

**DECODING DISCOURSE, NAVIGATING SOCIETY: AN
INTEGRATED CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR SINOLOGY
THROUGH NEWSPAPER READING AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSLINGUAL-ANALYTICAL
COMPETENCE**

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Abstract

This paper proposes a comprehensive theoretical and pedagogical framework for *Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society*, an advanced undergraduate course designed for third-year Sinology majors in international academic contexts. The course advances Chinese language and area studies pedagogy by moving beyond skills-based language instruction toward an integrated model of critical literacy. Anchored in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) structure, it synthesizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mediatization Theory, and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) to foster students' linguistic, analytical, and intercultural development simultaneously.

Addressing a key gap in Sinology education—the transition from advanced language proficiency to meaningful scholarly engagement with contemporary China—the course trains students to systematically deconstruct Chinese news discourse across lexical, grammatical, intertextual, and socio-political dimensions. Mediatization Theory frames students' understanding of the institutional, political, and technological logics shaping news production, while ICC-informed comparative media analysis cultivates critical cultural awareness.

Pedagogically, the course adopts a dual-cycle instructional model that alternates between teacher-guided analytical training and student-led seminars, operationalizing constructivist and sociocultural learning principles within a community-of-practice framework. A constructively aligned assessment design—combining reflective writing, presentations, examinations, and a final news-writing project—evaluates both theoretical mastery and applied competence. The paper argues that this integrated approach offers a replicable model for Sinology and advanced foreign language education, equipping students with the critical media literacy necessary to engage thoughtfully with contemporary Chinese society.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Sinology Education; Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC); Chinese Media Literacy.

1. Introduction: Rationale and Theoretical Imperative

The study of contemporary China in the 21st century presents a formidable yet essential challenge for Sinology programs worldwide. Moving beyond the foundational pillars of classical texts, literary canons, and core linguistic structures, a comprehensive understanding of modern China demands direct engagement with its dynamic, multifaceted, and often paradoxical social reality. For advanced undergraduate students of Sinology, achieving this understanding requires a bridge—a pedagogical tool that connects high-level language proficiency with the analytical frameworks of the social sciences. This course, “Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society”, is designed to be precisely that bridge, utilizing the daily discourse of Chinese news media as its primary pedagogical material and analytical site.

The foundational premise of this course rests upon a constructivist view of social reality and the central role of language within it. As Berger and Luckmann famously argued in *The Social Construction of Reality*, “language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations” (1966, p. 37). The newspaper, as a daily, institutionalized producer of language, serves as a primary agent in this process of construction, preservation, and transmission. It does not merely report on a pre-existing social world but actively participates in its continual making and remaking. Through its narratives, frames, and lexical choices, the press contributes to what Berger and Luckmann term the “objectivation” of social phenomena—transforming fluid human activities and interpretations into a seemingly objective, factual, and enduring reality for its readers.

Therefore, the pedagogical imperative of this course is twofold. First, it must address the linguistic-disciplinary gap. Advanced students often possess the grammatical competence to parse complex sentences but lack the specific discursive and socio-political literacy to decode *how* meaning is strategically generated within Chinese public discourse. Second, and more critically, it must equip students with the theoretical and methodological tools to become critical consumers and analysts of mediated social knowledge. They must learn to see the newspaper not as a transparent window onto China but as a deeply implicated actor in shaping perceptions, legitimizing structures, and negotiating power.

This course is conceived as a response to these imperatives. It posits that a deep, critical engagement with Chinese newspaper discourse—understood as a primary site where language, ideology, and social practice intersect—is indispensable for cultivating the next generation of Sinologists. These scholars must be capable of not only accessing Chinese-language sources but also of interrogating their conditions of production, their underlying logic, and their role in the ongoing construction of Chinese social and political life. The following sections detail the

specific theoretical frameworks and pedagogical design through which this critical engagement is structured and fostered.

2. Theoretical Foundations

The pedagogical architecture of “Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society” is intentionally interdisciplinary, synthesizing robust theoretical frameworks from sociology of knowledge, linguistics, media studies, and education to form a coherent analytical lens. This integration provides students with a sophisticated metalanguage and a structured methodology to transform their reading from passive comprehension to active, critical deconstruction.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the Core Analytical Engine

The primary methodological framework of the course is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), principally as developed by Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1998). CDA provides the precise tools to operationalize the Berger and Luckmann-inspired view of language as a social practice. As Fairclough articulates its fundamental premise, “Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (1992, p. 64). This constructivist stance moves the pedagogical focus beyond mere textual description to the investigation of the often-opaque relationships between discourse, power, and ideology. Van Dijk further clarifies the political dimension of this analysis, stating that critical discourse analysts specifically “focus on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society” (2015, p. 466).

