

Sense of the Chinese Nation as One Community and the Construction of Xinjiang's Image - A Discourse Analysis of News Reports from People's Daily

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Abstract: Xi Jinping General Secretary of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of China And President of the People's Republic of China emphasized at the National Conference on Ethnic Unity and Progress the need to “坚持以铸牢中华民族共同体意识为主线” (with a focus on forging a sense of the Chinese nation as one community). Rooted in the commonality of consolidating social consensus, the construction of Xinjiang's image is indelibly linked to the sense of the Chinese nation as one community. Taking Xinjiang's image construction as the core proposition, this study employs the Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) and systematically examines the discursive pathways of Xinjiang's image construction through a Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA), using a 42,248-token corpus from People's Daily (2023–2024) on “Xinjiang” and “sense of the Chinese nation as one community”. The study finds that People's Daily uses the sense of the Chinese nation as one community as its deep discursive structure, symbolizing Xinjiang's image as the leader of ethnic unity, the promoter of common prosperity, the facilitator of cultural integration, the guardian of a law-based society. The research demonstrates that in constructing Xinjiang's image, the sense of the Chinese nation as one community is not an abstract political slogan but is translated into tangible regional identity through discursive strategies such as historical anchoring of revolutionary red culture, interest-based bonds of economic cooperation, emotional infiltration of social integration, and authoritative endorsement of policy safeguards.

Keywords: Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA); Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA); Xinjiang; a sense of the Chinese nation as one community

1. INTRODUCTION

As the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China, *People's Daily* is the most authoritative platform for publicizing the Party and government's policies, holding absolute representativeness on Xinjiang-related issues. Scholars Zhu & Jiao (2024) argue that mainstream media represented by *People's Daily* actively leverage their role as the “voice of the Party” to “take center stage” in news reports on Xinjiang's social development, serving as a key force in guiding mainstream public opinion, minimizing the spread of negative narratives, and consolidating social consensus.

On September 27, 2024, H.E. Xi Jinping General Secretary of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of China And President of the People's Republic of China emphasized at the National Conference on Ethnic Unity and Progress the need to fully implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, particularly the Party's important theories on strengthening and improving ethnic work, and to “坚持以铸牢中华民族共同体意识为主线” (with a focus on forging a sense of the Chinese nation as one community) to advance ethnic unity and high-quality ethnic work (Xi, 2024). Xinjiang's image construction, anchored in cultural identity and supported by the synergistic mechanisms of political leadership and economic integration, aims to build the broadest consensus in a diversifying society and shape a sense of the Chinese nation as one community (Sun, Jin & Gao, 2024)—a process inherently tied to consolidating social consensus. From this perspective, there is a certain correlation between the construction of Xinjiang's image and the sense of the Chinese nation as one community.

An increasing number of scholars have conducted research on Xinjiang-related content based on the sense of the Chinese nation as one community. For example, Gao & Liu (2023) took “interests and common interests” as the starting point of their study, anchored in the perspective of “enriching the

people and invigorating Xinjiang” and the economic dimension as the foundation for strengthening the sense of the Chinese nation as one community, further confirming the focal points of their coupled actions, and exploring the logical approach for the coupling of “enriching Xinjiang’s people” and strengthening this sense. Zhang & Li (2024) adopted grounded theory to conduct an exploratory study on education for ethnic minority college students in Xinjiang to strengthen their sense of the Chinese nation as one community, constructing an educational model for this demographic. Existing research has laid a foundation for understanding the relationship between Xinjiang and the sense of the Chinese nation as one community. However, analysis of existing studies on Xinjiang’s image construction—such as Wan (2014), who used frame analysis to reveal that *People’s Daily* actively constructs a positive image of Xinjiang as developing, prosperous, stable, and upward-moving, showcasing its “overlapping” reality truthfully, objectively, and rationally—alongside Wei & Dina’s (2024) frame analysis summarizing Phoenix Weekly’s portrayal of a robust yet nuanced Xinjiang government image, a delicate but reasonable Han-Uyghur interethnic relationship, a fragmented yet opening Uyghur social image, and a fading violent extremist narrative—highlights that research on the correlation between Xinjiang’s image construction and the sense of the Chinese nation as one community remains underdeveloped.

