

English-Language Media Representations of the Fukushima Nuclear Wastewater Discharge in China and Japan: A Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Despite growing attention to the controversy surrounding the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge, limited research has examined how the issue is discursively constructed by media outlets in China and Japan, the two principal stakeholders. To address this gap, this study draws on comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine English-language media representations of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge in *Global Times (GT)* and *The Japan News (JN)*. It is found that appreciation is the most frequently used attitudinal resource across both outlets, followed by judgement and affect. However, *GT* is predominantly negative in its coverage, whereas *JN* tends toward more positive evaluations. In representing the event, *GT* portrays Japan as a potential threat to the global community and as an evader of its international responsibilities, while presenting the Chinese government as people-oriented, capable, and responsible. By contrast, *JN* portrays Japan as a coordinator of domestic solidarity and a problem-solver addressing nuclear wastewater issues, while depicting the Chinese government as an external actor whose policies bear on Japanese livelihoods. These divergent representations can be read as reflecting the differing ideological stances underlying each outlet's coverage of this issue.

Keywords: Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge, Sino-Japanese media coverage, comparative critical discourse analysis, attitude system

1. Introduction

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake-triggered tsunami struck the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, causing a leakage of radioactive substances. The resulting wastewater accumulated for a decade before Japan announced, on April 13, 2021, its plan to discharge it into the ocean. On August 22, 2023, the Japanese government authorized Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) to begin discharging the wastewater into the sea, with three rounds of discharge commencing on August 24, October 5, and November 2.

Japan's plan to discharge the Fukushima nuclear wastewater into the sea, and its subsequent implementation, have triggered heated discussion about its societal impacts. While this event has been examined extensively from the perspectives of international law (Wu & Gong, 2023), marine safety (Yue & Yang, 2024), and the global economy (Wu et al., 2023), its media representations remain largely underexplored. This gap is notable given that media discourse plays a key role in shaping public opinion and policy legitimacy in environmental crisis communication. However, existing research has focused primarily on broader topics such as climate change and global warming (e.g., Dayrell, 2019; Liu & Huang, 2022) or Western media portrayals of the post-Fukushima disaster (e.g., Arlt & Wolling, 2016; Tollefson, 2020). Thus, how media outlets within the Asian region have framed this ongoing, transboundary environmental crisis warrants further investigation.

International attention to Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge has generated extensive media coverage. To regain authority and enhance its perception as a technologically advanced nation, Japanese narratives have often sought to reframe the Fukushima crisis from a disaster to an opportunity demonstrating nuclear resilience (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021). While this narrative has found mixed reception internationally, neighboring countries such as China and South Korea have strongly opposed the move. Historically, critics have argued that such unilateral disposal poses substantial risks to other nations' marine interests and cannot be treated merely as a matter of domestic sovereignty (Chang & Zhao, 2012).

Given their roles as the primary stakeholders in this event, the media representations in Japan and China have drawn recent scholarly attention. Li and Li (2022) investigated Japanese domestic media coverage of the discharge, revealing internal contestation over the policy's legitimacy. By contrast, Lu (2023) examined Chinese news coverage of this event, noting that state-affiliated media constructed a pessimistic and apprehensive stance toward Japan's actions. While these studies provided valuable insights into discursive framing within their respective national contexts, they lack a transnational comparative perspective.

Drawing on Fairclough's (1989, 1992) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis and the Attitude system within Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, this study examines English-language media representations of Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge in mainstream Chinese and Japanese media outlets. It aims to identify the attitudinal resources and polarities employed in Sino-Japanese media coverage and examine the interactions among text, discourse, and social practice in the discursive construction of this marine environmental event. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the similarities and differences in the attitudinal representations of the Fukushima nuclear

wastewater discharge between Chinese and Japanese media coverage? 2) How do identity, power, and ideology shape these English-language media representations in Chinese and Japanese media outlets?

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

This study compiled a specialized corpus of English-language media coverage from two mainstream outlets: *Global Times* (henceforth *GT*) in China and *The Japan News* (henceforth *JN*) in Japan. These two outlets were selected because they are the primary English-language media outlets through which each country presents this issue to a considerable international readership. The search procedure involved retrieving articles from the official websites of *GT* and *JN* by the following keywords, including “Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge”, “nuclear-contaminated water dumping”, and “treated water release”.

The retrieved articles were then screened against three specific inclusion criteria: 1) published between August 22, 2023 and November 2023, spanning the first three discharge rounds on August 24, October 5, and November 2. To ensure the coverage tracks the evolving timeline of the event rather than clustering around a single date, one article per month was selected from each outlet; 2) maintain a substantive focus on the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge, excluding texts that only mention the event in passing; 3) original in-house coverage, specifically credited to “Global Times staff reporter” or “The Yomiuri Shimbun”, while excluding syndicated articles reproduced from external news agencies. This procedure yielded a final corpus of eight articles: four from *GT* (2,467 words in total) and four from *JN* (1,879 words in total). An overview of the selected articles is provided in Appendix A.

2.2 Analytical Framework and Procedure

This study adopts Fairclough’s (1989, 1992) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the overarching theoretical framework and employs Martin & White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory as the specific analytic tool to investigate the way Chinese and Japanese media outlets convey varied attitudes towards the discharge event.

