

Analysis of China-related Reports in Nepal

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Abstract: Although there is a history of thousands of years for the cultural exchange and communication between Nepal and China, and Nepal holds a positive attitude towards the "The Belt and Road" initiative, there are still many problems in reporting of China by Nepalese newspapers due to the impacts of western countries and India. Under such background, this paper takes the Twitter account of *The Himalayan Times* for example, and selects 3198 China-related tweets which are explored from time distribution, topic of attention, and emotional tendency to provide reasonable material basis for enhancing communication of China in Nepal. It is found that, the China-related tweets have such problems as single themes and large emotional value fluctuation. Hence, China still needs to further enhance communication in Nepal.

1. Introduction

The year 2020 marks the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Nepal. Under the long-lasting joint efforts of both parties, co-construction of "The Belt and Road" is proceeding stably. The One Belt And One Road initiative brings new hope to Nepal, which will push trade, tourism, investment and cooperation between China and Nepal to a new level [1]. Nepal has an important economic strategic position and geopolitical advantage as a critical area of implementing "The Belt and Road" initiative or as a strategic partner of promoting lasting friendship for development and prosperity together with China.

The development of modern journalism in Nepal has been affected by domestic political changes for a long time. After the promulgation of the new constitution clearly stipulates the freedom of speech of citizens and the right to publish news report materials, the development of Nepalese journalism has entered a fast lane [1]. Nepalese media are highly privatized, and there is only one official television station (Nepal Television) and one official broadcasting station (Radio Nepal) across the country [2]. Due to Nepal's geographical conditions and development level, Radio became the most popular communication media for a long time. After 2002, television and radio broadcasting developed in Nepal [3]. However, the overall quality of TV stations is low and the homogeneity is high [4]. After that, newspapers became the main source of information for Nepalis [5]. With the arrival of network era, more and more Nepalese media turn to new media from traditional media, while Twitter and Facebook are mostly most widely used among the Nepalese.

In the Internet era, the audience's media use habits have changed. The social media represented by Twitter plays a more and more important role in news communication, and they have become a main channel for people to obtain news. Hence, this paper takes *The Himalayan Times* in Nepal for example, analyzes China-related reports on Twitter account and studies the time distribution, themes of attention and emotional tendency of these reports. This will be of great significance for turning Nepal's geographical position to a geographical advantage, and forcing India to join "The Belt and Road" initiative so as to jointly build and develop South Asia and open the road of cooperation between China and other South Asian countries.

2. Analysis of China-related Reports

2.1 Sample Selection

Newspapers in Nepal are mainly in Nepali, followed by English [6]. Founded in December 1995, *The Himalayan Times* is issued by Nepal International Media Network Corporation, which belongs to a private newspaper and is one of most influential English newspapers in Nepal. In 2002, *The Himalayan Times* ranked the third place in terms of sales volume among all newspapers in Nepal and became the top-selling English daily paper. In the annual newspaper classification report issued by Nepal Council of Press in 2018, it was listed as the highest-level A+. Its Twitter account was created in June 2010. As of December 2, the number of followers reached 122,004.

All data from the establishment date of Twitter account (@thehimalayan) of *The Himalayan Times* to the date of writing this paper (December 2, 2020) are chosen in this paper. "China" and "Chinese" are used as the key words, and a total of 3,717 reports were obtained as of December 2 based on China-related contents on the python account. Through manual screening, the contents with a low degree of association were eliminated, and finally 3,198 reports were chosen for theme mining, sentiment analysis and cross analysis of theme and emotion.

2.2 Distribution of Reporting Time

Since its setup, the number of China-related tweets to on @thehimalayan has shown a trend of high-low-up, where several high nodes appeared in July-August 2011, March 2013, June 2018 and February 2020, as shown in Fig. 1.