To further explore this topic, this study examines reporting samples from specific mainstream media outlets, attempting to answer the following questions:

1. What images of Xinjiang does *People’s Daily* construct?
2. What discursive strategies does *People’s Daily* employ?
3. How does Xinjiang’s image construction reflect the sense of the Chinese nation as one community?

2. DATA COLLECTION

This study adopts the corpus-based DHA to carry out qualitative research. The corpus, sourced from *People’s Daily* database (<http://data.people.com.cn>), includes texts on “Xinjiang” and “sense of the Chinese nation as one community” published between October 2023 and October 2024, encompassing speeches by General Secretary Xi, commentator observations, and congratulatory letters. Using Nvivo14.0 software, duplicate texts were removed, and reporter names were excluded, resulting in a 42,248-token corpus of 20 news articles focused on Xinjiang and the sense of the Chinese nation as one community.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH STEPS

3.1. Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA)

In his paper *Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change* (2006), Martin proposed the concept of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), arguing that the focus of discourse analysis should not be confined to “bad news” reflecting social inequalities and negative phenomena, but should actively engage with and analyze “good news” advocating peace, kindness, and equality (Martin, 2006). The essence of PDA lies in shifting discourse analysis from critical reading, critique, and passive behavioral responses to constructive action. For textual analysis, Martin & Rose (2003) introduced a new goal: design—abandoning traditional negative practices like criticism and deconstruction, and instead using intentional discourse analysis to proactively shape and guide social discourse, fostering harmony, progress, and a vision for a better future (Zhu, 2006). As a vital medium for information dissemination, news discourse—when interpreted constructively through PDA—helps propagate discourses of negotiation, harmony, friendship, and peace, cultivating positive discursive environments and social values (Zhou, 2023). This aligns with the “peace linguistics” advocated by PDA scholars like Martin, aiming to build a tolerant, reconciled, and coexisting human society (Zhu, 2006). This study adopts PDA’s “constructionist” perspective to examine how China’s mainstream media construct Xinjiang’s image, seeking to provide a reference for other provinces in shaping their own narratives. The core philosophy of PDA thus offers theoretical applicability and practical guidance for this research, providing a robust framework to promote social harmony and solidarity through discourse analysis.

3.2. Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA)

Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA), proposed by Professor Ruth Wodak of the University of Vienna and her team during their analysis of post-war anti-Semitic trends in Austria, emphasizes integrating known historical information and the social-political context embedding discourse events (Wodak &

Meyer, 2009). This study introduces a DHA model for analyzing Xinjiang's image. Within the DHA framework, discursive strategies analysis is central, with Wodak (2009) highlighting five key strategies: referential strategies, predicational strategies, argumentation strategies, strategies of perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation strategies. Building on Wodak's definitions, this study operationalizes these strategies specifically for Xinjiang's image construction: Referential Strategies: How Xinjiang self-identifies; Predicational Strategies: How Xinjiang describes itself; Argumentation Strategies: The thematic foundations of Xinjiang's claims; Strategies of perspectivisation: The ideological lens through which Xinjiang articulates claims; Intensification/Mitigation strategies: Techniques to strengthen or weaken the illocutionary force of claims.