As a foundational figure in CDA, Fairclough (1989) highlighted the underlying relationships between language, power, and society, arguing that discourse, as a form of social practice, is often used to construct or maintain structures of power in society. He initially proposed a three-dimensional model that conceptualizes text, interaction, and context as a unity. Recognizing that “interaction” and “context” failed to fully capture the complexity of “discourse as social practice” (Wang & Yang, 2008), Fairclough (1992) later refined the model to encompass text, discursive practice, and social practice. Correspondingly, three stages of analysis are outlined, including description (textual analysis focusing on formal features of the texts), interpretation (discursive analysis examining the relationship between text and discursive practice), and explanation (social analysis addressing the relationship between discursive practice and broad social contexts).

Within this three-dimensional model, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar typically serves as the primary tool for textual description (Wang & Yang 2008). This study specifically utilizes Appraisal Theory, an extension of SFG's interpersonal metafunction. As the core of Appraisal Theory, the attitude system maps feelings construed in English texts (Martin & White, 2005), which involves three semantic regions (i.e., affect, judgement, and appreciation) and two polarities (i.e., positivity and negativity). According to Martin & White (2005), affect covers the emotions concerned with "affairs of the heart", "ecosocial well-being", and "the pursuit of goals"; judgement deals with attitudes towards behaviors, which can be further divided into those dealing with "social esteem" and those oriented to "social sanction"; and appreciation involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena including the "reaction", "composition", and "value".

Given that the parameters of evaluative meaning are sensitive to "what is at stake" in a given context (Martin & White, 2005), the coding unit for attitudinal resources was defined at the lexical level, i.e., individual words or phrases construing evaluative meaning toward one of the key participants in the event, such as the Japanese and Chinese governments, TEPCO, the marine environment, and the affected public. To ensure coding reliability, the corpus was independently annotated by two coders with linguistic backgrounds, achieving an inter-coder agreement of 89%; remaining discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Drawing on this analytical framework, the study combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine English-language media representations of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge in China and Japan. The quantitative analysis calculates the frequency and proportion of attitudinal resources and polarities to capture the overall attitudinal patterns in *GT* and *JN* coverage. Given the difference in corpus size, frequencies are normalized per 1,000 words for each attitudinal category, and log-likelihood tests are conducted to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the two datasets. Building on these quantitative findings, the qualitative analysis draws on specific textual evidence to verify and elaborate on the observed patterns. It further examines the media nature of *GT* and *JN*, and discusses the identities of the key stakeholders, the power relations between the two media, and the ideologies underlying Sino-Japanese coverage.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Textual Level

The overall distribution of attitudinal resources in *GT* and *JN* is presented below. As shown in Table 1, all three attitudinal subtypes are present in both outlets' coverage of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge. Overall, *GT* deploys attitudinal resources at a substantially higher density ($F=256$, $NF=104$) than *JN* ($F=130$, $NF=69$), a difference that reaches statistical significance ($LL=14.72$, $p<0.001$).

Table 1. The overall distribution of attitudinal resources in *GT* and *JN*

Attitudinal resources	<i>GT</i>		<i>JN</i>		LL
	F (%)	NF	F (%)	NF	
Affect	30 (11.72%)	12	19 (14.62%)	10	0.40
Judgement	110 (42.97%)	45	40 (30.77%)	21	17.68****
Appreciation	116 (45.31%)	47	71 (54.61%)	38	2.14
Total	256 (100.00%)	104	130 (100.00%)	69	14.72***

Note. a) F (%) represents the raw frequency of attitudinal patterns and the proportion related to total attitudinal patterns in specific dataset, while NF represents the normalized frequency of attitudinal patterns per 1,000 words; b) The log-likelihood value (LL) is adopted to measure significance. **** $p < .0001$, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

At the subtype level, appreciation constitutes the largest share of each outlet's attitudinal representations (*GT*: $F=116$, 45.31%; *JN*: $F=71$, 54.61%), their normalized frequencies are comparatively close (*GT*: $NF=47$; *JN*: $NF=38$), and a log-likelihood test indicates no statistically significant difference between them ($LL=2.14$, $p>0.05$). Affect is the least prominent subtype in both outlets (*GT*: $F=30$, 11.72%, $NF=12$; *JN*: $F=19$, 14.62%, $NF=10$), likewise showing no significant cross-outlet difference ($LL=0.40$, $p>0.05$). The most pronounced divergence emerges in judgement: although *GT*'s proportional share of judgement ($F=110$, 42.97%) is not dramatically larger than *JN*'s ($F=40$, 30.77%), the normalized frequency reveals *GT* ($NF=45$) deploying judgement resources at more than twice the density of *JN* ($NF=21$), reaching a highly significant difference ($LL=17.68$, $p<0.0001$).

These patterns suggest that *GT* and *JN* attach comparable importance to appraising the entities and chained events associated with the Fukushima discharge (appreciation), and both similarly downplay stakeholders' emotional responses (affect). *GT*, however, places a markedly stronger emphasis on evaluating the conduct and character of the stakeholders involved (judgement), whereas *JN* tends to background such ethical evaluations of human behavior.

Table 2. The overall distribution of attitudinal polarities in *GT* and *JN*

Attitudinal polarities	<i>GT</i>		<i>JN</i>		LL
	F (%)	NF	F (%)	NF	
Positivity	78 (30.47%)	32	98 (75.38%)	52	10.97***
Negativity	178 (69.53%)	72	32 (24.62%)	17	75.99****
Total	256 (100.00%)	104	130 (100.00%)	69	14.72***

Note. Same as Table 1.

