

A Corpus-Based Study of Media Coverage of Pacific Island Countries

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Abstract

This corpus-assisted discourse study examines how Pacific Island media represent Chinese infrastructure and culture. Drawing on two corpora from different countries, the analysis reveals four localization patterns: ceremonial focus with state voice, initiative focus with institutional voice, implementation focus with administrative-technical voice and entity focus with financial-corporate voice. In cultural reporting, a systematic mutual learning discourse emerges through “mutual,” “bridge,” and “share(d).” The findings demonstrate that external narratives are actively localized and re-contextualized within Pacific media, transforming China-related discourse into locally intelligible knowledge. The study provides an empirically grounded framework for understanding China’s discursive positioning in the region.

Keywords

Corpus, Media Coverage, Pacific Island Countries

1. Introduction

The Pacific Island region has increasingly become a frontier of strategic competition among major powers in recent years. The deepening cooperation between China and Pacific Island countries in areas such as infrastructure, culture, and education has drawn considerable scholarly attention to the regional discursive landscape. However, existing research has largely focused on the discursive construction of China’s activities in the Pacific Islands by official sources in the United States and Australia, with relatively limited systematic examination of local island media. Local media are not merely channels of information dissemination but also sites of meaning production—representation is the process by which meaning is constructed through language. How do island media represent China’s infrastructure projects? How do they represent Chinese culture? These discursive

practices not only reflect the complexity of regional public opinion but also directly relate to the effectiveness of China's external communication strategies.

This study employs a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach to examine the discursive construction of China in Pacific Island media from two dimensions. The first part draws on a corpus of 132 reports (2019-2025) from four countries: Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea, focusing on object salience and source configuration in infrastructure reporting. The second part draws on a corpus of 30 reports (2016-2026) from Fiji, Samoa, and Solomon Islands, focusing on discursive features and rhetorical strategies in cultural reporting. Both parts share the same methodological framework, an analytical path combining corpus linguistics with the discourse-historical approach, systematically examining high-frequency words, collocates, and concordance lines to reveal how island media incorporate Chinese issues into their local discursive systems. The study aims to answer two core questions: What discursive configuration patterns emerge in island media coverage of China? And how do these patterns reflect mechanisms of discursive localization?

2. Corpus-Assisted Analysis of Chinese Infrastructure Reporting in Pacific Island Media

Infrastructure cooperation between China and Pacific Island countries encompasses roads, stadiums, ports and public buildings. Regional debates frame these projects through development, strategic competition or debt. Yet it remains unclear which project objects local media make salient and which actors they position to interpret them within domestic institutional contexts and practical public needs. Following Hall (2013), this section treats representation as meaning produced through language and examines these two dimensions in local English-language media in four Pacific Island countries.

2.1. Corpus and Analytical Design

The corpus comprises 132 reports published from 2019 to 2025 by local media in Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea: 33 texts per country corpus and 50,167 tokens in total. The analysis combines corpus-assisted discourse studies with selected categories from the discourse-historical approach. Nomination and predication inform the analysis of object salience, while perspectivization informs the analysis of source configuration. Using AntConc 4.4.0, each country corpus was compared with the other three combined. Keywords were retained when log-likelihood was at least 6.63, LogRatio at least 1.0, and article range at least 5. Collocates were identified within a 5L-5R window, with a minimum co-occurrence of 3 and range of 2. Concordance lines then verified meaning, source position and evaluative function (Baker et al., 2008; Reisiigl & Wodak, 2009).

2.2. Object Salience and Source Configuration

In this part, **Table 1** reports eight shared or country-specific nodes, while **Figure**

1 identifies corpus-distinctive keywords. **Figure 2** maps the institutional identities associated with China. A zero indicates that no collocate met the filtering thresholds.

Table 1 shows that shared infrastructure vocabulary develops unevenly across the four corpora. Road forms broad networks in Vanuatu (67 collocates), Fiji (51)

Table 1. Number of filtered collocates for selected nodes.

