

Positive Discourse Construction of “Chinese Solutions” in County-level Humanistic Reports: An Appraisal Study of *iChongqing* from 2021 to 2025

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Abstract: While global cross-cultural interaction evolves into an increasingly diversified ecosystem, county-level humanistic writing stands as a primary platform to exhibit on-the-ground practices of the “Chinese Solutions.” Its discursive construction significantly embraces the effectiveness of cross-cultural dissemination. Based on a corpus of 44 from 2021 and 2025, the present research applies the Attitude system of Appraisal Theory. By combining quantitative statistics with qualitative interpretation, it explores how “Chinese Solutions” are actively constructed in discourse, along with the underlying logic and implementable paths. This analysis revolves around three prominent themes: rural revitalization, cultural continuity, and cross-cultural exchange. It assesses the operational modes of county-level humanistic communication and addresses the critical difficulties encountered in international publicity. The collected texts feature a reasonable proportion of affect, judgment, and appreciation resources, which collectively boost discourse construction via arousing emotional empathy, cultivating rational recognition, and unifying value perceptions. While Chinese citizens serve as the main narrative actors, foreign participants are included to introduce international outlooks. The report is intended to offer practical insights for local media seeking to refine international communication strategies for county-level humanistic reporting, thereby facilitating the global circulation of China’s grassroots development experience and outstanding culture.

Keywords: Appraisal theory; Positive discourse analysis; Chinese solutions; *iChongqing*

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1. Introduction

Against profound changes in global governance and growing competition in international communication, better telling China’s stories and making China’s voice heard have become a key priority for strengthening

national cultural soft power and international discursive influence. Serving as microcosms of national governance, counties embody the concrete implementation of “Chinese Solutions” in livelihood improvement, industrial upgrading, and cultural inheritance. County-level English reports on *iChongqing* undertake the task of presenting grassroots development achievements to the international community. Nevertheless, most existing research focuses on macro-narrative analysis rather than the micro-linguistic mechanism of evaluative meaning construction. Appraisal Theory supports the analysis of evaluation and interpersonal dynamics. It further uncovers the implicit discursive logic in county-level humanistic reports. Current literature on “Chinese Solutions” discourse construction mainly concentrates on national-level political discourse, while county-level grassroots reporting remains under-examined. Moreover, relevant studies seldom combine corpus quantitative statistics with qualitative case interpretation to reveal the distribution rules and pragmatic functions of Attitude resources. To fill this gap, this study addresses three research questions:

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews existing studies on appraisal theory and media discourse. Section 3 elaborates on the theoretical framework: appraisal theory’s attitude system. Section 4 introduces corpus data and mixed research methods. Section 5 presents quantitative statistics and qualitative case analysis. Section 6 concludes the findings, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Existing studies on appraisal theory and media discourse

As a core theoretical branch of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory is widely employed to explore evaluative language and interpersonal meaning in discourse construction^[1–2]. Proposed and refined by Martin and White, the theory consists of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation subsystems, among which the Attitude dimension, including Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, lays a solid foundation for analyzing emotional expression, behavioral judgment, and aesthetic evaluation in various texts^[3–8]. From functional and cognitive perspectives, Hart further interpreted the implicit correlation between discourse form, grammatical features, and ideological orientation, which offers important theoretical guidance for media discourse analysis^[1]. Combined with Positive Discourse Analysis, Appraisal Theory has now become a mature research paradigm for news and public communication studies^[4].

Domestic scholars have extensively applied this theory to interpret Chinese news narratives. Relevant studies have probed into attitudinal resources in rural revitalization and rural e-commerce news, revealing how evaluative language shapes public recognition of grassroots practices^[5, 9–10]. Meanwhile, researchers have also analyzed character reports, inspirational speeches, and macro political narratives such as the Chinese Dream, expanding the application value of Appraisal Theory in value construction and identity shaping^[7]. Furthermore, it has also been adopted in tourism image discourse research, proving its strong adaptability in cross-cultural communication analysis^[11–14].

Existing studies on the local international platform *iChongqing* mainly focus on urban image, ecological civilization, and red culture communication from the perspective of communication theories^[6]. Few scholars have adopted Appraisal Theory to conduct micro-linguistic analysis on its county-level humanistic reports.

3. Theoretical framework: Appraisal theory's attitude system

3.1. Overview of appraisal theory

Appraisal Theory affords a useful tool kit for explicating how speakers and writers negotiate interpersonal meanings^[8]. Appraisal Theory is a significant extension and advancement of systemic functional linguistics in the field of interpersonal meaning research. It was first proposed by Australian linguist J.R. Martin in the 1990s, and later further improved by Martin and P.R.R. White, forming a complete theoretical framework including three subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation Breaking through the limitations of traditional linguistics focusing on grammatical structure, the theory shifts the research perspective to the interpersonal function and evaluative meaning of language, focusing on how writers express attitudes, adjust interpersonal relationships and construct discourse positions through language resources, providing a refined theoretical tool for discourse analysis.

