

Rereading U.S. Discourse on Human Rights Related to Xinjiang ---- Critical Discourse Analysis in the Perspective of Post-Structuralism

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Abstract: In recent years, Xinjiang region has become a U.S. "outpost" to contain China. The U.S. government has characterized the Xinjiang issue as a "human rights issue" and has been "hying" it through government statements, news reports and human rights reports, and has also signed into the so-called "Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020," signifying its "legitimization" and "normalization" of its interference in China's internal affairs. This paper selects the U.S. Human Rights Reports on China released in 2017-2020 as the corpus, and uses critical discourse analysis methods to reread the U.S. human rights discourse on Xinjiang in a post-structuralist perspective, deconstructing the U.S. human rights discourse on Xinjiang from three aspects: text, discourse practice and social practice, revealing the neglected power operation and ideological infiltration behind it, and restoring the construction mode of U.S. discourse hegemony. It is hoped that this article will help China to examine and dismantle the hegemonic discourse, and provide suggestions for a more targeted counteraction to discourse hegemony, the use of discourse to shape China's national image, and the construction of a national discourse system.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the U.S. government has frequently made statements related to Xinjiang, mainly on its "human rights issues", which has caused extremely bad effects in the international arena. The U.S. human rights discourse on Xinjiang is not an occasional or isolated expression, but a progressive, continuous and long-term discourse system with obvious value presetting, trying to interfere with China's internal affairs through criticism of human rights, so as to disrupt, contain and even transform China.[1] In response, the Chinese government has countered with a wealth of facts, but many countries are not buying it, choosing instead to follow the U.S. in its criticism and accusations of China, and are even tempted to introduce relevant sanctions. The U.S. human rights discourse in relation to Xinjiang areas replaces facts with falsehoods, classifies national identities as superior or inferior, and creates the illusion that some countries "have the responsibility and mission to stop China's human rights violations," which is a thoroughly hegemonic discourse. [2]

So, how has the U.S. hegemony over human rights discourse related to Xinjiang been formed and strengthened? How should China face such hegemonic discourses? Based on these questions, this paper uses critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the construction mode of the U.S. human rights discourse related to Xinjiang in a post-structuralism perspective, and reveals the nature of the power of the U.S. human rights discourse related to Xinjiang in constructing identity and serving national interests. It is hoped that this study will provide recommendations for China to better respond to the hegemonic discourse.

2. Post-structuralism and Critical Discourse Analysis

With the linguistic turn in international relations, the acting and constructive functions of language are gradually recognized and valued, and research on international relations from the perspective of

language is gradually increasing. However, most of these studies discuss the role of language at the theoretical level, without really touching on the use of language at the practical level [3]. For this reason, some scholars have suggested that critical discourse analysis in the field of linguistic studies can be introduced into international relations research to provide the latter with concrete and feasible methods of discourse analysis [4].

(i) Post-structuralism

Since its development in the late 1980s, post-structuralism international relations theory has gradually become a unique theoretical perspective for people to examine international relations. Influenced and inspired by post-structuralist philosophical trends and 20th century Western philosophy of language, it places discourse at the core of theory, upholds discourse ontology and epistemology, emphasizes the role of discourse in international politics, considers the world as a discursive construction, and advocates explaining the phenomenon of international relations through language.

Post-structuralism often uses discourse as an entry point to study identity and foreign policy. Identity no longer exists in advance, but is constructed through discourse. While emphasizing discourse, post-structuralism also emphasizes the deconstructive role of language. Jacques Derrida argues that the world can be reconceptualized through a deconstructive approach, that is, by deconstructing languages through languages, by reading them a second time and giving them new interpretations, thus revealing the contradictions that exist in the discourse itself, identifying what is hidden behind the dominant ideas and concepts, uncovering what is concealed or excluded from the text, discourse, or system [5].

(ii) Analysis of critical discourse

Critical discourse analysis began with Norman Fairclough [6] and aims to analyze language to reveal the unspoken ideological meanings of discourse, especially those biases, discrimination and distortions of fact that people take for granted, and to explain the social conditions of their existence and their role in power struggles [7]. CDA offers a new perspective and approach to language studies. It is not only an analysis of discourse, but also a kind of criticism: while discourse naturalizes ideology into accepted and familiar common sense, CDA is the reverse movement, i.e., denaturalization. The linguistic form of discourse is analyzed to reveal the relationship between language and implied power and ideology and how the ruling class uses language to enforce ideological control and maintain its position of power.

