

Changes in African Mainstream Media's Perception of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This paper applies the corpus-based critical discourse analysis to an investigation into diachronic changes in African mainstream media's perception of China's "Belt and Road" initiative. It built a corpus of Belt-and-Road-Initiative-related reports in African mainstream media *AllAfrica* from September 2013 to December 2020, and divided the corpus into three sub-corpora. Then, it made a critical analysis of the media discourses from the perspectives of key words, collocation and concordance lines. The analysis reveals that a bulk of explicit positive discourses indicating appreciation, recognition and active participation have been constructed in the reports of three stages, presenting that "Belt and Road" initiative promotes China-Africa and global economic development, but it also suggests a change of stance from full approval to implicit query and explicit criticism. Through the analysis from discursive and social practice, it is found that the reasons for the overall perception and diachronic changes are the long history and challenges of China-Africa cooperation as well as the influence of western media.

Keywords

Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis, Belt and Road, African Mainstream Media

1. Introduction

In September and October of 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping proposed the initiative of building the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" while visiting Kazakhstan and Indonesia, which marked the beginning of "Belt and Road" Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to promote the economic and infrastructural development in the countries along the Belt and

Road. Since its inception, more and more countries participated in the initiative. And Africa became the foothold for the construction of “Belt and Road” Initiative. Up to December 2019, African countries take 30% of those countries that have joined “Belt and Road” initiative which is expected to substantially improve African connectivity and provides a great platform to cement China-Africa cooperation (Githaiga et al., 2019). The construction of “Belt and Road” draws sustained attention and mixed reactions from domestic and foreign media. The media is an important channel for understanding a country’s response to “Belt and Road” initiative. On the one hand, the media play an important role in international politics and interstate relations. On the others, media can reflect more hidden, vague and deep subconscious thoughts on specific issues (Li and Wen, 2020). So it is of great significance to study African mainstream media’s perception of “Belt and Road” initiative to further develop China-Africa relationship. This research uses corpus-based critical discourse analysis as the research method to explore the cognitive characteristics and diachronic changes of African media reports on “Belt and Road” Initiative, and then analyze the social factors behind it.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have emerged in academic circles concerning the media’s reports on “Belt and Road” initiative. Some Chinese scholars conducted a comparative study about the Chinese and western media’s reports on Belt and Road initiative through critical discourse analysis on self-built corpus. Xiao et al. (2019) and Deng (2020) explored the similarities and differences between Chinese and American reports about “Belt and Road” Initiative in China’s and American English news media. Zhang and Wu (2017) examined the representation of China by *China Daily* versus *Financial Times* of UK. Many other scholars focus on the report of “Belt and Road” Initiative in Asian media. Li and Wen (2020) used discourse analysis combined theories of international relations, agenda setting and media framing to investigate the construction of Singapore’s mainstream Chinese media on “Belt and Road” Initiative. Based on the political economy analysis, Chin (2021) examined Malaysia’s perception and strategy toward “Belt and Road” Initiative. Li & Liu (2020) investigated the top three Pakistani media by constructing and analyzing semantic networks of the news. Some foreign researchers also draw much attention to the study of “Belt and Road” Initiative in different media, especially the Asian media. Ozsu & Binark (2019) conducted thematic content analysis of the news on the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Turkish mainstream newspapers and examined how Turkish media relocates the “Belt and Road” Initiative with respect to Turkey’s political and economic concerns. Muhammad et al. (2019) investigated the ideological construction of image of “Belt and Road” Initiative in Pakistani news media discourses through corpus-based critical discourse analysis. Pitlo and Karambelkar (2015) did a study on India’s Perception and Response to China’s “One Belt,

One Road” Initiative through content analysis. [Kuteleva & Vasiliev \(2020\)](#) explores Russia’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative by examining the reports of the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Russia’s major newspapers between 2013 and 2019 and traces the visibility of different topics and maps the shifts in its focus over these years.