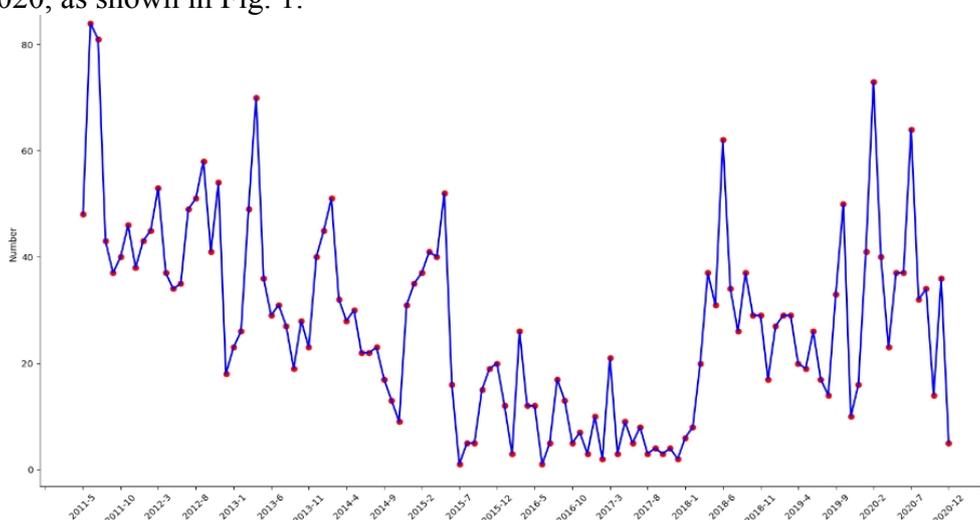


Fig 1. Time distribution of China-related tweets to on Twitter account in The Himalayan Times

According to the figure, the account paid great attention to China after it was established in June 2010, and the number of relevant tweets increased greatly in July-August 2011. In the two months, the account focused on issues such as 21 people trapped due to the mine flood in southwest China and the Tibet issue. In 2013, North Korean nuclear issue aroused the tense situation in Northeast Asia again. On February 14, 2013, Kerry, United States Secretary of State, met with President Xi Jinping to discuss North Korean problem, and this move attracted widespread attention. On June 20, 2018, President Xi Jinping met with Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal at the Great Hall of the People. Prime Minister of Nepal spoke highly of the "The Belt and Road" initiative and indicated his wish to take active part in the construction of "The Belt and Road". The meeting attracted wide attention from *The Himalayan Times*. February 2020 was the peak of COVID-19 outbreak in China, causing extensive attention around the world. Thus, the number of tweets on @TheHimalayan related to the first case of COVID-19 in the world and the issue of people's health in the world rose dramatically, and a wide discussion was sparked.

2.3 Analysis of Report Themes

Analysis of Report Themes is a process to discover and research topics by using the relationship among the feature items of the text set[7]. In 2003, Blei et al. proposed LDA model which holds that every words of an article is classified into a theme by "selecting a theme with a certain probability and selecting a word from that theme with a certain probability" [8]. In this paper,

themes are mined through LDA theme model algorithm: select the model with maximum Coherence, which is expressed by text vectorization, use text vectors for clustering, and detect the minimum outlier to get the best number of themes, and build the LDA model to mine the topics.

Through the representation of text vectorization in python, the text vectors are used for clustering, and the best number of themes is obtained by detecting the minimum outlier. The data show that, when the number of themes is 6, the Coherence value is maximum. Hence, the number of themes is set to 6. Based on LDA model, six themes are gained: “High level exchange visits between China, India and Nepal”, “China-Nepal border trade agreement”, “The first case of COVID-19 in the world and the issue of people's health in the world”, “‘One China principle’ in Hong Kong issue”, “China's foreign trade economy, warning Canadian government” and “US and China trade negotiations, US sanctions Huawei”, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Theme mining result

