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The Mediatisation of the Chinese Dama in Chinese English-Language Media: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

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Abstract. The term 'Chinese dama' was originally coined by the Wall Street Journal in 2013 to refer to a group of middle-aged and elderly Chinese women who, somewhat frenetically, purchased gold or other items. This study employs a cognitive-linguistic approach to critical discourse analysis to examine how Chinese damas are linguistically mediatised in the Chinese English-language news media. A specialised corpus of 41 news articles with 26661 words, covering the years between 2013 and 2019, was built for this purpose. Informed by Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory, four most recurrent themes of Chinese dama news discourses were identified and coded. The analysis of these discourses suggests that whilst there is divergence in how newspapers construe Chinese damas' participation in social activities when they are agentive, there is convergence in terms of schematising the conflicts between Chinese damas and the other parties. This seems to fit with the media's ideological framework, steering ultimately towards the legitimisation of excluding Chinese female seniors from the public realm.
Keywords: Mediatisation; Construal operations; Discursive strategies; Chinese English-language media; Chinese dama

[ch] 中国英文媒体报道中"中国大妈"的媒体化：认知语言学路径

摘要："中国大妈"一词源于《华尔街日报》2013年的新闻报道。该词指代一群疯狂购买黄金等物品的中国中老年女性。在认知语言学研究框架的指导下，本文对"中国大妈"在中国英文媒体报道中的语言媒体化过程进行了批评话语分析。首先，选取2013年至2019年间中国国内英文媒体有关中国大妈的报道，自建语料库；语料库包含41份英文新闻语篇，词数为26661。其次，基于马斯洛的"需求层次"理论，确定"中国大妈"新闻语篇中最常见的4个主题，并对其进行了编码。研究指出，尽管中国国内各个英文媒体对"中国大妈"这一群体在社会活动中的施事角色的概念化认知存在分歧，但在对"中国大妈"与其他各方之间的冲突图示化表征方面存在趋同现象。这基本符合中国国内英文媒体的意识形态框架，各大媒体普遍倾向于将中国女性老年人排除在公共领域之外。

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1. Introduction

1.1. The origins and meanings of 'Chinese dama'

The term 'Chinese dama' was originally coined by the Wall Street Journal to refer to a group of middle-aged and elderly Chinese women who, somewhat frenetically, purchased gold or other items. Notably, 'dama' was once an affectionate term for an elderly woman who, heavily influenced by traditional Chinese values,

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served in the household and was concerned with daily living expenses. More recently, 'Chinese dama' not only designates a group, but also represents a unique Chinese social phenomenon investigated in a growing number of academic publications over the past decade (Zhao, 2015; York et al., 2020). Some of these publications indicate that 'Chinese dama' was deliberately constructed to indicate the conflict between ideal and reality of the portrayals of a retired female group (Zhao, 2015). Being frequently mediatised in a number of public events, for example, participating in square dancing and gold rushes, they have apparently become the object of ridicule. The findings of these studies reveal that traditional patriarchal ideology prevails in the local Chinese-language media.

Traditional patriarchal ideology within Chinese social context can be traced back to the practice of Confucian values, at the core of which is the principle of basic family ethics extended into social ethics. In ancient China, the concepts of 'nei (inside)' and 'wai (outside)', applied to familial relationships, indicate a system of separate spheres for men and women. Womanhood is confined to the wifely and motherly roles in the private sphere; women's obligations include the furtherance of the family lineage and devotion to serving her family (Yu, 2021). After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a new gender ideology that women can 'hold up half the sky' began to take root in China. Traditional Confucian values were officially suppressed especially during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s (Croll, 1980). Women were transformed from 'a person in the family' to 'a person in the society' and therefore enabled with a solid material basis and economic independence vital to their further emancipation. The socialist revolution did liberate women, however it failed to give the 'female subjectivity' back to them, thus creating another form of repression.

Entering the reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, during the process of globalisation and marketisation, Western cultures and feminist scholarship flooded into China, which has reinforced the ideology of egalitarianism in gender (Rofel, 1999). Meanwhile, neo-Confucianism has reemerged since the reform and opening up in China. As a repackaging of traditional patriarchal values, it still prevails in contemporary China (Fincher, 2014), advocating for the strict separation of women on the inside and men on the outside. In keeping with the patriarchal norms of neo-Confucianism, a virtuous woman, in her role as a wife and mother, should stay in private spheres and claim responsibilities in childrearing and household management without regret or resentment. The mediatisation of 'Chinese dama' manifests both the neo-Confucianism trend and gender inequality. To some degree, this also reflects the identity crisis faced by a group of Chinese older women, as well as revealing the social-cultural conflicts and the ageing population problem that exist in China.

1.2. Mediatisation of women in the Chinese context

The term 'mediatisation' emerged in the 1990s and was developed and promoted by Friedrich Krotz, Stig Hjarvard and others (Hjarvard, 2004; Krotz, 2001). It denotes the process through which core elements of human activity, for example, a language activity, assume a media form. As a consequence, the activity is performed through interaction with a medium, and the symbolic content and structure of language activities are influenced by media environments, upon which they gradually become dependent (Hjarvard, 2007: 3).