From those previous studies, we can find that studies on media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative is still a new research topic and most of them focus on the Asian and western media, and few studies have been done on African media. In terms of research methodology, most researches employ content analysis, discourse analysis or text analysis; only a few combined the corpus linguistics with discourse analysis, but none of them studies the diachronic changes of media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative. Thus to supplement the existing research, this study builds a corpus of African mainstream media reports of the Belt and Road Initiative and conducts a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data to find out the changes in its perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative and explore the underlying political intentions.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research method used in this study is “corpus-based critical discourse analysis”. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to interpret the characteristics of discourse in the social context, revealing the relationship between language, power, and ideology. The media, including the television, the press, online resources, play an important role in communicating what happens in the world to the public. Audiences or readers are particularly reliant upon the media to inform them when they do not possess direct knowledge or experience of what is happening ([Muhammad, 2019](#)). And CDA enabled researchers to find out the hidden ideological motive behind the discourse of media ([Baker, 2010](#); [Van Dijk, 1998](#)). [Fairclough \(1992\)](#) asserts that CDA is critical because it elaborates the social inequalities or social wrongs of the day. And he classified three analytical dimension of CDA: text, discursive practice and social practice. The first dimension refers to the linguistic analysis of text, including vocabulary, grammar, semantics, pragmatics, etc. Discursive practice reveals the process of production of texts and its implications. And social practice discloses the power and ideology beyond the text ([Fairclough, 2000](#)). However, CDA studies have been criticized for its small-scale analysis which may not be able to identify which linguistic pattern are more frequent or less frequent, and the selection of texts is often subjective, and the analysis is likely to be over-interpreted ([Stubbs, 1994, 1996](#)). [Stubbs \(1994: p. 204\)](#) proposed that “some patterns of language use are not directly observable, because they are realized across thousands or millions of words of running text, and because they are not categorical but probabilistic”. Corpus linguistics (CL) focuses on the quantitative analysis of linguistic patterns like vocabulary, grammar, etc. which offer a reasonably high degree of objectivity. It enables the researchers to analyze the texts free from preconceived or existing

notions regarding their linguistic or semantic/pragmatic content (Baker et al., 2008: p. 277). It also brought a revolutionary change in identifying frequencies, collocations, concordances of the text which facilitated textual and content analysis to a great extent. However, CL tends to disregard the macro social and cultural context (Mautner, 2007; Widdowson, 2000). Mautner (2007) claims that what large-scale data are not well suited for ... is making direct, text-by-text links between the linguistic evidence and the contextual framework it is embedded in. Since CL and CDA have its strengths and weakness respectively, Baker et al. (2008) advocated the combination of CL and CDA so as to eliminate the problems and exploit the strength of both. He claims that corpus linguistics offers the best technique to analyze the incremental consequence of discourse (Baker, 2010). In recent years, many scholars have attempted to adopt corpus-based critical discourse analysis in the media discourse analysis (Samaie & Bahareh, 2017; Wilkinson, 2019; Wang & Ma, 2020). Regarding the research on the “Belt and Road” Initiative, some scholars also used corpus-based critical discourse analysis to find the construction of “Belt and Road” Initiative in Asian and western media (Muhammad et al., 2019; Xiao et al., 2019). This study uses critical discourse analysis as the research paradigm combined with corpus linguistics to analyze the keywords, collocations and concordance lines of reports on “Belt and Road” initiative in mainstream African media with Antconc 4.0, and then discusses the diachronic changes in African mainstream media’s perception of China’s “Belt and Road” initiative and its social factors by using Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Questions

This paper seeks theoretical and methodological insights from Fairclough’s three dimensional framework (text, discursive practice and social practice) based on which the current study proposed the following questions:

- 1) What is African mainstream media’s perception of the “Belt and Road” initiative as a whole and has its perception changed from 2013 to 2020 through text analysis?
- 2) What are the reasons for African mainstream media’s overall perception and the changes through analysis of discursive and social practice?

4.2. Data

This research uses “belt and road” and “one belt, one road” as the search terms, and the search time period is from September 13, 2013 to December 31, 2020. With the assistance of the lexisnexis database, a total of 549 reports related to the “Belt and Road” were retrieved in *AllAfrica*. And 499 reports were collected after the duplicate and irrelevant texts were removed. Then a corpus with a total of 416,553 tokens, referred to as “African media BRI corpus” was built. *AllAfrica* is

an official African news agency and one of the most important government-affiliated news agencies of the African Federation. Its purpose is to provide “a voice of, by and about Africa”. Most of its reports are from newspapers, news agencies and publishers of different African countries. Some reports are original. Therefore, the *AllAfrica* can represent the voice of mainstream African media. In order to investigate the diachronic changes in African media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative, this research further divided the “African media BRI corpus” into three sub-corpora according to the quantity distribution: 2013-2016 (corpus A), 2017-2018 (corpus B), 2019 to 2020 (corpus C).