Theme	Key words
High level exchange visits between China, India and Nepal	Chinese, China, India, country, government, Nepal, Jinping, visit, Xi, official, Indian
China-Nepal border trade agreement	China, Chinese, Nepal, Minister, THTPrint, government, country, border, Prime, Nepali
The first case of COVID-19 in the world and the issue of people's health in the world	China, countries, world, first, since, health, coronavirus, morning, Chinese, country, work
‘One China principle’ in Hong Kong issue	China, Chinese, President, cases, reported, first, Minister, US, Friday, visit, Hong Kong
China's foreign trade economy, warning Canadian government	China, Chinese, financial, Canada, India, trade, Kathmandu, Government, Road, billion cases
US and China trade negotiations, US sanctions Huawei	China, Chinese, Huawei, US, reports, border, company, mainland, media, Hong Kong

It can be seen that, among the six topics, social issues account for 1/6, and economic issues account for 1/6, while the remaining 2/3 topics are political issues. The political topics concentrate on two aspects: China's international relations, including China's relations with western countries and the relations among China, Nepal and India; “one-China” principle, including the disputes of Hong Kong issue and the “Tibet issue”.

“High level exchange visits between China, India and Nepal”: China, India and Nepal border geographically, with close and complex relations. On May 19, 2013, Premier Li Keqiang paid an official visit to India. On May 15, 2015, Indian Primer Modi paid an official visit to China. On June 20, 2018, President Xi Jinping met with Nepalese Primer Oli. From October 12 to 13, 2019, President Xi Jinping paid a visit to Nepal. High level exchange visits between China, India and Nepal have been a focus of various countries.

“China-Nepal border trade agreement”: The proposal of “The Belt and Road” initiative has greatly promoted the trade between China and Nepal. At present, China and Nepal have carried out a lot of border trade cooperation, such as China-Nepal highway and Zhangmu Port. The bilateral border trade also has become a focus of the two countries.

The global spread of COVID-19 has caused a huge impact on the world economy and people's health. The topic of “the first case of COVID-19 in the world and the issue of people's health in the world” also becomes a focus of media attention around the world.

“‘One China principle’ in Hong Kong issue”: In June 2019, demonstrators in Hong Kong, China initiated a protest against the amendment, and later it evolved to a violent conflict. This move challenges the baseline of “one country, two systems”, and also reflects the relation between China and US. Besides, “Tibet-related issue” between China and Nepal and “one China principle” also triggered extensive attention from media in both China and Nepal.

“China's foreign trade economy, warning Canadian government” and “US and China trade negotiations, US sanctions Huawei” involve China-US trade war. On December 1, 2018, Canadian

government arrested Meng Wanzhou - CFO of Huawei Technologies in Vancouver at the request of US, which sparked heated debates. This not only represents the US' intention to curb Huawei's position as a leader in the 5G era, but also reflects the US' suppression of China's development. A lot of tweets were published on @thehimalayan to report these events.

In general, China-related reports on @thehimalayan concentrate on China's political topics and less involve social, economic and cultural issues.

2.4 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is a process of identifying users' subjective feelings, opinions, and attitudes from text data [9]. In this paper, sentiwordnet dictionary constructed by Wordnet is used to calculate ternary affective polarity of each tweet: positive, neutral and negative. The computational formula is Eq.1.

$$E_p = \sum_0^n e_p (-1)^N + \text{Pos} - \text{Neg} \quad (1)$$

E_p represents the emotional polarity of tweets: 1 positive, 0 neutral, -1 negative; e_p represents the polarity of an emotional word; N is the number of negative words associated with the emotional word; Pos are the number of positive emotion icons; Neg represents the number of negative emotion icons. The analysis results are shown in Fig. 2:

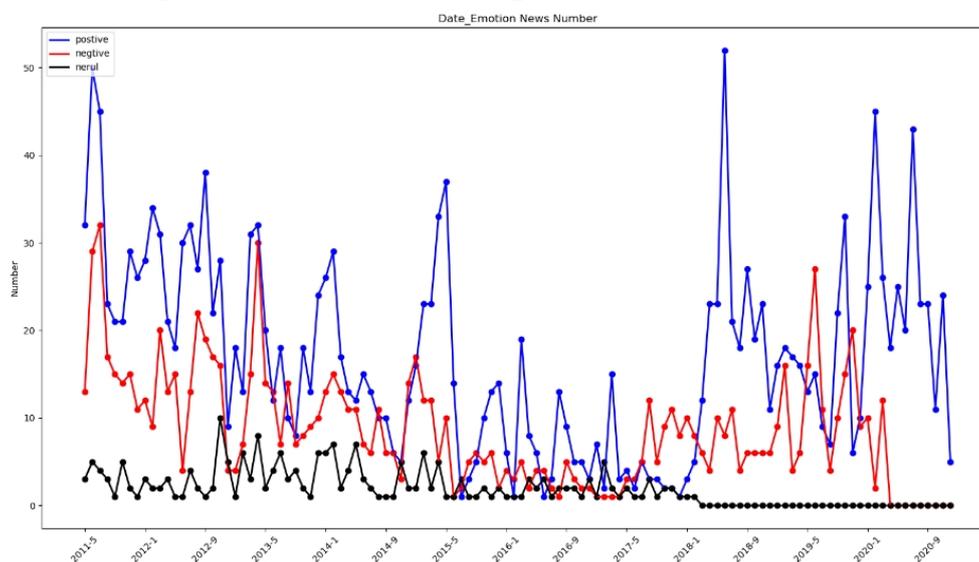


Fig 2. Results of sentiment analysis

On the whole, China-related reports on @thehimalayan show obvious emotional tendency. Positive and negative emotion values are much higher than the neutral emotion value. As shown in the comparison between the positive emotion curve and the negative emotion curve, the positive emotion value was significantly higher than the negative emotion value in the early stage of account setup. However, after April 2013, the negative emotion value rose obviously, equal to the positive emotion value. This is partly attributable to "tent confrontation" between China and India. On April 15, 2013, a border clash happened between China and India. India alleged that Chinese soldiers "crossed the line of actual control to invade India" and set up tents, and then the Indian military pitched tents nearby, leading to a "tent confrontation" situation between both parties. At that time, "The Belt and Road" initiative had not been proposed yet, and the Nepalese government and media showed an obvious pro-India tendency. The report of @thehimalayan on this event also presents an obvious negative emotion to China.

Around April 2015, the positive emotion value went up significantly, obviously higher than the negative emotion value. On April 10, 2015, China and Nepal negotiated on building a railway across the Himalayas, and both parties expressed the great significance of this railway in political and economic aspects. This event significantly enhanced the positive emotion of Nepalese media towards China.

In June 2018, the positive emotion value rose sharply, up to a peak. This month, President Xi Jinping met with Nepalese Primer Oli at the Great Hall of the People. Prime Minister Oli of Nepal spoke highly of the "The Belt and Road" initiative and expressed his wish to take active part in the construction of "The Belt and Road". @thehimalayan also released a positive tweet on this event.

It's worth noting that around May 2019, the negative emotion value was significantly greater than the positive emotion value, because during President Bhandari's visit to China in late April and early May, 3 correspondents from the English division of Nepal National News Agency published a report on the 14th Dalai Lama on the portal website in May 2019. In addition, two parliamentarians from Samabadi Party of Nepal were reported to attend a meeting held by so-called "Tibetan Parliament" in Latvia from Mat 7-10. The two events sparked a discussion on "one China" principle, and the negative emotion value of China-related reports on @thehimalayan during this period was also significantly higher than the positive emotion value.

5 months later, namely around October 2019, the positive emotion value of China-related reports on @thehimalayan increased greatly, and later the positive emotion value was basically higher than the negative emotion value. President Xi Jinping was on a visit to Nepal from October 12 to 13, 2019, during which the most important achievement was that the China-Nepal comprehensive cooperative partnership of friendship from generation to generation established ten years ago was promoted to a strategic cooperative partnership of lasting friendship for development and prosperity. @thehimalayan also released many positive reports on this event.

It can be seen that, the overall emotion value of China-related reports on @thehimalayan fluctuates greatly. Especially when a specific event happens, the negative or positive emotion value will rise or fall dramatically.