Within the context of Chinese newspapers, this framework equips students to transcend the basic question of *“what does this text say?”* and instead pursue a more probing line of inquiry: *“how does it say it, why does it say it this way, and what social effects might this have?”* To this end, the course employs CDA across three constitutive levels of analysis, training students to systematically connect linguistic detail to broader social processes:

Textual Practice: At the micro-level, students apply CDA to dissect linguistic features. This includes analyzing lexicalization (e.g., categorizing a labor action as a “strike” [罢工] versus a “coordination incident” [协调事件], why is a protest framed as a “disturbance” [骚乱] versus a “collective expression” [集体表达]?), modality (e.g., the use of “must” [必须] vs. “could” [可以] to convey authority or possibility, using “must implement” [必须落实] to express deontic authority versus “could explore” [可以探索] to suggest possibility), and transitivity (e.g., who is the active agent and who is the passive recipient in an event, as in “police dispersed the crowd” [警方恢复了秩序] vs. “the crowd dispersed” [秩序得以恢复]).

Discursive Practice: At the meso-level, the course employs the concept of intertextuality. Here, the focus expands to the production, consumption, and intertextual relationships of texts. A core assignment requires students to perform contrastive intertextual analysis, collecting reports on the same event from different newspaper genres (e.g., the party organ *People's Daily* 《人民日报》, the financial investigative outlet *Caixin* 《财新》, and the popular-nationalist *Global Times* 《环球时报》). They examine how these texts dialogically reference, recontextualize, or ignore each other and their sources. This practice allows students to map the discursive field, identifying the struggle between dominant, institutional voices and marginal, alternative narratives. It operationalizes van Dijk's insight that "one of the crucial tasks of CDA is to explicate the role of discourse in the reproduction of power and hegemony" (2006, p. 119), by making visible the processes through which certain perspectives become normalized while others are omitted or delegitimized.

Social Practice: At this macro-level, CDA connects text to society. The students will learn how to connect their textual and discursive findings to the broader sociocultural and political context. They investigate how the identified discourse strategies contribute to overarching social functions, such as the legitimization of specific policies, the construction of collective identities (e.g., the "model citizen" [模范公民] versus the "troublemaker" [捣乱分子]), and the naturalization of socio-political concepts like "social stability" [社会稳定] or "national rejuvenation" [民族复兴], also the reproduction or challenge of dominant ideological formations, such as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" [中国特色社会主义] or the "Chinese Dream" [中国梦]. This level of analysis fulfills the critical aim of situating media discourse within what Fairclough terms "the hegemonic struggles which take place in and over discourse" (1995, p. 94), enabling students to critically evaluate the role of news language in maintaining or challenging existing social relations and power structures in China.

2.2. Mediatization Theory: Contextualizing the "Media Logic"

To comprehend the institutional dynamics and structural pressures that shape *why* Chinese newspapers produce discourse in particular ways, the course incorporates Mediatization Theory as articulated by Couldry and Hepp (2017). This theoretical lens is essential for moving beyond textual analysis alone, situating CDA within the concrete organizational and technological realities of contemporary media production. As Couldry and Hepp define it, "Mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other" (2017, p. 15). More specifically, the theory posits that media have evolved into a semi-independent social institution possessing its own constitutive "media logic"—a set of norms, formats, temporalities, and economic imperatives—to which other core institutions (politics, the economy, religion) must increasingly adapt to communicate effectively and maintain their social relevance.

This framework provides the crucial macro-context that animates the micro- and meso-level CDA performed by students. It reframes the news text from being a simple output of political

will to being the negotiated product of a complex force field. Students are guided to examine how at least three distinct, and often competing, institutional logics collectively impress themselves upon news production:

The Political-Instrumental Logic: This encompasses the directives of propaganda (宣传), the imperative of maintaining social stability (社会稳定), and the overarching narrative frameworks of national policy (e.g., the “Chinese Dream”). This logic is most visibly embodied in central party organs like *People’s Daily* (《人民日报》).