Research on the mediatisation of women in the Chinese context has attracted increasing attention in recent years addressing the following topics: 'tongzhi' (i.e., lesbians, gay men, and other sexual minorities) in Hong Kong (Wong, 2005); the 'Hong Kong Girl' or 'Kong Girl' (an other-attributed stereotype of some Hong Kong women) (Kang & Chen, 2017); 'taimei' (a recently-coined phrase deployed to refer to Taiwanese sister/girl) in Taiwan (Su, 2018) and the leftover women phenomenon (Feldshuh, 2018; Yu, 2019). Wong (2005) discusses the reappropriation of the word 'tongzhi' by mainstream media in Hong Kong and provides synchronic evidence for sociolinguistic accounts that explain how lexical items may undergo pejoration because of the context within which they are used. Kang and Chen (2017) propose that 'Kong Girl', on the one hand can be seen as a form of resistance to stereotypical gender norms that require women to be silent and submissive, but on the other hand also reinforces normative femininity by her attention to physical attractiveness and her desire to date and marry a good provider. With regard to the mediatisation of 'taimei' in Taiwan, Su (2018) combines questionnaires and news corpus data to reveal that the slang term 'tai' is strongly associated with non-standard language and non-conformity, and is less compatible with the mainstream ideal of femininity.

Feldshuh (2018) investigates the myth of leftover women by conducting a narrative analysis of three Chinese televised shows. She shows that the narratives construct a uniform myth that a woman's happiness lies in her marriage which might conflict with her pursuits, such as career and higher education. Yu (2019), employing a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, examines how the leftover-women phenomenon is linguistically represented in the English-language news media in China. The representations demonstrate that the Chinese English-language news discourse is more contentious than its Chinese-language counterparts in that conservative and progressive gendered ideologies co-exist.

This study investigates the Chinese English-language news discourse on the Chinese-dama phenomenon. Investigating English-language news could shed light on how the Chinese media present such a controversial group to their English-speaking readers worldwide. Although the Chinese English-language news media, such as Global Times, are also state-run, they claim to be more liberal compared with local Chinese-language

media. Our analysis follows a social constructionist approach to gender and discourse that views gender categories as social constructs. Gender is one of the foremost ways in which people conceive identity, and many societies place much emphasis on gender-appropriate ways of behaving (Baker et al., 2013). Gender identity is based on the collective social experience of living as a member of the group taking on particular gender roles in order to conform to cultural expectations (Cameron, 1997: 23). Based on cognitive-linguistic critical discourse analysis, this study aims to explore the discourse themes, discursive strategies and ideologies, which the Chinese English-language news media draw upon in the mediatisation of Chinese damas that expresses, sustains, or challenges particular gender norms. This study addresses the following questions:

1. How are Chinese damas mediatised in English-language Chinese newspaper texts?
2. What ideologies are represented through the linguistic patterns of mediatisation?
3. How do these ideologies conform to and conflict with traditional gender norms?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Cognitive-linguistic critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforward CDA) is a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective, which usually focuses on theoretical concepts such as power, ideology and domination (Baker et al., 2008: 273). Cognitive-linguistic critical discourse analysis (hereafter CL-CDA) posits that the role of discourse in society is mediated by cognition (Wodak, 2006). As with all CDA approaches, CL-CDA seeks to unveil how discursive practices serve to present ideological presumptions as objective and righteous, and potentially perpetuate power imbalances (Fairclough, 1989). Cognitive Linguistics is particularly useful for CDA as it is able to 'lay bare the structuring of concepts and conceptions' (Dirven et al., 2003: 4) which constitute ideologies. A cognitive-linguistic approach not only makes explicit the fundamental role of mental representations, but also shows that many discourse structures can only be described in terms of various cognitive notions.

As Hart (2014) proposes, CL-CDA often examines construal operations that are ideologically significant in media discourse. The term 'construal' refers to our ability to conceptualise a given scene in alternate ways. Every lexical and grammatical element incorporates, as an inherent aspect of its meaning, a certain way of construing the conceptual content evoked (Langacker, 2013). Alternative construal operations rely on diverse cross-domain cognitive systems and serve to realise different ideological discursive strategies in specific contexts as the construals they produce encode a particular legitimating or delegitimating representation of reality (Hart, 2014). In CL-CDA, Hart has established a coherent theoretical framework to disclose the ideological reproduction mediated through four discursive strategies, three of which are illustrated and explained in the current research: structural configuration, positioning and framing. This research expands on the applications of these strategies and correlates them with specific linguistic means of realisation.

2.2. The analytical framework

News discourses on the mediatisation of Chinese damas can be examined in terms of structural configuration, positioning and framing strategies. According to Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 44), discursive strategies are 'a more or less accurate and intentional plan of discursive practices adopted to achieve particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aims'. These discursive practices are inevitably affected by the social-cultural context, as the choices made in media discourse depend on the writers' goals, knowledge, interests, shared values and beliefs of their media organisations and the wider community (Fairclough, 1995). Therefore, the news, according to Fowler (1991: 222), is not a natural phenomenon, but a product, and the media have been described as projecting and perpetuating stereotypes.