3.3. Research Steps

In summary, from the perspective of PDA, this study mainly conducts data analysis through Nvivo14.0, selects the report samples of specific mainstream media for semantic network analysis, and answers the research questions through the following research steps: First, the authors of this study discussed the potential discursive dimensions of the construction of Xinjiang's image. Subsequently, the authors used the stratified sampling method to randomly select 30% of the textual data for initial coding respectively, and calculated the inter-coder reliability coefficient (Cohen's Kappa value: 0.82) through the "coding comparison query" function, which is significantly higher than the threshold standard of 0.70 in the field of social sciences (Cohen, 1960; Yu & Tay, 2020). The "coding arbitration process" was adopted as the mechanism for resolving disagreements: First, the distribution of controversial terms was visualized through the NVivo "word cloud matrix", and then the semantic definition consensus was reached by referring to the "strategic discourse" analysis framework of Wodak & Meyer (2009), and finally a standardized coding protocol was established. Based on the meaning of the database in terms of language or logic, the first author completed the coding of the data. The flexible setting of coding units reflects the hermeneutic characteristics (Yu, 2022a): The smallest unit is a compound sentence containing a complete assertion (such as "Promote the exchanges and integration among all ethnic groups through the intangible cultural heritage exhibitions"), and the largest span is a news paragraph with a complete argument (such as a special report on the Belt and Road Initiative). In addition, all codes are accompanied by the "context annotation" field, which records metadata such as the text location (chapter/page number), associated verbs (such as "construct", "highlight"), and rhetorical strategies (such as parallelism), forming a multi-level evidence chain.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through the analysis of the target corpus using Nvivo14.0, we found that the reports (a total of 90 cases) in People's Daily regarding the sense of community of the Chinese nation in Xinjiang mainly construct four images: The Leader of Ethnic Unity: Xinjiang's vanguard role in revolutionary red culture inheritance, accounting for 21.83%. The Promoter of Common Prosperity: Xinjiang's spirit of cooperation in regional economic development, accounting for 20.75%. The Facilitator of Cultural Integration: Xinjiang's bridging role in social harmony and cultural exchanges, accounting for 19.14%. The Guardian of a Law-based Society: Xinjiang's responsibility in policy implementation and legal protection, accounting for 38.27%.

4.1. The Leader of Ethnic Unity: Xinjiang's Vanguard Role in revolutionary red culture Inheritance

The high-frequency thematic terms related to "The Leader of Ethnic Unity: Xinjiang's Vanguard Role in revolutionary red culture Inheritance" are mainly revolutionary red culture education (33 cases, 40.74%), revolutionary red culture exchange (26 cases, 32.10%), and red tourism cooperation (10 cases, 12.35%). This indicates that Xinjiang aims to strengthen ethnic unity, enhance national pride, protect cultural heritage, and promote economic and cultural development through relevant content.

As shown in Example [1], Xinjiang, represented by Xinjiang University, refers to itself as "the inheritor of revolutionary red culture", highlighting its role as a disseminator and educator of revolutionary red culture and history. In terms of the predicational strategies, the repeated use of positive verbs such as "foster", "showcase", and "enhance" emphasizes Xinjiang's role in revolutionary red culture inheritance and ethnic unity education, making its positive contributions and efforts in these fields more prominent. By leveraging historical and cultural themes, Xinjiang University emphasizes the

importance of revolutionary red culture in promoting ethnic unity and enhancing students' historical identity through relevant courses and activities. From the perspectives of education and history, Xinjiang University showcases the positive impact of shared cultural heritage and revolutionary spirit on ethnic unity through activities such as visiting the university history museum and rehearsing plays in the art troupe. The increase in the number of visitors to the university history museum and the construction of the ideological and political curriculum system also strengthen Xinjiang University's responsibility and determination in revolutionary red culture inheritance and ethnic unity education. This discursive construction not only reinforces the image of Xinjiang represented by Xinjiang University but also provides legitimacy and justification for its role in ethnic unity.

[1] Xinjiang University insists on using revolutionary red culture to foster moral character and shape identities, emphasizing the educational role of its university history museum. The Lin Jilu Art Troupe, established with students from the School of Chinese Language and Literature as its core members, has created and performed plays such as *Communists in Xinjiang (1936–1945)* and *We Are in Our Prime*, vividly showcasing the “Anti-Japanese University (Kangda) Spirit”. According to Yu Fuen, Director of the University History Research Association, annual visits to the history museum have increased from over 10,000 to more than 30,000. In terms of ideological and political curriculum development, Xinjiang University not only prioritizes courses like “Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” but also adds specialized topics such as “History of Xinjiang's Ethnic Groups' Struggles to Defend the Borderlands” and a local 思政课 (ideological and political education (IPE) course) titled “Concise Course on Xinjiang's Local History”—focused on the Chinese national historical perspective—to enhance students' historical identification and cultural confidence. (Source: Xinjiang University: Upholding the Mission of Cultivating Virtue and Nurturing Talent)

In the interaction between revolutionary red culture inheritance and ethnic unity, Xinjiang has shaped itself as a revolutionary red culture inheritor and ethnic unity promoter through discursive practices. This discursive construction not only highlights Xinjiang's significant role in ethnic unity and revolutionary red culture inheritance but also constructs a special image of Xinjiang as “the leader of ethnic unity” and “the vanguard in revolutionary red culture inheritance” in the public view.

