palestinian-Israeli*”. AntConc’s Concordance and Cluster tools were used to extract all instances of these patterns in both corpora. We then computed their frequencies and chronological distribution across the three time periods. Moreover, we examined accompanying noun heads (e.g., “talks”, “conflict”, “agreement”) to understand how the parties were linguistically framed within specific themes.

Argumentation strategy examines how arguments are justified and legitimized through recurrent patterns of reasoning known as topoi (Wodak, 2009). Here we examined the topoi employed to support or oppose specific actors, actions, or policies related to Middle East peace by analyzing the immediate contexts surrounding key terms such as “peace plan”, “Trump’s initiative”, and “two-state solution”. Using concordance lines in AntConc, we identified co-occurring argument schemes and categorized them into several topoi such as threat, responsibility, justice, and uselessness.

4 Results and Findings

4.1 Macro-level Descriptions

Frequently co-occurring groups constituting topics are displayed in lemma clusters, with the size of circles representing the absolute frequencies. We selected the top 200 strongest co-occurring lemmas in both corpora. The ranking of each subgraph accorded with the statistical significance of the topic.

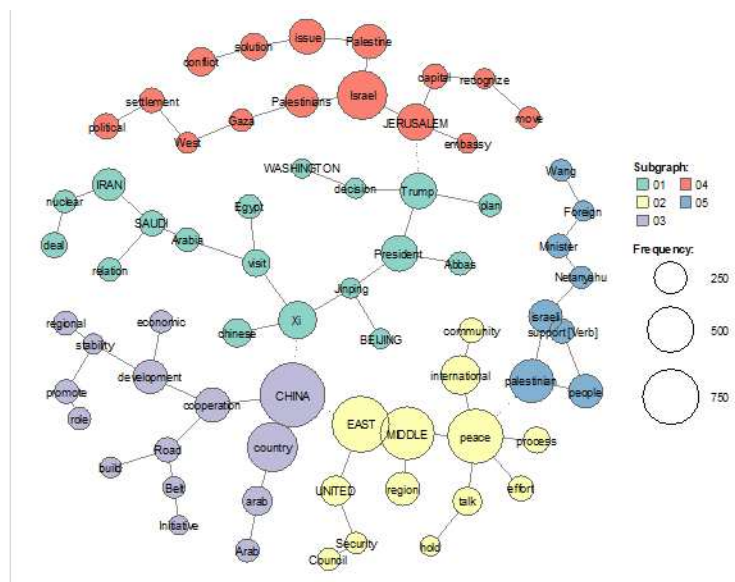


Figure 2. Co-occurrence Network of CD

As is indicated in Figure 2, China Daily frames Middle East peace as a central diplomatic priority, emphasizing the leadership roles of Xi Jinping and Donald Trump as pivotal hubs connecting key thematic clusters. Topic 01 highlights Xi's engagement with Middle Eastern nations and contrasts it with U.S. and Palestinian leadership, while Topic 03 underscores China's broader cooperation with Arab states under the Belt and Road Initiative. Topic 02 calls for multilateral dialogue and international institutional involvement to advance regional peace, with Topic 05 focusing specifically on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Topic 04 centers on Trump's 2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and its geopolitical repercussions. Collectively, the coverage reflects China's advocacy for cooperative, leader-driven diplomacy in addressing Middle East stability.

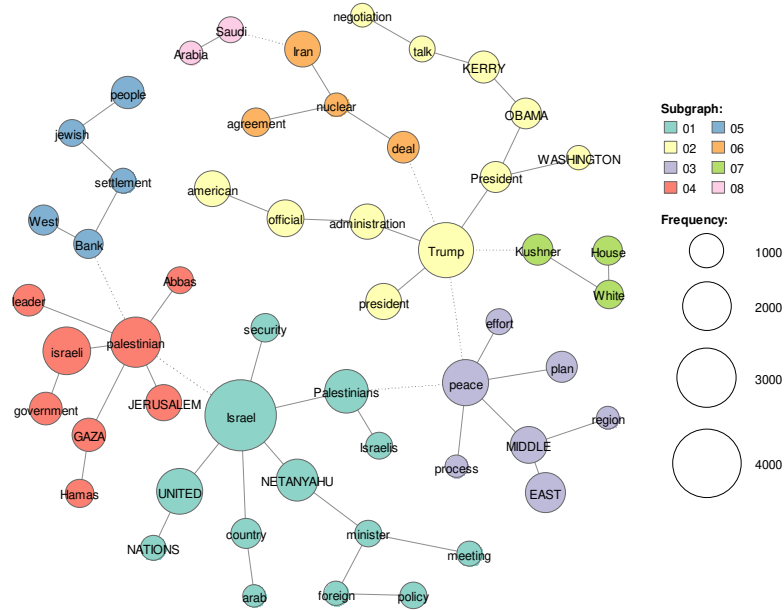
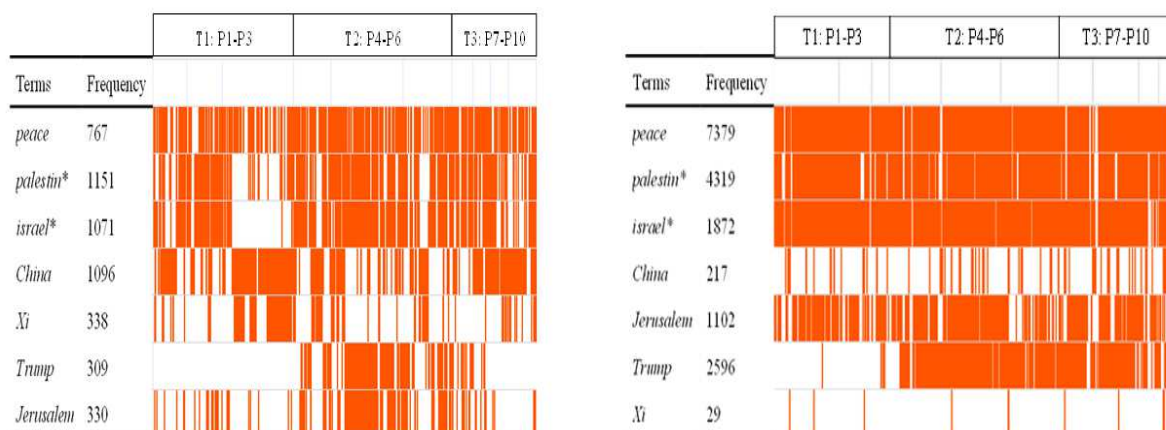


