

# On the English Version of *China's Energy Transition*: National Identities in the International Publicity Discourse of Chinese Energy from the Perspective of Transitivity

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## Abstract

This study analyzes discourse from the perspective of transitivity, which helps to uncover the social significance embedded in energy-related discourse. Utilizing the English version of the white paper titled *China's Energy Transition*, released by the Chinese government in 2024, a corpus has been built, and high-frequency keywords were extracted by using the corpus software AntConc. The transitivity of the discourse was annotated with UAM Corpus Tools and analyzed. The findings indicate that the English version of the white paper predominantly employs material process within its transitivity, while relational process, mental process and other types are subordinative. This pattern highlights China's achievements and conveys a cautious approach to energy construction and development. Consequently, it constructs national identities for China as a global contributor to energy development, a leader in green development, and an advocate for energy transition.

**Keywords:** transitivity; energy discourse; *China's Energy Transition*; English version; national identity

**Funding:** Stage achievement of 'Research on the Translation Achievements of the Communist Party of China over the Past Century', supported by Research and interpretation of the spirit of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, a key project of the National Social Science Fund (Fund No. 22AZD006); and 'Research on the Foreign Translation and Introduction of the History of the Communist Party of China', supported by the National Social Science Fund project (Fund No. 21BYY059).

## 1. Introduction

The current international energy situation is developing towards sustainability, cleanliness, and efficiency. Energy transition has become an unstoppable trend in the international energy development. At the same time, under the background of economic globalization, factors such as energy transition, geopolitical issues, and the global economic situation, accelerating energy transition is still an urgent global strategic adjustment. It is essential to tell the international community China's viewpoints, positions, plans, and strategies in the international energy field, promote the dissemination of China's energy policies internationally, enhance China's energy discourse power and influence globally, as a necessary step in countering international malicious propaganda, achieving positive national identity shaping, and building a great modern socialist country. Energy-related Chinese government white papers, as typical Chinese energy discourse, contribute to building China's international energy discourse system, seeking participation in international energy discourse construction, enhancing China's influence and voice in the international community, and giving the full play to China's role in global energy governance.

Research on energy discourse has only attracted the attention of the academic community in recent years in China. The research involves comparative studies on energy discourse at home and abroad (Zhao & Liu, 2020; Liu & Liu, 2021; Zhang, 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2023), studies on US government energy discourse (Zhao & Zhao, 2021; Zhao & Song, 2023) and national identity (Wang, 2022), research on the securitization logic and national image construction in Chinese energy discourse (Ge, 2020), corporate identity construction (Chen, 2022), characteristics of new energy discourse (Kong and Han, 2023), and the construction of a clean energy discourse system (Wang, 2024). The research is mostly conducted from the perspectives of critical discourse analysis (Zhao & Zhao, 2021; Wang, 2022; Kong & Han, 2023; Sun, 2022), positive discourse analysis (Xu, Wu & Li, 2021; Ma & Lin, 2021) historical discourse analysis (Wang & Zhou, 2021), etc., and the research methods predominantly employing corpus analysis, forming a research path combining qualitative and quantitative research. However, there is a scarcity of research on the construction of national identity in China's energy international publicity discourse, especially from the perspective of transitivity, and no studies have explored the role of transitivity process utilization in national identity construction.

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

Halliday (1978) pointed out in the Systemic Functional Grammar theory that language has metafunctions, which are ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Among them, the ideational function can be further divided into experiential function and logical function. Experiential function refers to the expression of various experiences that people

have in the real world (including the physical world) through language, while logical function refers to the expression of logical relationships between two or more units of meaning (Hu, Zhu and Zhang, 2005). Through the experiential function, we can explore the subjective and objective worlds reflected in language, including the events that occur, the people and objects involved, and the time and space in which these events take place. Experiential function is mainly realized through transitivity and mood. Transitivity is a semantic system that categorizes various practical activities of humans in the real world into six processes. Based on different real experiences, Halliday distinguishes them as: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal process, and existential process. By specifically categorizing experiences in real world into six processes, from the perspective of systemic functional grammar, it categorizes experiences in real world through grammar, clarifying the participants and environmental components involved in various process. Consequently, transitivity represents a choice-making behavior wherein the acting subjects integrate their choices of process types, roles of participants, and environmental components associated with the selected process types, thereby constructing the experiential processes through which they perceive the physical and psychological worlds (Halliday, 1973).