(iii) A research route combining post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis

Although poststructuralism is one of the post-modern schools of international relations theory and CDA is an approach to linguistics that is both critical and interdisciplinary, which is to say that they do not belong to the same field, but they both focus on "discourse", which is a practice in itself and can have an impact on the control of ideology and the maintenance of power positions in society.

In concrete practice, post-structuralist theory provides a theoretical complement to CDA, clarifying the role of discourse in ideological and power struggles as "constructing identity and maintaining a balance between identity and foreign policy". However, post-structuralism only answers the question of what to deconstruct, but does not specify how to deconstruct discourse, while CDA answers this question by providing concrete means for deconstructing discourse, which to a certain extent makes up for the methodological shortcomings of post-structuralism [8]. The commonality of the two approaches in terms of research objects and purposes, as well as their epistemological and methodological complementarity, makes the combination of the two approaches reasonable and effective (see Figure 1).

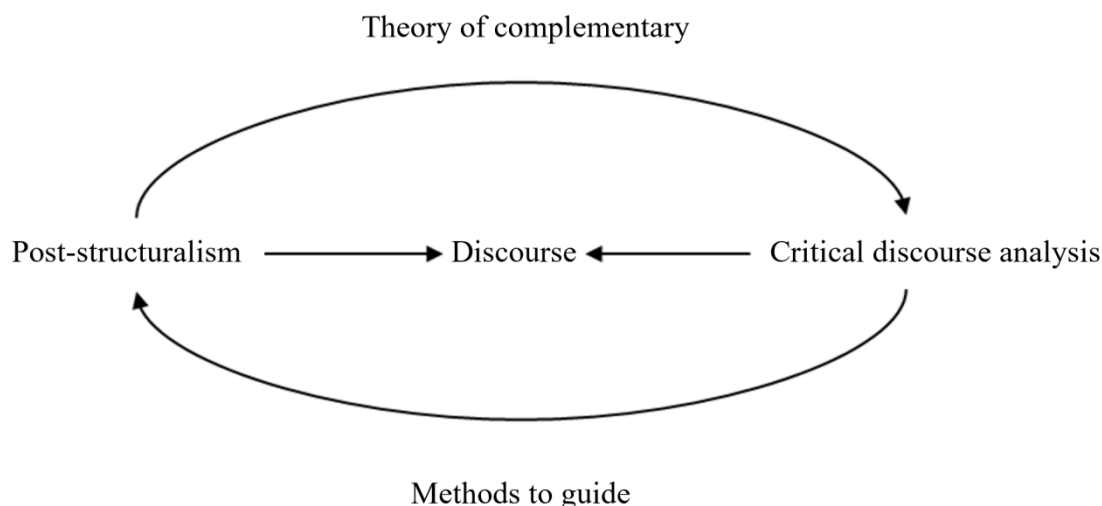


Figure 1. Research route combining post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis

The specific analytical framework of this paper is based on Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model. He describes discourse as a complete unity containing three dimensions [9]: text, discourse practice and social practice, and accordingly proposes three steps of CDA: describe, interpret and explain [10]. The macro framework of discourse analysis is the linguistic description of the text, the interpretation of the relationship between the text and the discourse practice, and the explanation of the relationship between the discourse practice and the social practice. The linguistic description of the text is to analyze the formal structure of the discourse (textual analysis); the interpretation of the relationship between the text and the discourse practice is to reveal how the discourse is produced, transmitted and received (process analysis); the interpretation of the relationship between the discourse practice and the social practice is to analyze the phenomena of power, inequality and prejudice in the broader social context of the discourse, and to explain how power and ideology work (social analysis). These three levels of analysis can expose the nature of power in the post-structuralist perspective in which discourse constructs identity and provides the basis for legitimacy in the implementation of relevant foreign policies (see Figure 2).

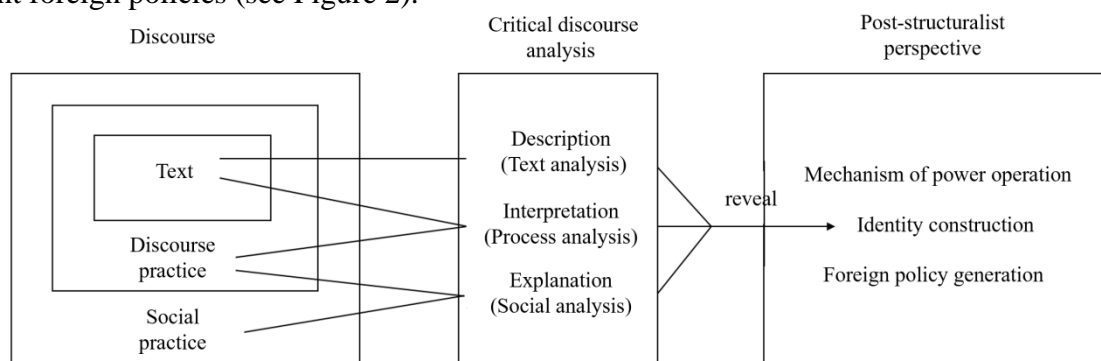


Figure 2. Critical discourse analysis model in the post-structuralism perspective