Figure 3. Co-occurrence Network of NYT

The NYT network involves 8 topics, as indicated in Figure 3. It frames Middle East coverage primarily through the lens of Israeli-Palestinian relations (Topic 01), with related emphasis on the Jerusalem capital dispute (Topic 04) and regional tensions involving *Gaza*, *Hamas*, and *settlements* (Topic 05). U.S. leadership—especially the Trump administration (Topic 02)—serves as a central node, linking *Iran’s nuclear program* (Topic 06), *Kushner’s* diplomatic role (Topic 07), and *Saudi Arabia* (Topic 08). Although peace efforts appear (Topic 03), they are peripheral compared to the dominant focus on political figures, power dynamics, and U.S.-centric diplomacy—contrasting with China Daily’s stronger emphasis on multilateralism and cooperative dialogue.

However, although static co-occurrence networks have provided an overview of the decade, it remains unknown how lemmas are diachronically distributed. Seven pivotal lemmas that connect topics in CD and NYT were chosen: *peace*, *palestin**, *israel**, *China*, *Jerusalem*, *Xi*, and *Trump*, as shown in Figure 4. Terms are analyzed in the Plot function in AntConc, which visualizes the exact distribution of lemmas in the corpora, while the blank spaces represent absence.



A: The Dispersion Plot of CD

B: The Dispersion Plot of NYT

Figure 4. The Dispersion Plots of CD and NYT

As shown in the dispersion plots, both corpora extensively reported the Middle East peace and Palestinian-Israeli relations throughout the decade since *peace*, *Jerusalem*, *israel**, and *palestin** are all distributed throughout the decade, and the latter two largely overlap across the two corpora. However, distinctive patterns emerge in the coverage of CD and NYT, reflecting their divergent ideological stances and editorial priorities. First, CD consistently foregrounds Chinese national identity, exemplified by the overlapping dispersion of “Xi” and “China”—most notably when coverage of Xi’s state visits to the Middle East coincided with a relative absence of reporting on *Palestine-Israel*, signaling a deliberate prioritization of China’s diplomatic activities. Within this framework, Xi is portrayed as a representative of the Chinese government, as evidenced by the higher frequency of “China” compared to “Xi.” Second, CD closely links president Trump to specific issues such as the *Jerusalem capital incident*, aligning his coverage with particular events during his presidency. In contrast, NYT minimizes the role of China and Xi, whose limited presence is vastly overshadowed by Trump’s prominent representation—highlighting NYT’s emphasis on U.S. figures and politics. Third, while CD’s coverage of Trump recedes after his presidency, NYT continues to feature him prominently, reinforcing his status as an influential political figure beyond his term in office. Together, these patterns illustrate how each outlet constructs narratives that align with their respective national perspectives and editorial agendas.

4.2 Micro-level collocate analysis

Collocating and contextual analysis will work in conjunction with DHA’s discursive strategies.

4.2.1 Predication Strategy

The Predication strategy of DHA focuses on qualifications imparted to entities, which can be achieved by using predicates. The current study searched the top 5 verb collocates of *peace* in two newspapers, respectively (see Table 4&5), which was achieved by the filter in KH coder’s KWIC for intended parts of speech and the Loglikelihood ratio (LLR) of collocates to measure the strength. In the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), the Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) is commonly used to measure the statistical significance of co-occurrence relationships between two words, helping to identify key terminology and semantic associations. For instance, when analyzing verb collocations of the term “peace,” LLR can assess the strength of associations between “peace” and verbs like “build,” “maintain,” or “promote.” By calculating LLR values, researchers can filter verb collocations that most effectively embody the concept of “peace”—for example, the phrase “build peace” might yield a higher LLR score than “undermine peace.”