Structural configuration is the most basic strategy by which writers impose an image-schematic representation upon an event. Imagistic schemas are integral to the conceptualisation process in that their representation provides a whole structure to the event which captures relations such as topology, sequence and causation (Hart, 2014). Using this strategy, events can be construed in terms of an action chain schema and a motion schema. In an action chain, energy is transferred from an agent to a patient (possibly via an instrument) resulting in a change in the state of the patient. The action chain supports the prototypical transitive clause which describes a physical interaction (Langacker, 1991). The agent is the source of energy flow whilst the patient is the energy sink, and the instrument constitutes an energy transmitter. With regard to the motion schema, it is made up of at least four constituent elements: a figure, namely the entity that undergoes motion; the motion itself; a path along which the motion takes place; and a ground, i.e. a location of landmark. Note that lexical items involved in structural configuration refer not only to physical interactions and motions but, by metaphoric extension,

also to psychological and social ones, conceived in terms of psycho-social pressures (Talmy, 1988: 50), which include verbal, emotional, as well as perceptual states of agents. In contrast to physical schemas, although Matlock et al. (2004) regard the schemas consisting of these kinds of lexical items as being non-physical in that they indicate no physical action or observable state change, we define them as non-physical schemas.

A positioning strategy relies on 'a more general capacity to adopt a simulated perspective' (Hart, 2014: 176). It involves speakers' choice of a vantage point from which an event is represented. Different vantage points, resulting in different construals of the same event, may have overt consequences for the image-schematic representation evoked in readers' minds (Langacker, 2008). Of the construal operations based on the choice of vantage points, the panning operation is the most frequently researched. It includes asymmetrical and reciprocal transactive constructions. Asymmetrical constructions, being one-sided, ask the conceptualiser to 'take sides' (Hart, 2014), that is, they require a voice choice between active and passive, and the energy transfer is unidirectional from an agent to a patient. By contrast, reciprocal constructions demand a recognition of the active roles of both participants in the process, facilitating a more objective, fly-on-the-wall perspective with one participant presented as the topic and the other the focus of the sentence.

Framing is a discursive strategy that concerns the process whereby, through lexical choices, a social actor or action is placed within a frame, namely a socially shared network of meanings (Fillmore & Baker, 2010). Frames are stored in long-term semantic memory constituting our conceptual background knowledge against which particular events are understood (Fillmore, 1982). A frame can be activated when any one element of the frame is introduced in discourse, giving rise to inference and evaluation. Lexical cues can thus evoke large pre-packaged complex frames. The most basic framing device is categorisation, whose ideological function can be seen clearly in the categorisation of social actions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

To build a corpus of news articles about Chinese damas in Chinese English-language newspapers, the keyword 'Chinese dama' was used to extract relevant data from the Lexis-Nexis Corpus, the world's largest electronic database for journalistic texts. As news coverage of Chinese damas first appeared in 2013 and disappeared from the Chinese English-language media in 2019, news texts from that period were collected. Each article was manually checked to ensure that the primary topic of the news text was relevant and related to Chinese damas. Two duplicates were identified and removed. Ultimately, the corpus contains 41 news articles with 26661 words, including 25 articles published in China Daily, 8 articles in Global Times and 8 articles in other Chinese English-language media. These news articles were originally written in English mainly by Chinese journalists. The current research analyses newspapers because printed and electronic news media remain an authoritative source of information for a significant number of people and continue to reflect specific ideological positions.

3.2. Coding categories

These data, that is Chinese dama news texts, were duly analysed qualitatively by applying NVivo (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019), following the premises of Critical Discourse Analysis; this involved identifying the themes of Chinese dama news discourses as well as coding the multiple discourses and relevant discursive strategies.

Informed by Maslow's (1943) 'hierarchy of needs' theory, the articles were closely read and themes or 'bodies of instances' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 167) related to Chinese damas' actions were identified, namely Entertainment & Exercise, Economy, Social Interaction and Culture. Entertainment & Exercise refers to Chinese damas' acts of entertaining and exercising, i.e. square dancing. Economy involves Chinese damas' investing activities for gaining a financial return and maintaining family property, such as buying gold or jewelries; as well as activities of purchasing that help establish their or their families' identities. Social Interaction concerns damas' affiliating with a group, receiving and giving affection and love, for instance worshipping stars or looking after family members. Culture relates to damas' aspiring for respect, reputation and glory, or seeking to fulfill personal potential by participating activities such as performing in a theater. These themes mainly correspond to Maslow's 'physiological need', 'safety need', 'love and belonging need', 'esteem' and 'self-actualization'. Notably safety need concerns three constituents, that is, safety against crime and fear; property protection; family protection (Datta, 2010). Physiological need is the strongest, most basic and essential one; while self-actualization is the weakest in the urgency hierarchy. Esteem and self-actualization represent a higher purpose in one's own life and depict individuals living with full concentration and absorbing the 'being' values.

Table 1 The coding categories

Main categories	Subcategories	
DISCOURSE THEMES	1 Entertainment & Exercise 2 Economy 3 Social Interaction 4 Culture	
DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES **Schematisation:**		
Action Chain	Asymmetrical Reciprocal	Physical Non-physical
Motion		
Positioning:	Active voice Passive voice	Agent Patient
Framing:	1 Aggregate 2 Making Noise 3 Violence 4 Shopping 5 Desiring 6 Responsibility 7 Performing	

Identifying the discourse themes helps to segment the data, hence allowing a more systematic and in-depth examination of how Chinese damas are mediatised. All our corpus data in plain text format were imported into NVivo, then coded at both local and global levels within the textual context (see Table 1). Coding was conducted in two cycles. The initial coding process started by using Discourse Themes as the main category and each specific discourse theme as the sub-category. Then we assigned these sub-codes to segments of the data that referred to these themes. In example (1), while the segment seemingly represented Chinese damas' failure in Social Interaction, we coded it as Economy discourse. This is because when checking the context, we found the subsequent sentence was talking about economic growth.