3. Using Critical Discourse Analysis to Reread U.S. Xinjiang-related Human Rights Discourse

This paper selects human rights discourse on Xinjiang from Human Rights Reports on China issued by the U.S. government in the last four years (2017-2020) as the corpus [11]. During this period, the number of Xinjiang-related legislation in the U.S. Congress increased significantly, with 15 Xinjiang-related bills introduced in less than two congressional terms, more than the number of Xinjiang-related proposals in the previous 17 years of the U.S. Congress combined [12]. This indicates that Xinjiang has become an important battleground for the U.S. to contain China during this period. In addition, as

an official U.S. government document, Human Rights Report, with its clear expression of views and high exposure, is both formal and authoritative, and meets the criteria for text selection [13].

(i) Text Analysis

Textual analysis is the first level of CDA. The structure of the text and the linguistic forms employed are choices made by the discourse generator guided by his purpose and various social factors, and thus have significant ideological meaning or social significance [14]. Fairclough's analysis of this process draws heavily on M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. According to systemic functional grammar, language has three major metafunctions, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. Roger Fowler and Gunther Kress point out that when conducting CDA, the analysis should focus on linguistic forms and processes such as transitivity, modality, transformation, classification, and cohesion [15]. For specific texts, these grammatical resources do not have equal importance in the transmission of ideology and need to be analyzed on a text-specific basis. Based on the characteristics of the corpus of human rights reports, the author selects two typical linguistic processes, namely "classification" and "transformation" in the ideational function, for analysis.

3.1 Classification

As one of the most important cognitive tools for human beings, classification refers to giving order to the external world through language, representing the discourse generator's description of experiences and processes that can reflect his or her attitudes and value preferences [16]. The choice of vocabulary is the best way to achieve classification. By analyzing the four years of human rights reports both synchronically (i.e., analyzing each year's report separately) and diachronically (i.e., comparing the four years of human rights reports along the time line), the following linguistic characteristics of classification system for the U.S. Xinjiang-related human rights discourse were found.

3.1.1 Comparison of lexical emotions

There are positive and negative emotions in the vocabulary. The emotional meaning of the words selected for the human rights reports is mainly pejorative, and the verbs chosen are mainly: force, abuse, torture, violate, detain, repress, control, discriminate, intimidate, monitor, threaten, harass, perpetrate, ignore, impose, limit, etc.; adjectives are mainly: forced, restrictive, arbitrary, cruel, inhuman, degrading, unlawful, harsh, pervasive, intrusive, disturbing, flagrant, etc. In terms of nouns, typical categorical behaviors can also be frequently found. For example, the U.S. government refers to individuals released by the Chinese government after legal detention as "survivors," cadres and people of various ethnic groups who are "twinned" as "informers," and the legally established vocational skills education and training centers are referred to as "camps". In addition to these obvious pejorative terms, the U.S. also often uses "subtle" pejorative terms such as "claim", "allege", "so-called", and "propaganda" when describing the actions of the Chinese government, implying the attitude and position of the U.S. government.

For China, the United States does not completely avoid the use of positive words. However, they are used either mixed with pejorative words, i.e., positive words are used to modify pejorative words to create a contrasting effect, such as "systematic torture", "routinely ignore", "concerted efforts to compel..." , "build a comprehensive database to track the movement, mobile app usage, and even electricity and gasoline consumption of inhabitants"; or quotation marks are putted around positive words that indicate positive behavior of the Chinese government, which serve as a negative and ironic effect, implying that they are just "fronts" for China's "human rights violations", such as "for the purpose of 'social-instability forecasting, prevention, and containment'", "in 'child welfare guidance centers'", "codify efforts to 'contain and eradicate extremism' " etc.