Table 4. Verb collocates of *peace* in CD

T1: 2013.8 ~ 2016.7			T2: 2016.8 ~ 2019.7			T3: 2019.8 ~ 2023.7		
Lemma	Frequency	LLR	Lemma	Frequency	LLR	Lemma	Frequency	LLR
promote	24	132.08	promote	27	159.31	maintain	10	57.59
resume	11	93.65	achieve	14	76.64	promote	11	53.63
restore	9	58.83	push	9	44.40	achieve	8	40.23
bring	11	56.71	revive	5	43.89	stall	4	36.23
support	12	47.47	harm	5	38.51	resume	4	21.96

Table 5. Verb collocates of *peace* in NYT

T1: 2013.8 ~ 2016.7			T2: 2016.8 ~ 2019.7			T3: 2019.8 ~ 2023.7		
Lemma	Frequency	LLR	Lemma	Frequency	LLR	Lemma	Frequency	LLR
pursue	12	80.47	bring	25	136.36	achieve	14	96.32
achieve	11	56.12	forge	16	107.93	unveil	7	54.84
resume	9	51.59	achieve	13	76.79	bring	9	40.36
advance	8	50.67	lead	14	49.81	strike	12	36.94
fail	9	42.38	fail	10	43.75	call	7	35.24

As indicated in Tables 4&5, both corpora across the three periods advocated for protective actions (e.g., restore, maintain, resume, etc.) and promotional efforts (e.g., bring, promote, achieve,

etc.) toward Middle East peace, while also expressing certain concerns (e.g., harm, strike, fail, etc.). It suggests that both corpora regard the construction of Middle East peace as a recurring object of evaluation, but their discursive orientations differ in tone and implication. LLR values show that in T1, the predicates in *China Daily* are generally higher than those in NYT, indicating that China Daily expressed more determination over the issues in this period. In T2, the top five verb lemmas in NYT, except *bring*, are slightly higher than those of CD in terms of frequencies and LLR. At last, T3 displays a reversed situation of T1, during which the top five verb collocates in NYT are all stronger than those in CD. However, it is inappropriate to jump to the conclusion that *the New York Times* showed more determination of peace construction and promotion than *China Daily*. Considering the sizable gap between the two corpora, we can discover the distinctions underneath. *New York Times*, with a generally larger size of the overall corpus, only yielded a slightly higher expression of protection and moment, which instead indicated that its expression was disproportionally weaker than those in *China Daily*. This precisely reflects that while U.S. media discourse extensively covers the Middle East peace agenda, it does not demonstrate the same level of strong calls for achieving peace as Chinese media does, which aligns with the macro-level analysis that the New York Times' advocacy for peace is overly generalized and fragmented. The refutation could be illustrated to some extent by the following two examples.

Example 1: “*The first stage of U.S. President Donald Trump’s Middle East peace plan will be launched on Tuesday at a conference the White House touts as a bid to begin drumming up \$50 billion in investment but which Palestinians deride as an “economy first” approach doomed to fail.*” (*China Daily*, 2019.6.25)

Example 2: “*The crisis that engulfed the ailing Middle East peace process this week was much more about preserving the process than finding a path to peace.*” (*The New York Times*, 2019.4.28)

Example 1 shows how *China Daily* predicates peace through economic and developmental action. The verbal phrase “touts as a bid to drum up investment” frames the peace plan as a constructive, pragmatic initiative tied to regional prosperity. This reflects that *China Daily* connects “peace” to cooperation and mutual benefit, emphasizing China’s preference for growth-oriented diplomacy and institutional optimism. By contrast, *The New York Times* predicates peace with skepticism and critique (Example 2). The adjective “ailing” and the comparative structure construct

the peace process as stagnant and self-serving. This reflects that peace is depicted as a rhetorical goal overshadowed by political inertia and procedural maintenance. In brief, the predication strategy analysis reveals that both media shared similar semantic preferences of support and concerns for the course. However, the *New York Times* fails to display commensurate resolve despite its markedly greater volume of coverage.

4.2.2 Perspectivation Strategy

The Perspectivation studies the involvement of narrations, which can be reached by looking at the quotations (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). We categorized quote sources by nationality and institutional role (e.g., Chinese officials, US officials, Israeli or Palestinian actors, international organizations), aiming at revealing each media outlet's discursive preferences in sourcing—whether authority is granted to governmental actors, international bodies, or marginalized groups. Thus, the current study collected the top 10 name collocates with the highest LLR of the lemma *say*, the most frequent reporting verb with 5,356 occurrences in NYT and 1,169 in CD, as seen in Tables 6 – 7. These rankings of quote sources in the two media allow us to find frequent quote givers and explore the perspectives of each press to generalize the respective in-group and out-group (Wodak & Meyer, 2016)