(1)   Chinese damas are often mocked for their investment naivety, poor fashion taste and disregard for public etiquette. (China Daily, 2014-09-01)

Furthermore, based on the taxonomy of discursive strategies, the second coding process started by using Structural Configuration, Positioning and Framing as the main categories. This process is both deductive and inductive, both having predetermined categories and categories arising from the data. The inductive coding entailed the creation of some new codes. For example, in the coding of Schematisation, two new sub-categories, that is Physical and Non-physical, were created as lower-level codes after going through the entirety of the data. In this regard, the coding categories were frequently revised for further analysis. Note that the coding process of Framing was inductive, in which we identified salient event frames (EFs) as sub-categories by referring to both the general data and the frame index in FrameNet on the basis of lexical cues (FrameNet, n.d.). Note that in order to increase precision and reduce subjectivity, all coding results had to be evaluated and discussed by the authors of this research, going through processes of rechecking and modification. These results were further subject to qualitative interpretation and critical scrutiny so as to unveil the possible ideologies behind them.

4. Analysis

In this analysis, we investigate the use of alternative ideological discursive strategies realised by construal operations within the four themes of Chinese dama news discourses, that is, Entertainment & Exercise, Economy, Social Interaction and Culture. As explained above, discursive strategies are an intentional plan of discursive practices adopted to achieve particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aims, such as projecting and perpetuating stereotypes; ideology is viewed as the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group (van Dijk,1998). In what follows, this study will examine the ideologies behind particular linguistic mediatisations.

4.1. Structural configuration

Action chain schema. An action-chain schema can be used to indicate a physical or non-physical interaction between participants in which energy is transferred from an agent to a patient resulting in a change in the state of the patient. As Hart (2014) suggests, diverse action-chain schemas are available when construing the same event, namely asymmetrical and reciprocal. Their fundamental distinction is as follows: the former involves a unidirectional flow of energy from an agent to a patient, while the latter concerns a bidirectional flow of energy so that both participants can be ascribed the status of active agents in the event. As in Table 2 below, action chains, with 81 asymmetrical and 13 reciprocal ones in total being invoked, are more prevalent in Entertainment & Exercise (43.6%) and Social Interaction (25.5%) discourses. Noticeably, all four discourse themes incorporate asymmetrical action-chains. Non-physical asymmetrical action-chains (66.0%), which indicate the psychological and social interactions between Chinese damas and other participants, are more frequent than physical ones (20.2%), which express observable physical interactions between Chinese damas and other participants. In contrast, reciprocal action-chains only appear in Entertainment & Exercise and Social Interaction discourses.

Table 2 Distribution of action chain schemas in news discourses

	Asymmetrical		Reciprocal		Total
	Physical	Non-physical	Physical	Non-physical	
Entertainment & Exercise	10	22	4	5	41 (43.6%)
Economy	0	20	0	0	20 (21.3%)
Social Interaction	7	13	4	0	24 (25.5%)
Culture	2	7	0	0	9 (9.6%)
Total	19 (20.2%)	62 (66.0%)	8 (8.5%)	5 (5.3%)	94 (100%)

Entertainment & Exercise discourse concerns both physical (31.3%) and non-physical (68.7%) actions and the latter are more frequently employed than the former, accentuating the psychological and social interactions between Chinese damas and other participants. Regarding asymmetrical action-chains, most actions (74.2%) are enacted by other participants of society, whereas the rest (25.8%) are enacted by Chinese damas. When the other participants are agents, the non-physical actions, such as *hate*, *accuse*, *order* and *urg*e, are used to express either hostile or forceful attitudes towards damas, while the physical ones, such as *attack*, *shoot*, *hit* and *pelt*, are exploited to launch a physical assault against Chinese older women with or without instruments. In the case of agents, *residents* and *Chinese government* are identified respectively, and the latter bears the responsibility for alleviating the conflicts between damas and other people. By contrast, the frequent non-physical actions enacted by Chinese damas are *disturb*, *harass* and *bother*, with the residents as patients. For example:

(2)   The roll of drum beats magnified into thunderous cracks for disgruntled local residents, [who (local residents)$_{agent}$] [called$_{non-physical\_action}$] [the police$_{patient/agent}$] to [arrest$_{physical-action}$] [the troupe's 60-year-old choreographer and leader (Chinese damas)$_{patient}$]. (Global Times, 2013-8-25)

In (2), the energy transfer initially flows from *local residents* to *the police* and then from *the police* to *choreographer* and *leader*. Meanwhile the clause *the roll of drum beats...residents* invokes a construal where the source of the energy flow is not the implied subject of the who-clause, that is, the local residents who call the police to arrest Chinese damas, but instead some aggravating cause or circumstance (Hart, 2013). The event is thus configured in a way conforming to the classic ideological square (van Dijk, 1998) with the in-group, i.e. *residents*, being empathetically represented as victims of the intrusion and harassment and the out-group, i.e. *the Chinese dama*, consistently viewed as harassers and intruders. By schematising the events with reference to asymmetrical action-chains (78.0%), responsibility for conflicts is assigned to only the Chinese dama. By contrast, in the schematisation of reciprocal action-chains (22.0%), as illustrated in (2), responsibility is shared.