In addition, as a resource for constructing meaning, transitivity not only reflects the author's understanding and experience of reality but also influences the reader's understanding of specific social practices through discourse. In the context of translation, the application of transitivity is not only a cognitive mapping of the source language text by the translator, but also profoundly influences the reader's understanding of the discourse of the translated text as a representation of specific social practices. Through an analysis of the transitivity system, it is possible to delve into the content contained or missing in discourse, thereby revealing how social, cultural, political, and ideological factors coordinate the selection of transitivity types in discourse (Mayr, 2008). Similarly, coordinating the use of transitivity in the translation process can achieve a positive utilization of discourse to complete the construction of national identity, guiding readers of the translated text to correctly understand and accept the national identity conveyed in the discourse of the translated text. Therefore, this study utilizes the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" as the corpus for analysis. This document serves as a quintessential international publicity text on national energy discourse. The aim is to explore the discourse's meaning and its role in constructing China's identity within the realm of energy discourse, specifically from the perspective of transitivity. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to offer valuable insights for promoting China's national identity in the international energy-related publicity.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Corpus Source

The corpus is derived from the English version of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*", published by the State Council Information Office at the end of August 2024. This white paper is a key document on China's energy transition and the second government white paper on energy issues in 2024. As a typical international publicity discourse on Chinese energy, it not only analyzes the international energy situation and trends but also points out the importance and urgency of the global energy transition. It emphasizes critical issues such as clean energy development, energy efficiency improvement, and carbon reduction, while introducing to international readers China's energy consumption structure, energy production situation, the energy transition process, and the experiences and achievements China has accomplished in the energy sector. Furthermore, it clarifies the future direction of China's energy transition and policy recommendations, including accelerating the development of clean energy, strengthening energy security, fostering energy technology innovation, and enhancing international energy cooperation, all underpinned by important concepts such as green, low-carbon development, energy security, innovation-driven development, and win-win international cooperation, as proposed by the president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping.

#### 3.2 Research Questions

- (1) What are the high-frequency keywords in the English version of this white paper?
- (2) What are the characteristics of the use of transitivity in the English translation of this white paper?
- (3) What kind of national identity is constructed through the transitivity utilization in the English translation of this white paper?

#### 3.3 Research Methods

Obtain the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" from the official website of the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (<http://www.scio.gov.cn/>). Clean the original text by extracting analyzable content from charts, removing redundant spaces and garbled characters, and accurately splitting paragraph into sentences for precise annotation. The text was then converted to a plain text format in UTF-8. An independent corpus has

been established, containing 595 sentences with 13,279 tokens and 2,241 types in the English translation of the white paper "China's Energy Transition".

This study selected the CROWN2021 corpus as the reference corpus. The corpus is part of the Brown Family American English Corpus, developed by the China Foreign Language Education Research Center of Beijing Foreign Studies University and released in November 2022. The study extracted 26 texts from the category H of the corpus, totaling 48,114 words, sourced from official documents released by the White House, various federal government departments, and state governments in the United States in 2021. By comparing the government documents in CROWN2021, it is conducive to effectively reveal the keyword usage features in the English translations of Chinese government white papers. Using the corpus software Antconc 4.0.4 developed by American scientist Laurence Anthony, the Word List function is used to extract keyword tokens from the English translation of the white paper "China's Energy Transition," adopting the H category corpus of CROWN2021 as the reference corpus. After manually removing prepositions, conjunctions, and other invalid words, high-frequency and meaningful keywords are obtained, the top 30 high-frequency keywords are counted and sorted, and a list of high-frequency keywords is established. Subsequently, the corpus software UAM Corpus Tools 3.3 developed by the Autonomous University of Madrid, was used to annotate the transitivity of the corpus automatically and then manually proofread and tested to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the obtained data. This process culminated in an analysis based on the high proportion of transitivity types, enumerating specific examples and analyzing the role of transitivity in the national identity construction within the English translation of the white paper "China's Energy Transition".