4.3. Data Analysis

4.3.1. Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis is carried out to examine the topic and central elements of the reports on “Belt and Road” initiative from Africa mainstream media and differences or changes in the sub-corpora. The strong keywords, combined with concordance analysis could provide more helpful indications about the stance of newspaper and provide a good entry point for critical discourse analysis and the essence of the discourse can only be seen through correct and effective interpretation of the keywords (Baker et al., 2008). Whether a keyword is strong or not is determined by its keyness which is defined as the higher frequency of particular words in the corpus in comparison with a reference corpus. The higher the frequency of a word’s appearance compared with the reference corpus, the higher its keyness.

4.3.2. Collocation Analysis

Collocation is the above-chance frequent co-occurrence of two words within a pre-determined span which is usually five words on either side of the word under investigation (Sinclair, 1991). The collocates of a node can not only provide the semantic meaning of a word, but also convey the implication of the messages (Hunston, 2002) and the corpus makes it possible to investigate large-scale collocates. In order to analyze collocates more effectively, the concept of collocability was put forward. It is examined from the frequency of occurrence and co-occurrence of two words. This research uses MI (mutual information) value which reflects the mutual attraction relationship between the nodes and collocates to measure the collocability. The greater the MI value, the higher the collocability between the two words. Hunston (2002) claims that collocates with a MI value greater than 3 can be regarded as strong collocates.

4.3.3. Concordance Line Analysis

The concordance displays a word or cluster in its immediate co-text and the concordance line can be sorted in different ways and can be expanded to the whole text. So concordance line analysis can help analysts discover linguistic patterns and hidden discourse meanings that keywords and collocates cannot reveal. The concordance line can also be extended to the semantic prosody and discourse prosody, which reveals the speaker’s or writer’s stance (Stubbs, 2001). Based on collocate analysis, this research conducts detailed content analysis

through the concordance lines of some collocates.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Positiveness and Activeness

The keyword list can immediately show the overall characteristics of the African media's perception of "Belt and Road" Initiative. This study uses "BNC written corpus" as the reference corpus and "Africa media BRI corpus", the observation corpus, then calculate the keyword list with Antconc4.0. **Table 1** shows the top ten keywords with highest keyness.

The top ten keywords can be grouped into five categories: major countries, topic, theme, main content and characters. "*China, Africa, Chinese*" indicates that China and Africa are the two major sides of reports; "*road*" reflects the theme of the "Belt and Road" initiative; "*cooperation, development*" reflects the purpose of "Belt and Road" initiative is to promote cooperation and development; "*Economic, global*" shows that the reports are mainly about the economic cooperation between China and African as well as the development of global economy. "*President*" exhibits that national leaders have paid close attention to and actively participated in the construction of the "Belt and Road"; president Xi Jinping played an especially important role in China-Africa "Belt and Road" cooperation ("Xi" is also a keyword ranking at the 14th place in the keyword list). From 2013 to 2018, president Xi has visited Africa five times and is one of the presidents who visited Africa most frequently. The presidents of other African countries, such as Egypt, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, etc., also frequently appear in the corpus. It can be seen that the African media maintain that the "Belt and Road" Initiative promotes the development of economic cooperation between China and Africa and the world economy. The overall cognitive attitude of Africa mainstream media towards "Belt and Road" initiative is positive and active.

Table 1. The top ten keywords of highest keyness.

No.	keywords	Freq.	keyness
1	China	6789	+8038.39
2	Africa	3946	+4653.56
3	Chinese	2730	+3211.46
4	cooperation	2406	+2827.81
5	development	2143	+2516.58
6	countries	2061	+2419.58
7	road	1428	+1671.41
8	economic	1335	+1561.58
9	global	1213	+1417.56
10	president	1205	+1408.12

In addition to the top ten keywords, some keywords ranked between 11 - 50 in keyness can be summarized into two groups: countries and topics and themes (**Table 2**).