To further examine how these attitudinal resources are polarized, Table 2 presents the overall distribution of positive and negative evaluations in *GT* and *JN*. The two outlets display sharply

divergent and statistically significant polarity preferences. Negative attitudes dominate *GT*'s coverage ($F=178$, 69.53%, $NF=72$), far exceeding *JN*'s negative share ($F=32$, 24.62%, $NF=17$); this disparity is extremely significant ($LL=75.99$, $p<0.0001$). Conversely, positive attitudes are significantly more prevalent in *JN*'s coverage ($F=98$, 75.38%, $NF=52$) than in *GT*'s ($F=78$, 30.47%, $NF=32$), supported by log-likelihood results ($LL=10.97$, $p<0.001$).

Together, the results show that *GT* and *JN* have opposing preferences for attitudinal polarities when reporting the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge. While both outlets evaluate the event itself, *GT* is statistically much more inclined to condemn stakeholders' behaviors and devalue related phenomena. In contrast, *JN* systematically frames the issue through a significantly more positive lens, mitigating negative evaluations of the stakeholders' actions.

3.1.1 Affect

Affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings, encompassing the moods of happiness or sadness, the feelings of peace or anxiety, the sense of achievement or frustration, and the surge of desire or disinclination (Martin & White, 2005). Table 3 presents the distribution of affect polarities in *GT* and *JN*.

Table 3. The distribution of affect polarities in *GT* and *JN*

Affect polarities	<i>GT</i>		<i>JN</i>		LL
	F (%)	NF	F (%)	NF	
Positivity	11 (36.67%)	4	16 (84.21%)	8	2.79
Negativity	19 (63.33%)	8	3 (15.79%)	2	9.02**
Total	30 (100.00%)	12	19 (100.00%)	10	0.40

Note. Same as Table 1.

It is shown that negative affect predominates in *GT*'s coverage, accounting for nearly two-thirds of its affect resources ($F=19$, 63.33%, $NF=8$) compared with positive affect ($F=11$, 36.67%, $NF=4$). *JN* exhibits the opposite trend, with positive affect overwhelmingly dominant ($F=16$, 84.21%, $NF=8$) and negative affect comprising only a marginal share ($F=3$, 15.79%, $NF=2$). Furthermore, the log-likelihood test indicates that the difference in negative affect density is statistically significant ($LL=9.02$, $p<0.01$), whereas the difference in positive affect density, though numerically sizable, does not reach significance ($LL=2.79$, $p>0.05$). To illustrate these differing preferences for affect polarities in *GT* and *JN*, more detailed textual evidence and interpretation are as follows.

Examples from *GT*

- 1) Seoul **called on** [affect+] efforts to ensure safe dumping while **highlighting the need** [affect+] for transparent data sharing. (October 7, 2023)
- 2) "We **urge** [affect+] Japanese government to face the **opposition** [affect-] and **concerns** [affect-] in Japan and from international community," spokesperson said. (October 7, 2023)
- 3) **Distrust** [affect-] is mounting among the Japanese public. Many Japanese netizens said

TEPCO had “zero credibility”, while others expressed their **nervousness** [affect-] concerning the so-called “treated water”. (November 2, 2023)

- 4) The TEPCO and Japanese government have handled [the discharge] very poorly, said a Japanese netizen, who also **fears** [affect-] the accumulation of these scandals could lead to another major accident. (November 2, 2023)

In the examples above, *GT* mainly depicts the emotional reactions of neighboring countries, the international community, and the Japanese public. Positive affect resources are adopted to show the strong desire of neighboring countries for accountability, while negative affect resources are used to demonstrate the distrust, anxiety, and disapproval of the international community and the Japanese public.

When depicting neighboring countries, *GT* uses positive affect resources like “called on”, “highlighting the need”, and “urge” (see Examples 1 & 2) to show that Korea and China strongly demand that the Japanese government take safety measures and provide transparent explanations regarding the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge. Broadening its scope to the international community, *GT* shifts to negative affect resources such as “opposition” and “concerns” (see Example 2), which indicates that the discharge fails to gain international favor and arouses a shared sense of insecurity. This negative emotional framing also extends specifically to the Japanese public. By highlighting the negative feelings of “distrust”, “nervousness”, and “fears” (see Examples 3 & 4), *GT* aligns the Japanese anxiety with international concerns, underscoring mounting skepticism toward TEPCO’s institutional credibility as well as the safety of the “treated water” and the risk of further accidents.

Examples from *JN*

- 5) Ahead of the release, TEPCO **determined** [affect+] that there were no problems regarding matters such as the dilution of the treated water. (August 24, 2023)
- 6) Japan **has repeatedly called for** [affect+] discussions among the two countries’ experts since the treated water discharge started in August. (November 26, 2023)
- 7) Japan has won **support** [affect+] and **understanding** [affect+] from the international community by having the IAEA evaluate the discharge process. (November 26, 2023)
- 8) It is not only the people of Fukushima who are **concerned** [affect-] about declining sales ...affected by the Chinese embargo. (September 7, 2023)

In the examples above, *JN* mainly depicts the emotional reactions of the Japanese government, TEPCO, and the public. Positive affect resources are used to show the confidence of the Japanese government and TEPCO in handling the discharge and the support it has received internationally, while negative affect resources are used to demonstrate the domestic public’s anxiety over its economic loss.

