

10.18686/frim.v2i4.4327

# Research on the Construction of China's Image from the Perspective of Transitivity

## -- A Case Study of the Hangzhou Asian Games Coverage in *Global Times*

Yunshu Liao, Haoping Yue<sup>\*(Corresponding author)</sup>

Hunan Agricultural University of Foreign Languages and Literature, Hunan 410125, China

**Abstract:** From the perspective of transitivity, this paper explores the latest editorial “*Hangzhou hard to say goodbye; it's a new starting point: Global Times editorial*” published by the English version of China's mainstream media *Global Times* after the Hangzhou Asian Games. With the assistance of the corpus annotation tool UAM Corpus Tool 6.2, we counted the distribution of transitivity processes and participants in the corpus, and the results show that material, relational and mental processes appear more frequently, which helps to construct the image of China as a green, technologically advanced, civilized, open and inclusive country, and demonstrates China's maturity and self-confidence in hosting international events.

**Keywords:** Transitivity; China's image; Hangzhou Asian Games

### 1. Introduction

National image, a pivotal component of a nation's soft power, has garnered significant scholarly attention since its inception. The 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games marks China's third hosting of Asia's premier international multi-sport event, following the 1990 Beijing Asian Games and the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, serving as a vital showcase for China's image to the global stage. Consequently, this research endeavors to delve into the latest editorial titled “*It is hard to say goodbye to Hangzhou; this is a new starting point: Global Times editorial*” (hereinafter referred to as “*Hard to Say Goodbye to Hangzhou*”) published by the English edition of China's prominent media *Global Times*, subsequent to the end of the Games. This editorial, which serves as the inaugural report in the English version of the *Global Times* post-Games, encapsulates the latest updates and a comprehensive recap of the event, functioning both as a report on a major international occurrence and an exhibition of China's sporting prowess and international persona. Thus, a meticulous analysis and citation of this article will facilitate an exploration of China's national image, as framed within the report, through the lens of transitivity.

### 2. Transitivity

The systemic-functional school believes that language carries out various functions, and Halliday (1977) divides the metafunctions of language into three main categories: conceptual, interpersonal, and discourse functions. Conceptual function refers to language's representation of external experience and internal cognition. The system of transitivity is an important part of the conceptual function and can reflect the speaker's world of experience. In traditional grammar, the object of study of the transitive system is limited to the verb level, while Halliday extends the scope of the transitive system to the clause level, i.e., it covers the processes, the participants of the processes, and the relevant environmental components<sup>[1]</sup>. The transitive system consists of six transitive processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Physical process is the process of “doing” something or “happening” something, including the actors and targets; mental process is the process of “feeling” and “cognition” and other mental activities, mainly including the perceiver and the phenomenon being perceived<sup>[2]</sup>; relational process reflects the logical relationship between two things, which is categorized into attribution and identification by Halliday. Attributive relational processes are concerned with carriers and attributes, while identificatory relational processes are about markers and values. Verbal process is the process of transmitting and communicating information through speech, which contains the speaker, the addressee and the content of the speech; existential process is the process of describing the existence of a person or an object, and the participant is the existential object; behavioral process mainly refers to the process of human physiological behaviors, such as crying, laughing, etc., and generally there is only one participant in the actor.

The above transitive processes basically include the activities and events in the objective world, and can reproduce people's cognition and experience of the subjective and objective world. Different transitive processes and their frequency of use in discourse can reflect the motivation of language users, reflecting ideology and values through the behavior or state of specific participants, and thus constructing their

identity and image.

### 3. Analysis of the Transitive processes and the Constructed Image of China in the Report “*Hard to Say Goodbye to Hangzhou*”

In this study, with the help of UAM Corpus Tool 6.2, we labeled and counted the descriptive objects of the clauses and the types of transitive processes in the selected corpus, then manually labeled the descriptive objects of the clauses, and used the software to count the number and percentage of clauses with different descriptive objects. Then, according to the types of clause processes in the transitivity system, we labeled the material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes, and finally counted the total number of clauses in each type of process. The results show that material process, relational process and mental process occur frequently, with 60, 14 and 10 times respectively, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of process types of clauses in “Hard to say Goodbye to Hangzhou”**

Process type	Material process	Relational process	Mental process	Verbal process	Behavior process	Existence process	Total
Frequency	60	14	10	1	0	6	91
Proportion	66%	15%	11%	1%	0%	6%	100%

Therefore, the following will be combined with specific examples in the discourse to discuss the material process, relationship process, psychological process and the role of the construction of China’s national image.

#### 3.1 The Image of China Constructed by Material Processes

In common parlance, the material process is the process of “doing”, the reproduction of external experience, and the completion of something. The material process is generally composed of an action verb, an actor, and a goal. The following is a typical material process clause from the report “Hard to say goodbye to Hangzhou”:

**Example 1:** In recent years, with changes in the international landscape, geopolitics has inevitably permeated various fields, creating conflicts and confrontations where they shouldn’t exist, including in international sports events. The Hangzhou Asian Games has successfully resisted this negative influence, allowing the games to return to their essence.

There are four material processes in Example 1, two of which have geopolitics as their actor and the other two have the Hangzhou Asian Games as their actor. In recent years, with the changes in the international landscape, geopolitics has inevitably penetrated into various fields, creating conflicts and confrontations in areas where they should not exist, including in international sports events. The verbs “permeate” and “create” used in describing geopolitics therefore have a negative or neutral meaning, suggesting that international sporting events are no longer just about sport and competition, but are influenced by wider geopolitical factors, leading to the emergence of a new type of competition in the event. It is also influenced by wider geopolitical factors, leading to undue tensions and conflicts at the event. When describing the action as the Hangzhou Asian Games, the verbs used mostly contain positive or neutral meanings, describing the behavior of the Hangzhou Asian Games in resisting geopolitics and other negative influences that undermined the fairness and justice of the sports events, and in promoting the return of the sports events to their essence. The use of “resist” in the report shows China’s determination and ability to resist external influences, demonstrating China’s autonomy and firmness. The words “allow” and “return” emphasize China’s adherence to and promotion of the key principles and core values of sports events. It expresses China’s unwillingness to be influenced by external factors and its focus on the development and promotion of sports itself.