The Commercial-Market Logic: Predominant in many metropolitan and financial newspapers (e.g., *The Paper* 《澎湃新闻》, *Caixin* 《财新》), this logic prioritizes audience appeal, advertiser interests, market competition, and the news values of conflict, immediacy, and human interest to capture readership and revenue.

The Technological-Digital Logic: Driven by the infrastructures of the internet and mobile platforms, this logic emphasizes speed (instant updates), interactivity (comments, shares), algorithmic distribution, and multimedia storytelling, reshaping news formats and consumption patterns across all outlets.

A concrete pedagogical application involves students conducting a comparative framing analysis of a single contentious socio-political event—such as a local environmental protest. They would dissect how the event is constructed in, for example, the *People’s Daily* versus *The Paper*. The former might deploy a frame of “Government Responds Swiftly, Ensuring Social Harmony” (政府迅速响应, 保障社会和谐), emphasizing political resolution and order—a clear adaptation to the political-instrumental logic. The latter might employ a frame of “Villagers’ Decade-Long Fight Against Polluting Factory” (村民十年抗争污染工厂), highlighting accountability, civic action, and personal narratives—a framing tailored to the commercial-market logic’s demand for compelling human drama and investigative appeal.

Through such exercises, mediatization theory empowers students to see Chinese newspapers not as monolithic “state mouthpieces” but, as Couldry and Hepp’s perspective suggests, as “complex sites where various social institutions meet and their logics interact, often in tension with each other” (2017, p. 56). It reveals news discourse as a terrain where political control, market forces, and technological change are in constant, dynamic negotiation, thereby adding a vital layer of institutional explanation to the discursive patterns uncovered through CDA.

2.3. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC): Fostering Critical Cultural Awareness

The ultimate goal of Sinology extends beyond analytical proficiency to fostering meaningful and ethical intercultural engagement. Therefore, this course is explicitly aligned with established models of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), particularly those articulated by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006). These frameworks provide a structured pedagogy to transform students from external analysts into reflexive intercultural learners, capable of navigating the complex moral and epistemological spaces between

cultures. Deardorff emphasizes that intercultural competence is best understood as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (2006, p. 247). This course operationalizes this ability through a deliberate focus on three interconnected dimensions of Byram’s model:

Knowledge (*Savoirs*): Students acquire systematic, declarative knowledge of China’s unique media ecosystem. This includes its historical development, its regulatory and censorship architecture (e.g., the role of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television and the Cyberspace Administration of China), the political economy of different newspaper types, and the media’s prescribed role in “social governance” (社会治理) and the cultivation of “socialist core values.” This foundational knowledge is essential for contextualizing discourse and moving beyond superficial cultural assumptions.

Skills of Discovery and Interaction (*Savoir apprendre/faire*): The cyclical structure of student-led research, presentation, and peer debate is designed to train these dynamic skills. Students must actively *discover* primary texts, interpret their codes and contexts, and *interact* with differing interpretations in a collaborative yet critical forum. This process cultivates the ability, as Byram describes, to “operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction” (1997, p. 34). It transforms passive knowledge into an active, dialogical practice of meaning-making.

Critical Cultural Awareness (*Savoirs’ engager*): This dimension is the cornerstone of the course’s intercultural aims. It moves beyond skills to an ethical and critical stance. Byram defines this as “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (1997, p. 53). The course activates this ability through structured comparative analysis. When students juxtapose Chinese media narratives on international events (e.g., climate change negotiations, geopolitical disputes in the South China Sea) with coverage from their home countries’ media, they are compelled to *de-center*. They must relativize their own culturally naturalized perspectives and recognize the historicity, situatedness, and potential partiality of *all* media discourse—including that which they have previously taken for granted. This practice disrupts ethnocentric judgment and fosters what Deardorff identifies as a key internal outcome: “adaptability, flexibility, an ethnorelative perspective, and empathy” (2006, p. 254).

The goal is not to adopt a Chinese perspective uncritically, nor to reject one’s own, but to develop a critical understanding that can negotiate the space between them, making informed and reflective judgments about the power dynamics, values, and meanings at play in cross-cultural representation.

2.4. Constructivist and Sociocultural Learning Theories: Designing the Learning Process

The instructional design of this course is fundamentally grounded in Constructivist (Piaget, 1970) and Sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) learning theories. These frameworks reject the transmission model of education, instead conceptualizing learning as an active, situated process of knowledge construction, wherein learners build new understanding through

interaction with their environment and social community. This philosophical commitment directly shapes the course's pedagogical architecture, transforming it from a lecture-based format into a dynamic workshop of critical inquiry.