Node	Solomon Islands	Fiji	Vanuatu	Papua New Guinea
road	31	51	67	5
development	40	27	22	15
loan	8	0	10	5
aid	0	4	5	0
stadium	18	0	1	0
cable	0	0	0	28
bri	0	23	0	0
funds	0	0	6	0

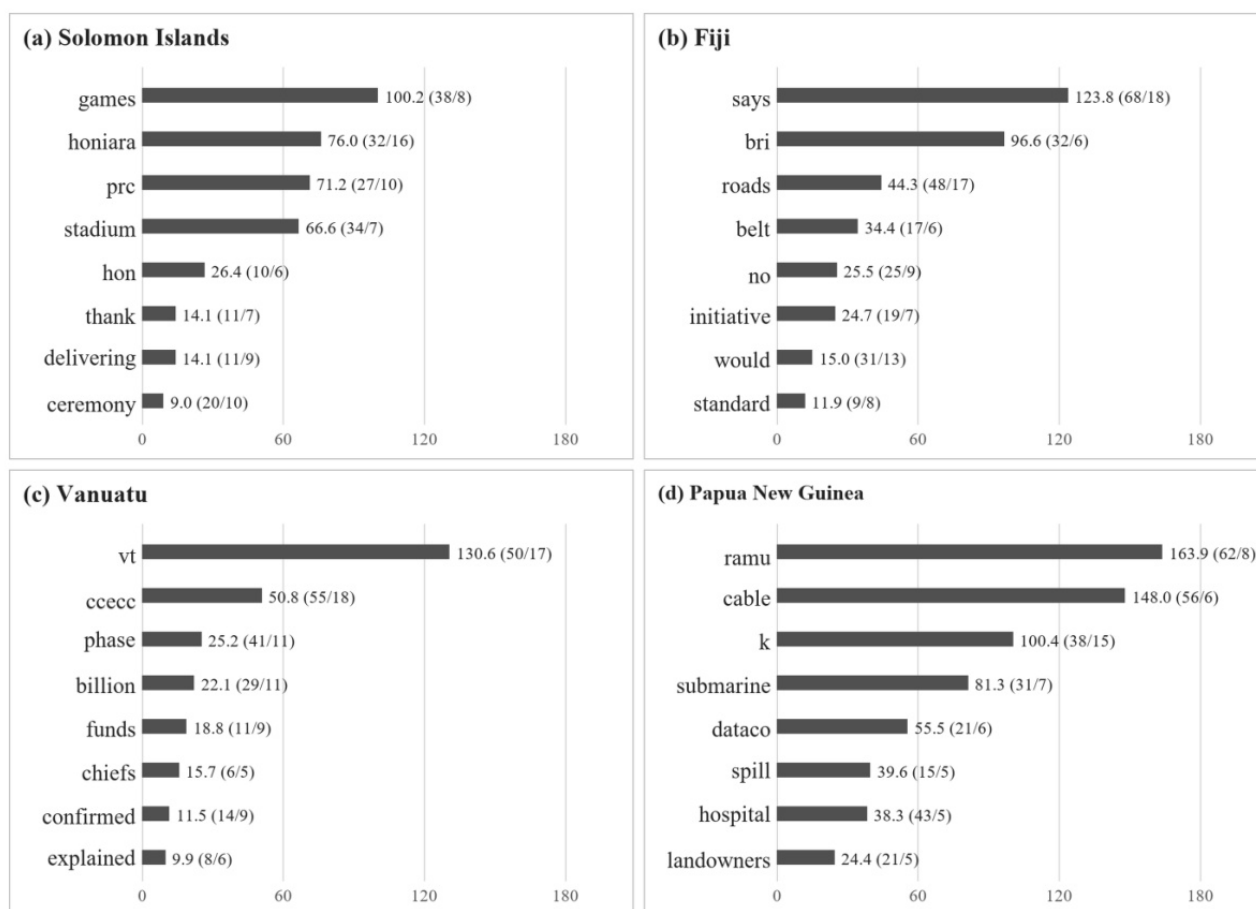


Figure 1. Representative keywords across the four country corpora.