In the research of international communication discourse, Appraisal Theory has unique adaptability: the core goal of international communication is to achieve cross-cultural understanding and recognition, and attitude resources, as the core of Appraisal Theory, exactly assume the key role of “conveying emotions, expressing positions and shaping consensus.” As a grassroots carrier of international communication, county-level humanistic reports need to balance local authenticity and international readability. The reasonable use of attitude resources can effectively build a communication chain of “emotional resonance- rational recognition-value approval”, enabling the grassroots practice of the “Chinese Solutions” to enter the international discourse system in a more acceptable way.

3.2. Core components of the attitude system

The Attitude System is the core subsystem of Appraisal Theory, used to express the writer's evaluative stance towards people, events, and things. It is divided into three types of resources: affect, judgment, and appreciation, corresponding to psychological, ethical, and aesthetic categories, respectively, jointly forming a complete system of discourse evaluation.

3.2.1. Affect resources: Trigger carriers of emotional resonance

Affect resources are the crucial carriers for triggering emotional resonance among international audiences. By presenting the real emotional experiences of villagers, cultural inheritors, foreigners, and other subjects, it can break the emotional barriers in cross-cultural communication, transforming the grassroots effectiveness of the “Chinese Solutions” from an “abstract concept” into a “perceivable emotional experience”, enhancing the appeal and affinity of the discourse. The “satisfaction” of villagers with improved living conditions and the “love” of foreigners for Chongqing culture can make international audiences recognize the practical value of the “Chinese Solutions” at the emotional level.

3.2.2. Judgment resources: Supporting elements of rational recognition

Judgment resources are the pivot to building rational recognition of the “Chinese Solutions.” By evaluating the behavioral qualities of grassroots practitioners (e.g., the “professional competence” of Village CEOs, the “tenacity” of cultural inheritors) and the legitimacy of local development practices (e.g., the “inclusiveness” of rural revitalization, the “openness” of cross-cultural exchange), it can provide ethical and rational support for the grassroots practice of the “Chinese Solutions”, enabling international audiences to recognize its internal logic and practical value, and enhancing the credibility and persuasiveness of the discourse.

3.2.3. Appreciation resources: Core tools of value approval

Appreciation resources are the core tools to guide international audiences to form value approval. By evaluating the “beauty” of rural ecology, the “preciousness” of cultural heritage and the “effectiveness” of industrial development, it can highlight the value output of the “Chinese Solutions” in ecological protection, cultural inheritance and economic development, enabling international audiences to recognize the practical effectiveness of the “Chinese Solutions” at the value level, realizing the communication upgrade from “understanding” to “recognition.”

4. Research methodology and data source

The present research adopts a mixed research method combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to ensure the objectivity and depth of the research conclusions.

Quantitative research: This study uses AntConc to calculate the corpus’s basic linguistic features (types, tokens, TTR value), the allocation of attitude resources (frequency and proportion of affect, judgment, and appreciation), research subjects, and high-frequency words. Data presents the corpus’s overall characteristics and thematic orientation. Qualitative research: Based on the results of quantitative analysis, typical cases (covering three core themes) are extracted from the corpus, focusing on the use of attitude resources. Combined with the core viewpoints of Appraisal Theory, it interprets how to help the positive construction of the “Chinese Solutions” discourse, focusing on the specific expression and construction effect of attitude resources in original English sentences. The research data are humanistic story reports published in the counties section of the *iChongqing* website from 2021 to 2025. After manually screening and eliminating duplicate reports and irrelevant reports, 44 valid corpora are finally determined.

5. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of county-level humanistic reports on *iChongqing*

5.1. Basic information and linguistic features of the corpus

A TTR value of 0.19 indicates a medium-to-low level of lexical diversity, with a relatively high repetition of core lexical items (**Table 1**). This pattern is closely associated with the relatively large corpus size, its predominantly expository and narrative-oriented style, and its thematically concentrated nature. From the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), such lexical concentration does not signal linguistic limitation.

Table 1. The metadata information of the corpus

Types	4747
Tokens	24407
TTR (Type-Token Ratio)	0.19

Table 2 shows that the overall growth trend aligns closely with national strategies and the platform’s communication objectives. Rural revitalization has entered a full-scale implementation phase. Since 2023, counties, as key practice areas, have seen their development achievements become a major focus of external publicity. As Chongqing gains greater international visibility, the platform relies on county-level humanistic

reports to present a richer, more diverse city profile.