2.5 Theme-emotion Cross Analysis

Theme-emotion cross analysis aims to carry out sentiment analysis of the themes mined from the themes and present the change trend of emotional values of different themes with time, as shown in Fig. 3.

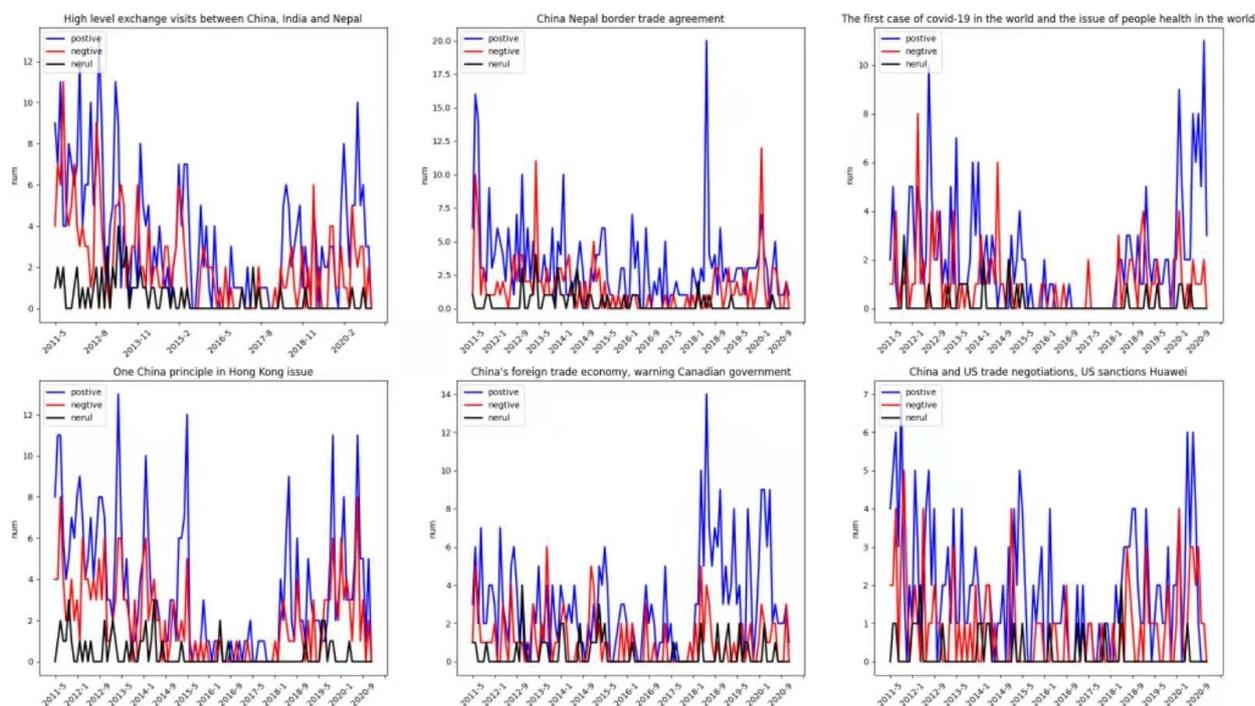


Fig 3. Theme-emotion analysis results

According to Fig. 3, for the two themes: "One China principle' in Hong Kong issue", and "China's foreign trade economy, warning Canadian government", @thehimalayan holds a positive attitude. For the theme of "the first case of COVID-19 in the world and the issue of people's health in the world", the negative emotion value of relevant tweets on @thehimalayan is high. Such social

reports mainly focus on China's disasters, including bird flu and COVID-19. Moreover, such political topics as "US and China trade negotiations, US sanctions Huawei", "China-Nepal border trade agreement" and "High level exchange visits between China, India and Nepal" also have large emotion value fluctuations.