Regarding the Japanese government and TEPCO, *JN* uses positive affect resources like “determined” (see Example 5) to indicate that TEPCO firmly assures the safety of the wastewater discharge and “has repeatedly called for” (see Example 6) to show that the Japanese government actively pursues bilateral dialogue with China, together serving as a response to the international demand, opposition, and concern reported in *GT* (see Examples 1-4). Concerning the public, *JN* uses positive affect resources “support” and “understanding” (see

Example 7) to show that Japan has won backing from the international community through the IAEA's evaluation of the discharge process, countering *GT*'s portrayal of widespread international opposition and concern (see Example 2). In contrast, *JN* adopts the negative affect resource "concerned" (see Example 8) to depict domestic anxiety over declining seafood sales caused by the Chinese import ban, which redirects attention from the safety of the discharge itself toward the economic fallout.

3.1.2 Judgement

Judgement deals with attitudes towards characters and behaviors, including the admiration or criticism of personal judgements and the praise or condemnation of moral judgements. (Martin & White, 2005). The distribution of judgement polarities in *GT* and *JN* is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The distribution of judgement polarities in *GT* and *JN*

Judgement polarities	<i>GT</i>		<i>JN</i>		LL
	F (%)	NF	F (%)	NF	
Positivity	35 (31.82%)	14	30 (75.00%)	16	0.22
Negativity	75 (68.18%)	31	10 (25.00%)	5	40.13****
Total	110 (100.00%)	45	40 (100.00%)	21	17.68****

Note. Same as Table 1.

The data highlights a clear polarization in how *GT* and *JN* utilize judgement resources. *GT* is heavily skewed towards negative judgement, accounting for over two-thirds of its total judgement instances (F=75, 68.18%, NF=31) compared to a nearly one-third share for positive judgement (F=35, 31.82%, NF=14). *JN*, however, relies predominantly on positive judgement (F=30, 75.00%, NF=16), with negative judgement confined to a marginal share (F=10, 25.00%, NF=5). The log-likelihood test confirms that this divergence is driven by the use of negative resources: the density gap in negative judgement between *GT* and *JN* is extremely significant (LL=40.13, $p < 0.0001$), whereas the gap in positive judgement density is not significant (LL=0.22, $p > 0.05$), despite *GT*'s notably lower proportional share of positive judgement. To illustrate these differing preferences for judgement polarities in *GT* and *JN*, more detailed textual evidence and interpretation follow below.

Examples from *GT*

- 9) Chinese government **always puts people's wellbeing first** [judgement+], and will take all measures necessary to **safeguard** [judgement+] food safety and the health of our people. (August 24, 2023)
- 10) China's General Administration of Customs (GAC) **has continued to assess** [judgement+] the risk of the radioactive contamination of Japanese food ... **strictly ensuring** [judgement+] safety. (August 24, 2023)
- 11) To **forcibly start** [judgement-] the ocean discharge is an **extremely selfish** [judgement-] and **irresponsible** [judgement-] act... By **dumping** [judgement-] the water into the ocean,

Japan has turned itself into a **saboteur** [judgement-] of ecological system and **polluter** [judgement-] of global marine environment. (August 24, 2023)

- 12) The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) **only has access to** [judgement-] information provided by TEPCO, which has been found **guilty** [judgement-] of **lying repeatedly** [judgement-]. (October 7, 2023)

In the examples above, *GT* mainly judges the images and behaviors of the Chinese government, the Japanese stakeholders, and the international organization IAEA. Positive judgement resources are adopted to show admiration for the Chinese government, while negative judgement resources are used to express criticism and condemnation of the Japanese stakeholders and the IAEA.

Concerning the Chinese government, *GT* uses positive judgement resources like “always put people’s wellbeing first”, “safeguard”, “has continued to assess” and “strictly ensuring” (see Examples 9 & 10) to admire the Chinese government’s consistency in prioritizing people’s needs, its tenacity to assess food safety, and its capacity to take protective measures. When dealing with the Japanese stakeholders, *GT* mainly uses negative judgement resources like “dumping”, “saboteur”, “polluter”, “forcibly start”, and “extremely selfish and irresponsible” (see Example 11) to condemn the immorality of Japanese authorities in harming the global environment and their failure to act responsibly. In addition, negative judgement resources like “guilty” and “lying repeatedly” (see Example 12) are adopted to depict the illegality and inaccuracy of TEPCO’s reporting. Turning to the international organization IAEA, *GT* uses the negative judgement resource “only has access to” (see Example 12) to criticize its incapacity and unreliability, whose evaluation depends on a limited and potentially distorted information source.

Examples from *JN*

- 13) There is growing momentum in Japan to **actively purchase** [judgement+] marine products from Fukushima Prefecture ... It is necessary to **expand** [judgement+] a circle of support so as **not to yield** [judgement+] to China’s hardline approach. (September 7, 2023)
- 14) The Japanese government should **promote** [judgement+] policies such as **moving away from dependence** [judgement+] on the Chinese market and **expanding** [judgement+] new sales channels. (September 7, 2023)
- 15) Information disseminated from the international nuclear energy organization is extremely important to **increase** [judgement+] transparency in the water discharge,” an official said Friday following the IAEA inspection. “The Japanese government intends to **continue responding to this matter thoroughly** [judgement+].” (October 27, 2023)
- 16) While Japan hopes to start scientific discussions among experts from both countries at an early date, China **continues to demean** [judgement-] the monitoring mechanism. It remains uncertain **whether** the two countries **will be able to** [judgement-] find common ground. (November 26, 2023)

In the examples above, *JN* mainly judges the images and behaviors of Japan, the international organization IAEA, and the Chinese government. Positive judgement resources are adopted to show admiration for Japan and the IAEA, while negative judgement resources are used to

express criticism of the Chinese government.