The use of these positive or neutral verbs reflects China’s values of upholding fairness and justice in the international arena, its commitment to promoting international friendship and cooperation, and its construction of an image of an autonomous and resolute, united and positive great power.

#### 3.2 China’s Image Constructed by Relational Process

National image is a subjective reflection of an entity, based on the subjective judgment and evaluation of the outside world<sup>[3]</sup>, while the relational process is the most direct way of assessment and judgment in the system of objects, which can explain the properties and characteristics of things<sup>[4]</sup>, therefore, a specific national image can be constructed through the relational process. The relational process expresses the relationship of “is”, that is, the relationship between objects, people, situations or events with some kind of connection, or refers to the attributes, characteristics or state of a certain thing, etc., which can be roughly divided into the attributive type that describes the attributes of a thing, and the identifying type that qualifies a thing.

**Example 2:** This year’s Asian Games has attracted participation from 45 countries and regions. Each country has its own unique national conditions and different systems and cultures. Some are among the wealthiest countries in the world and some are still struggling with political instability. However, on the Asian Games stage, regardless of which country or region they represent, athletes share the same starting line

and move toward the same goal.

The passage in Example 2 contains three attributive relational processes. The carrier is each country participating in the Hangzhou Asian Games, and the attributes are embodied by the word “are”, which describes that each country has its own unique national conditions and different systems and cultures. On the stage of the Asian Games, no matter which country or region they represent, the athletes are all standing on the same starting line, moving towards the same goal. The links and interactions between countries were demonstrated, which demonstrated that China, as the host country, actively advocated the spirit of unity and cooperation among athletes from different countries to compete together. It builds out China’s national image of promoting peace and cooperation and emphasizes the importance of pursuing goals together on the international stage.

### 3.3 The Image of China Constructed by Mental Processes

Mental processes can be divided into three subcategories: emotion, perception and cognition. Emotion is the experience of human attitudes towards objective things and the manifestation of desires; perception is the cognition of the external world by human beings through their own senses, which involves vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, etc. The cognitive process describes human beings’ cognition of the world through mental activities such as forming concepts, perception, judgment, or imagination<sup>[5]</sup>. The mental processes in this report can reflect people’s attitudes and perceptions of Hangzhou to China, which in turn shows China’s national image.

**Example 3:** For the Chinese people, “out of Asia, into the world” was once the nation’s aspiration for the Asian Games. Every time a gold medal is won, it ignites an unparalleled sense of national pride among hundreds of millions of Chinese people. However, as various major sports events have been held in China in recent years, despite it still cheers for winning gold medals, Chinese society no longer sees it as the sole proof of the county’s strength. Instead, it places greater emphasis on the spiritual essence of sports. This represents a significant psychological shift and demonstrates the collective maturity and confidence of Chinese society, behind which is the growth of China transitioning from being a major sporting nation to a leading sporting nation.

The first half of Example 3 contains 2 emotion-based mental processes, highlighting the national pride that Chinese people feel every time they win a gold medal, showing the nation’s strong identification with and support for the country. At the same time, it describes that China is changing from a sports power that emphasizes the number of gold medals to a sports power that pays more attention to sportsmanship, showing the nation’s self-confidence and pride in the field of sports. The second half of the paragraph contains two cognitive mental processes, the Chinese are the perceiver and the perceived object is the spiritual essence of sports. The Chinese people’s aspiration for the Asian Games to “go out of Asia to the world” shows China’s global awareness and pursuit as a modernized country. This shows that China is not only concerned about domestic affairs, but also actively participates in and pays attention to international affairs, demonstrating the openness and internationalization of the country. It builds a modern, confident and mature national image of China, demonstrates China’s progress in sports and the change of national mentality, and at the same time highlights the country’s leadership position and potential for future development.

## 4. Conclusion

It is found that in the distribution of the material processes in the study corpus of an English editorial about the Hangzhou Asian Games in China’s mainstream media Global Times, the material process accounts for the highest proportion, mainly presenting China’s efforts as the host country of the Asian Games to provide high-quality services for the event and to organize the event efficiently. This is followed by the relational and psychological processes, with the relational process mainly presenting the friendly interactions and exchanges between China and other countries participating in the Hangzhou Asian Games. The psychological process emphasizes the importance of sportsmanship in the Asian Games, reflecting the unity and friendship among the athletes, as well as the cooperation and understanding among Asian countries. At the same time, the success of the sports events also demonstrated the organizing ability and service level of the Chinese government and society for international events, and constructed an image of China that is green and thrifty, technologically advanced, peaceful and tolerant, a strong sports nation, and civilized and orderly.

## References

- [1] HALLIDAY, M.A.K. An induction to functional Grammar (2nd ed.) [M]. London: Arnold, 1994.
- [2] HALLIDAY, M.A.K., MATTHIESSEN, et al. An introduction to functional grammar (3rd ed.) [M]. London: Arnold, 2004.
- [3] JERVIS, R. The logic of image in international relations [M]. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- [4] FOWLER R, HODGE, et al. Language and Control [M]. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
- [5] He Wei, Zhang Ruijie, Light Xiaohong, et al. Functional Santics in Chinese [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2017.