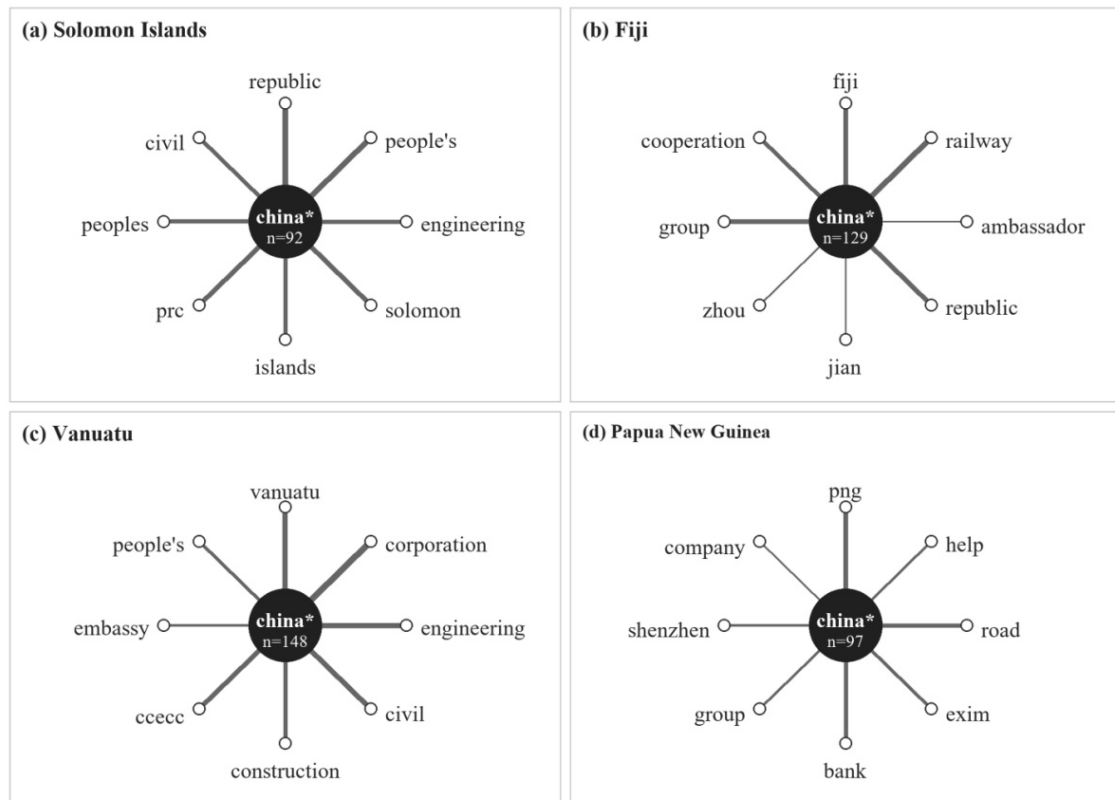


Figure 2. Collocation networks of *China** across the four country corpora (Line width indicates Log Dice association strength).

and Solomon Islands (31). Its network in Papua New Guinea contains only five. Country-specific nodes identify concentrated project domains: stadium in Solomon Islands, bri in Fiji, funds in Vanuatu, and cable in Papua New Guinea. These distributions contextualize later naming and sourcing differences.

Figure 1 sharpens the comparison through corpus-distinctive vocabulary. Solomon Islands links games (*LL* = 100.2), prc (71.2) and stadium (66.6) to ceremonial projects and state naming. Fiji combines says (123.8) with bri (96.6), joining initiative terminology to attributed institutional speech. Vanuatu brings vt (130.6), the Vanuatu vatu marker, together with CCECC (50.8), confirmed (*LL* = 11.5) and explained (*LL* = 9.9), connecting budgets to administrative and technical authority. Papua New Guinea foregrounds ramu (163.9), cable (148.0) and k (100.4), the Papua New Guinean kina marker, emphasizing named projects and quantification. **Table 1** and **Figure 1** therefore show which objects and reporting resources become salient in each corpus.

Figure 2 shows the institutional identities associated with *china**. Solomon Islands link the node to PRC and the formal state name, placing China within bilateral relations. Fiji connects it with the ambassador and named diplomatic personnel, foregrounding institutional mediation. Vanuatu links China to CCECC and its corporate name, positioning the contractor as a technical interpreter. Papua New Guinea associates China with Exim Bank, Shenzhen and road, emphasizing

finance and corporate participation. Concordance lines confirm that these actors supply claims, explanations and responses, consistent with corpus-assisted research showing that institutional voices shape which interpretations enter news discourse (Boulanger & Gagnon, 2018).