(3)   [They (Chinese damas)$_{agent1}$] have had to [square off$_{action}$] with [basketball players and other athletes$_{agent2}$] for outdoor space. (Hong Kong Free Press, 2017-11-15)

In a reciprocal action-chain, the event is construed as involving a bidirectional flow of energy so that both participants are ascribed the status of active agents. In (3), *Chinese damas*, *basketball players* and *athletes* are all encoded as agentive actors in the encounters, implying that the older women should not be the only ones to

blame. In view of the hierarchy of needs, Entertainment & Exercise discourse involves a clash of physiological need, safety need as well as self-actualization need between Chinese damas and other people.

Moving to Economy discourse, all interactive actions are non-physical and construed as asymmetrical action-chains. Similar to Entertainment & Exercise discourse, the majority (60.0%) of non-physical actions are again enacted by other participants, while the rest (40.0%) are performed by Chinese damas. Frequent actions pertaining to others are *ridicule* and *mock*. These semiotic actions are used to reveal how Chinese damas are evaluated, mostly by *news writers*, *reporters* and *Chinese news press*. In two cases the agents of discriminatory acts of ridiculing and mocking are left unspecified, whereby the other (*Chinese damas* in example 4) 'becomes more salient just through the absence of competition' (Langacker, 2008: 384). When Chinese damas are cast in the role of agents (40.0%), their frequent actions are *defeat* and *drive*, both of which are schematised with ironies. According to Sperber and Wilson (1981), most ironies have victims (*Chinese rich damas* in example 5), at least in the sense that an implicit victim is whoever mistakenly considers ironic representations to be true. Overall, the non-physical actions in Economy discourse tend to be associated with discriminatory connotations and in these cases, *Chinese damas* are subject to mocking and ridiculing, as represented in (4) and (5).

(4)   [Chinese damas$_{patient}$] are often [mocked$_{action}$] for their investment naivety, poor fashion taste and disregard for public etiquette. (China Daily, 2014-09-01)

(5)   [Chinese rich damas$_{agent}$] [drove$_{action}$] [George Soros$_{patient}$] into fury and [defeated$_{action}$] [Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan$_{patient}$]. Spending 100 billion yuan was easily done and just like buying a melon. (Global Times, 2013-05-02)

In (4), the energy flows to the patient *Chinese damas* whereas its source is omitted, avoiding the responsibility of a possible agent and meanwhile foregrounding the mockeries of Chinese damas. By employing an agentless construction, together with a nomination of *naivety*, facets of Chinese damas' investment events, such as snapping up properties and buying tremendous amounts of gold, are construed as things instead of processes. Things do not pertain to time, therefore we see them all in accumulation (Radden & Dirven, 2007: 80). As for (5), the energy transfer flows from *Chinese rich damas* to *George Soros*, *Goldman Sachs* and *J.P. Morgan*, all of whom are celebrated tycoons in global financial markets. Considering that the transfer of energy in an action-chain often results in a change in state to a participant downstream in the energy flow, in view of the socioeconomic status disparity of the participants in examples like (5), the patients are possibly affected, though not necessarily in any substantial way. Consequently, ironies here serve to remark on the failure of expectations about Chinese damas' investment performance in financial markets. Regarding the hierarchy of needs, the asymmetrical action-chains in Economy discourse are thus employed to present Chinese damas' failure to fulfill their safety needs in the public realm. Altogether, the construal operations in Entertainment & Exercise and Economy discourses serve to legitimate the exclusion of Chinese damas in public spheres.

In respect to Social Interaction discourse, 54.2% of actions are non-physical and 45.8% are physical. In asymmetrical schemas, actions enacted by Chinese damas (75.0%) are three times more frequent than those performed by other participants (25.0%), often involving the actions *take care of*, *look after* and *hope*. Semantically, the former two are both physical and non-physical, depicting the housewife traits of a Chinese dama who assumes responsibility for caring for other family members. As in (6), the energy transfer flows from *damas*, the agents, to *grandchildren* or *aged parents*, the patients, resulting in a change in state to the patients. This reveals that Chinese damas bear the burden of serving the fulfillment of the needs, at all levels, of other family members, ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization. By doing so, they may eventually fulfill their own need for love and belonging. In stark contrast, the non-physical action *hope* represents Chinese damas as lonely, ageing mothers who value family reunion. In (7), it signifies a transfer of energy between *Chinese damas* and *children*. The majority of sentences with non-damas as agents contain a verb related to 'attract' which involves two participants, and Chinese damas are the ones being attracted. As illustrated in (8), the energy transfer flows from *EXO-M* (the young male idols) to *middle-aged mama fans* (Chinese damas). In a similar vein, both (7) and (8) reveal that Chinese damas aspire to fulfill the needs of love and belonging. In addition, examples like (8) imply that Chinese damas participate in social activities, no longer confined to family-related issues in private spheres.