Table 6. Top 10 name collocates of *say* in CD

T1: 2013.7 ~ 2016.6			T2: 2016.7 ~ 2019.6			T3: 2019.7 ~ 2023.6		
Lemma	Freq.	LLR	Lemma	Freq.	LLR	Lemma	Freq.	LLR
Xi	65	372.847	Xi	62	395.875	Zhang	21	143.802
Zhang	26	259.384	Gong	23	177.061	Sevilla	11	116.105
Wang	24	177.903	Wang	24	158.446	Wang	18	110.902
Gong	16	137.467	Trump	32	99.421	Hua	10	93.542
Liu	14	102.231	Mladenov	11	85.478	Borrell	7	59.391
Jinping	10	44.286	Geng	10	84.177	Xi	10	53.479
Yi	7	43.333	Abbas	18	78.359	Lapid	4	37.327
Bai	4	38.375	Li	10	76.876	Shu	4	37.327
Abbas	7	37.857	Netanyahu	15	71.602	Abbas	5	23.924
Eliba	4	30.77	Jinping	12	62.224	Pompeo	4	21.448

As we see in Table 6, In T1 and T2, *Xi* for Chinese President Xi Jinping is the overwhelmingly strong quote giver, pointing to his serial visits to the Middle East and his speeches. In T1, other

quote givers include Chinese diplomatic influentials (*Zhang, Wang, Gong, and Liu* for Zhang Dejiang, Wang Yi, Gong Xiaosheng, Liu Jieyi, and Liu Yangdong, respectively). Among them, *Bai* refers to Bai Lianlei, a Chinese scholar on Palestinian issues, while *Abbas* and *Eliba* refer to the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and Ahmed Eliba, a researcher at Cairo, respectively. However, the quote givers in T2 slightly change. While key Chinese officials still top (*Xi, Gong, and Wang*), *Trump* emerges as the fourth, representing his influence in the Jerusalem issue in T2(P5). The following minor lemmas are *Mladenov* (the UN envoy for Middle East peace), *Geng* and *Li* (Chinese officials), *Abbas* and *Netanyahu* (Palestinian and Israeli leader), and *Jinping*. Furthermore, the quote givers in T3 change more significantly, with the overwhelming quote source *Xi* replaced by *Zhang* for Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN. In brief, all three periods witnessed a dominant reference to Chinese political figures. Minor quote givers included scholars at home and abroad, the neutral international institutions, and Palestinian, Israeli, and American names. The dominant reference suggests that *China Daily* mainly took Chinese government as the in-group member, while scholars and international institutions were less central, which can be further illustrated by the following two quotations.

Example 3: “‘*The Palestinian issue should not fall into oblivion, and we must bring hope to the Palestinian people as early as possible,*’ Xi said.” (*China Daily*, 2016.1.22)

Example 4: “‘*Independent statehood is the inalienable national right of the Palestinian people, and it cannot be compromised or bargained away,*’ Zhang Jun said. (*China Daily*, 2020.8.27)

Example 3 exemplifies perspectivation through the projection of Chinese leadership as a moral actor. By invoking collective responsibility (“we must bring hope”), *China Daily* frames China's engagement as benevolent and principled, activating the topos of solidarity and moral duty. Moreover, perspectivation also attributes authority to China's UN representative (Example 4). The assertive tone (“cannot be compromised”) foregrounds China's alignment with international law and justice, reinforcing its image as a neutral yet principled mediator. Therefore, these two quotations demonstrate how *China Daily* attributes narrative authority primarily to Chinese government figures, such as Xi Jinping, Wang Yi, and Geng Shuang, reinforcing the paper's institutional alignment and diplomacy-oriented stance and consistent institutional alignment.

In contrast, *KERRY* for John Kerry is the dominant U.S. quote giver in T1, leaving a

considerable margin off the others, as shown in Table 7. Unexpectedly, *NETANYAHU* for Israeli Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* even exceeds *OBAMA* for Barack Obama, while *Abbas* for the Palestinian president is much less prominent, which illustrates an ostensive unbalanced reference to the Israeli side of the constant conflicts. In T2, *Trump* for Donald Trump topped, with its strength and frequency twice of those of the second lemma *Kushner* for Jared Kushner and his family. This ranking reflects that the incumbent Donald Trump exerted his diplomatic influence on the Middle East peace, while the *Kushners*, having business strength and marriage relationship with the Trumps, also received massive coverage in the press. In T3, *Trump* continues to exceed any other lemmas, indicating his essential role even in his post-presidency. *Netanyahu* ranks second, followed by names of American administrations (*Kerr, Indyk, Biden, Ross, Pompeo, Evans, and David*). To sum up,. First, Trump in T2 and T3 reflected his massive effects on the Middle East peace processes, mainly due to his pro-Israeli diplomatic position and his long-lasting significance to the geopolitical relations. Israeli identities, mainly marked by *Benjamin Netanyahu*, received coverage even greater than most of the American perspective-givers, which marked the Israeli government as a core American in-group member. In contrast, scholars and international voices were rarely sourced although *the New York Times* similarly sourced from domestic authorities extensively. Interestingly, though we identified Palestine-Israel relations as a constant topic, Palestinian perspectives were only one-third of their Israeli counterparts in T1, and were even neglected in T2 and T3, which means Palestinian voices had been understated. Such an imbalance illustrates how perspectivation functions ideologically foregrounding certain actors' voices while backgrounding others to sustain perceived alignments in global politics.