In portraying Japan, *JN* presents both the public and the government as acting in coordinated solidarity in response to the discharge and the Chinese ban. On the one hand, *JN* adopts positive judgement resources like “actively purchase”, “expand [a circle of support]”, and “not to yield” (see Example 13) to show their willingness to support the afflicted seafood industry, their capacity to build solidarity, and their resolve to withstand external pressure. On the other hand, *JN* uses positive judgement resources like “promote [policies]”, “moving away from dependence”, “expanding [new sales channels]”, and “continue responding to ... thoroughly” (see Examples 14 & 15) to highlight its capacity to take corrective measures and its commitment to handling the discharge responsibly. Turning to the IAEA, *JN* uses the positive judgement resource “increase [transparency]” to recognize the IAEA’s contribution to data sharing, which helps dispel misunderstandings about the discharge. This serves as a response to the condemnation of the IAEA’s incapacity and unreliability reported by *GT* (see Example 12). However, when addressing the Chinese government, *JN* uses negative judgement resources like “continues to demean” and “whether [the two countries] will be able to” (see Example 16) to portray China as obstructing scientific dialogue and monitoring mechanisms, refuting its cooperative and rigorous image constructed by *GT* (see Example 10).

3.1.3 Appreciation

Appreciation involves attitudes towards things, entities, and phenomena, including positive or negative evaluations of reaction, composition, and value (Martin & White, 2005). Table 5 presents the distribution of appreciation polarities in *GT* and *JN*.

Table 5. The distribution of appreciation polarities in *GT* and *JN*

Appreciation polarities	<i>GT</i>		<i>JN</i>		LL
	F (%)	NF	F (%)	NF	
Positivity	32 (27.59%)	13	52 (73.24%)	28	11.81***
Negativity	84 (72.41%)	34	19 (26.76%)	10	28.51****
Total	116 (100.00%)	47	71 (100.00%)	38	2.14

Note. Same as Table 1.

While *GT* and *JN* demonstrate no statistically significant difference in their overall use of appreciation resources (LL=2.14, $p>0.05$), divergences consist in how they polarize that appraisal. In *GT*, negative appreciation constitutes the vast majority of these resources (F=84, 72.41%, NF=34) compared with positive evaluations (F=32, 27.59%, NF=13). However, *JN* relies predominantly on positive appreciation (F=52, 73.24%, NF=28), with negative evaluations comprising roughly one-quarter of its total (F=19, 26.76%, NF=10). Notably, log-likelihood tests confirm that the density gaps between the two outlets are statistically significant for both positive (LL=11.81, $p<0.001$) and negative (LL=28.51, $p<0.0001$) appreciation. The following analysis provides textual evidence to contextualize how these divergent patterns are

construed in discourse.

Examples from *GT*

- 17) The disposal of the Fukushima **nuclear-contaminated** [appreciation-] water is a **major issue** [appreciation+] about nuclear safety. Its impact goes beyond Japan's borders, and the issue is **by no means a private matter issue** [appreciation+]. (August 24, 2023)
- 18) "We conduct **substantive** [appreciation+] communication with neighboring countries, and establish a **long-term** [appreciation+] and **effective** [appreciation+] international monitoring mechanism with the participation of other stakeholders and handle the **nuclear-contaminated** [appreciation-] water in a **responsible** [appreciation+] manner," the spokesperson said. (August 24, 2023)
- 19) The Japanese government **failed to** prove ... that the monitoring plan is **sound** [appreciation-] and **effective** [appreciation-]. Japan also **failed to** have **thorough** [appreciation-] consultations with other stakeholders. (August 24, 2023)
- 20) Japanese government has entered a new phase of damaging the marine environment, which could have **incalculable results** [appreciation-] ... making it a **fifth international criminal crime** [appreciation-] ... there is a likelihood of **severe and either widespread or long-term damage** [appreciation-] to the environment. (September 2, 2023)

In the examples above, *GT* evaluates the quality and disposal of wastewater as well as the effects of the Chinese and Japanese governments' actions. Positive appreciation resources are adopted to show the significance of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater disposal and the effectiveness of the Chinese government's actions, while negative appreciation resources are used to present the harmfulness of the wastewater as well as the ineffectiveness and bad consequences of the Japanese government's actions.

When evaluating the nature of the wastewater, *GT* uses positive appreciation resources like "major issue" and "by no means a private matter issue" (see Example 17) to stress the global significance of its disposal. *GT* also uses negative lexis "nuclear-contaminated" (see Examples 17 & 18) to characterize the wastewater as inherently polluted and harmful. Shifting the focus to the countermeasures taken by the Chinese government, *GT* uses positive appreciation resources like "substantive", "long-term", "effective", and "responsible" (see Example 18). These terms present China's measures as performing highly positive and constructive functions in addressing the crisis. Conversely, when assessing the consequences of the Japanese government's actions, appreciation resources like "sound", "effective", and "thorough" (see Example 19) are linked with the expressions "failed to", which shifts their polarity from positive to negative. *GT* uses these resources to indicate that Japan's measures are fundamentally ineffective. Moreover, *GT* also adopts negative appreciation resources like "incalculable results", "fifth international criminal crime", and "severe and either widespread or long-term damage" (see Example 20) to underscore the catastrophic marine ecological harm caused by the discharge.