(6)   Since [damas$_{agents}$] are often busy [taking care of$_{physical\_and\_non-physical\_action}$] their [grandchildren$_{patient}$] or sometimes even [looking after$_{physical\ and\ non-physical\ action}$] their own [aged parents$_{patient}$]... (China Economic Review, 2015-6-2)

(7)   [We (Chinese damas)$_{agent}$] still [hope$_{action}$] [children$_{patient}$] can frequently come back, enjoy nice family time... (China Daily, 2015-1-26)

(8)   [EXO-M$_{agent}$], a Chinese-South Korean boy band, has also [attracted$_{action}$] many [middle-aged mama fans (Chinese damas)$_{patient}$]. (China Daily, 2016-04-29)

In Culture discourse, Chinese damas are exclusively construed by means of asymmetrical action-chains. The actions are mostly non-physical (77.8%), and 71.4% are performed by damas, 28.6% by other participants. The recurrent non-physical actions regarding dama agents are all semiotic ones such as *tell* and *assert*. As in example (9) below, the event is construed in terms of a unidirectional flow of energy from an agent, *Chinese damas*, to a patient, *the younger generation*, via *new dance*. In principle, semiotic actions in Culture discourse are exploited to indicate Chinese female seniors' efforts in asserting their existence in society they are losing touch with while fulfilling the needs of esteem and self-actualization. In the case of other participants, the recurring actions are *invite* and *bring*. Inviters are primarily identified as *art directors* who assert the 'being' values (Maslow, 1943) of Chinese damas. Ideologically, whilst non-physical action chains in Social Interaction discourse, to a certain extent, are used to perpetuate the gender roles of Confucianism, non-physical action chains in Culture discourse serve to confront Confucius gender norms.

(9)   Now [they (Chinese damas)$_{agent}$] can [tell$_{action}$] wonderful life stories to [the younger generation$_{patient}$] through ['new dance'$_{instrument}$]. (China Daily, 2016-08-27)

Motion schema. A motion schema presents a domain of experience in which one entity, a figure, appears to move along a path which is defined relative to a ground, location or landmark (Hart, 2016). There is no transmission of energy between entities but rather a motion path of one entity (the 'figure') is delineated relative to another entity (the 'ground') (Hart, 2013). As shown in Table 3, both physical and non-physical motions primarily exist in Economy discourse, the former describing situations in which entities move in space whereas the latter represent emotional or cognitive states.

Table 3 Distribution of motion schemas in news discourses

Motion	Entertainment & Exercise	Economy	Social Interaction	Culture	Total
Physical	0 (0.0%)	7 (63.6%)	2 (100.0%)	1 (50.0%)	10 (62.5%)
Non-physical	1(100.0%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	6 (37.5%)

With respect to physical motion schemas (63.6%) in Economy discourse, the sole figure tracked is *Chinese damas* and their physical motions are *travel*, *rush*, *flock* and *stampede*. As in (10), *Chinese damas* are represented as following a path of motion which finds them located inside *department stores* or *jewelry stores*. Regarding non-physical motion schemas (36.4%) as in (11), when Chinese damas are encoded as a figure (25.0%), only one motion comes into play. *Chinese damas* are described as following a time path of motion which finds them located inside *the country's economy*. Notably, the other participants encoded as a figure (75.0%) are abstract entities, i.e. *gold price*, *the number of dama travellers* and *their (Chinese damas') consumption habits*. Generally, in Economy discourse, the motion schemas involve the Chinese damas' expanding purchasing power along with a rise of their family status. According to Zuo and Bian (2005), 'making more household decisions is believed to reflect a higher status and more overall power within families'.

(10)   [They (Chinese damas)$_{figure}$] hit the headlines during the Spring Festival holiday again for [flocking$_{physical—motion+path}$] to [department stores$_{ground}$] and snapping up gold products. (China Daily, 2014-02-19)
(11)   ...[they (Chinese damas)$_{figure}$] are growing to [become$_{non-physical\_motion+path}$] a major force in [the country's economy$_{ground}$]. (Global Times, 2019-5-8)
(12)   ...[she (the Chinese dama)$_{figure}$] [flew$_{physical—motion+path}$] from Beijing to [Shanghai$_{ground}$] just to meet Yang Yang, a 25-year-old male actor. (China Daily, 2016-04-29)

Social Interaction discourse includes two cases of physical motion events of worshipping stars. When a Chinese dama is schematised as figure as in (12), the motions are *flew* and *travel*. Example (12) designates a pure motion event without reference to any effect on the landmark, while (10) and (11) refer to the impact of the motion force. Examples like (12) indicate that Chinese damas tend to be increasingly active in social activities, no longer confined to family-related issues in the private realms, thus challenging Confucian gender norms.

To conclude, in Entertainment & Exercise discourse, Chinese damas are primarily mediatised as harassers and intruders in public spheres, followed by rejecting their fulfillment of physiological need. Safety challenges ultimately frustrate their pursuit of love and belonging and conflicts with decision makers are an unavoidable consequence. In Economy discourse, whilst the action-chains are employed to represent Chinese damas as international investment losers who are inclined to endanger others' safety needs in the public realm, motion schemas are used to mediatise Chinese damas as national economic growth promoters with expanding purchasing power and rising family status. In Social Interaction discourse, Chinese damas are mediatised as

housewives, middle-aged mama fans and empty-nesters seeking love and belongingness in both private and public realms. In Culture discourse, Chinese damas are predominantly depicted as storytellers and amateur performers, seeking to fulfill esteem and self-actualization needs. Ideologically, Social Interaction discourse is challenged by Culture discourse, in that action chains regarding the former serve to perpetuate the gender roles of Confucianism, while those in the latter are employed to confront Confucius gender norms.