It can be seen from **Table 2** that “Belt and Road” Initiative had great influence on a wide range of African countries, including East Africa, North Africa, West Africa, South Africa. Among them, “*South (Africa)*” is the keyword with highest keyness. As China’s main trading and fellow BRICS partner, South Africa is one of the important partners of “Belt and Road” Initiative, and its participation extends the Maritime Silk Road beyond its ancient route (Ehizuelen, 2017). “*Beijing*” is also a keyword generally because of the attendance of many African leaders in 2017 “Belt and Road” International Cooperation Summit Forum and 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit, indicating that this forum has a great influence on Africa. “*Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, etc.*” show that many African countries have also joined the “Belt and Road” cooperation successively. “*Belt, initiative, trade, economy, investment, relationship*” show that the theme of the report is around economic and trade cooperation through “Belt and Road”; “*world, international*” show that “Belt and Road” promotes world economic cooperation; “*infrastructure, project*” display that infrastructure construction is the basic starting point in “Belt and Road” cooperation and Chinese infrastructure financing helps diversify African economies (Githaiga et al., 2019); “*government, forum, summit*” indicate that the governments actively participate in the forum summit; “*support, promote, important*” indicate that the African mainstream media think very high of the initiative.

From keywords analysis above, it can be concluded that the African mainstream media held affirmative attitude towards the “Belt and Road” initiative, and the construction of infrastructure and other projects is the focus of China-Africa cooperation.

5.2. A Change from Full Approval to Implicit Query and Explicit Criticism

In order to examine the diachronic changes in African mainstream media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative, “Africa media BRI corpus” was further divided into three sub-corpora according to the quantity distribution: 2013-2016 (corpus A), 2017-2018 (corpus B), 2019 to 2020 (corpus C). The diachronic changes will be examined through the analysis of changes in keywords, collocates, and concordance lines.

5.2.1. Changes in Keywords

Antconc 4.0 was used again to extract keywords of the three sub-corpora with “Africa media BRI corpus” as the reference corpus respectively. And then the top six keywords with highest keyness were selected to observe the changes (**Table 3**).

From **Table 3**, it can be found that the most significant difference between the keywords of the three sub-corpora are the name of countries. In corpus A,

Table 2. Keywords ranking between 11 - 50 in keyness.

countries	South Africa, Beijing, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Djibouti, Nigeria, Liberia, Sudan
topics/themes	trade, world, Belt, initiative, international, government, Infrastructure, forum, support, investment, relations, projects, summit, economy, promote, important

Table 3. The top six keywords in keyness.

Corpus A			Corpus B			Corpus C		
keyword	freq.	keyness	keyword	freq.	keyness	keyword	freq.	keyness
Egypt	338	+144.56	Ethiopia	375	+39.45	pangolin	143	+106.56
South	478	+121.43	initiative	576	+70.1	covid	96	+71.52
sides	222	+92.47	belt	562	+48.66	Liberia	144	+48.69
sisi	130	+81.41	road	760	+37.57	pandemic	59	+43.07
silk	273	+63.64	Tanzania	267	+25.95	debt	129	+39.87
cultural	160	+57.75	said	949	+23.67	Mauritius	111	+39.45

“*Egypt and South (Africa)*” are the keywords, because in the initial stage, Egypt was the first country in Africa to sign “Belt and Road” Initiative agreement, followed by South Africa (Githaiga et al., 2019). Through concordance lines of the two keywords, it is found that China and Egypt/South Africa have in-depth cooperation in trade, finance, infrastructure, education, culture and other aspects. The verb-object structure following Egyptian President Sisi in corpus A, such as “*appreciated what Xi said, asserted that Egypt backs the Chinese initiative, confirmed that his country is ready to, committed Egypt’s support for Xi’s Belt and Road initiative, welcomed Chinese enterprises, etc.*”, show the Egyptian government’s strong support for the initiative. What’s more, the verb-object structure following South Africa, such as “*(South Africa) have agreed to jointly explore, have cooperated closely*” also exhibit South Africa’s active participation. “*Cultural*” reflects the close and frequent cultural exchanges between China and Africa, which, to a large degree, help enhance the “Belt and Road” cooperation (Zhou, 2019).