Example 5: “*I will call them from now on losers, because that’s what they are,” Mr. Trump said after the meeting with Mr. Abbas. “They’re losers. And we’ll have more of them. But they’re losers. Just remember that.*” (*The New York Times*, 2017.5.23)

Example 6: *Israel praised the United States for standing with it. In a video statement posted on Twitter moments after the vote, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, compared Ms. Haley to the Maccabees, Jewish fighters whose capture of Jerusalem in the second century B.C. is commemorated during Hanukkah.* (*The New York Times*, 2017.12.18)

Examples 5 and 6 illustrate two starkly contrasting perspectivation strategies in political

discourse. In Example 5, Trump employs a derogatory label (“losers”) and reinforces it through repetition and a pseudo-objective assertion (“that’s what they are”) to construct a binary opposition of “winners versus losers” and his disdain and rudeness toward Abbas. This approach disparages an unspecified “them” while casting him as the sole, authoritative judge of value—a tactic grounded in great-power chauvinism and adversarial rhetoric. By contrast, in Example 6, Netanyahu employs a culturally resonant historical metaphor—comparing U.S. Ambassador Haley to the Maccabees—to frame diplomatic support as a heroic continuation of Jewish resistance and sacred tradition, thereby elevating the U.S.-Israel relationship into a morally charged narrative that reinforces their alliance. Therefore, *The New York Times* does not fabricate opinions outright; rather, it strategically selects, presents, and contextualizes extreme or symbolically loaded statements by political figures. While maintaining the appearance of “objective reporting,” it effectively shapes the public’s interpretive framework for understanding international affairs.

Table 7. Top 10 name collocates of *say* in NYT

T1: 2013.7 ~ 2016.6			T2: 2016.7 ~ 2019.6			T3: 2019.7 ~ 2023.6		
Lemma	Freq.	LLR	Lemma	Freq.	LLR	Lemma	Freq.	LLR
KERRY	111	466.416	Trump	183	653.255	Trump	117	452.417
NETANYAHU	74	307.665	Kushner	78	290.483	Netanyahu	50	175.676
OBAMA	51	160.839	Kerry	41	205.17	Kerr	25	141.635
Abbas	28	102.255	NETANYAHU	54	172.648	Indyk	14	110.124
Miller	14	99.705	Tillerson	32	147.689	Biden	28	106.437
Rhodes	10	77.674	Kerr	25	137.418	Ross	11	90.087
Indyk	13	76.896	Indyk	12	92.361	Mladenov	14	89.958
Yaalon	11	64.706	MILLER	13	90.361	Pompeo	17	88.218
Benjamin	16	64.587	Makovsky	10	81.976	Evans	9	69.706
Erekat	11	60.651	DAVID	20	81.587	David	13	69.648

4.2.3 Nomination & Argumentation Strategies

Nomination deals with the linguistic reference to processes, actions and phenomena while argumentation generalizes the content-related topoi linking arguments and conclusions through the formal conditional preposition “if x is y, then something must be done” (Wodak, 2009; Žagar, 2010). Considering the pairing patterns found in the aforementioned dispersion plots, *Israeli* from *Israel** and *Palestinian* from *Palestin** are picked to form the compound adjectives *Israeli-Palestinian* and *Palestinian-Israeli* for corpus queries. Search findings in Table 8 indicate that *The New York Times* has consistently favored the term order “*Israeli-Palestinian*” across all periods, whereas *China*

Daily, while initially adopting this same narrative structure during T1 at a ratio of 17:3, achieved a relatively balanced usage between the two terms in T2 (21:19) and T3(12:7). We argue that this ordering of national identities reflects *The New York Times*’ biased emphasis on Israel, portraying it as a closer U.S. ally and thereby establishing an Israeli dominant discursive framework. In contrast, although *China Daily* initially followed the NYT -established narrative pattern, over the subsequent decade—amid China’s growing influence in Middle Eastern peace affairs—it gradually shifted toward a more neutral stance, deliberately avoiding bias and aspiring to mediate impartially between the two sides, while actively seeking to transcend the narrative logic of American media and construct a distinct Chinese discourse.