Examples from *JN*

- 21) It is also **essential** [appreciation+] for the government to disseminate such **objective** [appreciation+] information to the world in an **easy-to-understand** [appreciation+] manner

- to deepen understanding of the **appropriateness** [appreciation+] of the discharge of **treated** [appreciation+] water and the **safety** [appreciation+] of Japanese marine products. (September 7, 2023)
- 22) Based on **objective** [appreciation+] and **scientific** [appreciation+] evidence ... the IAEA stated that the plan is “**consistent with international safety standards**” [appreciation+]. (October 27, 2023)
- 23) As Japanese citizens have long witnessed the **plight** [appreciation-] of the afflicted areas, there are many who cannot accept China’s **unilateral** [appreciation-] and **scientifically baseless** [appreciation-] stance. (September 7, 2023)
- 24) Foreign Minister sought an immediate end to China’s ban on seafood imports from Japan imposed over the release of **treated** [appreciation+] water... But the two sides are still **far apart** [appreciation-] on the discharge, and **no specific progress** [appreciation-] has been made on the issue. (November 26, 2023)

In the examples above, *JN* evaluates the quality of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater, the credibility of its disposal and inspection process, and the conduct of the Japanese and Chinese governments in handling the discharge and its aftermath. Positive appreciation resources are used to affirm the safety of the wastewater and the credibility of the disposal and inspection process, as well as the value of the Japanese government’s communication efforts, while negative appreciation resources are used to portray China’s stance as unreasonable and to note the continued impasse between the two countries.

When framing the Fukushima nuclear wastewater and associated processing procedures, *JN* employs the positive appreciation resource “treated” (see Examples 21 & 24) to mark the wastewater itself as processed rather than contaminated. Also, “appropriateness” (see Example 21) evaluates the discharge process as proper, while “safety” (see Example 21) is attached not to the wastewater directly but to Japanese marine products, reassuring readers about seafood consumption. *JN* further justifies the reliability of the disposal and inspection process using terms like “objective”, “scientific”, and “consistent with international safety standards” (see Example 22), countering *GT*’s portrayal of Japan’s monitoring plan as unsound and ineffective (see Example 19). Shifting to the Japanese government’s outreach efforts, *JN* uses positive lexis like “essential”, “objective”, and “easy-to-understand” (see Example 21) to present the government’s communication efforts as significant and valuable in fostering correct understanding of the discharge. When evaluating the countermeasures enacted by the Chinese government, *JN* uses negative lexis like “unilateral” and “scientifically baseless” (see Example 23) to delegitimize China’s opposition as unreasonable, while also referencing the “plight” of the disaster-afflicted areas (see Example 23) to underscore how China’s ban would compound the existing local hardship. Finally, *JN* characterizes the state of bilateral dialogue as an impasse by using negative appreciation resources like “far apart” and “no specific progress” (see Example 24), implicitly rebutting *GT*’s claim of substantive transnational communication (see Example 18).

3.2 Discourse Level

3.2.1 Media Nature of *GT*

Launched in 2009, *Global Times* (*GT*) serves as China's second English-language newspaper and far-reaching opinion leader at home and abroad through sharp and innovative reporting. It claims that it presents trustworthy facts and insightful views to "eliminate the world's information deficit toward China", which stays away from "the avoidance of conflict and confrontation in Chinese journalistic tradition" and "the designed provocation in Western media's China reportage" (*Global Times*, n.d.).

Sponsored by People's Daily, the organ of the Communist Party of China (CPC), *GT* is usually considered the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, which reflects the ideologies of the CPC (Wang & Ma, 2021). As the President of *People's Daily* stressed, *GT* must adhere to the correct direction of public opinion, uphold the unity of the Party's policies and the people's aspirations, and strengthen the initiative in media coverage (Wang, 2004), thus promoting the development of Chinese party publicity.

Thus, *GT* tends to publicize Chinese authoritative attitudes to domestic and international readers when reporting the Fukushima nuclear water discharge. It involves social agents who firmly follow the guidance of the CPC, like "the spokesperson" (see Examples 2 & 18), "Chinese government" (see Example 9), and "China's General Administration of Customs" (see Example 10) to stress the CPC's emotions, judgements, and evaluations in this marine environmental event.

3.2.2 Media Nature of *JN*

Founded in 1955, *The Japan News* (*JN*) is a daily English-language newspaper published by *The Yomiuri Shimbun* (*YS*). *JN* aims to advance the world's understanding of Japan by transmitting domestic and international news to global readers (*The Japan News*, n.d.). Notably, *JN*'s content primarily consists of translated articles from *YS*. As its parent company, *YS* is Japan's leading national newspaper with the largest circulation in Japanese journalism, which claims to contribute to "improving democracy through accurate and prompt reporting as well as moderate and sensible editorials" (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, n.d.).