In corpus B, the keywords about country names are “*Ethiopia, Tanzania*”. After South Africa and Egypt, Ethiopia and Tanzania have signed the “Belt and Road” cooperation memorandum. Concordance lines such as “*signed cooperation agreements, continue to encourage more investments*” reflect their supportive attitude towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

The key words of country name in corpus C are “*Liberia, Mauritius*” which show that with the promotion of the initiative, more and more African countries are willing to join the cooperation. The concordance lines of the keywords such as “*sign agreement on mutual promotion, continue to collaborate, foster friendly and mutually beneficial ties*” show the active cooperative actions between Liberia and Mauritius and China. However, some concordance lines like “*has long had a huge trade imbalance in its economic ties with China; in direct competition with China; Crossing the river by feeling the stones*” imply concern and uncertainty

about problems in China-Africa cooperation. In addition, “*pangolin, covid, pandemic*” in the corpus C are closely related to Covid 19, and the concordance lines such as “*China’s contribution to making vaccines accessible; Combating Covid-19 with Solidarity*” show that China-Africa cooperation will be strengthened in the context of Covid-19. However, some concordance lines like “*China’s economic adventure in Africa has seemingly become far less profitable; have petitioned Chinese Ministry of Commerce and institutions not to fund projects*” indicate that the media has some doubts about China-Africa cooperation projects.

From the analysis of keywords in the three sub-corpora, we can find that the countries that involved in “Belt and Road” Initiative expanded from some big and influential countries in north and south Africa to small countries in east and west Africa. African mainstream media’s perception of “Belt and Road” initiative had changed from complete optimism to cautious query.

5.2.2. Changes in Collocates

Antconc 4.0 is used in this section to count the collocates of the nodeword, “Belt and Road initiative”, the span of word cluster being 5, and then those collocates with collocability greater than 5 are selected to be analyzed (Table 4). Since this section aims to observe the positive or negative meanings of collocates in the context, the frequency of the collocates is not considered.

The collocates in Table 4 can be summarized into five categories: description, attitude, action, achievement and prospect. Corpus A is the initial stage of “Belt and Road” Initiative, and the descriptive collocates are all objective and neutral description of “Belt and Road” Initiative; the descriptive collocates in corpus B mainly reflect the grandeur of the project; but in corpus C, descriptive collocates reveal some political implication. In terms of attitude and action, the three sub-corpora all use a large number of verbs to show the actors of the initiative, which is highly emotional. The meanings of the collocates also show appreciative attitude and activeness of participation in “Belt and Road” Initiative. In terms of achievements, the three corpora used a large number of verbs, a few adjectives and nouns to show remarkable achievements of “Belt and Road” Initiative. And in corpus B, metaphors such as “blossoms” and “bloom” were used, which added more emotional effect. In terms of prospect, the three corpus have similar and repetitive expressions. Baker (2010) points out that the mode of repetition is the strongest key strategy of media which is influential and powerful. The difference is that negative collocates began to appear in corpus B and C. In corpus B, most collocates, such as “*untold, tale, bedtime (story)*” are used as metaphors to reveal the insinuations and doubts about the “Belt and Road” initiative except “*usurped*”. Van Dijk (1998: p. 273) claims that a precise negative view may be highlighted by a catchy metaphor from a negative conceptual domain. In corpus C, “*predatory, concerns, struggle*” directly express the criticism and worry about the “Belt and Road” Initiative, while “*critique, commentators*” indirectly criticized the “Belt and Road” Initiative through the comments of others.

Table 4. Collocates with collocability greater than 5.

Corpus A	[comprises, centering, refers, proposed], [lauding, welcomed, hailed, echoing], [joined, participate, pushing, pursuing], [reviving, profound, boost], [visions]
Corpus B	[immense, hugely, ambitious], [endorses, welcomes, vows, strongly, backs], [joining], [blossoms, effectiveness, bloom, widen, harvest, generate, fostering], [envisages], [usurped, untold, tale, bedtime]
Corpus C	[transformative, geopolitically], [platforms, affirmative, welcomed, supporting], [participate, joined], [harvest, facilitating, promoting, contributing, connected, achieve], [blueprint, vision], [predatory, concerns, struggle, critique, commentators]

In general, the frequency of positive collocates far exceeds that of negative collocates. It can be concluded that the African media hold a supportive attitude to “Belt and Road” initiative in the three stages as a whole, but implicit doubts and explicit criticism also appear in the second and third stages.