Constructivism underpins the core expectation that students must be the primary agents of their own learning. As Piaget asserted, "The principal goal of education is to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—men and women who are creative, inventive, and discoverers" (as cited in Bringuier, 1980, p. 132). This goal is operationalized in the student-led seminars and reflective essays. Learners are not presented with a singular, authoritative interpretation of a news text. Instead, they are tasked with actively building their own evidence-based interpretations and arguments through primary text analysis. The process of comparing divergent reports, identifying linguistic patterns, and formulating a coherent critique requires them to assimilate new information into existing cognitive frameworks and accommodate those frameworks when confronted with contradictory evidence, thereby constructing a more nuanced and personal understanding of Chinese media discourse.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides the essential social and interactive dimension to this constructivist process. It posits that higher-order cognitive functions originate in social interaction. Vygotsky famously argued that "what a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87), a principle encapsulated in the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. The course structure is a deliberate application of this principle:

Scaffolding: The instructor's initial role is that of a facilitator who provides structured support, or "scaffolding." The early lectures and guided whole-class analyses offer the necessary tools—the specialized vocabulary, CDA heuristics, and mediatization concepts—precisely calibrated to operate within the students' collective ZPD.

Community of Practice: The peer-learning model, central to the bi-weekly cycle, institutionalizes social learning. The student presentations and subsequent critical Q&A sessions create a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this community, knowledge is not possessed by the instructor and transferred downward; it is socially co-constructed through dialogue, debate, and collaborative problem-solving. More capable peers, through their presentations and critiques, provide models of advanced practice, guiding others toward higher levels of analytical competence. This interactive process externalizes and socializes the act of critical thinking, making it visible and learnable.

By weaving together CDA (providing the *how* of analysis), Mediatization (explaining the *why* of production), ICC (defining the *purpose* of understanding), and a Constructivist-Sociocultural pedagogy (dictating the *method* of learning), this course creates a robust, multi-layered, and theoretically coherent foundation. It systematically transforms advanced language students from passive recipients of information into active, socially situated, and incipiently autonomous critical scholars of Chinese society.

3. Course Design: A CLIL-Based, Dual-Cycle Model

The pedagogical architecture of “Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society” represents a sophisticated application of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) principles, consciously structured around Coyle, Hood, and Marsh’s (2010) foundational 4Cs Framework. As the authors assert, successful CLIL requires the holistic integration of four components: “Content (subject matter), Communication (language learning and using), Cognition (learning and thinking processes), and Culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship)” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 41). This course is explicitly designed to embody this integration:

Content: The substantive knowledge encompasses Critical Discourse Analysis, Mediatization Theory, and the empirical realities of China’s media ecosystem and social governance.

Communication: Language is both the object and medium of study. Chinese is the target language for high-level analysis, debate, and written production, while English serves as a precise metalanguage for introducing complex theoretical constructs, ensuring cognitive accessibility.

Cognition: The curriculum is engineered to systematically develop higher-order thinking skills. Students progress from analysis and evaluation in guided sessions to synthesis and creation in their independent research and presentations, engaging in what Coyle et al. describe as the necessary “cognitive processing and problem-solving” (2010, p. 54) that deepens both content and language mastery.

Culture: The development of Critical Cultural Awareness (*savoir s’engager*) is a central pillar. Through comparative media analysis, students interrogate their own and others’ cultural frames, advancing toward the intercultural understanding that is core to the 4Cs model.

This theoretical framework is operationalized through a rigorous 90-minute Dual-Cycle Structure, where each two-week period constitutes a complete epistemic loop from scaffolded knowledge construction to autonomous scholarly practice.

3.1. Week A: Teacher-Scaffolded Analysis & Discursive Negotiation (The “Input & Internalization” Cycle)

This session is designed for guided immersion and the modeling of expert practice.

Part 1: Conceptual Framing (10 mins): The instructor, using English for conceptual clarity, introduces or revisits a core theoretical lens (e.g., “Framing Analysis within CDA”). This provides the cognitive “toolkit” for the session.

Part 2: Expert Modeling of Analysis (50 mins): The core of this session is a live, think-aloud deconstruction of a recent, carefully chosen news text. The instructor, switching to Chinese for text-specific work, explicitly models the application of the day’s theoretical tool. This involves:

Micro-Level Demonstration: Highlighting specific lexical choices, grammatical structures, and rhetorical patterns.