Table 2. Distribution and proportion of corpus from 2021 to 2025

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Number	4	6	6	12	16	44
Proportion	9.1%	13.6%	13.6%	27.3%	36.4%	100%

Table 3 presents the vocabulary distribution of the three subsystems in the attitude system of county-level humanistic reports. Such a finding reaffirms that the evaluation of *iChongqing*'s county-level humanistic reports is mainly concentrated at the appreciation level, i.e., evaluating the value, composition, and reaction of county development, while combining evaluations of behavioral qualities and emotional experiences, highlighting the narrative orientation of the reports centered on “value and aesthetics”, which aligns with the need to convey practical effectiveness in international communication.

Table 3. Vocabulary distribution of the three subsystems under the attitude system in county-level humanistic reports

Attitude System	Positive Vocabulary	Negative Vocabulary	Total Vocabulary	Proportion
Affect	65	10	75	24.0%
Judgment	80	4	84	26.9%
Appreciation	147	6	153	49.0%
Total	292	20	312	100%

As shown in **Table 4**, affect resources are overwhelmingly positive (87.2%), dominated by happiness and satisfaction, with only a small share of negative emotions, which helps deliver warm emotional resonance for international readers. **Table 5** reveals that judgment resources contain more negative items (64.3%), mainly reflecting practical limitations in grassroots practice, making the narration objective and realistic. **Table 6** indicates that appreciation resources take a clear positive orientation (80.58%), concentrating on the value and structural advantages of county development. Overall, the three attitude resources are rationally distributed: affect builds emotional closeness, judgment maintains rational authenticity, and appreciation shapes positive value recognition of grassroots Chinese Solutions practices.

Table 4. Vocabulary distribution in affect resources

Affect Resource Category	Inclination/ Disinclination	Happiness/ Unhappiness	Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction	Security/ Insecurity	Proportion
Positive Vocabulary	6	14	17	2	87.2%
Negative Vocabulary	0	2	1	7	12.8%
Subtotal	6	16	18	9	100%

Table 5. Vocabulary distribution in judgment resources

Judgment Resources	Competence (Social Esteem)	Propriety(Social Sanction)	Proportion
Positive Vocabulary	6	9	35.7%
Negative Vocabulary	18	9	64.3%

Table 6. Vocabulary distribution in appreciation resources

Appreciation Resources	Reaction	Composition	Valuation	Proportion
Positive Vocabulary	157	225	315	80.58%
Negative Vocabulary	24	54	90	19.42%

5.2. Qualitative analysis of “Chinese Solutions” discourse construction

5.2.1. Construction of rural revitalization discourse: Attitude resources empowering grassroots development practices

Example 1:

Title: Village CEOs Propel China’s Rural Progress | In-Depth, by TAN XINYU | Jun 05, 2024

URL: <https://www.ichongqing.info/2024/06/05/village-ceos-propel-chinas-rural-progress-in-depth/>

TT: As a village CEO, innovation is key. Sticking to traditional practices makes it difficult to elevate a village to higher levels of development.

Title: Village CEOs Guide, Empower Rural Revitalization Efforts, by Xinhua | May 22, 2024

URL: <https://www.ichongqing.info/2024/05/22/village-ceos-guide-empower-rural-revitalization-efforts/>

TT: Village CEOs serve as links between rural resources and the market. They use their skills to drive the rural collective economy to ensure efficient use of resources, thereby making sure rural people benefit from what they have.

Analysis: “Village CEOs” (village officials), as professional forces in rural revitalization, are a key group portrayed in the reports. The terms “Village CEO” and “Village CEOs” appear 31 times in total in the corpus. It contains two significant types of judgment resources—capacity judgment (“use their skills”) and normality judgment (“innovation is key”, “Sticking to traditional practices makes it difficult...”). “Use their skills” directly evaluates the professional competence of Village CEOs, emphasizing their core advantage as “professional talents”; “innovation is key” and “Sticking to traditional practices makes it difficult...” form a contrast, evaluating the rationality and necessity of Village CEOs’ “innovative practices” from both positive and negative aspects. These judgment resources jointly construct the core logic of “talent-driven development” in the “Chinese Solutions”, proving that the involvement of professional forces is an effective path for rural revitalization and enhancing the rational persuasiveness of the discourse.