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Analysis of high-frequency keywords and transitive

By comparing with the reference corpus of H category texts in CROWN2021, high-frequency recurring keywords in the text are extracted by using the keyword-list function of Antconc. The high-frequency keywords obtained through comparison effectively reveal the discourse themes, while analyzing a certain number of high-frequency keywords in summary can not only provide an overall understanding of the discourse content, but also reveal the social and cultural implications behind it (Xu, 2019). The extracted high-frequency keywords in the study can to some extent reflect the main topics and focus of the white paper "China's Energy Transition," and also reflect the social and cultural background of the discourse content, thereby aiding in understanding and interpreting the government's attitudes, measures, and motives towards energy issues in the current international and domestic contexts. After manually removing prepositions, pronouns, and other non-substantive and non-content-bearing keywords, the study extracted the top 30 keywords in the white paper "China's Energy Transition" sorted by Log Likelihood Ratio Test (LLRT) values, which include: "energy," "China," "power," "green," "development," "carbon," "transition," "electricity," and etc., as shown in Table 1. By contextualizing the discourse and categorizing the high-frequency keywords, it can be found that the high-frequency keywords are mainly nouns, such as "energy," "China," "power," "development," "carbon," "development," accounting for a high proportion of 76.7%; followed by adjectives, such as "green," "clean," "world," "new," "installed," "nuclear," accounting for 20%; and verbs are the least, with only "built," accounting for 3.3%. By classifying the parts of speech of the high-frequency keywords, it can be found that the high-frequency nouns reflect the high attention and emphasis of the Chinese government on energy types, energy reserves, energy development, energy consumption and supply, and green-oriented transition of energy; the high-frequency adjectives reflect the urgent demand for clean, green new energy resources, the interaction between China and the world in energy field, and China's efforts in developing clean energy such as hydropower; and the high-frequency verbs reflect the proactive measures and fruitful results taken by China in clean energy development and ensuring national energy security. Through this analysis, it can be understood that China and the Chinese government attach great importance to the development of green and low-carbon energy, energy security, and international energy development trend and cooperation, reflecting that China is not only an energy consumer but also an energy producer. While actively promoting the development of clean energy and improving energy efficiency, China is actively advancing the construction of clean energy infrastructure, enhancing and enriching energy types and supply sources, taking solid steps in leading global energy transition and ensuring national energy security.

Table 1. Top 30 in term of High-frequency keywords and LLRT values

High-frequency keywords	LLRT Value	High-frequency keywords	LLRT Value
energy	1188.15	sector	82.632
China	506.854	storage	82.57
power	321.437	conservation	77.953
green	313.043	supply	74.814
development	159.129	efficiency	72.509

carbon	158.444	market	70.63
transition	134.518	world	61.934
electricity	129.345	wind	61.847
capacity	116.847	new	59.851
clean	106.15	built	59.674
consumption	105.02	installed	57.439
coal	103.514	gas	54.356
cooperation	98.077	hydro-power	52.088
country	95.668	stations	50.764
enterprises	88.877	nuclear	47.724

By employing UAM Corpus Tools, the transitivity of the corpus were annotated, and through manual check and repeated proofreading, the distribution characteristics of transitivity in the English version of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" were obtained. The application of transitivity in the discourse illustrates how the discourse describes events happening in the real world, the elements involved such as people, things, time and space environment, and the cognition and evaluation of specific social practices conveyed through discourse. By distinguishing and annotating the transitivity in the English version of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*," it is clear that material process is in dominate position, with other types of transitivity as subordinative, as detailed in Table 2. Material process, relational process, and mental process are the main types of transitivity used in this white paper, with material process accounting for 88.078%, occupying a dominate position in the total number of process clauses in the discourse, highlighting the discourse's tendency towards objective descriptions of real-world experiences. It can be seen that the discourse content has a strong factual nature, reflecting the discourse author's or speaker's level of understanding and attitude towards the reality of the topic; relational process account for 9.02%, second only to material process in terms of total quantity, to a certain extent reflecting the discourse author's or speaker's understanding of the topic's ownership and attributes, indirectly reflecting the discourse author's or speaker's value judgment; mental process account for 1.255%, with a small total quantity but serving as an important basis for inferring the discourse author's and speaker's value orientation and emotional attitude, as well as a crucial channel for constructing the psychological state, ideological orientation, and value orientation of the reader for discourse. These three types of transitivity process are the main source of transitivity used in the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" for constructing China's national identity and are the focal points of analysis in this study.