2.3. Country-Specific Object-Voice Configurations

The comparison yields four object-voice configurations, each linking a salient reporting focus to a characteristic arrangement of voices.

In Solomon Islands, stadium and games make ceremonial facilities salient, while PRC and related formal naming foreground China as a bilateral state actor. Reports on handover ceremonies place gratitude and public benefit in official speech. The resulting pattern is ceremonial focus and state voice: infrastructure is represented as a visible outcome of bilateral cooperation whose public meaning is articulated through state actors and ceremonial speakers.

In Fiji, bri and road connect infrastructure to an initiative and policy setting. Government departments, the road authority, and diplomatic representatives explain benefits, identify defects, or promise repairs. The resulting pattern is initiative focus and institutional voice: infrastructure is represented as a policy-linked project whose meaning is negotiated through official and professional institutions.

In Vanuatu, vt, phase, and funds foreground budgets, schedules, and implementation progress. Government or project authorities confirm authorization and timing, while CCECC personnel explain construction standards. The resulting pattern is implementation focus and administrative-technical voice: infrastructure is represented as an undertaking validated procedurally by public authorities and interpreted professionally by the contractor.

In Papua New Guinea, Ramu NiCo, cable projects, and monetary markers foreground identifiable entities, scale and measurable outcomes. Banks, companies, and parties to disputes explain finance, delivery, losses or compensation. The resulting pattern is entity focus and financial-corporate voice: infrastructure is represented as a quantifiable project entity whose benefits, liabilities, and responsible participants can be traced.

2.4. Summary

Taken together, the four corpora reveal a shared representational mechanism with four country-specific outcomes. Project vocabulary establishes the reporting focus, while recurring source patterns indicate which actors are repeatedly positioned to interpret it. Ceremonial focus is paired with state voice in Solomon Islands; initiative focus with institutional voice in Fiji; implementation focus with administrative technical voice in Vanuatu; and entity focus with financial-corporate voice in Papua New Guinea. These configurations show how infrastructure is localized through different combinations of object salience and source configuration. Local relevance therefore depends not only on project type but also on the institutions available to interpret it. This finding is consistent with research showing

that external narratives are reorganized within local Pacific reporting contexts (Wallis et al., 2023; Doidge & Kelly, 2025).

3. Corpus-Based Analysis of Chinese Culture in Pacific Island Media

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of China's engagement in the Pacific Islands. Doidge and Kelly (2025) conducted a systematic analysis of China-related discourses in Pacific Island news media, revealing issue-dependent framing patterns that vary across policy domains. From a Chinese scholarly perspective, Zhang (2023) examined China's motives, influence and prospects in Pacific Island countries, providing insights into how China's involvement is perceived within Chinese academic circles. Mausio (2023) investigated China's soft power relations with Fiji since 1975, highlighting the role of cultural exchange in shaping bilateral ties. However, existing studies have predominantly focused on geopolitical and economic dimensions, leaving the specific question of how Chinese culture is discursively constructed in Pacific Island media relatively underexplored. The present study seeks to address this gap by adopting a corpus-based approach to examine the representation of Chinese culture in Pacific Island English-language media.

3.1. Data and Method

A specialized corpus of 30 news articles (11,945 tokens) was compiled from mainstream English-language media across three Pacific Island countries: Fiji (Fiji Times, Fiji Sun), Samoa (Samoa Observer, Samoa Global News), and Solomon Islands (Island Sun). The articles were published between 2016 and 2026, covering topics such as traditional festivals, Chinese language education, cultural exchange, and overseas Chinese communities. All texts were stored in plain text format with UTF-8 encoding.

The corpus was analyzed using AntConc 4.4.1 through four procedures. First, word frequency analysis was conducted to identify thematic patterns. Second, collocation analysis was performed with "Chinese" and "China" as node words (span ± 5 , minimum frequency 3) to examine semantic differences. Third, concordance analysis was carried out on key terms including "festival", "traditional", "cultural exchange", "friendship", "mutual", "bridge", and "shared". Fourth, metaphorical analysis was applied to interpret discourse functions from the perspective of the mutual learning among civilizations theory.

