Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the implementation of the “Reform and Opening-Up” policy in 1978, China has undergone market-oriented reforms and opened its economy to foreign investment. The process of economic development accelerated after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Benefiting from cheap natural resources and low labor cost, China has earned a reputation as the global hub for manufacturing and has emerged as the leading exporter of goods (Pan, 2016). However, the rapid development of the manufacturing industry has led to problems such as the increasing resource consumption, an aging population, and product quality issues. To address these concerns, the central government developed the Made in China 2025 plan (MIC 2025). Prime Minister Li Keqiang proposed the concept in an executive meeting of the State Council on March 25, 2015. MIC 2025 aims to upgrade ten priority sectors, including information and communication technology, robotics, aerospace, and new energy vehicles (Lin, 2020). The goal of this plan is to transform China’s manufacturing industry from “Made in China” to “Created in China” (State Council, 2015). “Made in China” conventionally denotes goods that have undergone the manufacturing or assembly process in China, with no requirement for the origination of design or conceptualization to be domestically rooted, while “Created in China” is limited to products and innovations whose inception, design, and development have emanated from within China. The Chinese government has exhibited a commitment to fostering innovation and cultivating indigenous technological advancements, thereby bolstering domestic industries and renovating the image of Chinese products. In other
words, the plan aims to achieve a leap in supply chain upgrading, and lift China out of the middle-income trap to become a high-income country (Malkin, 2020).

Su et al. (2013) have documented reactions around the world in response to the development of MIC, ranging from praise and admiration for China’s emergence as a “world workshop”, “world industrial center”, and “new economic superpower” to concerns and resentment, referring to China as a “commercial invader”, “environment destroyer”, and “job stealer”. The development of MIC has been a key factor in China’s economic rise (Su et al., 2013), but it has also created challenges and tensions internationally especially with the United States. China has been one of the top US trade partners since their establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979. However, their trade relationship has deteriorated with time. First, the US trade deficit with China became larger, increasing from $1.7 billion in 1986 up to $418 billion in 2018 (US Census Bureau, 2022). The large volume of US imports from China resulted from many US companies’ outsourcing their production to China, attracted by the low-cost manufacturing there, and from the huge consumer demand for cheap and good-quality Chinese products. Second, the US accused China of unfair trade practices, for example, China’s government subsidies, forced transfer of high technologies of US companies, theft of intellectual property and business secrets, and deliberate manipulation of the Chinese currency (yuan) (Chen & Wang, 2020; Swenson & Woo, 2019). To punish China regarding the above trade practices, the US implemented some measures. These included blacklisting several Chinese companies to restrict their access to American technology and business, imposing tariffs on a range of Chinese goods to level the playing field, and negotiating trade agreements with China to rebalance the market shares of US companies. Third, the US was concerned with the challenge of maintaining dominance over the global value chains (GVCs), that is, production processes that embody value added (e.g., labor services) from at least two countries (Antràs, 2020). The popularity of MIC in the international markets (Su et al., 2013) and the implementation of MIC 2025 that aims to develop high-tech sectors (Malkin, 2020) led to the US concern. More recently, in mid-2018, the aggravated power confrontation between the two countries developed into a veritable trade war.