Table 8 *Israeli-Palestinian v.s. Palestinian-Israeli* frequencies in NYT and CD

	T1	T2	T3
NYT	52:3	80:3	62:3
CD	17:3	21:19	12:7

Topoi—recurrent patterns of reasoning or commonplaces in argumentation—play a crucial role in shaping how states, institutions, and media frame issues, justify policies, and persuade audiences in international relations(Wodak, 2009). we examine the topoi employed to support or oppose specific actors, actions, or policies related to Middle East peace. Here we resorted to concordance lines in Antconc and collected the noun phrases and gerunds involving the two adjectives (*Israeli-Palestinian v.s. Palestinian-Israeli*). The results were twofold: those denoting status quo (*conflict, confrontation, dispute, etc.*) and solutions (*negotiation, talk, deal, cooperation, etc.*). All instances will be carefully examined within the KWIC (Key Word In Context) function of AntConc to analyze their contextual information, specifically identifying noun phrases modified by “Israeli-Palestinian” and “Palestinian-Israeli” and determining their linguistic referents. These discourse instances will then be embedded into argumentative topoi structured as “If X is Y, then a response is required.” Since not all search results explicitly refer to the Israeli-Palestinian issue or its potential solutions, this section does not employ quantitative metrics; instead, it categorizes findings dichotomously—based solely on the presence or absence of such argumentative constructions—to trace how these topoi were deployed across different time periods.

Table 9. Topoi in diachronic distribution

Topoi	NYT			CD		
	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
Usefulness	√				√	
Uselessness		√	√		√	
Threat	√	√	√	√	√	√
Expectation	√	√	√	√	√	√
Obligation	√	√				
Manipulation			√			

As seen in Table 9, the topoi of Usefulness/Uselessness judge solutions, which can be paraphrased into “because solutions are useful/useless, something must be done.” NYT evaluated usefulness in T1 and uselessness in the other two, while CD’s discussion of the pair occurred in T2 when Donald Trump ignited the capital issues in T2. Polarization was observed in CD that it highlighted useful mechanisms proposed by China (eg., “a useful endeavor” in Example 7) and the international community but blamed the counterproductive U.S. government as uselessness. Similar self-presentation was seen in NYT (T1), in which wisdoms of the U.S. and Israeli officials (John Kerry and Tzachi Hanegbi) were praised. Tones in NYT (T2 & T3) turned critical by referring to plans of the China as “old ideas” (see Example 8) and the international community as “*failure*” or “*fragmentation and weakness*”. Therefore, these examples reveal that *China Daily* took China government and the international community as useful topoi and antagonized the U.S. in T2, while the *New York Times* regards both China and the international community as the useless topoi.

Example 7: *President Xi Jinping [...] “We offered a platform for all to make their views heard, to seek more consensus and to raise the voice for peace together. I think this is a useful endeavor, and if continued, the voice for peace will become louder and the forces for peace will grow stronger.”* (CD, 2014.01.10)

Example 8: *China dipped its toes into Middle East diplomacy in 2013 by offering a four-point plan that rehashed old ideas for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That failed to achieve a breakthrough.* (NYT, 2023.03.11)

The topoi of threat/expectation identify how much weight was given to the Israeli-

Palestinian status quo, which could be reconstructed into “because the status quo hangs in a balance or because specific progress will help, something must be done.” Both were constant argumentations in each press. Similar expressions were used to confirm the status quo as a threat, such as *the situation “beyond description”* (See Example 9), *the risk of more violence, a serious violation of international law*, etc., in CD, and *the downward spiral, seemingly intractable situations, a dire threat*, etc., in NYT. However, each newspaper focused on different facets of expectations when discussing potential plans. The CD turned from T1’s *economic growth and regional stability* to T2’s *peace and stability and sustainable security* and T3’s concerns over *refugees, fairness and justice*, and *the necessary impartiality*. Over the same period, NYT was attentive to plans for territory and refugee settlements as exhibited by T1’s *territorial compromise and settlement on the status of Jerusalem*, T2’s *helping refugees and a settlement freeze*, and T3’s *freezing of any expansion of Israeli settlements and annexation of the Palestinian territories*. As shown in Example 10, the U.S. stance in T3 on Israel’s annexation of the West Bank. Shapiro’s statement—using phrases like “could be short-lived” and “would certainly withdraw”—presupposes a scenario in which a future change in administration would reverse current policy. His wording constructs a clear causal expectation: if the U.S. government shifts to Democratic leadership, Trump-era recognition would inevitably be rescinded. This also implies that “any current celebration is fleeting,” thereby framing Trump’s actions within a critical perspective and highlighting the volatility of U.S. foreign policy. In short, while *China Daily* ascended from development and stability to broader humanity and justice, the *New York Times* was always concerned about the territory and refugee settlements.