3.2. Key Findings

After removing function words, the most frequent culture-related lexical words are shown in **Table 2**. These words fall into four semantic categories. Festival culture dominated the corpus, with the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival being the most reported events. Relationship-oriented terms ("cooperation", "friendship", "mutual", totaling 74 occurrences) were nearly as frequent as "festival"

alone, suggesting that cultural topics are frequently embedded within diplomatic discourse. Festival reporting typically followed a three-part structure, including explanation of cultural meaning, description of on-site activities, and quotation of official speeches, serving both cultural dissemination and diplomatic functions.

Table 2. High-frequency culture-related words

Word	Frequency	Range	Category
festival	90	17	Culture
community	65	17	Community
cultural	59	19	Culture
celebration	43	19	Culture
cooperation	34	10	Relation
culture	31	16	Culture
traditional	29	17	Culture
Confucius	29	6	Education
mutual	19	9	Relation
friendship	21	11	Relation

Collocation analysis revealed a clear semantic division between the terms “China” and “Chinese”. “China” primarily collocated with “republic” (Likelihood 46.82) and “Fiji” (26.87), framing it within formal diplomatic contexts. In contrast, “Chinese” predominantly collocated with “community” (43.37), “new” (29.02), “language” (25.67), and “culture” (23.11), reflecting cultural identity and community activities. The overlapping word “Fiji” further illustrates this contrast: in the “China” group it appears in the “China and Fiji” diplomatic framework, while in the “Chinese” group it appears as “Chinese in Fiji”, reflecting a community narrative. This divide reveals two parallel pathways in Pacific media reporting: a top-down official diplomatic frame and a bottom-up community cultural frame.

Among all culture-related adjectives in the corpus, “traditional” had the widest distribution, appearing 29 times across 17 articles. Its collocates covered “traditional Chinese culture”, “traditional festivals”, “traditional friendship”, and specific cultural forms such as traditional dances and traditional Chinese medicine. This suggests a notable tendency toward the traditionalization of Chinese culture in Pacific media, with contemporary Chinese popular culture, digital culture, and technology rarely mentioned.

The word “mutual” occurred 20 times across 9 articles, forming a hierarchical network as shown in **Table 3**. These correspond to the core dimensions of mutual learning among civilizations theory.

Alongside this direct use of mutual vocabulary, the corpus also features several

Table 3. Collocation distribution of “mutual”.

Collocate	Frequency	Theoretical Correspondence
mutual respect	6	Equality and dialogue among civilizations
mutual understanding	3	Mutual understanding
mutual benefit(s)	4	Mutual benefit and win-win cooperation
mutual trust	2	Mutual political trust
mutual assistance/support	2	Unity and mutual support
mutual learning	1	Exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations
mutual prosperity	2	Shared prosperity

recurring rhetorical devices that contribute to the mutual learning discourse. One prominent example is the “bridge” metaphor, which appeared 7 times across 4 articles, operating at four progressive levels. The first level is a bridge of friendship, where the Mid-Autumn Festival event was described as “creating a bridge of friendship between cultures.” The second level extends bridge to practical cooperation, with the Confucius Institute described as “a bridge to reinforce friendship and cooperation.” The third level elevates bridge to civilizational dialogue, where the Institute “acted as a bridge for communicating different languages and civilization.” The fourth level shifts agency to individuals, with the ambassador calling on “all Chinese citizens to continue their roles as bridges.”

A further example is the discourse of “share(d)”, which occurred 14 times across 9 articles. The adjective “shared” (9 occurrences) formed the core of community discourse, including “shared future”, “shared values”, and “shared heritage”, “shared history”, and “shared vision”. The verb “share” (5 occurrences) constructed a participatory framework emphasizing equal sharing rather than one-way transmission, with phrases such as “share the fruitful outcomes” and “share their experiences.”

Taken together, the three keyword clusters form a coherent discourse system. “Mutual” defines the principles of engagement: equality, respect, trust; “bridge” defines the pathways of engagement: connection, communication, understanding; and “shared” defines the goals of engagement: common future, shared values. These three dimensions advance progressively from principle to pathway to goal, collectively constructing an image of Chinese culture in Pacific Island media as mutually respectable, bridgeable, and shareable.