This dissertation investigates the news discourse on MIC in China and the US between 2006 and 2018. The motivation is twofold. First, studying MIC is useful to better understand the trade relations and power dynamics between the two countries. MIC plays a significant role in the global economy, particularly in US imports and employment. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979, the US-China trade relationship has been marked by both cooperation and conflict. On one hand, China has contributed to US consumers’ access to
affordable products and supported US jobs. On the other hand, tensions have arisen due to the steep increase in US imports from China since China’s accession to the WTO in 2001, which rose from $102 billion in 2001 to $536 billion in 2022 (US Census Bureau, 2022). Moreover, there is a risk to the US of losing its global advantage in high-technology products. Second, the representation of MIC can reveal the journalists’ discursive manipulation and its potential influence on the society. In a particular society, the prevailing ideology arises through the process of naturalization, whereby the dominant class’s or group’s practices are perceived as universal or commonsensical (Fairclough, 2015). According to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure. In this view, representations in media discourse are constrained by dominant ideologies and power relations in a given society while at the same time playing a role in maintaining or transforming them (Chen & Wang, 2020). The representation of MIC in media discourse can shed light on how China is perceived and positioned in the global economy, which in turn may have implications for China’s domestic and foreign policies. To those ends, I have examined the Chinese English-language newspapers and the major US newspapers. Two of the most important newspapers analyzed in this dissertation are China Daily (CD) and The New York Times (NYT). CD is a highly regarded English-language newspaper in China, providing an important source of information on China’s political, economic, cultural, and social development to the global community (Zhang & Wu, 2017). Meanwhile, the NYT is widely known as “the paper of record” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 299) that influences other mass media and society. The prestige newspapers can set political agendas and lead public debates (Krippendorff, 2004). Operating in different societies and being supported by different ideologies, the newspapers can present us the interesting findings of the news discourse on MIC, which may influence public perceptions of Chinese products. The selection of the period from 2006 to 2018 was underpinned by the compelling statistical data of China’s gross domestic product (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2022) and the increasingly widening disparity in the US-China trade balance. The gap culminates at approximately $418 billion in 2018, and subsequently diminishes and remains below $383 billion in the following years (US Census Bureau, 2022).

1.1 Media discourse

Media discourse is an essential part of modern communication and plays a vital role in constructing social reality and shaping public opinions. According to Shoemaker and Reese
media discourse involves a powerful process, which interprets the events from the interests of and under the control of certain groups. They can decide what and how information will be presented to the public. By employing various linguistic devices, such as word choice and metaphors, the media practitioners can create emotional impact and promote particular values and ideologies. For example, in a corpus-based CDA on the representation of R.A.S.I.M. (i.e., Refugees/Asylum Seekers/Immigrants/Migrants) in the UK newspapers (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), the term “illegal immigrants” was repeatedly used to refer to the people who have entered a country without permission. It reinforces the negative stereotype and perpetuates the discrimination and marginalization of this group. Metaphor is a powerful device in media discourse that shapes and conveys complex ideas, attitudes, and ideologies. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, metaphor is not merely a linguistic expression but a fundamental cognitive tool, influencing how people think and perceive the world. In media discourse, metaphors are strategically employed to make unfamiliar concepts more accessible and relatable to the public. Semino (2021) explores the use of fire-related metaphors in the news coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic, which not only simplifies the narrative but also invokes a sense of emergency. Compared to war-related metaphors that are frequently used in communication about difficulties ranging from cancer to climate change, fire-related metaphors are particularly effective in conveying the nature and challenges of the pandemic, and do not have counterproductive framing effects as war-related metaphors do. Fire metaphors are used for multiple purposes, such as convey danger and urgency, distinguish between different phases of the pandemic, explain measures for reducing contagion, etc. Regarding the metaphors in this dissertation, there are many uses related to the events of Mattel toy recalls and trade conflict, such as battle, hand over, hurt, pinch, war, and so forth.

Media show diverse coverage, and one significant factor is ideological disparities. Chinese media are regarded as the mouthpiece of the party and the government, with the news selection process managed by Chinese state agencies through either ownership or regulation (e.g., Zeng et al., 2014). Forty years of marketization have ushered Chinese media away from absolute state domination, but they still fulfill political tasks (Liu & Yao, 2015). Accordingly, Chinese journalists view themselves as civil servants that help maintain a harmonious society. The Western media, especially the US media, reflect the values of capitalism and anticommunism, tending to focus more on conflicts and crises in developing countries and otherize non-Western countries in a negative way. Wang (1992, p. 206) states that political ideology is “a very strong indicator and factor in determining the overall ‘direction’ of foreign news coverage”. China is characterized by an authoritarian domestic system and an aggressive foreign policy (Stone &
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Xiao, 2007). Some analysts in the US have viewed China as a major threat since the demise of the Soviet Union due to its rapid economic growth, military modernization, and territorial claims in the South China Sea. Regarding the portrayal of MIC, the advances received far less attention than the drawbacks. Since joining the WTO in 2001, China has conformed its industries to the international standards and has become the largest exporter of goods in the world. However, the issue of product quality is a common topic, and MIC products are often represented as cheap, poor-quality, and plagiarized (Obeng, 2019). During the time of recalls or safety problems concerning Chinese products, the representation of MIC often has more to do with politics than objectivity (Li & Tang, 2009). For instance, the 2007 Mattel toy recalls gave rise to many US news articles blaming Chinese manufacturers for the lead problem, while Babuji and Beamish (2007) later proved that 76.4% of the toy recalls in the US from 1988 to 2007 were caused by product design.