5.2.2. Construction of cultural heritage discourse: Attitude resources inheriting local cultural genes

Example 2:

Title: 14 Years Later: Revisiting Chongqing’s “Bangbang” Family in an Iconic Photo, by CHANG CHEN | Nov 28, 2024

URL: <https://www.ichongqing.info/2024/11/28/14-years-later-revisiting-chongqings-bangbang-family-in-an-iconic-photo/>

TT: Ran’s son, Ran Junchao, deeply admires his father’s resilience. On school forms, he proudly lists his

father's occupation as "porter", saying, "My dad's hard work and sweat raised me. He's the person I respect the most in the world."

Analysis: This sentence contains two core types of affect resources—respect ("the person I respect the most") and pride ("proudly lists"). "The person I respect the most" expresses Ran Junchao's deep emotional admiration for his father's perseverance as a "bangbang"; "proudly lists" reflects his positive emotional identification with the "bangbang" occupation, rather than shame. These affect resources transform the "bangbang" from a simple laborer into a carrier of family and urban cultural memory, embodying the logic of "cultural inheritance rooted in daily life" in the "Chinese Solutions." For international audiences, it avoids the stereotype of "manual labor as inferior" and helps them understand the spiritual value of grassroots cultural inheritance.

5.2.3. Construction of cross-cultural exchange discourse: Attitude resources building bridges for international communication

Example 3:

Title: Chongqing Amazes Overseas Chinese Media Delegation

URL: <https://www.ichongqing.info/2023/04/15/chongqing-amazes-overseas-chinese-media-delegation/>

TT: "Chongqing has completely transformed since my last visit. I didn't expect it to be so modernized now. Chongqing's Jiangbeizui is reminiscent of Shanghai's Lujiazui, displaying a truly stylish ambiance", she added.

Analysis: The judgment resources evaluation of development level ("so modernized", "stylish ambiance") and recognition of service capacity ("provides 'one-stop legal services'") in this sentence evaluate Chongqing's urban modernization and institutional support for international cooperation. By comparing Jiangbeizui to Shanghai's Lujiazui (a globally recognized financial hub), the report helps international audiences quickly understand Chongqing's development strength; the mention of "one-stop legal services" highlights the institutional inclusiveness of grassroots governments in facilitating cross-border business. These judgment resources construct the discourse of "China's grassroots regions have the capacity for international cooperation", reflecting the "high-level openness" orientation in the "Chinese Solutions."

6. Conclusion and implications

6.1. Major findings

Taking 44 county-level humanistic reports of *iChongqing* (2021–2025) as the corpus, such findings explore the positive construction of the "Chinese Solutions" discourse based on the Attitude System of Appraisal Theory. The main research findings are as follows:

Quantitative analysis presents the characteristics of "focused theme, diverse subjects and continuous growth": the number of reports increases year by year, accounting for 36.4% in 2025, reflecting the continuous improvement of the platform's attention to the international communication of county-level humanities; the reported objects are mainly Chinese (70.0%), with an international perspective (foreigners account for 23.0%), forming a diverse narrative pattern; high-frequency words focus on three themes of rural revitalization, cultural heritage and cross-cultural exchange, constructing a narrative system of "development practice + cultural inheritance + international interaction."

Qualitative analysis reveals differences and interplay among the three Attitude resource types across

themes. Affect resources express the subjects' true feelings to evoke cross-cultural resonance. They are particularly prominent in narratives about cultural heritage and cross-cultural exchange. Judgment resources construct the rational support of the discourse by evaluating behavioral qualities and practical results, and are widely used in the themes of rural revitalization and cross-cultural exchange. Appreciation resources strengthen the value recognition of the "Chinese Solutions" by evaluating the value and significance of things, and have significant effects on the themes of rural revitalization and cultural heritage. The three types of resources jointly construct a communication chain of "emotional resonance-rational recognition-value approval," realizing the effective cross-cultural transmission of the grassroots practice of the "Chinese Solutions."

6.2. Limitations and future research directions

A major limitation is the narrow scope of the corpus. It draws solely on reports published by *iChongqing*, leaving out other local overseas communication platforms. Further research is needed to confirm whether the findings can be generalized. Additionally, the analysis is confined solely to the Attitude System of Appraisal Theory, which leads to a partial examination of evaluative resources. Moreover, this research relies primarily on case analysis and fails to explore correlations between Attitude resource distribution and communication outcomes.

Accordingly, future studies may proceed in four directions. Researchers can enlarge the corpus to include reports from diverse local and international platforms and conduct cross-platform comparisons to identify shared rules and distinctive features of "Chinese Solutions" discourse. The theoretical framework can also be extended to incorporate Engagement and Graduation Systems, enabling a full application of Appraisal Theory for more in-depth discourse analysis. Moreover, cross-cultural comparison can be introduced to analyze audience acceptance across different cultural contexts, supporting the development of tailored international communication strategies.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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