# Construction of China's National Identity in An Australian Travel Brochure

## ─ A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

## LA CONSTRUCTION DE L'IDENTITE NATIONALE DE LA CHINE DANS LA BROCHURE DU VOYAGE AUSTRALIEN

## ─ L'ANALYSE DE LA PERSPECTIVE DANS UN DISCOURS CRITIQUE

## Zhang Jie[1]

**Abstract:** As promotional advertising discourses, travel brochures are the direct products of travel institutions' ideology, as well as a major medium for addressees' perceiving tourist sites. In cross-cultural context, the travel brochure of China produced by Australian Helen Wang travel agency constructed a specific national identity catering for tourists' seeking novelty. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, Systemic Functional Grammar is effective in interrogating the institutional ideology behind this discourse.

**Keywords:** travel brochure; ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar

**Résumé:** En tant que discours de publicité de promotion, les brochures de voyage sont les produits directs de l'idéologie des institutions de voyage, et également un média majoritaire pour le porte-parole des sites touristiques. Dans un contexte interculturel, la brochure du voyage de la Chine produite par l'agence australien de voyage Helen WANG a établit une identité particulière nationale en lançant des nouveautés de découverte pour les touristes. A travers une analyse de la perspective dans un discours critique, la grammaire fonctionnelle et systématique est effective dans l'enquête de l'idéologie institutionnelle derrière ce discours.

**Mots-clés:** brochure de voyage, l'idéologie, discours critique, la grammaire fonctionnelle et systématique

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It's well accepted common sense in tourist industry that travelers are always "excited by the experience of difference that is at the heart of all great journeys. Different flavors, aromas, stories, religions, languages, lifestyles and landscapes..." In the field of tourism, tourist destinations always seem to be different pieces of land, charming with exoticness and mystery. "…If travel doesn't stimulate your fascination with the wonders of life and nature, you're not really traveling at all…" (Travel Indochina. 2003, p.4) Like all tourist advertisements, Helen Wang's Tours, an Australian travel institution, confidently states in its travel brochure of China: "…Our program of tours is designed to show you China in the best possible way, covering not only the highlights, old and new, but offering insights into its way of life.…." (Helen Wong's Tours, China, 2003. p. 1) However, Daniel Boorstin (1964) is not as optimistic as those tourist promoters, "the modern tourist is just a passive onlooker who seeks to enjoy the extravagantly strange from the secure vantage of the

familiar…Contemporary tourists thrive on 'pseudo-events'. However, 'pseudo-events' are no more than 'contrived attractions'…This increases the gulf between the tourist and the natives and the real life destination. Eventually the contrived image of the destination becomes the criterion by which the tourist selects and evaluates the sights at his destination. Tourism becomes a closed, self-perpetuating system of illusions." (qtd. in Wallace,2003) As active readers, we can't help interrogating what are considered as "real" China and Chinese people in promotional tourist discourses; how Chinese national identity is constructed in discursive practice, and what the underlying ideology behind the scene is.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is not simply a symbolic system of information; and discourse is not a grammatical unit over clause either. In Speech Act theory, all discourses are purposeful, functional communicative acts in specific contexts of culture and situation. Martin & Rose（2003: 1）treat discourse as "more than a sequence of clauses" but "meaning beyond the clause"; as "more than an incidental manifestation of social activity" but "the social as it is constructed through texts". For them, the starting point for interpreting social discourse is with "texts in social contexts". Critical Discourse Analysis (hence fore CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of text and talk, which views language "as discourse, as constructing and constructed by social interests-'thought' or ideology, control, gender, class, race, politics" (Toolan, 2002: xxiii), and attempts "to unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse that have become so naturalized over time that we begin to treat them as common, acceptable and natural features of discourse" (Teo, 2000). More specifically, CDA aims at interpreting how a social discourse is shaped by looking at "(a) social determinants: What power relations are operating and are they located primarily at situational (i.e., local), institutional, or societal levels? (b) Ideologies: What ideologies are operating and how do these belief systems shape the discourse? and (c) effects: Does this discourse contribute to sustaining existing power relations?" (Fairclough, 1989)