1.2 Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of problem-oriented discourse analytical research that aims to comprehend how language is utilized to influence social interactions and power relations and how it either reproduces or challenges the current social structures (Baker et al., 2013). It examines language in different contexts, for example, media, politics, health, and education. CDA is useful for exploring media representations of social issues, given the media’s powerful influence on public perceptions and beliefs. Regarding the media representation of MIC, Obadia (2009) argued that though MIC had achieved advances, they were almost neutralized by a series of Chinese product accidents in 2007, which raised public health concerns worldwide. This spawned a proliferation of platforms dedicated to denouncing the involved products and attributing blame to China as a whole, rather than accusing particular Chinese business industries. The totalizing stereotype of “harmfulness” or “toxicity” of the involved products was linked to the country of origin, amalgamating various aspects such as trade and culture into nebulous portrayals of the label “Made in China” and China. This is in contrast to the descriptions of substandard goods of other origins, where news coverage emphasized specific brand names. The negative portrayal of MIC contributed to an “ideological battleground” in economics and politics, leading to stricter controls on importing Chinese goods and exporting key parts to Chinese manufacturers. The intertwined power relations and underlying ideologies behind the representation completely fit the scope of CDA that is “not
interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach” (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). CDA draws on theories from linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines to explore the relationship of discourse, ideology, and power. Wodak and Meyer (2015) listed common approaches to CDA - Corpus-Linguistics Approach (Gerlinde Mautner), Discourse-Historical Approach (Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl), Dialectical-Relational Approach (Norman Fairclough), Dispositive Analysis (Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier), Social Actors Approach (Theo van Leeuwen), and Sociocognitive Approach (Teun van Dijk). In this dissertation, I mainly use the first two of these approaches to unveil the detailed linguistic operationalization and the essential socio-political contexts of the representation of MIC.

Corpus Linguistics (CL) is a methodology that involves the systematic analysis of large-scale language data in order to identify patterns and trends within a specific set of discourses (Baker, 2006). It has gained popularity as a method of analysis in CDA since Mautner (1995) proposed to make use of corpus techniques to explore how language features contribute to the construction of social meanings and power relations. Wordlists and collocation analysis are two essential methods in CL that provide valuable insights into language use. According to McEnery and Hardie (2012), a wordlist is a list of all the words in a corpus, with their frequency of occurrences. It provides a quantitative overview of the vocabulary used by the speakers or writers and recognizes the most frequent words in the discourse. We can have a general understanding of the salience of words in the corpus, and identify the topics in the discourse. Collocation analysis identifies the words that co-occur most frequently in the corpus, and reveals the semantic preferences and prosodies centering around the target word. It is useful for identifying the language patterns and the corresponding discursive practices that are employed by the speakers or writers. Both wordlists and collocations are powerful tools to reveal important features of language use for further analysis and to deepen our understanding of the underlying powers and ideologies.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) emphasizes the importance of historical and social contexts in shaping language use and interpretation. It is three-dimensional: (1) identify the topics of a specific discourse, (2) investigate discursive strategies, and (3) examine linguistic means and realizations (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Framing is an important discursive strategy in DHA that refers to the use of language to construct a particular interpretation or understanding of an issue or event. Entman (1993, p.52) defined framing as the “selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and the exclusion of others in order to promote a particular
problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”. It highlights the ways that events are packaged and presented to the audience. Newspapers usually take an active role in setting the frames of references for the audience, by emphasizing particular elements of an event while disregarding others. In doing so, the newspapers filter the reality of the event and the audience can only view whatever the media choose for them (Tuchman 1978). There are several studies that follow Entman’s definition and explore the frames in the news discourse on the US-China trade conflict, biotechnology, and a car accident in China in 2003 (e.g., Chen & Wang, 2020; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Zhou & Moy, 2007). For example, the study of Chen and Wang (2020) examines the coverage of the trade dispute between the US and China in two prestigious newspapers, *The New York Times* (NYT) and *China Daily* (CD), in the years of 2018 and 2019. Using a corpus-based CDA approach, the authors identified four frames based on Entman’s classification by categorizing the top keywords. The comparison demonstrates that NYT tended to frame the dispute as a “war”, influenced by the hard-line ideology that China was a threat to the US national security, while CD profiled this issue as a “friction” and sought to downplay the situation, which was guided by China’s tenet of “pragmatic nationalism”.