4.2. The Promoter of Common Prosperity: Xinjiang's Spirit of Cooperation in Regional Economic Development

The high-frequency thematic terms related to “The Promoter of Common Prosperity: Xinjiang's Spirit of Cooperation in Regional Economic Development” are mainly industrial docking (33 cases, 42.86%), economic development (19 cases, 24.68%), trade promotion (14 cases, 18.18%), and investment incentives (9 cases, 11.69%). This shows that Xinjiang attaches importance to regional cooperation and industrial complementarity and actively seizes national development strategies and opportunities to achieve common prosperity.

In Example [2], by introducing the case of the Shandong watermelon brand, Xinjiang positions itself as “the cultivator of the ‘sweet industry’”. This reference not only reflects Xinjiang's innovation and development in the agricultural field but also emphasizes its important role in regional economic cooperation. In terms of the predicational strategies, positive verbs and adjectives such as “inject strong momentum”, “take root”, and “drive the improvement of planting technology and management levels” in this example significantly highlight Xinjiang's role in promoting regional economic development and agricultural industrial upgrading. By mentioning “the widespread implementation of industrial aid projects to Xinjiang” and “promoting the high-quality development of Shule County's characteristic and advantageous leading industries”, Xinjiang emphasizes the importance of the spirit of cooperation in promoting economic development and industrial upgrading through real-life themes. From the perspectives of regional cooperation and common development, Xinjiang demonstrates its open attitude and willingness to cooperate in promoting regional economic development by stating the introduction of external resources and technical support. In terms of the intensification strategies, the display of achievements such as “bearing fruitful results” and “becoming a new engine for the further development of local villages” helps to highlight Xinjiang's positive impact and firm attitude in promoting common prosperity.

[2] In Kashgar Prefecture, industrial aid projects from Shandong, Guangdong, and other places have blossomed everywhere, injecting strong momentum into the local economic development. Among them, the watermelon brand brought by Shandong's aid to Xinjiang has taken root in Shule County, improving the quality of local agricultural products, driving the improvement of planting technology and management levels, and promoting the high-quality development of Shule County's characteristic and advantageous leading industries. The "sweet industry" has borne fruitful results and has become a new engine for the further development of local villages. (Shandong Watermelon Brand Takes Root in Shule County, Xinjiang—The "Sweet Industry" Yields Abundant Fruits (Forging the Community, One Family of the Chinese Nation))

In the interaction between regional economic development and common prosperity, Xinjiang has shaped itself as a promoter of common prosperity and a model of the spirit of regional economic cooperation through discursive practices. This discursive construction not only significantly highlights Xinjiang's important role in promoting regional economic development and common prosperity but also subtly constructs an important image of Xinjiang as "the promoter of common prosperity" in the public mind.

4.3. The Facilitator of Cultural Integration: Xinjiang's Bridging Role in Social Harmony and Cultural Exchange

The high-frequency thematic terms related to "The Facilitator of Cultural Integration: Xinjiang's Bridging Role in Social Harmony and Cultural Exchange" are mainly community participation (21 cases, 29.58%), ethnic exchange and cooperation (32 cases, 45.07%), ethnic integration (8 cases, 11.27%), and language learning (4 cases, 5.63%). This constructs a positive image of Xinjiang that focuses on grassroots governance, promotes cross-regional cooperation and co-construction, continuously expands the breadth and depth of interaction, exchange, and integration, pursues high-quality development, benefits people's livelihoods, and adheres to the Party's leadership.