4.2. Positioning

A positioning strategy can co-occur with a structural configuration strategy where many grammatical constructions include as part of their conventionalised meaning an image-schematic representation and a particular vantage point (Hart, 2014). As shown in Table 4, 81 asymmetrical constructions pertain to Chinese damas in all four discourses. In these constructions, active voice (79.0%) encodes the perspective of the agent, while passive voice (21.0%) encodes the perspective of the patient. In Chinese English-language news, damas are frequently described as agents by means of active voice (38 cases) and as patients in active (26 cases) and passive sentences (16 cases). Chinese damas are, therefore, placed in the foreground of the conceptualiser's attention, whilst other parties are backgrounded, such as *residents* and *Chinese government* in Entertainment & Exercise discourse, *the Chinese press* in Economy discourse, *young male idols* in Social Interaction discourse and *art directors* in Culture discourse.

Table 4 Chinese dama ascription in asymmetrical schemas

	Active Voice		Passive Voice		Total
	Agent	Patient	Agent	Patient	
Entertainment & Exercise	9 (36.0%)	16 (64.0%)	1(14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	32
Economy	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)	20
Social Interaction	14 (73.7%)	5 (26.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1(100.0%)	20
Culture	7 (77.8%)	2 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9
Total	38 (59.4%)	26 (40.6%)	1 (5.9%)	16 (94.1%)	81

Ideologically, an active voice highlights the role of the agent in the conceptualisation process, whilst its counterpart is analysed as distancing the agent and detracting attention from relations of causality (Kress & Hodge, 1993). Considering the discourses of Entertainment & Exercise and Economy, an active voice serves to draw attention to the negative behaviours of the Chinese dama, the out-group in the ideological square, while a passive voice is adopted to direct attention away from the negative behaviours of other parties, the in-group in the ideological square. The passive voice serves to distance other parties from the dama event being described, redirecting judgements of responsibility and blame onto the victims themselves, i.e. Chinese damas, and away from the perpetrators, i.e. the other parties, as passive voice suggests some degree of involvement on the victims' part (Chan & Maglio, 2020). Contrastingly, in discourses of Social Interaction and Culture, an active voice is mainly employed to profile the neutral or positive traits of Chinese damas, the in-group in the ideological square.

Reciprocal schemas (13 cases) only occur in Entertainment & Exercise and Social Interaction discourses. Typically, the 'Chinese dama' agent tends to appear as the topic, the other agents as the focus. However, in Entertainment & Exercise discourse, this seems reversed. As in example (13), *enforcers* appears as the topic, whilst *a formidable army (Chinese damas)* is the focus, treating the behaviours of Chinese damas as newsworthy and the roles of the other parties as normative. Additionally we find that whilst there is divergence in how newspapers construe Chinese damas' participation in social activities when they are agentive, there is convergence in terms of schematising the conflicts between Chinese damas and the other parties. This seems to fit with the media's ideological framework, steering ultimately towards the legitimisation of excluding Chinese female seniors from the public realm.

(13) But [enforcers$_{agent1}$] are facing [a formidable army of opposition (Chinese damas)$_{agent2}$]. (South China Morning Post, 2014-12-17)

4.3. Framing

Cognitive linguistics identifies framing as a means of instilling a specific worldview in peoples' minds by the lexical choices in the text (Fillmore, 1982). Throughout the Chinese dama news discourses, seven event frames, such as 'aggregate', 'noise making' and 'shopping', are evoked by specific lexical cues (Table 5).

Table 5 Frequency of event frames in news discourses

Event Frames	Frequency	Lexical Cues
aggregate	129	group, troupe, cohort, gang, crowd, gather, congregate...
noise making	62	disturbance, noise, loud, distract, harass, rattle, bother...
violence	16	altercation, violent, attack, arrest, hit, shoot, pelt...
shopping	103	stores, money, products, price, discount, purchase, buy...
desiring	25	fan, idol, obsession, affection, aspire, attract, chase...
responsibility	18	housewife, family, take care of, hold, control,support, devote...
performing	25	performer, perform, audience, stage, theater, tickets, debut...

In Entertainment & Exercise discourse, the categorisation of social actions accesses an 'aggregate' frame (129 cases) pointing to a particular manner Chinese damas act; a 'noise making' frame (62 cases) indicating damas' disturbing other parties in everyday life; a 'violence' frame (16 cases) revealing the violent way other people react to Chinese damas' disturbance. These frames invoke the image of a group of older women whose identities are in dispute. They create the potential for social conflicts and are subject to exclusion. Such a conceptualisation echoes an expectation that Chinese senior females should be kept captive in household labor in the private sphere. The public-private distinction serves as an exploitation of women and perpetuates an ideology that seeks to reproduce the principle of male supremacy (Sangwha, 1999: 10).

As regards Economy discourse, the categorisation accesses a 'shopping' frame (103 cases) containing entries for Chinese damas buying gold, properties or bitcoins for investment as well as purchasing other products that help establish their or their families' identities. The fact that most of Chinese damas are widely depicted as financially illiterate (Zhao, 2015) and thus solely responsible for their failure of investment, downplays the significance of the governmental involvement and assistance of providing a comprehensive social security system and reliable investment channels, which may make a substantial difference to outcomes. In addition, with the use of a 'shopping' frame, Chinese damas are mediatised as affluent shoppers exerting great power in shaping modern Chinese consumption patterns and very frequently they are still depicted as incompetent money holders thinking 'everything cheaper is worth buying'.