In this dissertation, CL and DHA are adopted to explore what contents the newspapers, the power institutions, report on MIC between 2006 and 2018 and what underlying ideologies can be gleaned from the linguistic devices they use.

### 1.3 Outline of chapters

The research comprised four studies that will be reported in Chapters 2 through 5 of this dissertation. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the research background of the development of MIC in the past decades, covering the crucial events of China’s economic reform in 1978, the accession to the WTO in 2001, the presidential transition in China and the US in 2010s, and the intensification of their trade relations around 2018. These chapters use a corpus-based CDA approach to examine the representation of MIC between 2006 and 2018 in Chinese and US newspapers, respectively. Chapter 4 compares the representation of MIC in Chinese and US newspapers and identifies the conflicting ideologies based on language use and socio-political contexts. The news articles were significantly influenced by the product scandals that occurred around 2007 and the US-China trade disputes in 2018. Chapter 5 specifically looks into the
representation in the event of the 2007 Mattel toy recalls, which provides a qualitative analysis based on the quantitative findings in the previous chapters by using framing theory and CDA.

Though the label “Made in China” is prevalent worldwide, little research has been dedicated to this label and to the products and the trade hidden behind it from a linguistic perspective, let alone a corpus-based analysis on large-scale data. **Chapters 2 and 3** describe how data was collected from Chinese and US newspapers using a combination of the database LexisNexis and manual collection from the newspapers’ websites. The self-built corpora were then divided into sub-corpora based on when important Chinese policies were released. Adhering to the three-dimensional DHA methodological framework, the chapters give detailed elaborations of the representation in the two corpora respectively by integrating the corpus methods of wordlist, collocate, and concordance - the common topics and semantic prosodies related to MIC, the discursive strategies, and the involved linguistic means.

Since media discourse is not a reflection of reality but a product affected by various factors, the comparison across different countries is valuable as the similarities and differences in language use and the underlying ideologies will be revealed. **Chapter 4** therefore uses CDA and CL to relate the quantitative findings to the cultural and ideological differences between Chinese and US media. The chapter presents a detailed comparison of the topics and semantic prosodies related to MIC and their changes over time. The discussion of the differences between the Chinese and US newspaper articles focuses on Chinese product scandals around 2007 and the conflicting semantic prosodies regarding the trade dispute around 2018, where the diverse hidden ideologies in the newspapers are most clearly revealed.

Media is a crucial resource in times of crisis for people to get information and make judgments. MIC was associated with affordable price and good quality, whereas the series of product scandals around 2007 crushed the trust of US consumers in MIC (Han & Wang, 2012). **Chapter 5** focuses on the 2007 Mattel toy recalls, a representative event that influenced the corresponding news articles. The toys were initially recalled due to Chinese manufacturers’ excessive use of lead paint (about 2 million toys), and then due to Mattel’s design flaw of loose and small magnets (about 18 million toys). The rapidly changing situation within three months and the different social actors involved in this process led to complex and diverse portrayals of MIC in the Chinese and US newspapers. This chapter introduces the context of the toy recalls, presents the theoretical background, that is the features of framing theory, the use of framing in crisis, and ideology as the link between framing and CDA, and then performs a qualitative analysis on eight articles from mainstream Chinese and US newspapers using framing theory and CDA.
The dissertation ends with a general discussion (in **Chapter 6**) of the main findings of the corpus-based CDA on the topics and semantic prosodies related to MIC and the portrayal of MIC in the frames of the Mattel toy recalls, followed by contributions to the literature on MIC. Finally, some avenues for further research are recommended.