Meso-Level Connection: Showing how these textual features construct a particular frame or intertextual relationship.

Macro-Level Interpretation: Explicitly linking the discourse to broader social, political, or cultural contexts informed by mediatization theory.

This process makes the invisible cognitive work of expert analysis visible, providing a scaffold within the students' ZPD.

Part 3: Dialogic Negotiation (30 mins): Students, now primed with both the tool and a model, engage in guided discussion or debate on the issues raised. This is not a free-for-all but a structured discursive space where they must use the newly acquired metalanguage to articulate their interpretations, challenge others, and negotiate meaning. This stage transforms passive input into active, socially mediated cognition, fostering both communicative competence and critical thinking.

3.2. Week B: Student-Led Critical Inquiry & Community Praxis (The “Output & Co-construction” Cycle)

This session flips the classroom dynamic, positioning students as primary knowledge producers within a scholarly community of practice.

Part 1: Seminar Presentations (60 mins): Two students assume the role of seminar leaders. Their task extends beyond summary to critical exposition. Each presentation must:

Clearly identify sources (publication, date) and justify the selection (the *why* of interest, linked to course themes); Conduct a structured analysis applying CDA and mediatization concepts to their chosen texts; For comparative presentations, explicitly analyze the interplay of different “media logics” in shaping divergent reports; Articulate a clear, defended thesis based on their analysis. This format assesses not only linguistic proficiency but, more importantly, the ability to synthesize theory and evidence into a coherent scholarly argument.

Part 2: Collaborative Critique & Intercultural Dialogue (30 mins): The audience transitions from listeners to active participants in a scholarly peer-review process. The Q&A is structured to encourage:

Methodological questioning: “How did you isolate *framing* in text A versus text B?”

Interpretive challenge: “Could the evidence you cited also support an alternative reading?”

Intercultural perspective-taking: “Based on your analysis, how might a Chinese reader with a different social position interpret this? How does this framing compare to the dominant narrative in my home country regarding similar issues?”

This interactive forum is where knowledge is socially co-constructed, intercultural competence is tested in real-time, and the classroom truly becomes a community of critical inquiry.

3.3. The Lexical Approach as Discursive Resource Acquisition

Vocabulary instruction is fully integrated into this CLIL model, moving from list

memorization to strategic resource acquisition. Post-analysis, students receive a structured lexicon for each text, divided into:

Basic Vocabulary & Sentences: High-frequency terms and formulaic expressions essential for literal comprehension and reproduction of core ideas.

Extended Vocabulary & Sentences: Thematically or analytically rich terminology, coupled with complex sentence structures that model how to use this vocabulary in argumentation (e.g., “This lexicalization serves to naturalize the boundary between...”, “The consistent use of this metaphor functions ideologically to...”).

This approach treats vocabulary not as an isolated goal but as the essential discursive resource bank required to execute the cognitive and communicative tasks of critique and presentation, directly supporting the progression from comprehension to sophisticated scholarly production.

4. Assessment: Aligning Theory with Practice

The assessment strategy for “Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society” is a deliberately constructed ecosystem, where each component serves as both a measure of learning and an extension of the pedagogical process itself. It is designed to achieve constructive alignment, ensuring that the course’s theoretical foundations, learning activities, and evaluation methods are fully coherent and mutually reinforcing. This system moves beyond testing rote knowledge to create multiple, iterative opportunities for students to perform, demonstrate, and reflect upon the competencies central to the course: critical discourse analysis, intercultural awareness, and scholarly communication.

4.1. Bi-weekly Reflective Essays: Fostering Metacognitive and Critical Engagement

These periodic written assignments serve as the primary instrument for fostering metacognition and critical reflexivity. Submitted at the end of each instructional cycle, the essays require students to synthesize the analytical work of the previous two weeks. Crucially, the prompt demands more than summary; it asks students to:

Analyze the Analysis: Reflect on the theoretical frameworks (CDA, Mediatization) applied in class and in peer presentations, evaluating their utility and limitations in interpreting specific texts.

Articulate Positionality: Situate their own interpretations within the “community of practice”, explaining how class discussions, debates, or alternative viewpoints challenged, confirmed, or refined their initial readings.

Exercise Critical Cultural Awareness: Explicitly reflect on the intercultural dimension of their learning, considering how their own cultural positioning influenced their reception of the news discourse and how the Chinese media's framing might be perceived from different subject positions.