5.2.3. Changes in Concordance Lines

From the analysis of keywords and collocates, we basically found the diachronic changes in African media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative. In order to further reveal the specific perception of the African media, we listed concordance lines of the nodeword “Belt and Road initiative” with positive and negative meanings (Table 5, Table 6). There are actually a large number of positive concordance lines but only a small part is listed here due to their similar selection of words and sentence patterns; we listed more negative concordances here because of their different ways of expression and to better reveal the implication of the discourse.

Table 5 shows that the semantic prosody of the concordances in the three sub-corpora displays positive attitudes and passionate emotions towards “Belt and Road” Initiative. It is believed that the “Belt and Road” Initiative can promote global prosperity and development and African countries expressed strong desire to participate in the “Belt and Road” initiative and the determination to make good use of that platform. It can be seen that in the three stages, the African media’s support for “Belt and Road” initiative remains the same.

In corpus B, “*the story. ... remains untold*” implies that China’s actual behavior in Africa did not comply with what the “Belt and Road” Initiative claims, and there is discrepancy between what was said and what was done. The second concordance line uses the example of Hambantota to warn that Africa should not readily participate in the “Belt and Road” initiative, suggesting that “Belt and Road” Initiative in Africa is a kind of colonialism. The third concordance line uses the metaphor of “*a bedtime story*” to imply that China is using a romantic story to deceive the world in order to achieve hegemonic purposes. There are more negative concordance lines in corpus C than in corpus B. The fourth concordance line directly indicates that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is neo-colonial and China intends to occupy Kenya’s main ports. The fifth concordance line criticizes the “Belt and Road” Initiative as a bullying investment behavior. The sixth concordance line borrows words from Western commentators to accuse China

Table 5. Concordance lines with positive meanings.

Corpus A	The Belt and Road initiative being championed by China will unleash global prosperity through increased cross border trade
Corpus B	The leaders said they are willing to actively participate in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative , enhance security cooperation
Corpus C	The Tunisian side endorses the Belt and Road initiative , and is ready to actively participate in relevant construct
Corpus B	Cape Verde Supports Belt and Road Initiative , vows to deepen cooperation with China
Corpus C	The new government of Madagascar in promoting cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative and implementing the achievement
Corpus C	Enhance strategic coordination, make good use of the two major platforms , namely the Belt and Road Initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Table 6. Concordances with negative meaning.

Corpus B	1 the story of China's overseas renewables investment, reaching beyond the formal Belt and Road Initiative , remains largely untold .
Corpus B	2 Sri Lanka's Hambantota cited as a cautionary tale for nations attracted to Belt and Road Initiative benefits. Mauritius has avoided picking a side
Corpus B	3 to rival the US-dominated transatlantic zone? Is China's Belt and Road Initiative Just a Bedtime Story?
Corpus B	4 plans by China to take over Kenya's main port are giving some credence to concerns of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) being a form of neo-colonialism by the Asian nation that is a global economic powerhouse.
Corpus B	5 U.S. economic investment is critical as China is heavily investing in the continent through its Belt and Road Initiative , often through predatory behavior.
Corpus C	6 Many Western commentators especially have seen its Belt and Road Initiative - through which it has lent many billions of dollars to countries along the route - as essentially a debt-trap initiative
Corpus C	7 Nepal is already a signatory of China's Belt and Road Initiative , which could increase market access and trafficking of wildlife
Corpus C	8 Obviously China struggles with implementing the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa because of bad governance, so they create an institute to research about it. How clever!

of implementing a debt trap in Africa. The seventh concordance line uses Nepal's example to illustrate that joining the "Belt and Road" Initiative will lead to the expansion of the wildlife trading market and criticizes the illegal behavior. The eighth concordance line uses "struggle" to indicate that the "Belt and Road" strategy is not going smoothly, and the exclamatory sentence "However clever!" satirized China's cunning.