In Example [3], Xinjiang refers to itself as "the facilitator of cultural integration" by hosting events such as the National Traditional Ethnic Minority Sports Games and the National Ethnic Minority Art Festival. Regarding the predicational strategies, Xinjiang effectively highlights its role in promoting cultural integration and social harmony by using positive verbs and adjectives such as "build a stage for all ethnic groups" and "promote more innovative integration of all ethnic cultures". By enumerating events like "thematic cultural activities for building a shared cultural home of the Chinese nation", Xinjiang emphasizes the importance of cultural exchange in promoting social harmony and enhancing cultural identity through real-life themes of cultural identity and ethnic unity. From the perspective of multicultural integration, Xinjiang showcases the positive impact of cultural exchange and integration between different cultures on social harmony through various cultural activities. In terms of the intensification strategies, the text citation of General Secretary Xi's words helps readers believe in the authenticity of the discourse, increases its reliability and authority, and further demonstrates Xinjiang's special role in cultural integration and social harmony (Hu & Xu, 2023).

[3] General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Culture is the soul of a nation, and cultural identity is the root of ethnic unity." The National Traditional Ethnic Minority Sports Games and the National Ethnic Minority Art Festival have built stages for all ethnic groups to display their styles, exchange and learn from each other, and blend emotionally; "Thematic Cultural Activities for Building a Shared Cultural Home of the Chinese Nation" have entered Guizhou, Yunnan, Zhejiang, and other places, promoting more innovative integration of all ethnic cultures through forms loved by the masses; representative children of all ethnic groups have participated in activities such as the "Pomegranate Seeds' Journey to the Motherland" theme team day and "Salute to the National Flag", planting the sense of the Chinese nation as one community in their hearts... A series of practical measures have made the work of forging the sense of the Chinese nation as one community more tangible, perceivable, and effective, stimulating the vitality of Chinese culture and building a shared cultural home for the Chinese nation. (All Ethnic Groups Work Together to Realize the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation—A documentary record of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the Core Promoting the Forging of the Sense of the Chinese Nation as One Community)

In the field of social harmony and cultural exchange, Xinjiang has shaped itself as a facilitator of cultural integration and a bridge for cultural exchange through discursive practices. This discursive construction

not only emphasizes Xinjiang's special role in social harmony and cultural exchange but also constructs images such as "the facilitator of cultural integration" and "the promoter of social harmony" for Xinjiang through the mainstream media.

4.4. The Guardian of a Law-based Society: Xinjiang's Responsibility in Policy Implementation and Legal Protection

"Policy support and legal protection" is the most important theme in People's Daily's reports on "Xinjiang" and "the sense of national community" in the past year. The high-frequency thematic terms related to "The Guardian of a Law-based Society: Xinjiang's Responsibility in Policy Implementation and Legal Protection" are mainly ethnic policies (110 cases, 77.46%), rights and interests protection (26 cases, 18.31%), and legal protection (4.22%). This constructs a positive image of Xinjiang that takes forging the sense of the Chinese nation as one community as the main line, takes development as the top priority, promotes the high-quality development of ethnic work, is committed to building a high-quality talent team, attaches importance to cultivating virtue and nurturing talent and cultural prosperity, and protects civil rights and social stability.

From Example [4], Xinjiang positions itself as "the guardian of a law-based society" by commemorating the implementation of the Law on Regional National Autonomy and emphasizing the governance of ethnic affairs in accordance with the law. In terms of the predicational strategies, Xinjiang uses verbs such as "uphold", "promote", and "safeguard" to emphasize its role in safeguarding national unity and ethnic unity and highlights its positive contributions and efforts in the construction of the rule of law. By leveraging the real-life themes of the rule of law and social development, Xinjiang demonstrates the role of law in ensuring social stability and promoting ethnic unity by emphasizing the importance of governance in accordance with the law and ethnic unity. From the perspectives of the universality and seriousness of the law, Xinjiang shows the positive impact of the rule of law on social stability and long-term peace and stability through the implementation of the Law on Regional National Autonomy. In terms of the intensification strategies, the repeated mention of Xinjiang's relevant policies forms a repetitive intertextual effect, further highlighting Xinjiang's significant role and influence in policy implementation and legal protection.