Table 2. Categories of transitivity and their quantities and percentages

Types	Quantity	Percentage
Material Process	1123	88.078%
Relational Process	115	9.020%
Mental Process	16	1.255%
Behavioral Process	9	0.706%
Verbal Process	7	0.549%
Existential Process	5	0.392%
Total	1275	100%

#### 4.2 Transitive and National Identity Construction

The author or speaker of discourses makes a continuous choice through the transitive system to express the physical world and external experiences of people, and this choice is often influenced by the theme and discourse type (Xue, 2008). By analyzing the transitivity in the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*," it can explore the situation of the Chinese government as a discourse author making transitivity choices, revealing the cultural connotations and social significance expressed by Chinese government. The analysis will focus on the process types of transitivity and the national identity implied in the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*".

##### 4.2.1 Material process

The material process refers to the process of doing something, which is manifested by dynamic verbs and involves two participants, namely the actor who acts as the logical subject and the goal that acts as the logical direct object. Therefore, the material process focuses on "who did what," in other words, the actor and the action they performed. According to Table 2, clauses of material process occupy the dominant position in quantity in the English translation of this government white paper. The government white paper, issued by the Chinese State Council, is an official document focusing on expressing the views and positions of the state and the government, with the government as the narrative subject. It's narrative content mainly consists of the government's principles, policies adopted, achievements made, and problems encountered, and is a self-

narrative discourse based on objective facts. Therefore, in the English translation of the white paper, the actors in material process and material clauses are mostly Chinese institutions or organizations representing China--"中国政府", which are often translated as "China," "the government," "the Chinese government," or the pronoun "it". The coherent identity of the actors in material process in the discourse reflects the strategic policies and specific actions taken by China and the Chinese government through vigorous promotion in developing new energy, promoting energy transition, and ensuring national energy security.

**Example 1.** China (**Actor**) has realized greater control (**Goal**) over its own energy supply (**Circumstance**).

**Example 2.** China (**Actor**) has established a comprehensive energy supply system encompassing coal, oil, gas, nuclear, hydro, wind, and photovoltaic (PV) energy (**Goal**), providing robust impetus (**Goal**) for the fast and sustained development of the economy and society (**Goal**).

**Example 3.** In this way (**Circumstance**), the government (**Actor**) encourages the entire society (**Goal**) to prioritize the use of green energy and purchase of green products and services.

**Example 4.** China (**Actor**) is committed to striking a balance between traditional and new energy sources in order to facilitate its energy transition while ensuring a stable energy supply tailored to the country's national conditions and development stage (**Circumstance**).

**Example 5.** The Chinese government (**Actor**) actively guides the public (**Goal**) to prioritize green energy and carry forward the nation's traditions of diligence and thrift (**Goal**).

**Example 6.** It (**Actor**) is endeavoring to ensure energy security (**Goal**) in an open environment (**Circumstance**), open its energy sector (**Goal**) wider to the world (**Circumstance**), promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation (**Goal**), actively engage in global energy governance (**Circumstance**), guide global cooperation (**Goal**) in climate change (**Circumstance**), and build a global community of shared future (**Goal**).