3. General Characteristics of China-related Reports on Twitter Account of The Himalayan Times

3.1 Focus on Political Issues and Less Attention to Cultural Issues

The six themes that @thehimalayan mainly concerns concentrate mainly on political issues. Because of its underdevelopment, Nepal has long needed to seek foreign support for its development. India has long been the largest trade partner and aid-giving country of Nepal. However after India merged Sikkim, Nepal felt the crisis and gradually reduced its dependence on India. Since "The Belt and Road" initiative was put forward, Nepal has enhanced cooperation with China, and now Nepal adopts "equidistant diplomacy" to seek cooperation with China and India.

However, with the comprehensive development of China in economy and other aspects, China's global influence has been gradually enhanced in recent years. Meanwhile, there are many negative voices in the world, such as the "China threat theory". Western countries often treat China with a fixed mind. India also expressed its disapproving attitude to "The Belt and Road" initiative. Judging from a political perspective, Nepal expects to find a balance among countries to achieve its own development. Hence, as a newspaper with "official background", *The Himalayan Times* shows a particular concern on political issues such as China's relations with India and western countries.

It is also observed that @thehimalayan is less concerned about cultural issues. As the soft power of a country, culture can become a bridge linking two countries and promoting the relationship between two countries. Among the 200,000 Tibetans beyond China, about 130,000 Tibetans are in Nepal and India. The cultural relation between China and Nepal is based on Buddhism. Tibetan culture is a focus of both parties, including identity of Tibetans in Nepal and religious issue. @thehimalayan is less concerned about cultural issues of China.

3.2 Large Emotion Value Fluctuations, Especially Influenced by Specific Events

In general, the emotion values of China-related tweets on @thehimalayan fluctuate greatly. From the geographical perspective, Nepal is bordered on China's Tibet to the north and surrounded by India on the other three sides. Due to the backward economic development, on the one hand, Nepal needs China's support, so it holds positive attitude to bilateral economic and trade promotion mechanisms like Sino-Nepal Joint Commission on Economy and Tibet-Nepal Trade Fair. On the other hand, although Nepal has been trying to get rid of its over-dependence on India, India's restriction on Nepal is also very obvious. In terms of oil and gas supply, India has been in a monopoly position for a long time. Among the South Asian countries, the relation between India and China is most strained, and India also holds a negative attitude to "The Belt and Road" initiative. India's ambiguous attitude towards China's One Belt And One Road initiative and its external links with Nepal have caused problems for the implementation of the One Belt And One Road initiative [10]. Meanwhile, some western countries hold a hostile attitude to China. Hence, when a conflict happens between China and India or between China and western countries, Nepal's attitude will be wavering, and the emotion values of China-related reports in Nepal fluctuate greatly. When some specific events happen, such as president Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal, the negative or positive emotion value will also rise sharply.

3.3 Many Negative Reports in Political Issues

On the whole, the attitude of @thehimalayan to China-related tweets is mainly positive, but for some issues, especially political issues, there are still many negative tweets.

Most media of Nepal are private, and the funds mostly come from western countries represented by the United States and India. Western mainstream media like Associated Press and Reuters

reached agreements with some Nepalese media long ago to provide articles for free. The seemingly independent Nepalese media are in fact controlled by western countries to some extent [11].

Furthermore, although Nepal was not completely colonized by the UK in history, Nepal was forced to sign the *Treaty of Sargory* in 1814 and lost the 1/3 territory and part of sovereignty, making Nepal a semi-colony of the UK. Long influenced by western culture, Nepal gets used to reporting China-related issues with western thinking and views China through "colored glasses".

Seeing from international relations, Sino-US and Sino-India relations are complex and strained. The so-called "China threat theory" emerges in endlessly. Influenced by India and western countries, many Nepalese media have become a sounder of western countries.

Therefore, the overall emotion of China-related reports on @thehimalayan is positive, but there are many negative reports on some issues, especially political issues.

4. Conclusions

Nepal has always been a very significant political partner of China. However, due to the impacts of India and western countries, there are still many problems in reporting of China on Nepalese newspapers. Although China is adjacent, many Nepalese people do not understand China in fact. With the comprehensive development of China in economy and other aspects, its international influence is growing. Under the new international situation and media environment, how to get rid of cultural barriers is the problem that China needs to pay more attention to.

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