The 'shopping' frame indicates the ideology that even if Chinese senior females gain more marital decision-making power for their contribution to family well-being (Zuo & Bian, 2005), they are most likely to get frustrated in financial markets. This in fact discourages Chinese damas from participating actively in social activities in the public sphere. Interestingly, the 'shopping' frame in Economy discourse neatly fits with the 'responsibility' frame in Social Interaction discourse (18 cases), which represents damas as diligent persons, taking care of other family members and 'more willing to spend on their families rather than on themselves'. The frames of 'shopping' and 'responsibility' together demonstrate their pursuit of safety as well as love and belonging and also the role they play in the fulfillment of other family members' needs. They confront the ideology of male dominance because Chinese damas are enjoying more overall power within families along with a rise of their family status.

In addition to a 'responsibility' frame, a 'desiring' frame (25 cases) can be accessed in Social Interaction discourse. It contains entries to do with Chinese damas' transferring expectation from their children to their young male idols who are seemingly hardworking, upright and modest. The ideology connoted by the facts about Chinese damas' worshipping male stars implies the effects of a patriarchal society on their longing for sons to be successful. This disposition is informed by the family and cultural values shared by many Confucian heritage culture countries, such as Singapore, Japan, and Korea (Tan & Yates, 2011). In view of Culture discourse, a 'performing' frame (25 cases) relates to dama performers' dancing on stage to tell the audience the story of a generation of women born in the 1950s.

5. Discussion and final comments

The data drawn from Chinese English-language news media present interesting empirical findings about the mediatisation of Chinese damas. We are aware that no corpus is perfect nor representative (Sharoff et al., 2013). Although our corpora are rather small, striking patterns are revealed in the portrayal of Chinese female seniors. Hence, this investigation inspires new theoretical generalisations about the gender roles of women in Chinese society, providing innovative insights into the research on women in the Chinese context in general.

Overall, the ideological analysis of Chinese English-language news has yielded a juxtaposition of two contrasting portrayals of Chinese damas: 1) subject to exclusion in public sphere and confined to the wifely and motherly roles in the private sphere; 2) increasingly active in social activities and no longer confined in the private realms. The former indicates conflicting views on the use of public space in Chinese urban cities, a

loathing of China's Cultural Revolution generation and, more importantly, the resurgence of traditional gender roles of neo-Confucianism; while the latter reveals a confrontation with traditional gender norms.

The exclusion of Chinese damas implies conflicting views on the use of public space between the urban majority and minority. The urban majority having a say regard public space as quiet and orderly (Chen, 2010). The marginalised minority, namely Chinese damas, therefore gets excluded due to the *noisiness* and *disturbance* when seeking to fulfill physiological needs. This explains why Chinese damas are represented as out-group members to be blamed even when they are victims in other parties' resisting square dancing. Additionally, the exclusion relates to a loathing of China's *Cultural Revolution generation*. Most damas have experienced the Mao era featuring with socialist collectivism. They have internalised some habitus typical of that era (York et al., 2020), for instance gathering to dance in public spaces. Contrastingly, the middle-aged and young adults in contemporary China, affected by western culture, value space rights highly (Wang, 2015). Although it is reasonable to have dissimilar perceptions of public behaviours, the damas get excluded due to being defamed as the *Cultural Revolution generation.* As one Chinese joke puts it, 'it is not that the old are getting bad, but that the bad are getting old'.

Notably, the exclusion of Chinese damas in the public sphere primarily points to the resurgence of traditional gender roles of neo-Confucianism. These traditional gender norms perpetuate the myth that a woman participating in social-cultural activities at the expense of her families is not qualified to be a virtuous woman who bears obligations including the furtherance of the family lineage and devotion to serving her family (Yu, 2021). This patriarchal thinking is further associated with a rampant consumerism which bears the imprints of China's long-standing patriarchal values concerning familial relations. Chinese damas are largely confined by housewifely duties in the private sphere. They have always been charged with managing the daily functioning of the household, hence acting as 'consumer-in-chief' in the dominant gendered division of labour. In that way, the care work Chinese damas provide for the family is reduced to commodity purchasing (Brown, 2015).

At the same time, however, Chinese damas are depicted as no longer confined in the private realms. Their maintaining necessary social activities, such as *dancing*, *investing*, *attending supportive events for their idols* and *performing on stage*, is an indicator of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Additionally, Chinese female seniors are considered as economic growth promoters with expanding purchasing power and rising family status. They are *shopaholics* aspiring to a favorable identity to *remedy psychological deficits* brought on by physical senescence. As Pun (2003) acknowledges, consumption has been celebrated by Chinese women of different social classes as the most visible way to specify and valorise their femininity.

Bearing in mind that societal discourses and social interaction are subject to rapid mediatisation and digitalisation, our analysis could be further extended by considering the representation of Chinese damas in social media platforms like TikTok and Sina Weibo, with the aim of providing a broader picture of women in Chinese society as well as indicating the multiplicity of perspectives in portraying Chinese female seniors.

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CREDiT Authorship Contribution

Ke Li: data curation, formal analysis, software, and writing (original draft preparation). Xingwei Miao: management of the project, supervision and writing (review and editing). Gisela Redeker: methodology, supervision and writing (review and editing).

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