In fact, *YS* maintains tight linkages with Japanese conservative political factions. Closely allied with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), *YS* is widely recognized as a pro-government publication and a mouthpiece for the Japanese right wing (Wu, 2010). As the English edition of *YS*, *JN* inherits this conservative ideology, systematically prioritizing the LDP's political interests and downplaying adverse details when reporting on events involving the ruling party (Chan, 2012).

In that case, *JN* functions as a channel to broadcast the Japanese authorities' stances to global audiences. Bound by the parent company's political allegiance, the newspaper frequently foregrounds social agents whose interests align with the Japanese conservative political factions, such as "Tokyo Electric Power Company" (see Example 5), "Japanese government" (see Examples 6, 14 & 21), and "pro-government Japanese citizens" (see Example 13 & 23). The publication channels the LDP's emotions, judgments, and evaluations regarding the crisis.

3.3 Social Level

3.3.1 Identity

As Japan appears as the main body dominating the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge and China serves as the key stakeholder under the direct influence of Japan's decisions and actions, it is worthwhile to discuss how the two media outlets contribute to shaping the identities of Japan and China in different ways.

In *GT*'s coverage, Japan is discursively constructed as a potential threat to global community and as an evader of its international responsibilities through the extensive use of negative attitudinal resources. On the one hand, Japan has evoked widespread dissatisfaction and insecurity at home and abroad (see Examples 2-4). Furthermore, the Japanese government is depicted as undertaking immoral measures to dispose of the nuclear wastewater (see Example 11) and exerting a destructive impact on the marine environment (see Example 20), thus threatening human well-being and global ecological security. On the other hand, Japan demonstrates profound indifference to domestic and international opposition. TEPCO is condemned for repeatedly falsifying information regarding wastewater safety to evade accountability (see Example 12), while the Japanese government has failed to implement effective monitoring plans or conduct thorough consultations with stakeholders (see Example 19). However, *GT* constructs China as a people-centered, capable, and responsible nation. Driven by a concentration of positive attitudinal resources, the Chinese government is praised for consistently prioritizing its citizens' needs (see Example 9) and demonstrating the tenacity and capacity to strictly assess food safety risks (see Example 10). By implementing substantive, long-term, and effective measures to address the crisis (see Example 18), China is portrayed as actively fulfilling its role in safeguarding public health and maintaining the global common good.

However, *JN* discursively constructs Japan both as a domestic coordinator fostering solidarity and as a proactive solver addressing nuclear wastewater issues through various positive attitudinal resources. On the one hand, *JN* highlights the coordination between the public and the government: the public demonstrates resilience and willingness to support the afflicted seafood industry (see Example 13), while the government exhibits the capacity to implement corrective countermeasures against the Chinese embargo (see Example 14). Together, these coordinated efforts maintain Japanese interests against external economic pressure. On the other hand, Japan is depicted as actively providing solutions and assurances regarding the discharge. The government and TEPCO show firm determination in ensuring discharge safety (see Examples 5 & 21), seek bilateral dialogue and international validation (see Examples 6 & 7), and enhance transparency through objective, scientific communication (see Examples 15 & 21). Furthermore, the disposal process is justified by aligning with international safety standards (see Example 22). Using negative attitudinal resources, China is constructed as an obstructive adversary to Japanese livelihood and wellbeing due to its unilateral seafood embargo. Delegitimized as "scientifically baseless" (see Example 23), China's actions not only trigger domestic anxiety over declining sales (see Example 8), but also obstruct scientific dialogue and monitoring mechanisms (see Example 16). Consequently, *JN* portrays the Chinese

government as perpetuating an unnecessary impasse (see Example 24), which ultimately undermines Japanese economic stability and societal wellbeing.

3.3.2 Media Power

According to Fairclough (1989), discourse, as a form of social practice, is often used to construct or maintain structures of power in society. As different media outlets are in charge of the production of media coverage and the reconstruction of social reality, it is significant to discuss how media power exerts influence on *GT* and *JN*'s coverage of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge.

Specifically, *GT* serves as a state-run English-language media outlet under the guidance of the CPC, which intends to adhere to the correct direction of public opinion and uphold correspondence to the Party's policies (Wang & Ma, 2021; Wang, 2004). To echo the Chinese government's official stance, *GT* employs various negative attitudinal resources to condemn Japanese authorities' immoral actions to damage the ecological system and TEPCO's unjustified practices to evade accountability. Thus, *GT* constructs Japan as a threat to global community and an evader of its international responsibilities. Furthermore, *GT* strategically projects a positive national image to distance itself from "the designed provocation in Western media's China reportage" (*Global Times*, n.d.). To this end, *GT* uses extensive positive attitudinal resources to stress China's persistent efforts to safeguard public welfare and its effective countermeasures against the crisis. Consequently, *GT* constructs an image of China as a people-centered, responsible, and capable nation, which stands in sharp contrast to the negative portrayal of Japan.

However, *JN* closely aligns with its parent publication's conservative, pro-government stance. Historically maintaining strong ties with the ruling LDP, the Yomiuri media group tends to downplay adverse factors when reporting on issues involving the government's interests (Chan, 2012). Consequently, despite domestic and international controversy, *JN* utilizes considerable positive attitudinal resources to affirm the Japanese government and TEPCO's handling of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge, thus legitimizing Japan's marine environmental policies. Moreover, sharing *YS*'s overarching mission to shape public opinion of Japan at home and abroad, *JN* strategically amplifies issues concerning Japanese livelihood and the impacts of foreign policies. This discursive strategy effectively deflects internal conflicts toward external confrontations. By employing negative attitudinal resources to frame the Chinese embargo as unreasonable and detrimental, *JN* discursively attributes Japan's domestic economic plight entirely to Chinese policy.