As one of the key global cultural phenomena, world tourism has received much attention from researchers in a number of academic traditions, such as anthropology, art criticism, cultural criticism, geography, history, leisure studies, literary criticism, politics, and sociology. Particularly a group of linguists (Adam Jaworski, Virpi Ylänne-McEwen, Crispin Thurlow and Sarah Lawson. 2003: 135 – 163.) in Cardiff University has carried out an enlightening research on two main British Television Holiday Programs to gain an insight into the negotiation

of social roles and status in host-tourist interaction. In their research, they found "the dominant ideology of tourism…give evidence of only limited interaction between tourists and local people…Most contact with local people occurs in their principle roles as either 'helper/servant', 'expert' or part of 'local scenery'". (2003: 135) Adopting a CDA perspective, the paper tends to approach the construction of China's national identity in Helen Wang's travel brochure of China by register and genre analysis of Systemic Functional Grammar (hence fore SFG).

## 3. TRAVEL BROCHURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

### 3.1 Travel brochure as institutional ideological-discursive formation.

Fairclough (1995:27) defines social institutions as speech and ideology communities which contain diverse "ideological-discursive formations (IDFs) with own discourse norms embedded within and symbolized by own ideological norms". A dominant IDF in a social institution features "the capacity to 'naturalize' ideologies, i.e. to win acceptance for them as non-ideological 'common sense'." Practitioners of CDA have long been concerning and researching social institutional discourses, because language for specific purposes in social institutions is always the field ideology and control display. In the analysis of identity construction, we must understand that "Discourses are socially constructed knowledge of (some aspect of) reality…They have been developed in specific social contexts and in ways which are appropriate to the interest of social actors in these contexts…" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 4) Travel agency, like all the other business organizations, holds its own dominant "IDF" in accordance with the principles of market economy. Its underlying ideology realizes itself in naturalized "common sense" and "knowledge" in tourist promotional discourses. It is the objective of a CDA research to denaturalize those ideology-oriented, usage-sanctioned "common sense" or "assumed knowledge" by showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures."

### 3.2 National identity as recontextualised "stereotypes"

In travel brochures, all the linguistic and the visual selected and designed share a common purpose, that is to sketch out a distinct national identity in the interest of travel industry, which certainly attracts potential customers. Scollon points out, "Identity construction

most typically revolves around a nation or an individual characterizing a self by associating certain features with that self and by disassociating that self from the others from whom it wants to be viewed as distinct." (qtd. in Hallett, 2003: 1) National identities are recontextualisations, convenient hybrids of processes of representation whose realizations and forms are conditioned by the social practices of the advertisers and by their stereotypical views of the country being advertised. Distinct features are carefully selected and foregrounded through the mediation of all semiotic modes in tourist promotional discourses, which are no purely reflections of national identities.

## 4. GENRE ANALYSIS

SFG has long been regarded as a most effective approach to do CDA research. Wodak (2001) indicates: "Whether analysts with a critical approach prefer to focus on micro-linguistic features, macro-linguistic features, textual, discursive or sociological or historical – in most studies there is reference to Hallidayan systemic functional grammar." (p. 8) Genre describes the impact of cultural context on language, by exploring the staged, step-by-step structure culture institutionalizes as ways of achieving goals. Register theory explains the impact of the immediate context of situation on a language event. In terms of genre, travel brochure represents prominent features in its "schematic structure" and "realizational pattern" as follows:

Table 1: Macro-genre

| Schematic Structure | | Contents |
|---|---|---|
| Promotion | 1．Front cover page | highlights of brand name, destination, major sites, valid dates, sometimes travel type and slogans, etc. |
| | 2．Preface | welcome words with the instantiation of Chinese amazement and the advantages to travel with them, etc. |
| | 3．Contents | index of subject matters and relevant pages, etc. |
| | 4．Introduction | elaboration on the authority of the organizations, the high quality of their operating trips, the great variety & excellent value of their trips, etc. |
| | 5．Itineraries | detailed descriptions of the peculiar features of the trip and arrangement of activities, with trip information like accommodation, dates, transport, prices, etc |
| | 6. Booking conditions | significant regulations of contract like payment, cancellation, changes, refunds, insurance and so on, etc. |
| | 7．Booking form | official contract details, etc. |
| | 8．Back cover page | contact details of a respective travel agencies, etc. |

Travel brochure is a very complex macro-system composed of eight micro-discourses fulfilling various communicative acts. A further inquiry to its operating ideology which may be clamorously concealed requires a more detailed register analysis. In SFG, register analysis is organized by ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions into "field", "tenor" and "mode", which incorporate meaning potential with semiotics in discursive practice. Here, we take the introductory extract from Helen Wong's travel brochure to do a close register analysis.