Through concordance line analysis, it can be found that in the three stages, the African mainstream media's attitudes to the "Belt and Road" initiative is generally positive, but in the second and third stages there has been a change from indirect doubting to direct criticism.

5.3. Reasons for African Media's Perception of "Belt and Road" Initiative and Its Diachronic Changes

To investigate the reasons for African media's perception of "Belt and Road" In-

initiative and its diachronic changes, we analyzed the media discourse from the dimensions of discursive practice and social practice and summarized three reasons.

5.3.1. The Long History of China-Africa Cooperation

The long history of China-Africa cooperation is the main reason why African media has always maintained a positive attitude towards “Belt and Road” Initiative. First, the political strategic mutual trust and the effectiveness of the China-Africa cooperation mechanism have laid a political foundation for the African media to promote the concept of sincere friendship, equality and mutual trust of “Belt and Road” Initiative. Actually long before “Belt and Road” Initiative was put forward, its concept has been put into practice in Africa (Chen, 2016). Secondly, win-win economic and trade cooperation has effectively promoted the growth of Africa’s interests, which created a good atmosphere for African media to spread the aim of “Belt and Road” Initiative in a positive way. Third, cultural exchanges between China and Africa have become increasingly close which strengthen China-Africa friendship, deepen China-Africa development consensus, and create a foundation of public opinion for the promotion and expansion of the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Africa. Over the years, China and Africa have adhered to mutual respect and mutual learning of different civilizations, strengthened exchanges and cooperation in the fields of education, medical care, media, culture, etc., and realized in-depth communication and integration (Zhou, 2019).

5.3.2. The Challenges in China-Africa Cooperation

The challenges in China-Africa cooperation are the main reason why the African media doubted and questioned the “Belt and Road” Initiative. The implementation of the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Africa is indeed confronted with severe pressure. Social and political unrest in Africa, rising cost of “Belt and Road” Initiative infrastructure caused by corruption, the rising external debt of African countries, the depreciation of domestic currency, policy barriers, inflated expectations, the threat of terrorism and competition between major countries can change Africa’s favorable attitudes towards “Belt and Road” Initiative fundamentally (Githaiga et al., 2019). Those challenges led to African media’s misunderstanding of “Belt and Road” Initiative, and at the same time, under the influence of the condemnation and defaming of China from western countries, some African elites feel anxious and uncertain about the “Belt and Road” Initiative in Africa.

5.3.3. The Influence of Western Media

The influence of the Western media is the main factor of the criticism of the “Belt and Road” Initiative by the African media. Through the sources of the reports, we find that although most of the reports in the “African media BRI Corpus” are from newspapers of African countries, a small number of them are reproduced from media of western countries such as UK, US, France, Germany,

etc. Through file view, it was found that 40% of negative concordances came from the American, German, and British media, for example, “*Deutsche Welle*”, “*Council on Foreign Relations*” and “*Thomson Reuters Foundation*”. Those media condemned the “Belt and Road” Initiative as neo-colonialism, a debt trap and resource plunder because western countries are worried that the “Belt and Road” Initiative will damage their own interests in Africa.

6. Conclusion

Based on corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, this paper conducts a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of reports on the “Belt and Road” initiative in African mainstream media *AllAfrica* from September 13th, 2013 to December 31st, 2020. The aim is to present the African media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative. Through the analysis of keywords, collocation, and concordance lines, it can be found that the African mainstream media has generally maintained high recognition and strong support for “Belt and Road” Initiative, but there is also a change from complete recognition to implicit questioning and then to explicit criticism in some newspapers. The African media’s perception of “Belt and Road” Initiative is closely related to the foundation as well as challenges of China-Africa cooperation and the profound influence of Western media. The findings of this study can provide a reference for China to spread the concept of “Belt and Road” initiative in Africa, and is of great significance to promoting China-Africa cooperation. In response to negative reports, the Chinese media should try different ways to promote the correct concept of “Belt and Road” Initiative, actively respond to the speculation and doubts of the African media, and eliminate the influence of Western media’s prejudice and malicious interpretation on the African media. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen media exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa, and properly resolve problems in the process of China-Africa cooperation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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