Through the observation of the components involved in the material process in the above cases, verbs such as "realized," "established," "encourages," "is committed to," "guides," etc., have authentically presented specific social practices of China and the Chinese government in energy construction and development, promoting the popularization and application of green and clean energy, guiding and encouraging the gradual shift of social development towards green and clean energy as the driving force. It also demonstrates China and the Chinese government's proactive promotion of energy transition in line with the trend of global energy development, and their steadfast attitude in pursuing the path of green and sustainable energy development. Through words or phrases of the goal, such as "the entire society," "the public," "greater control," "a comprehensive energy supply system," "ensure energy security," "high-quality Belt and Road cooperation," "global cooperation," etc., reflect China and the Chinese government's emphasis on mobilizing domestic and international collective forces, guiding the domestic population, strengthening international cooperation to promote energy development and transformation, ensure energy security, balance national energy security, and actively participate in addressing global energy issues. In addition, the components of circumstance, such as "over its own energy supply," "in order to facilitate its energy transition," "to the world," "in global energy governance," "in climate change," etc., further demonstrate that the policies and measures adopted by China and the Chinese government are all aimed at serving global energy development and governance, addressing global issues such as climate change, solidifying the concept of "a global community of shared future," and promoting the benefits of energy development worldwide. The collaborative interplay of the actor, goal, and circumstance in material processes outlines China's identity as a contributor to global energy development for readers.

#### 4.2.2 Relationship Process

The relational process refers to the process of determining the relationship between various entities. The relational process can be divided into the "Attributive" class, which indicates what attributes someone or something has or to which type it belongs, and the "Identifying" class, which indicates that someone or something is identified as a specific entity. The attributive class relational process involves two participant roles: the "carrier" and the "attribute," while the identifying class relational process involves two participant roles: the "identified" and the "identifier." The relational process clarifies the relationship between participants and also reflects the value judgment and attitude of the discourse author or speaker through the choice of transitivity. The choices made by the translator in utilizing transitivity in the translation process encompass not only loyalty to judgments regarding participant relationships in the source text but also convey the judgement and attitudes of the translator or translation institution concerning these relationships. As an official international publicity text, the government white paper represents the value tendency of China and the Chinese government. Therefore, the analysis for the relational process in the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" can reveal China's and the Chinese

government's value judgment and attitude towards energy transition, and further explore the reasons for the corresponding cognitive generation.

**Example 7.** Energy Transition (**Identified**) Is the Only Way Forward (**Identifier**)

**Example 8.** Sustainable development and climate change (**Carrier**) are common challenges for all of humanity. (**Attribute**)

**Example 9.** Green development (**Carrier**) is a defining feature of an eco-civilization. (**Attribute**)

**Example 10.** The development and utilization of energy (**Carrier**) is an important aspect of the interaction (**Attribute**) between humanity and nature (**Circumstance**).

**Example 11.** It (**Carrier**) is crucial (**Attribute**) for the country (**Circumstance**) to establish green ways of production and life and realize high-quality economic and social development.

Analyzing sentences classified as relational processes reveals the contextual background, motivating factors, and significance of China's push for energy transition. From the above cases, it is evident that the identified relations in the government white paper are mostly related to energy, environment, and development topics, such as "Energy Transition," "Sustainable development and climate change," "Green development," "The development and utilization of energy," "It," etc. It can be seen that China and Chinese government do not simply view energy issues in isolation, but rather consider them as interconnected with environmental protection, social development, and other multiple issues. They adopt a dialectical approach to the positive or negative impacts that energy transition may bring, objectively proving the necessity and importance of energy transition. The identifiers or attributes are mostly judgments of the values related to energy, environment, and development that the identified relations and carriers involve, such as "the Only Way Forward," "common challenges for all of humanity," "a defining feature of an eco-civilization," "an important aspect of the interaction," "crucial." Through the analysis of identifiers and attributes in term of implication, it is evident that China and its government spare no effort in conveying to the readers the importance and necessity of energy transition, to demonstrate that China's promotion of energy transition is a choice in line with development trends and objective laws, a correct decision to practice environmental protection and achieve sustainable development. The components, such as the carrier and attribute, the identified and identifier, in clauses of relational process reveal to the readers an identity of a forward-looking and science-driven leader in green development.