## 5. REGISTER ANALYSIS

In order to carry out a detailed analysis of intersentential relation, the selected text is deconstructed into ordered clause complex in accordance with logico-semantic relation.

**Table 2: Intersentential relation**

Abbreviations:　　1, 2, 3…→Paratactic expansion; αβγ…→Hypotactic expansion

= Elaboration; + Extension; × Enhancement

bold →nominalization; underlined →theme; wave →graduation

[ ] →non-finite embedded clause；{ } →finite embedded clause；（ ）→ellipsis

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | 1. Many centuries ago, [developing in comparative isolation,] China led the world with its inventiveness and creativity. |
| | | 2. With a recorded history of 5,000 years, a sophisticated literature, language, music and art, and spectacular architecture [dating back more than 3,000], China's civilization has endured longer than any other. |
| | ×β | 3a. Long before the West was even aware of its existence, |
| 1 | α | 3b.China had invented paper and printing, gunpowder, the magnetic compass, rockets, paper money, umbrellas and the game of chess, |
| +2 | | 3c. and （China） was producing fine silk, porcelain and tea. |
| ×2 | | 4a. While the 20th century was a time of turbulence in China, |
| 1 | | 4b. recent years have seen the doors [thrown open] and a warm welcome [extended to the world]. |
| 1 | | 5a. Great changes have been occurring in China |

**Table 2: Intersentential relation(Continued)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| × | | 5b. and the eager and curious visitors {who come [to experience its historic and scenic wonders]} are surprised [to also discover a new China of the 21st century]! |
| | | 6. The China of the new millennium is a study in contrasts. |
| | | 7. The timelessness of the old is still to be found, often in the shadow of exciting new developments. |
| | | 8. China's traditional culture, its customs and charm remain – palaces and pavilions, ancient sites, classical gardens, teahouses, elegant boulevards and old water towns, and an endless diversity of peoples and natural landscapes – while the new face of China is at once exciting, stimulating, electrifying. |
| | ×β | 9a. Whether you are a first – timer or a frequent visitor, |
| | α | 9b. China always has something different, something fascinating [to interest and delight you]. |
| 1 | | 10a. Development over the past two decades has been extraordinary |
| +2 | | 10b. and the speed of growth （has been） nothing short of breathtaking. |
| | | 11. China's entry into the World Trade Organization, Beijing's selection [to host the 2008 Olympic Games] and Shanghai's 2010 World's Expo are only the latest international acknowledgements of its achievements. |
| 1 | | 12a. And alongside commercial and trade developments, tourism infrastructure in China continues [to be upgraded with new aircraft and the construction of new airports, hotels, restaurants and facilities], |
| ×2 | | 12b. While (-Meanwhile) areas of this vast country {that have long been inaccessible to foreigners} are being opened up… |

Following chronological order, the introductory discourse unfolds from the past of Chinese resplendence (1-3) to the glowing transitional period (4 & 5) then to the harmony co-existence of the old and the new (6-9),

finally to the rapid development of present China in commerce, especially tourism industry (10-12). The schematic structure let this introductory discourse progress step by step, by sketching a 'complicated mythological' China with both antique charm and modernity. All the descriptions are around China, and all the included themes reinforce each other to unfold before readers an even-more attractive distinct landscape.