This process operationalizes the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy—evaluation and creation—while training students to become self-aware, reflexive scholars. The essays are

submitted in standard DOC format to facilitate detailed digital feedback, where the instructor can engage in a textual dialogue with the student, modeling scholarly critique and guiding the development of their analytical voice.

4.2. Student-Led Seminar Presentations: Assessing Analytical Synthesis and Scholarly Communication

This is the capstone performance task for each instructional cycle, offering a holistic assessment of multiple learning objectives. Students are evaluated on a rubric that integrates:

Content & Cognition: The depth and accuracy of the CDA/Mediatization analysis, the strength of the evidence-text linkage, and the clarity of the synthesized thesis.

Communication: The effective, fluent, and appropriate use of Chinese academic and media discourse terminology to present complex ideas.

Intercultural Competence (Interaction): The presenter's ability to field questions, engage with alternative perspectives, and facilitate discussion—key components of *savoir faire*.

This task transforms assessment from a solitary exercise into a public, social act of scholarship, reinforcing the course's sociocultural learning foundation.

4.3. Examinations (Mid-term & Final): Validating Integrated Knowledge and Precision

The written examinations serve a dual purpose of validation and consolidation. Structured in two parts, they assess the integrated mastery of the course's two pillars:

Part 1: Theoretical and Contextual Knowledge: This section tests students' declarative knowledge of media theory (CDA concepts, mediatization logics), the structure of the Chinese media landscape, and key historical developments. Question types (short answer, definitions) ensure a firm grasp of the conceptual toolkit.

Part 2: Applied Linguistic and Analytical Proficiency: This section assesses the ability to operationalize knowledge. Through tasks like translating strategically chosen news excerpts (testing precision with discursive vocabulary), filling in blanks in a news analysis paragraph (testing control of academic metalanguage), or answering guided comprehension questions on an unseen text (testing immediate analytical skill), students demonstrate their capacity to apply learning in novel contexts.

The 80/20 weighting between basic/extended vocabulary in exam design is a direct reflection of the course's scaffolded lexical approach, incentivizing deep engagement with the core discursive resources.

4.4. Final News Article: The Summative Creative Synthesis

The culminating individual project requires students to transition from analyst to practitioner, embodying the ultimate synthesis of the course's learning outcomes. By researching and

writing an original news article of at least 1000 words on a topic of their choice (campus or societal), students must:

Internalize Genre Conventions: Demonstrate an implicit understanding of news writing structure, style, and rhetorical moves in Chinese.

Apply Discursive Strategies: Make conscious or unconscious choices regarding lexicalization, framing, and sourcing that reflect an understanding of media logic.

Synthesize Knowledge: Draw upon their semester-long study of Chinese media to produce a text that is both authentic to the genre and informed by a critical understanding of its conventions. This task moves them from deconstructing discourse to consciously participating in its construction, offering profound insight into their integrated learning.

In conclusion, this multi-modal assessment framework is intrinsically linked to the course's theoretical DNA. It ensures that the development of critical discourse awareness, intercultural competence, and advanced linguistic proficiency is not merely taught but is continually practiced, performed, and refined, providing a robust and authentic measure of the student's transformation into a critical scholar of Chinese society.

5. Conclusion and Implications

“Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society” represents a paradigm shift in advanced Sinology and Chinese language pedagogy. It moves decisively beyond the conventional bifurcation of “language course” and “content course”, proposing instead an integrated critical literacy model where advanced linguistic proficiency, theoretical acumen, and intercultural insight are cultivated as interdependent competencies. By anchoring itself in the robust theoretical triad of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mediatization Theory, and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), and by operationalizing these through a CLIL-based, constructivist dual-cycle design, the course provides a coherent and replicable framework for educating the next generation of global China scholars.

The course's primary contribution lies in its pedagogical translation of theory into structured practice. It demystifies critical theory by providing students with tangible, repeatable methodologies—such as contrastive intertextual analysis and framing dissection—to decode the complex narratives of contemporary China. The weekly oscillation between teacher-scaffolded modeling and student-led inquiry creates a dynamic learning ecosystem that fosters both confidence and autonomy. As students progress from analyzing the instructor's textual deconstructions to leading their own seminar-style critiques, they enact the very transition from novice to incipient expert that defines advanced academic training.