3.3.3 Ideology

As ideology exists both in the structure of discourse and in the discourse practices (Fairclough, 1992), it is necessary to figure out its crucial role in media representations. This section mainly discusses the differences in ideologies between China and Japan and interprets their separate impacts on *GT* and *JN*'s coverage of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge.

In contemporary Chinese discourse, the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind" serves as a prominent social value. This concept traces its lineage to Chinese cultural

traditions that underscore public spirit and common good, notably the Confucian ideal that “when the Great Dao prevails, the world is a commonwealth shared by all” and the Taoist vision of “uniting human and universe, and following the rules of nature”. By absorbing core tenets of Marxism, contemporary Chinese discourse has revitalized this collectivist ethos into a modernized vision (Li, 2016). More specifically, it advocates for collaborative international endeavors to build an open, inclusive, and ecologically sustainable world characterized by green development, universal security, and common prosperity (The State Council, 2023). *GT*’s coverage appears to frame the Fukushima nuclear wastewater issue through the lens of collectivist narratives. Rather than definitively proving broader institutional motives, the analyzed texts demonstrate a consistent attitudinal pattern. *GT* frequently employs negative attitudinal resources to stress global marine risks, characterizing Japan’s discharge as detrimental to shared environmental security. Conversely, positive attitudinal resources are mobilized to highlight China’s domestic and international efforts in managing the crisis, positioning these actions as protective of public health and the global common good. Consequently, *GT*’s discourse is strategically structured to validate China’s policy responses while critiquing the discharge as a violation of shared global interests.

In Japan, conservative socio-political discourse has increasingly exhibited state-centric and nationalist tendencies, often prioritizing national self-interest and vigilance against perceived external pressures in the Asia-Pacific region (Zhai, 2022). While historical and cultural ties between China and Japan are profound, shifting power dynamics and geopolitical frictions have periodically stimulated defensive narratives within certain factions (Cheng & Lian, 2020). Crucially, as an English-language publication affiliated with the broadly conservative Yomiuri media group, *JN* operates at the critical intersection of domestic conservatism and international public diplomacy. Rather than merely echoing domestic nationalist sentiments, it strategically navigates this space to project a rational and responsible national image to global audiences. Specifically, the analyzed *JN* articles exhibit a prominent state-centric framing regarding the discharge. Textual analysis reveals a strategic reliance on positive attitudinal resources to validate Japan’s disposals. By portraying the process as scientifically sound and emphasizing the nation’s regulatory capacity, *JN* thus legitimizes domestic environmental policies on the international stage. Meanwhile, the texts consistently employ negative attitudinal resources when framing China’s embargo on Japanese seafood. By foregrounding the economic plight of domestic fisheries and implicitly attributing these hardships to Chinese intervention, *JN* shifts the narrative focus from global environmental risks to external economic coercion. Ultimately, these linguistic choices construct a domestic victimhood narrative and delegitimize China’s diplomatic response, demonstrating how state-aligned media navigate contemporary geopolitical disputes.

4. Conclusion

This study draws on comparative CDA to examine English-language media representations of the Fukushima nuclear wastewater discharge in *GT* and *JN*. Across both outlets, appreciation emerges as the most frequently deployed attitudinal resource, followed by judgement and affect;

however, *GT* is predominantly negative in its coverage, whereas *JN* tends toward more positive evaluations. In representing the event, *GT* casts Japan as a potential threat to the global community and as an evader of its international responsibilities, while portraying the Chinese government as people-oriented, capable, and responsible. By contrast, *JN* frames Japan as a coordinator of domestic solidarity and a problem-solver addressing nuclear wastewater issues, while positioning the Chinese government as an external actor whose policies bear on Japanese livelihoods. These divergent representations appear rooted in the differing ideological orientations of the two outlets: *GT*'s discursive strategies align with a collectivist vision of "a community with a shared future for mankind," foregrounding the common good shared across multiple stakeholders, including the state, the public, and the environment alike. However, *JN* operates at the intersection of domestic conservatism and international public diplomacy, discursively legitimizing the state policy and constructing a defensive narrative against geopolitical pressure.

This study contributes to the growing literature on environmental crisis communication and cross-national media discourse. By integrating Appraisal Theory with CDA, it elucidates the linguistic mechanisms, specifically attitudinal resources, through which state-affiliated, English-language media construct national identities and navigate geopolitical frictions. The findings show how a global ecological issue can be discursively transformed into a site of ideological contestation, offering insight into the mediatization of international environmental disputes. Nonetheless, a few limitations should be acknowledged. The findings draw on a small corpus, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions; qualitative textual analysis, while affording in-depth insight into specific discursive strategies, cannot fully capture narrative shifts over an extended period; the interpretations offered here should therefore be read as indicative of the selected sample rather than as definitive claims about media motives more broadly. Future research would benefit from larger corpora and the integration of corpus-linguistic methods to track longitudinal shifts in media representations.

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Appendix A. Corpus source

Global Times (2023, August 24). *Update: China voices strong condemnation against Japan’s dumping of nuclear-contaminated water; halts all aquatic product imports from the country*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296885.shtml>

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