3.1.2 Stability of vocabulary selection

A diachronic comparison of human rights reports reveals that the words chosen for each year's human rights report are largely consistent in their lexical meaning and sentiment. By pairing the above

These nominalized structures serve as presupposition for the U.S. government, transforming processes and behaviors into states and phenomena, turning concrete into abstraction [21] and conveying rich presupposition [22] information to influence public perception and judgment. For example, in response to the needs of counter-terrorism and de-extremism in Xinjiang, China has set up a school-based education and training center with the common national language, legal knowledge, and vocational skills as the main teaching content, which is abstractly summarized as "a re-education center"[23], in which the U.S. government wants to convey the message that the Uyghur people have already received education, and the Chinese government is only re-educating them for "political indoctrination". The good intentions and efforts made by the Chinese government are hidden. Another example is "Monitoring of social media and the internet increased, and officials described their use of 'big data' to forecast, prevent, and contain social instability in Xinjiang". In this sentence, "instability" is derived from the clause "Xinjiang is instable". The expression in the form of a small clause may be true or false, and the reader can see that this is the author's opinion. However, if the clause is replaced by a nominal structure like "instability in Xinjiang", "Xinjiang is instable" becomes "a fait accompli". The presupposition here is no longer information shared by the speaker and the addressee, but becomes a matter of course for the addressee under the persuasion of the speaker [24].

3.2.2 The use of passivization

The use of passivization can reinforce the powerlessness of the addressee and the power control of the aggressor [25]. In addition to the extensive use of the past participle of verbs to modify nouns at the lexical level, the passive voice is also frequently used throughout the report. For example, the verb "detain" appears 98 times in the 2019 report, 44 of which are in the passive form.

The use of the passive voice also helps to convey the U.S. government's presuppositions, as exemplified by the statements in which the U.S. government accuses the Chinese government of "forcible detention" (see Table 1). The least noticeable ideological penetration that is most effective in maintaining unequal power relations [26].

Table 1. Predetermined information behind "passivization"

Original sentence	Presupposition Information
Authorities <u>were reported to</u> have arbitrarily detained...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This information was reported by a third party and was not fabricated by the United States out of thin air. 2. The Chinese government did not voluntarily admit to its "crime".
Families <u>were not given</u> information about the length or location of the detention.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many families are not provided with detailed information on the detention of their family members. 2. If these families want to get information, they can only hope for the government, and there is no other open and transparent channel.
..., all <u>were disappeared</u> at year's end.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not only "mandatory detention", but also the "disappearance" of people. 2. The situation after the "forced disappearance" is worrying and evocative.

(ii) Process analysis

Process analysis is the second level of CDA, which focuses on the relationship between texts and discourse practices. Texts are the products of discourse practices, which specifically include the generation, dissemination and reception of texts. Fairclough mainly focuses on the intertextuality of discourse at the second level, that is, how discourse is generated [27]. The concept of intertextuality, introduced by Julia Kristeva, refers to the fact that any discourse is an absorption and transformation of other discourses [28]. Intertextuality helps authors to manipulate readers to identify with their constructed ideologies and social identities, and critical discourse analysis aims to reveal the complex relationship between power and ideology behind this process, highlighting the ideological

transmission function of this linguistic phenomenon [29]. In the human rights reports, the U.S. government makes numerous quotations in an attempt to construct legitimacy for its own interpretation through the interaction of various voices, in which the ideological penetration is mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

3.3 Selection of news sources

Quotations are generally used in discourse to balance the voices of various parties and to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the text [30]. Quoted sources can generally be divided into three categories: specific sources, semi-specific sources, and unknown sources. In specific sources, information such as the name, occupation, and identity of the informant are detailed; semi-specific sources do not involve precise information about the informant and present only part of the broad information; and unknown sources omit the source altogether.

The sources in the human rights reports are mostly specific and semi-specific. The U.S. repeatedly cites specific "informed sources" or "international human rights NGOs" for their views and statements, such as "His daughter said she last heard from Hapiz in 2016...", "The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's annual report on media freedoms found...", "According to Human Rights Watch...", in an attempt to prove that what they say is true. But in the face of the truth, these "testimonies" are no match for the truth. The so-called "human rights organizations" also have complex and close ties with the U.S. government, and are not independent and impartial non-governmental organizations. Thus, it is clear that the U.S. has a clear bias in selecting specific sources, and the selection criteria are whether they stand for the U.S. and whether they are in line with U.S. interests, rather than whether they can objectively reflect the truth. The choice of quotation represents, to some extent, the granting of discourse power. Whichever side the discourse generator quotes in the discourse gives that side more discourse power [31]. In the human rights reports, it seems that many parties are speaking, but in fact the U.S. government is monologuing and exercising its discourse hegemony by wearing different "vests" to squeeze the space for Chinese discourse.