The implications of this course design are significant for multiple academic domains:

For Sinology and Area Studies Programs: This model offers a direct pathway to bridge the often-lamented gap between language training and disciplinary research. It equips students not only with the language skills to access primary sources but, more importantly, with the critical methodological toolkit to interrogate them. This cultivates a more nuanced, less media-translated, and more empirically grounded understanding of Chinese socio-political dynamics, ultimately leading to more sophisticated capstone projects and thesis research.

For Foreign Language Pedagogy (especially LCTLs): The course serves as a compelling case study for implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the advanced level in Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs). It demonstrates how high-level cognitive engagement with complex content can be the most powerful driver for advanced linguistic mastery, moving instruction from a focus on grammatical perfection to one of discursive competence and rhetorical effectiveness.

For Media Literacy and Global Education: In an era of disinformation and pervasive media bias, the course's core training in deconstructing news narratives has universal value. It fosters a transferable skill set of critical media literacy, teaching students to identify framing, source bias, and ideological subtext in any media ecosystem. Furthermore, by forcing the constant comparative reflection between Chinese and home-country media, it actively fosters the “critical cultural awareness” and “decentering” that are essential for responsible global citizenship.

Future iterations and research stemming from this course design could focus on longitudinal studies tracking the impact of such training on students' subsequent research quality, their intercultural adjustment during fieldwork in China, or their career trajectories in China-related fields. Additionally, the model's adaptability could be tested by applying its core principles—the theoretical triad and dual-cycle structure—to the study of other critical media forms in China, such as social media, television dramas, or documentary film.

In sum, “Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society” is more than a course; it is a proposition. It argues that understanding a society as vast and dynamic as China's requires moving beyond linguistic comprehension to critical discursive literacy. By training students to read not just the words on the page but the power relations, institutional constraints, and cultural assumptions behind them, this course aims to produce not merely speakers of Chinese, but insightful, critical, and ethically engaged interpreters of the Chinese world.

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Appendix: Syllabus of *Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society*

Course: Newspaper Reading and Chinese Society

Curriculum Type: Compulsory Course

Medium of Instruction: English and Chinese

Language used in class presentations, discussions, after-school assignments, and end-of-term statements/reports: Chinese

Students: Sinology Major, Undergraduates, Grade Three

Enrollment: 20 persons

Lesson Period Per Week: one period, 90 minutes

Course Designer/Instructor: Dr. Huang Xiao

A. Classroom Rules:

Your absence should not surpass 6 times, if you are sick or have any emergent things to deal with, please hand in written notes and/or sick-leave certificate from hospital to me later. Those who are late for 15 minutes will be deducted half of the attendance score; those who are late for 25 minutes will be deducted all of the attendance score for that time (unless you have some special emergency).

The time that you don't hand in your homework should not surpass 6 times either. Late assignments will be deducted half of the score, those who have not submitted the assignment within two days after the deadline will be deducted full score of this assignment.

You will be disqualified from taking final examination if you violate the above-mentioned stipulations.

B. Leading-in Course:

The newspaper is a printed publication which is regularly distributed to the public based on news and current affairs. It is an important carrier of mass communication. Newspaper has been the most conventional and popular medium of conveying local, regional, national and international news to the readers. Newspapers serve us the latest happenings in different parts of the world through a network of correspondents and news agencies. Therefore, newspaper and journalism are important ways for people to understand the world, have insight into international dynamics and connect with the external environment.

Reading Chinese newspapers and periodicals can help students understand Chinese society and Chinese people's livelihood better, also make an insight into Chinese people's world of thought. But newspapers are not just passive carriers of information, and news is not an absolute fact. News is what the subject perceives and spreads on change of things and sudden events. To a large extent, it does not possess the objectivity and impartiality assumed by people. The reporters are not cold-eyes observers without any personal emotion. The truth is often hidden behind all kinds of views. But this is also one of most valuable parts of the news. It

makes difference between perspectives and perspectives, collision between attitudes and attitudes, and competition between positions and positions.

In this sense, newspaper has become a place for communication and debating, which maintains a democratic dialogue among citizens and embodies the value and significance of independent thinking and freedom of speech.

C. Course Tasks and Objectives

C1. Mastering the basics

Students should understand and memorize relevant knowledge points, such as technical terms and their corresponding connotations, the typesetting of newspapers, the characteristics of news and the particularity of news language, the textual expression system of Chinese newspapers (Chinese newspapers have their own unique coding system, there are some specialties in word formation and language designing, also many stylized expressions, students should learn how to “decode”), the classification and common types of Chinese newspapers, the history of Chinese newspapers, and so on. In addition, this course will cover intermediate and advanced vocabularies related to various fields of society (such as politics, economy, education, science and technology), students need to memorize these words.