#### 4.2.3 Mental process

The mental process refers to the process of representing "sensing," "reflecting," and "cognition" and other psychological activities. The mental process generally has two participants, one is the subject of psychological activity, that is, the "senser," and the phenomenon perceived as the object of perception. The mental process is the representation of the cognition, emotions, and attitudes towards the objects of cognition in the real world by the discourse author or speaker, showing the emotions, joys, sorrows, and other emotions of the senser in the real world at the textual level, reflecting the senser's own spiritual will and desires. Through the analysis of the mental process in this government white paper, it can reveal the thoughts and opinions of the discourse author or speaker, and explore the underlying value orientation and ideology. Therefore, it can figure out what is the will, ideology, and value orientation of China and the Chinese government and how to realize synaesthesia and transfer their cognitive judgment to the reader through the cognitive and value orientation of the mental process in the English translation of the white paper.

**Example 12.** The green revolution (**Senser**) concerns the wellbeing of everyone and future generations (**Phenomenon**).

**Example 13.** China's energy transition (**Senser**) abides by the following principle : putting the people first (**Phenomenon**).

**Example 14.** The eco-environment of mines (**Senser**) has seen significant improvement (**Phenomenon**).

**Example 15.** China (**Senser**) firmly believes that clear waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, and acts accordingly (**Phenomenon**).

**Example 16.** China (**Senser**) has seen large-scale and cluster development of offshore wind farms (**Phenomenon**), with a cumulative installed capacity of 37,280 MW.

Through the analysis of mental process in the translated text, it can be found that China and the Chinese government actively convey the intention of promoting energy transition to readers. From the above example analysis, it can be seen that in the white papers, the senser are mostly related to China itself or activities led by the Chinese government, such as "China," "The green revolution," "China's energy transition," "The eco-environment of mines," etc., while the phenomenon are more diverse,

including specific achievements and abstract visions, such as "the wellbeing of everyone and future generations," "the following principles," "significant improvement," etc. By analyzing the psychological process of sensers, the deep-seated ideas and intentions of energy transition implied in the discourse structure can be better explored. It can be seen that China and the Chinese government fully express their recognition of the development law that "energy transition is a necessary condition for achieving sustainable development," as in examples 11 and 14; affirm themselves for the achievements in new energy development in recent years, as in examples 13 and 15; and convey that China's promotion of energy transition is scientific, principled, and methodical, as in example 12. Thus, the "achievements in new energy development in China" stem from practicing the "scientific principles and methods," which are based on the understanding of the development law that "energy transition is a necessary condition for achieving sustainable development." The English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" highlights China and the Chinese government's understanding and support for the rationality of energy transition through mental process, and thereby influences readers' emotional and attitudinal cognition for China and the Chinese government's actions in energy transition. This aligns with presenting China as an advocate for the active pursuit of energy transition.

## 5. Conclusion

This study takes the English translation of the white paper "*China's Energy Transition*" as the research corpus for China's energy international publicity discourse. Adopting Antconc to extract high-frequency keywords, the topics and focuses of this white paper have been identified. Subsequently, through UAM Corpus Tools, the corpus was annotated and manually verified, clarifying the usage characteristics of transitivity in the English translation of the white paper, and then analyzing the role of transitivity in constructing China's national identity. The study found that material process focus on realistic experiences, establishing an identity of global energy development contributor that continuously optimizes energy structures, strengthens international energy cooperation, and facilitates global energy transition in more green and low-carbon way; relational process focus on relationships among participants and their value judgments, building a leader identity that promotes the coordinated development of economy, society, and environment on a green development path; while mental process focus on perception and cognition, creating an identity as supporters who endorse and actively practice energy transition.

As one of the important types of government documents for international publicity, Chinese government white papers on energy play a significant role in constructing China's discourse system on energy and shaping China's positive national image in the international community. Under the current global energy crisis context, the translation of governmental white papers on energy not only serves as an effective way to explain China's energy development reality to the world and present China's energy propositions to international community, but also constitutes an important part of building China's international discourse system and national identity. Therefore, it is necessary to translate government documents such as white papers on energy-related topics to tell China's story well, paying attention to the coordination between the using of transitivity and discourse strategies in translation. This will allow for a clear and accurate transmission of China's attitudes, positions, solutions, and insights to international readers, facilitating their understanding of China's national identity within a coherent context.

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