Example 9: *UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon lamented the vast destruction in Gaza as he visited the area on Tuesday for the first time since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling the situation “beyond description” and urging a speedy reconstruction effort. (CD, 2014.10.15)*

Example 10: *As for the American support, Daniel B. Shapiro, the former ambassador to Israel under President Obama, warned that any celebration of a Trump recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank could be short-lived. “A Democratic successor to Trump would certainly withdraw U.S. recognition,” he said. (NYT, 2019.9.23)*

The topoi of obligation/manipulation were the unique argumentations highlighting the eliteness by NYT, which demonstrate the propositions that “because the situation is within someone’s

purview or because the situation is the result of someone's political manipulation, something must be done." The former one was frequently used to construct the Israeli-Palestinian relation as *the centerpiece of his (Obama's) diplomacy, his (John Kerry's) central mission, a peculiar place in the Obama administration*, etc. in T1 and *to draw Kushner's attention* (See Example 11) and *Mr. Trump's focus*, etc. in T2. However, the argumentation turned to criticize Trump in T3, when his failure of re-election ignited criticism against his decisions as political manipulations for the interests of his own. For instance, references could be found such as *a road map for their (Trump and Netanyahu) own futures than for the Middle East* (See Example 12). In other words, the topo of responsibility in T1 and T2 identified the status quo and solutions were within the purview of American and Israeli officials, while the topo of manipulation in T3 excluded Trump from the responsible in-group into the culprit of escalation (see also Example 10) .

Example 11: *But Mr. Kushner was clear about his own priorities, the report said. "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was among the most important issues to draw Kushner's attention," the delegation reported, and therefore the best way to win him over. (NYT, 2018.12.08)*

Example 12: *The Israeli-Palestinian peace plan unveiled by President Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sounds more like a road map for their own futures than for the Middle East. Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sound more like a road map for their own futures than for the Middle East. (NYT, 2020.01.28)*

4.3 Summary

Based on both macro data descriptions and micro discursive analysis, we can get the answers to research question 1 and question 2 through In-group and out-group constructions: the positive in-group and negative out-group, as shown in Table 10. Co-occurrence networks and dispersion plots reveal that *China Daily* highlights China government and Xi's active involvement, as well as the essential value of the international community (the Chinese positive Self representation) while *the New York Times* accentuates the U.S. and Israeli authorities (the U.S. positive Self representation). Discursive strategies also show that *China Daily* blamed the counterproductive U.S. government in T2 (the negative Other representation against the U.S. government) while the *New York Times* not only criticized non-American international institutions (e.g. the UN and multilateral conferences)

but also excluded Donald Trump from the in-group in T3 (2019.07-2023.06) (the U.S. negative representation). We also noticed that *New York Times* understated the presence of China government, which is reflected in the low frequencies of relevant lemmas and the absence of Chinese identities in perspectivism and argumentation strategies.

Table 10. In-group and out-group constructions

Media	In-group		Out-group
	Core in-group	Periphery in-group	
China Daily	Chinese government, Chinese officials	global scholars (T1, T3) the international community	U.S. government (T2)
New York Times	U.S. officials, Israeli officials	the international community	the international community (T2), Donald Trump (T2)

5 Discussion

Following the interwoven relations between language and ideologies, we find our findings converge with the ideological polarization at all levels of discourse structures (van Dijk, 2016). Both outlets frame themselves as impartial observers, but this “neutrality” is discursively constructed to serve strategic ends. In reality, it functions as a mode of soft power—allowing each nation to project moral authority or diplomatic responsibility without overt intervention. These ideological positions frequently manifest through what van Dijk (1998) and Wodak & Meyer (2016) term “the ideological square”: the discursive strategy of positively representing the self (also in-group) while negatively representing the other(also out-group). Based on the four discursive moves, the ideological square over Middle East Peace Coverage in the two media, as illustrated in Figure 5. Multiple layers of asymmetry are discussed as follow.

Emphasis on Positive In-group ● Attentive U.S. and Israeli officials ● Potential international aids (T1) De-emphasis on Negative In-group ● Absences of negative U.S. identity other than Donald Trump		Emphasis on Negative Out-group ● A selfish Donald Trump (T3) ● Useless international mechanisms (T2, T3) De-emphasis on Positive Out-group ● Absence of any specific non-American or Israeli positive identity (including China)	
<i>China Daily</i>		Emphasis on Positive In-group ● Attentive U.S. officials ● Attentive Israeli officials ● Potential international aids (T1) De-emphasis on Negative In-group ● Absences of any negative Chinese identity	
		Emphasis on Negative Out-group ● A counterproductive U.S. on Palestinian-Israeli issues (T2) De-emphasis on Positive Out-group ● Absence of any positive U.S. identity	
		<i>New York Times</i>	

Figure 5. The ideological square over Middle East Peace Coverage in the two media

The first asymmetry is observed that *China Daily* openly blamed the impotent U.S. government in T2 (2016.07 -2019.06) while the U.S. media didn't directly fight back. It is likely that the U.S. needn't necessarily have regarded China as a threat to their vested interest in the Middle East since China is not strong enough to compete. The truth is that U.S. is an establishment nested in the Middle East while China intends to expand its influence through the Middle East issues such as the Belt and Road Initiatives since 2013 and its peace mediations over Israeli-Palestinian tensions (Chaziza, 2018; He & Li, 2020). But given the marginalized Chinese identity in the American press, it is likely to conclude that China's voice and influence regarding Middle East peace are still too limited to be considered significant (Niblock, 2020).