C2. Becoming an interventional subject

As a third-year university student of Sinology Major, you should focus on training and cultivating your own critical and independent thinking. In particular, you should cultivate your own inquiry thinking on various fields of Chinese studies. This course requires students to collect and read different reports of different newspapers on the same event, analyzing the background of news events, the views and standpoints of reporters, dissecting the motivations, biases or prejudices hidden behind news writing, parsing the factors and elements affecting a specific report. Students are also required to form their own views on a certain news event, to inspect and investigate different Chinese people's views on international events by reading different kinds of newspapers, to explore what kind of national image the Chinese official and national newspapers are trying to establish, and to promote their academic research on Chinese society, and so on.

D. Instructional Method:

90 minutes for each lesson, every two lessons will be regarded as one cycle/period. The first lesson in each cycle is divided into three parts: in the first part, the lecturer will introduce knowledge about newspaper industry and journalism (around 10 minutes); in the second part, the lecturer will analyze several recent news reports (analytical content including words, sentences, grammar, background and related professional or expansive knowledge, around 50 minutes); in the third part, the students will discuss various issues which are involved in the news reports, and express their own views. Students are encouraged to debate on controversial topics (around 30 minutes). The second lesson in each cycle is divided into two parts: In the first part, two students will analyze the news on newspapers they collected and studied previous

week. Each student should prepare at least two news reports. Those news reports can be different statements and writings of the same event, or they can focus on different events and have no connection with each other. In the presentation and analysis, students should firstly inform audiences the news reports they choose being published on what newspapers (including the name and date), then explain why they are interested in this or these news events, and should also highlight the background and their own views. If the student chooses several articles focusing on the same news event, he or she should focus on analyzing the different perspectives and standpoints reflected by different reports and summing up his or her own views (each student should make a presentation for about half an hour). In the second part, the audiences will discuss the speakers' speeches and interact with speakers. For example, the audiences and speakers can ask each other questions and debate, and the audiences are encouraged to talk about whether there are similar events or phenomena in their own countries, and so on (around 30 minutes).

E. Course Assignments and Assignment Requirements:

At the end of each cycle, students should submit written assignments, including their own research and discussion of the news reports analyzed by the course lecturer and classmates, their own thoughts and conclusions on the views expressed by other students in the class discussion, their own perspectives, standpoints and opinions. Please use standard Chinese writing operation, please send standard DOC. paper, please do not encrypt the document or set it to read-only mode, because the course lecturer will correct and modify students' homework on the computer and give feedback. Assignments should be sent to the course lecturer's email-box by 9:00 pm on Friday of the second week of each cycle.

F. Test Mode:

There are two written tests in this semester—— the mid-term exam and the final exam. Each written test is divided into two parts. The first part examines students' mastery of professional and relevant knowledge of newspaper industry, and the second part examines students' vocabulary and reading ability. The types and patterns of questions include dictation, fill-in-the-blank questions, ask-and-answer questions and translation. The mid-term examination time is from 10:15 to 11:45 am (Room 400) on April 26th, and the final examination time is from 10:15 to 11:45 am (Room 400) on June 21st, the duration of each written test is 90 minutes. In addition, students should submit a press release written by themselves before 9:00 pm of June 20th. The content is not limited. It can be a report on campus events, or a tracking of social hot issues. The number of words should be at least 1000 words.

G. Announcements/Matters Need Attention:

This course is supposed to be a challenge for students, instructional results will be based on students' effective absorption of a large scale of advanced vocabulary, terminology and grammatical structures. Therefore, expanding vocabulary is a very important part of training content of this course. Even though students will not be required to memorize all of words in Vol.5 No.2, 2025

every news report being analyzed in class, however, students will be required to master most words. So, after every news report being analyzed, students will receive a vocabulary list, which will be composed of four sections: basic vocabulary; common sentences; extended vocabulary; extended sentences. Common sentences will be made up by basic vocabulary, extended sentences will be made up by extended vocabulary. In mid-term exam and final exam, basic vocabulary and common sentences will occupy 80-85%, extended vocabulary and extended sentences will occupy 15-20%.

H. Grading Criteria:

attendance	10%
daily performance (including presentations and homework)	25%
mid-term exam	25%
final exam	25%
final report (press release)	15%
total score	100