4. Discussion: Four Configuration Patterns of Discursive Localization and the Discursive Construction of Mutual Learning among Civilizations

The corpus analyses from both parts above converge on a common theoretical mechanism: when external narratives enter Pacific Island media, they are not received intact but are reorganized and re-signified within specific local discursive spaces. Research has shown that China-related issues undergo significant localization

processes in Pacific Island reporting. The present findings further reveal the concrete operational mechanisms of this localization-centered on the structural alignment between object salience and source configuration.

4.1. Chinese Official Narratives and Pacific Island Media Representations: A Comparative Perspective

To fully understand the localization process, it is necessary to first identify what is being localized, the official Chinese narratives as articulated through diplomatic channels, state media, and policy documents. Chinese official discourse on infrastructure cooperation in the Pacific Islands typically emphasizes mutual benefit, economic development, South-South cooperation, and the shared future of the BRI framework. This narrative is characterized by grand strategic framing, positive outcome projection, and the use of formal diplomatic language. In cultural reporting, Chinese official discourse highlights mutual learning among civilizations, cultural exchange, and people-to-people friendship, often presenting Chinese culture as a bridge for international understanding.

A comparison between these official narratives and the patterns identified in island media reveals several key divergences. First, in terms of narrative framing, Chinese official discourse tends to emphasize the broader geopolitical and economic significance of cooperation projects, while island media consistently frame infrastructure within domestic institutional processes and practical public needs. The ceremonial focus in Solomon Islands, the policy focus in Fiji, the implementation focus in Vanuatu, and the entity focus in Papua New Guinea each reflect a domestication of the narrative that shifts attention from grand strategy to local relevance. Second, in terms of voice and source configuration, Chinese official narratives predominantly feature state actors and official spokespersons. Island media, however, draw on a wider range of sources, government departments, road authorities, contractors, financial institutions, and community representatives, creating a polyphonic discursive space in which multiple interpretations coexist and compete. Third, in terms of expressive emphasis, Chinese official discourse prioritizes the articulation of shared vision and collective benefits, whereas island media exhibit a greater concern with procedural accountability, budget transparency, and the tangible outcomes of projects for local communities. Fourth, regarding communication effects, the localization patterns observed suggest that while Chinese narratives aim to foster broad regional acceptance, island media actively re-contextualize them within local discursive traditions and institutional frameworks, producing meaning that is more readily assimilable to local readers. This process of re-contextualization does not necessarily reject the Chinese narrative but repositions it within a local interpretive framework that emphasizes institutional mediation and practical consequences over geopolitical alignment.

4.2. Localization as Active Reconstruction

In infrastructure reporting, four distinctly different discursive configuration patterns

emerge across the four countries. Solomon Islands foregrounds “stadium” and “games” as salient objects, collocated with China and the formal state name, forming a ceremonial focus, state voice pattern in which infrastructure is represented as a visible outcome of bilateral cooperation, with its public meaning articulated through state actors and ceremonial speakers. Fiji foregrounds “BRI” and “road” as salient objects, collocated with government departments, road authorities, and diplomatic representatives, forming an “initiative focus—institutional voice” pattern in which infrastructure is represented as a policy-linked project whose meaning is negotiated through official and professional institutions. Vanuatu foregrounds currency markers, phases, and funds as salient objects, collocated with government or project authorities and contractor personnel, forming an implementation focus, administrative-technical voice pattern in which infrastructure is represented as a procedurally validated undertaking, confirmed procedurally by public institutions and interpreted professionally by contractors. Papua New Guinea foregrounds named project entities, currency markers, and quantifiable indicators as salient objects, collocated with banks, companies, and disputing parties, forming an entity focus, financial-corporate voice pattern in which infrastructure is represented as a traceable quantifiable project entity whose benefits, liabilities, and responsible participants can all be accounted for.