[4] Li Hongzhong emphasized that we should accurately grasp the new requirements for upholding and improving the system of regional national autonomy in the new journey and promote new achievements in the implementation of the Law on Regional National Autonomy. We should uphold the Party's overall leadership, especially the centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, resolutely safeguard national unity and ethnic unity, promote the high-quality economic and social development of ethnic areas, focus on building a shared cultural home of the Chinese nation, govern ethnic affairs in accordance with the law, and unite and mobilize all ethnic groups in the country to work together to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. (Symposium Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Promulgation and Implementation of the Law on Regional National Autonomy Held in Beijing to Forge the Sense of the Chinese Nation as One Community)

In the process of promoting the construction of a law-based society, Xinjiang actively shapes its role as a guardian of a law-based society, emphasizes the core role of law in maintaining social order and protecting civil rights, and demonstrates its actual achievements in promoting the rule of law through the implementation of specific laws and policies. This discursive construction not only shows Xinjiang's significant role and influence in policy implementation and legal protection but also constructs an important image of Xinjiang as "the guardian of a law-based society" from the public perspective.

5. CONCLUSION

Within the frameworks of PDA and DHA, People's Daily embed the sense of the Chinese nation as one community (90 cases) into the construction of Xinjiang's image. From the perspective of PDA, all four images reconstruct Xinjiang's narrative with a positive semantic framework: revolutionary red culture (21.83%) anchors the sense of the Chinese nation as one community in the continuity of collective memory through the positive coding of "revolutionary tradition" symbols. Economic cooperation (20.75%) sublimates material interests into the community ethics of value sharing with the reciprocal logic of "common development". Social integration (19.14%) transforms differences into practical

resources for unity through the discursive presupposition of “cultural symbiosis”. Policy support (38.27%) strengthens the institutional foundation of the community through institutional commitments. DHA reveals the historical strategies of this discursive construction: revolutionary red culture continues the socialist discursive tradition. Economic cooperation inherits the historical commitment of “common prosperity”. Social integration reproduces the ethnic policy context of “unity in diversity”. Policy support solidifies the national stance through the diachronic intertextuality of legal texts. The two theories together point to the interactive mechanism of ideology: The sense of the Chinese nation as one community, as a deep-seated discursive structure, symbolizes Xinjiang's image as “the leader of ethnic unity”, “the promoter of common prosperity”, “the facilitator of cultural integration”, and “the guardian of a law-based society” through images constructing. In turn, the media presentation of Xinjiang's image transforms ideological appeals into a naturalized process of social cognition through the repetition and intensification of discursive practices, ultimately achieving the two-way shaping of political concepts and regional identities.

Theoretically, this study breaks through the single perspective of traditional ideological analysis, realizes the collaboration between the positive semantic construction of PDA and the historical power tracking of DHA, and provides a dynamic explanatory model for the correlation between the sense of the Chinese nation as one community and the construction of Xinjiang's image. Practically, it reveals the mainstream media's practical wisdom centered on the sense of the Chinese nation as one community in border governance. The study proves that the sense of the Chinese nation as one community is not an abstract political slogan but is transformed into concrete regional identity through discursive strategies such as the historical anchoring of revolutionary red culture, the interest connection of economic cooperation, the emotional penetration of social integration, and the authoritative endorsement of policy guarantee.

This study analyzes the correlation between the sense of the Chinese nation as one community and the construction of Xinjiang's image based on the textual analysis of People's Daily's online database. However, communication is a dynamic and complex process, and how the audience interprets these texts requires further exploration in the future (Jiang et al., 2024). At the same time, with the rapid development of information technology, new media has become an important way for people to understand the world. Future research can further expand to multimodal data (such as images and live broadcasts) (Qi, 2024; Feng & Li, 2025) and introduce multimodal analysis of vision and symbols to explore how emotional mobilization strategies beyond texts can strengthen community identity.

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