Semi-specific sources are more common in human rights reports, such as "A Uighur woman", "Numerous former prisoners and detainees", "An NGO research report", "Some scholars", "A December 2019 report ". The reader does not know the specific source of the quotation and cannot judge its importance and credibility. The use of words such as "other," "numerous," and "some" tends to give the impression that China's "human rights violations" have been "proven" by many parties and have been criticized and blamed by all.

3.4 Selection of paraphrase

Paraphrasing refers to the specific way of quoting, which Fairclough divides into direct discourse and indirect discourse. The former is "direct quotation", usually with quotation marks, and the content and tense remain unchanged; the latter is "indirect quotation", that is, the linguistic form is processed on the basis of keeping the original meaning unchanged, and its expression and wording are determined by the paraphraser. The former is a complete reproduction of the original language, which makes it more objective and authentic than the latter. This is the reason why the U.S. repeatedly cites "parties" or "international NGOs" in its human rights reports.

However, indirect quotation can play a greater role in the transmission of ideology. Because it can blur the boundary between the paraphraser's words and the paraphrased words. It is conducive to the paraphraser to blend his own views and attitudes into the paraphrased words, and to drown out the voice of the paraphrased without drawing the reader's attention to it [32], thus completing the information transmission and ideological penetration.

To this end, when citing ambiguous sources in human rights reports, the U.S. mostly uses indirect quotes, such as "A Uighur woman said she and other women were forced to... ", "Numerous former prisoners and detainees reported they were beaten...", "There were credible reports that...", "An NGO research report noted that...", "Some scholars said victims were encouraged to...", "According to a

December 2019 report". Despite drawing on different sources, its expression remains the view and position of the United States itself.

3.5 The construction of paraphrasing contexts

In the human rights report, the U.S. government did not simply avoid China's official statements, but worked on constructing the context: either by putting facts in quotation marks to express doubt and sarcasm, such as "Officials later said she died of a 'medical condition' and prevented family members from examining the body"; or taking certain expressions out of context, such as "Police in Xinjiang called Yunus' older brother in Turkey, told him they were standing next to his parents, and said he should return to Xinjiang, which he understood to be threat against his parents' safety."; or using positions or views contrary to those of the Chinese side to defuse official Chinese statements, such as "In November 2016 the procurator general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, some experts called the number 'abnormally low'". In the context constructed by the U.S. government, the citation of Chinese discourse is another means of suppressing Chinese discourse.

(iii) Social analysis

Social analysis, the third level of CDA, focuses on analyzing the relationship between discursive practices and social practices as well as the relationship between discourse and power. In this stage, CDA explores the social context in which discourse is embedded, relates the discourse that has been generated to social practices, and further argues for the social function of the ideological penetration behind the discourse, such as whether it plays an intervening role in a certain social process, thus helping to gain or maintain certain power relations. Combined with post-structuralist theory, the answer to this question is obviously yes, and it is through the construction of identity that discourse fulfills this role. By constructing the subject, object, and problem identities needed for the state's foreign policy and excluding identities that are not conducive to policy implementation, the discourse provides legitimacy for the state's foreign policy and maintains the process of exercising state power. Therefore, when conducting a social analysis of the human rights discourse related to Xinjiang, we should first analyze the social environment in which it is produced, and then analyze the identity it constructs in this environment, thus revealing its maintenance of hegemony.

3.6 The social environment in which the human rights discourse on Xinjiang emerged

As China continues to rise, competition between China and the United States has intensified in many areas, including economy and trade, electronic communications, cultural industries, and international influence. From the "Asia-Pacific Rebalance" strategy to the current "Indo-Pacific Strategy," the U.S. national strategy has become more and more clear in its Chinese orientation, with the intention of comprehensively containing China's rise. This containment requires a corresponding discourse to provide a rational basis for it.