In cultural reporting, the corpus reveals a different kind of discursive construction, the systematic operation of a mutual learning discourse system. High-frequency analysis shows that culture-related words such as “festival,” “cultural,” and “celebration” predominate, while relationship-oriented words such as “cooperation,” “friendship,” and “mutual” occur at frequencies nearly comparable to cultural vocabulary, suggesting that cultural topics are frequently embedded in diplomatic discourse frameworks. Collocation analysis further reveals the semantic distinction between China and Chinese: the former primarily collocates with republic and Fiji, framed within formal diplomatic contexts; the latter primarily collocates with community, language, and culture, pointing to cultural identity and community activities. This distinction reflects two parallel paths in Pacific Island reporting, a top-down official diplomatic framework and a bottom-up community cultural framework.

More significantly, three keyword clusters, “mutual”, “bridge”, and “share(d)” form a coherent discursive system. “Mutual” defines the principles of engagement (equality, respect, trust), “bridge” defines the pathways of engagement (connection, communication, understanding), and “share(d)” defines the goals of engagement (common future, shared values). These three dimensions advance progressively from principle to pathway to goal, collectively constructing an image of Chinese culture in Pacific Island media as mutually respectable, bridgeable, and shareable. Research has shown that Pacific Island responses to China’s strategic narratives are not passive acceptance but active reconstruction and re-contextualization within local contexts. The present findings provide concrete corpus evidence for this assertion, revealing the operational mechanisms of such reconstruction at the

discursive level.

The findings from both analytical paths point to the same theoretical conclusion: when external narratives enter Pacific Island media, they undergo systematic discursive localization. The localization of infrastructure reporting is achieved through the structural matching of object salience, source configuration, while the localization of cultural reporting is achieved through the systematic operation of a mutual learning discourse system. The former manifests differentiated object-voice configuration patterns across different countries, while the latter manifests as a three-level discourse construction progressing from principle to pathway to goal. This localization is neither simple information filtering nor passive meaning reception, but rather the active reorganization of narrative resources by island media within their institutional environments and cultural contexts incorporating external narratives into local institutional frameworks and discursive systems, transforming them into intelligible, negotiable local knowledge. The comparison between official Chinese narratives and island media representations underscores that this process of transformation is not merely a matter of translation or adaptation but a fundamental re-contextualization that repositions external narratives within local discursive economies, reshaping their meaning and significance in ways that serve local institutional and communicative needs.

5. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the discursive construction of Chinese infrastructure projects and Chinese culture in Pacific Island media through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach, arriving at the following main conclusions.

First, island media coverage of Chinese infrastructure is not homogeneous but rather manifests in four distinctly different discursive configuration patterns. Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea respectively exhibit ceremonial focus-state voice, initiative focus-institutional voice, implementation focus-administrative technical voice, and entity focus-financial corporate voice patterns. This finding demonstrates that even the same external narrative object is assigned different meaning frameworks in different island media contexts, in response to their respective institutional environments, project modalities, and discursive traditions.

Second, island media coverage of Chinese culture exhibits a systematic “mutual learning” discourse system. The three keyword clusters “mutual,” “bridge,” and “share(d)” correspond respectively to the principles, pathways, and goals of mutual learning among civilizations, collectively constructing an image of Chinese culture as mutually respectable, bridgeable, and shareable. Meanwhile, the semantic distinction between “China” and “Chinese” in collocation patterns reveals two parallel reporting paths, official diplomacy and community culture indicating that cultural issues in island media serve both diplomatic functions and the expression of community identity.

Third, although infrastructure reporting and cultural reporting differ in their objects of study, they converge on the same theoretical mechanism discursive localization. Whether through the structural matching of object salience source configuration in infrastructure reporting or through the systematic operation of a mutual learning discourse system in cultural reporting, both demonstrate that external narratives are not transmitted intact upon entering Pacific Island media but are actively reorganized and re-contextualized within local discursive spaces. The core of this localization mechanism lies in island media incorporating external issues into their own institutional frameworks and discursive systems, transforming them into local knowledge that can be understood, discussed, and evaluated by local readers.

Fourth, the methodological contribution of this study lies in combining corpus linguistic methods with the discourse-historical approach, providing an operational analytical path for Pacific Island media research. The study also demonstrates that understanding China's discursive construction in the Pacific Islands requires not only attention to the production side of external narratives but also in-depth examination of the reception-side discursive practices how island media select, reorganize, and re-signify external narratives within local contexts. This perspective carries important implications for optimizing China's external communication strategies in the Pacific Island region.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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