## 5. 1 Field

### 5.1.1 Thematic Prominence of Lexical Items

Thematic prominence of lexical items provides the evidence of what are highlighted in this introductory discourse. The modernity of China occupies 47.8% of all the themes, following by 'the traditional' (26.1%) and 'the harmonious Contrast' (14%). The description of the inventiveness, creativity and greatness of ancient China brings a glorious ring to 'the General China'; on the other side, the introduction of great developments in nowadays China enhances China's touring value, by manifesting advanced tourism-related service. In transitivity analysis, material process and relational process take over half of all the process types, which show the descriptive and narrative feature of this selected text. What is worth noting is that, only sentence 9 adopts the second person "you" as the direct addressee, which associates the promotion of China tour with readers — potential customers. The absence of subjectivity makes this piece of work even more seem like an objective ideology-free descriptive or narrative writing. After a close look at the thematic prominence we can find that what is defined as 'the old' by travel agents is confined to only examples of Chinese "inventiveness" and "creativity", or carry-overs of its great civilization, mainly in arts and architecture. Moreover, what gained emphasis as 'the new' in China is the development of the third industry – Service Trade, e.g.: "And alongside commercial and trade developments, tourism infrastructure in China continues to be upgraded with new aircraft and the construction of new airports, hotels, restaurants and facilities…" As advertiser or promoter, intended addresser always violates a certain maxim of cooperative principle to convey a particular conversational implicature so as to achieve a particular indirect speech act.

### 5.1.2 Pragmatic presupposition

As one of the most common strategies in advertising, pragmatic presupposition refers to mutually known assumed background knowledge between intended addresser and potential addressees, relating to a specialized lexis in an appropriate context. Presupposition is a crucial part of advertising to embed and naturalize institutional ideology by causing potential addressees to accepting the existence of objects, propositions, and culturally defined behavioral

properties. In this text, presupposition is frequently adopted. To name a few, in clause 5b: "the eager and curious visitors…" proposes that as long as you are visitors to China, you are definitely eager and curious about China. Besides, what is assumed as "the old/traditional Chinese culture/charm" is exemplified in the clause 8 by "Traditional culture, palaces and pavilions, ancient sites, classical gardens, teahouses, elegant boulevards and old water towns, and an endless diversity of peoples and natural landscapes". In this way, the antique glory is presupposed as assumed knowledge and gradually taking shape in China's national identity.

## 5.2 Tenor

### 5.2.1 Mood and modality

Every discursive practice requires particular speech roles to attain a certain interpersonal metafunction, which is realized by "mood" and "modality" at the level of lexico-grammar. The introductory text of HWT is a typical outsider-oriented discourse, in which the agent is not identified and totally absent in order to take an authoritative stance. Meanwhile, addressees are directly designated by the second person – 'you' in sentence 9 to drawn closer the interpersonal relation, which is a major feature of advertising. Besides, the text predominantly employs the active declarative mood (except for clause 12b) without any modal verb or modal adjunct. The text is designed as a process of exchanging information between the addressor who possesses some "knowledge" and addressees who are seeking the information. Inherently, this text presents an unequal relationship of authority and learner. The lack of modality is a strategy used to establish and protect the writer's authority or non-arguability. These grammatical choices serve to emphasize and maximize the unequal power relationship resulting in authoritarian distance.

### 5.2.2 Appraisal

Martin (2003: 23–67) approaches "appraisal" as evaluation – "the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned…" Appraisal is a system of interpersonal meanings. Appraisal resources are used to negotiate interactors' social relationships and "establish the tone or mood of a passage of discourse, as choices resonate with one another from one moment to another as a text unfolds". In spite of its formal style, lots of appraisal resources can be found to interpret the intended addressor's interpersonal meaning. Such as: Adj.— sophisticated, spectacular, exciting, exciting, stimulating, electrifying, different, fascinating, extraordinary, breathtaking, etc; N.P.— its inventiveness and creativity, a recorded history of 5,000 years, a sophisticated literature…, fine silk…, warm welcome, great changes, historic and scenic wonders, new China, endless diversity, this vast

country, etc; V.P.— led the world, discover, interest and delight (you), etc 。 All the appraisal resources are adopted in agreement with the addressor's promotional speech act. In addition, this text adopts lots of resources of graduation to amplify attitudes: (longer than) any (other), long (before), even (aware of), at once (exciting…), endless (diversity), always, nothing (short of), only (the latest), long (been inaccessible), etc. Those are prominent features of advertising and promotion.