Since China's "The Belt and Road" initiative, Xinjiang has become a hub for China-Central Asia economic cooperation, a barrier for China to control internal and external terrorist forces, a strategic channel to influence the situation in South Asia, and a land-based support for China to build a stronger maritime power [33]. Internally, Xinjiang is of great significance to China's socio-economic development as it consolidates China's national security situation and becomes a new economic growth pole by virtue of its late-stage advantages in the west; externally, Xinjiang, as the core region of China's Silk Road Economic Belt, is a window of interconnection between China and other countries in Eurasia. It is closely connected with China's fundamental national interests and plays a pivotal role in expanding China's influence in the Eurasian region and even the world. The increased geostrategic value of Xinjiang makes it possible to stir up trouble there to contain China's development and hinder its rise in many ways, including economically, militarily, and socially, and more importantly, to achieve a strategic blockade of China's "Belt and Road" initiative and to hold China's strategic layout in check [34]. The U.S. has been using Xinjiang to further reshape the Asia-Pacific region in its favor. Based on this strategic consideration, the U.S. government has used the extremist forces left behind in

Xinjiang to construct the human rights discourse as a strategic tool to counterbalance China's rise and to maintain its own interests, hegemonic status, and geopolitical control over the world landscape.

3.7 Identity constructed by human rights discourse related to Xinjiang

The discourse of any state cannot exist apart from its national identity and interests, nor can the discursive interaction between any two states exist apart from the relationship and perception of their roles. George Modelski has classified the members of the international community from the perspective of the hegemonic state and briefly summarized four basic roles: hegemonic allies, challengers, dominators, and rejecters [35]. The hegemonic powers have different discursive preferences for each role. For hegemonic challengers that need to be prevented and suppressed, hegemonic powers often display a series of confrontational or insulting discourse to express concern, condemnation, and warning. Hegemonic challengers are constructed as "subverters"[36] of the existing order and rules of the international community. This logic is once again verified in the construction of the U.S. human rights discourse related to Xinjiang: the U.S. stands on the moral high ground of being a "human rights defender" and establishes China as "a human rights violator", "a concealer", and "a deceiver". China is constructed as "a destroyer of the international order" and "a target" (see Table 2). This status has made U.S. policies toward China “necessary” and “imperative”, such as imposing sanctions, requiring U.S. government departments to submit various reports on Xinjiang, and requiring Radio Free Asia to increase the amount of Uyghur-language programming in Xinjiang and to protect Uyghur-language journalists' coverage of the human rights and political situation in Xinjiang [37]. Under the operation of power, the U.S. discourse on human rights in Xinjiang is no longer mere words, but a social practice that infiltrates ideology, guides political cooperation, manipulates the international community, paves the way for U.S. policies, and puts a "cover-up" on its hegemonic practices.

Table 2. Chinese Identity in the Construction of U.S. Human Rights Discourse Related to Xinjiang

Representation	China National Identity
"Surveillance, Detention, Intimidation, Political Indoctrination"	"Human Rights Violators"
"Sensitive topics blocked, no access to public information"	"Concealer"
"Terrorism used as an excuse, published data which are not factual"	"Deceiver"
"Forced labor, contamination of global supply chains, ban on foreign journalists"	"International Order Breaker"
"Accused by NGOs, national media, journalists, academics, etc."	"Target of public criticism"

4. Conclusion

Post-structuralism leads people to examine discourse with a critical view, advocating the deconstruction of texts through rereading, analyzing the implied use of power in discourse, and uncovering the true nature of authoritative discourse systems. Taking the analysis of U.S. human rights discourse related to Xinjiang as an example, the epistemological and methodological complementarity between post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis makes the combination of the two particularly useful for identifying and analyzing discursive hegemony. Post-structuralism regards the role played by discourse in international relations as constructing identity and providing a basis of legitimacy for the implementation of foreign policy. Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, provides a practical and operational path to deconstructing discourse from the inside out, starting from the textual structure and linguistic features, revealing the ideological infiltration and identity construction behind it, and exposing the political nature of discourse as produced by power and serving national interests.

As long as there are no major changes in the international system and in the general environment of U.S.-China relations, the U.S. discourse hegemony over China will persist for a long time, and will even be further strengthened with the advancement of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. China's counterattack and confrontation against the hegemony of discourse will be long-term and have strategic significance. On the one hand, learning to use tools such as critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the U.S. discourse hegemony will help China identify and counter it, provide inspiration for China to construct its own discourse system, and let the discourse better serve the construction of China's national identity. On the other hand, in order to escape from the vicious circle of "suppression-resistance", China should take the initiative to set the framework of discourse dissemination from the beginning on issues that are easily "manipulated" by the hegemonic powers, such as those related to Xinjiang issues, so as to avoid the dominant power of discourse and concept definition from falling into the hands of the hegemonic powers. While stating the facts, China should convey Chinese values to the world, shape a more positive image of China, seek deeper recognition from the international community, and effectively enhance China's national "soft power".

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