The second asymmetry was observed that *China Daily* evaluated institutional practices over the issues while the *New York Times* preferred to make comments or value judgements on individual leaders. While *China Daily* attributed faults to the U.S. government, a collective condemnation against the institution, the *New York Times* singled out individuals such as Trump and Obama, placing merits or demerits on specific figures rather than systemic factors. Moreover, the dispersion plots reveal that Trump's leaving office overlapped with his absence in the CD corpus (2019.07-2023.06), implying that his failure in re-election resulted in *China Daily*'s delegitimation against him since he could no longer represent the national interests. However, his lemma remained active in the American press in his post-presidency. In contrast, Xi has been constructed as the representative of the Chinese government in *China Daily*. Thus, this asymmetry may point to *China Daily*'s institutionalism versus the *New York Times*' individual-centralism.

The third asymmetry is observed that *China Daily* was taking advantage of neutral discourses whereas the American press ostensibly backed Israel when reporting Palestine and Israel. It can be interpreted that *China Daily* expects to project objectivity considering China's evolving global role and its attempts to present itself as a neutral observer in international conflicts, an attempt to jump out of the existing biased narration shaped by the pro-Israeli U.S. government (Semenov & Tsvyk, 2021). The perceived backing of Israel by the American press stems from the historical alliances, shared values, and vested interests between the U.S. and Israel (Hoh, 2019; Xu & Sun, 2019), marking the U.S. establishment in the Middle East. Additionally, how diplomatic policies, public opinion, and cultural ties might influence the Israel-Palestine conflict is yet unknown, which

prompts further research into the case.

The final asymmetry observed lies in how events related to Middle East peace were accorded varying degrees of significance across different news outlets. Crucially, it is this very asymmetry that reveals Xi's state visits to Middle Eastern countries and Trump's interference in Jerusalem as potential triggering events—ones that shape the evolution of the peace-related news discourse in response to shifting geopolitical contexts. As mentioned in the Methodology, three key events coincide with spikes and plunges in the Token Trends: 1) Xi's state visits to three countries in the Middle East between 2015 and 2016; 2) Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital at the end of 2017; 3) Trump's unsuccessful attempt for re-election in 2020. The first event signifies China-dominated high-profile diplomatic engagements, which reflects China's determination to extend its geopolitical influence in regional affairs (Reeves, 2018). Conversely, the coverage over Trump's re-election aligns with the individual accentuations typical of *the New York Times*. Given that each event was accentuated by one of the parties only, the other media outlets tended to downplay the events, leading to the spike-plunge pairs at P3(2015.07-2016.06) and P8(2020.07-2021.06), contributing to this asymmetry. Notably, the event related to Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital attracted attention from both media, which is attributed to the event's destructive influence as Trump and the American government intensified the conflict (Altamimi, 2019). The controversial move garnered criticisms from both presses and resulted in a redistribution of the Self membership in the U.S. press.

Taken together, these asymmetric constructions have implications for public perception worldwide. Firstly, the Chinese audience tend to view issues through an institutional lens, attributing the Middle East peace crisis to the U.S. government only, whereas the U.S. audience influenced by the media may perceive issues as more personalized and less systematic. Secondly, considering *China Daily's* open blame and the *New York Times's* neglect, China still struggles to challenge the influencing power of the U.S. in the region since the two countries have distinct interests and capabilities in the Middle East (Xu & Sun, 2019). However, it is still possible for both sides to establish complementary partnerships to address the security challenges and conflicts, especially the Israeli-Palestine ones, because the greatest common interest of China and the United States in the Middle East is to maintain stability and development in the region. In a word, the existing

discursive asymmetries may stay in our way, which should be addressed by two countries' media wisely to reach this end.

6 Conclusion

The current study investigated the news discourses over the Middle East peace between July 2013 and June 2023 from *China Daily* and *New York Times* through corpus queries and the discourse-historical approach. The overall themes and four discursive strategies reveal the diachronic changes in the in-group and out-group constructions of each media as well as the asymmetric ideologies between the two media, pointing to potential conflicts between China and the U.S. over the Middle East peace process. *China Daily* underscores multilateral solutions, institutional dialogue, and cooperation at the state level, thereby portraying China as a neutral mediator. In contrast, *The New York Times* foregrounds themes of leadership, accountability, and moral legitimacy, aligning its reporting with the priorities of U.S. foreign policy. Based on the framework of the ideological square and its asymmetry analysis, the study helps to illuminate how the performance of neutrality of media in global conflict reporting functions not as detachment, but as a sophisticated form of discursive statecraft.

Our synergy of quantitative and qualitative approaches has visited massive linguistic data through the critical discourse lens. However, certain limitations persist within the mixed-methods framework. Although the discourse analysis meshes well with objective quantification, the nomination and argumentation strategies are mainly qualitative because noun collocates don't necessarily refer to the referential functions. New comprehensive approaches are expected to involve more data-driven descriptions. Looking ahead, political and news discourse analysis is poised to leverage large language models in conjunction with narrative structures and frame semantics, enabling the automated identification and dynamic tracking of actors, narrative patterns, and ideological positioning (Kaur & Arora, 2025).

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