## 5.3  Mode

The text is deep in depth of complexity, for only 2 out of 12 sentences in this introductory discourse are simple sentences, the other are compound, complicated or even complexed sentences. Furthermore, sentences are predominantly long, full of nominalization such as: isolation, inventiveness, creativity, civilization, existence, turbulence, timelessness, diversity, acknowledgement, achievement, etc. The use of nominalization here is to increase lexical density, which marks the text as formal written mode. The high concentration of circumstances creates a high experiential density and increases the detail and specificity of the information being presented, which would usually be found in written language rather than spoken discourses. The formal mode of language improves its credibility and authority by blurring the actual interpersonal relationship between the addressor and addresses —promoter and customer.

## 6.  CONCLUSION

It has long been the widely accepted ideology in tourism that "exoticness, mystery and charm" are labels of tourist destinations. Especially in cross-cultural tourist programs, constructing a distinct identity is the foothold of all tourist promoting projects. The genre and register analysis of the introductory text of HWT above provides an insight into the impact of institutional ideology on choices of lexico-grammatical and discourse-semantic resources in meaning-making. On one hand, the introductory text is constructed in line with Helen Wang travel institution's ideology of promotion through the mediation of semiotic choices. Throughout the text, exotic culture, glorious tradition and modernity are weaved together into a distinct identity of China by thematic prominence, presupposition, appraisal resources, etc. On the other hand, stereotypes in travel promotional discourses are constructive in shaping and strengthening addressor's and addressees' ideology. Discourses are produced, distributed and consumed under ideology, and then naturalized by conventional usage. As a critical medium of institutional ideology and a key field of cross-cultural communication, travel brochure exerts a profound reflective influence not only on addressor but also on addressees, not only on market and economy but also on ideology and culture. Tourist advertising performs effective functions communication and negotiation, stimulation and satisfaction, persuasion and guidance, appreciation and recreation, coordination and regulation. In the process of transmitting information, tourist promotional discourses are carrying out a subtle cultural infiltration and ideological reconstruction.

Human society is actually a macro-discursive structure intervened with various ideological-discursive formations. As social beings, our discursive world is actually constructed by ideology-embedded, usage-sanctioned assumed knowledge. "Ideology and power run through the whole ensemble of language and culture, positioning people within each social context as having more or less power, and opening or narrowing their access to resources for meaning." (Martin, 2003: 16) The shaping of discursive patterns can not be undertaken in a day, neither can it be challenged and changed all at once. This paper does not intend to provide an absolute answer to the national identity of China, but calls for a critical awareness of ideology embedded in identity construction in tourist promotional discourses.

## REFERENCES

Adam Jaworski, Virpi Ylänne-McEwen, Crispin Thurlow and Sarah Lawson. ( 2003).'The Positioning of the Local Other in Host-Tourist Interaction in British Television Holiday Programmes'. *Journal of Sociolinguistics 7/2,* 135 – 163

Fairclough, Norman. (1989). *Language and Power*, London& New York: Longman

Fairclough, Norman. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*, London & New York: Longman.

Hallett, Richard W. & Kaplan-Weinger, Judith (2003), *The Social Organization of National Identity: A Multi-Modal Analysis of Tourism Websites*, Linguistics Departmen. Illinois: Northeastern Illinois University

Jaworski, Adam, et al.. ( 2003). 'The Positioning of the Local Other in Host-Tourist Interaction in British Television Holiday Programmes' , *Journal of Sociolinguistics 7/2,* pp.135 – 163

Kress, Gunther R.. (1996). *Reading images: the grammar of visual design*, London & New York: Routledge.

Martin, Jim & David Rose. (2003). *Working with Discourse – meaning beyond the clause*,The University of Sydney: unpublished textbook.

Teo, Peter. (2003). 'Racism in the news: a Critical Discourse Analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers' , Cited in M. Talbot, K. Atkinson and D. Atkinson, *Language and Power in the Modern World.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.36

Toolan, Michael. (2002). *Critical discourse analysis: critical concepts in linguistics*, New York: Routledge

Wallace, Tim. (2003). *Some Basic Introductory Notes to the Course on Tourism, ANT 431, Tourism, Culture Change and Anthropology.* North Carolina State University

Wodak, Ruth & Michael Meyer.(2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis.* London: SAGE Publications

## THE AUTHOR

**Zhang Jie**, School of Foreign Languages, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Wuhan, Hubei, 430074, P.R. of China.