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Cohesion and Coherence in Chinese Reports and Official Statements on Donald Trump's State Visits to China in 2017 and 2026: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework of cohesion, this qualitative study compares two reports on Donald Trump's 2017 state visit to China with three official texts concerning his 2026 visit. It examines lexical cohesion, conjunction and reference, and the overall organization of the selected texts. The 2017 reports foreground cooperation and the visit's diplomatic and commercial outcomes. The 2026 texts also advocate cooperation, but connect it more explicitly with strategic stability and the management of competition and differences. The selected passages use different additive, contrastive, and conditional relations to develop these emphases. Collective references occur in both periods. At the level of overall organization, the 2017 reports place greater emphasis on the visit's outcomes, whereas the 2026 texts give more attention to the conditions for maintaining stability. These findings indicate a difference in emphasis within the selected texts. The small and genre-diverse sample does not establish a categorical change across all Chinese official reporting or prove a change in official perceptions as a whole.

Keywords

Cohesion and coherence; Chinese reports and official statements; Trump's state visits to China; China-U.S. relations; discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

China-U.S. relations rank among the world's most consequential bilateral ties. The official texts published around Trump's state visits to China in 2017 and 2026 offer two points at which to examine how the relationship was described. Both sets of selected texts address cooperation and differences, but they place different emphasis on these concerns. This comparison examines those differences in textual organization without treating the small sample as representative of all Chinese reporting.

Cohesion and coherence are core concepts in discourse analysis [1], [2]. Previous studies have applied this framework to various discourse types, including political speeches, diplomatic discourse, and conflict reporting [3]–[5], confirming its applicability to the analysis of political and diplomatic discourse. However, most such work has been horizontal, offering limited tracking of discursive evolution over time. While Li [6] compared Chinese and American newspaper coverage of a single event using transitivity systems and lexical cohesion, his focus was cross-national and cross-outlet, not diachronic. Thus, diachronic comparison of cohesion and coherence in texts about similar events remains underexplored.

This study focuses on five texts concerning Trump's state visits to China in 2017 and 2026 and uses cohesion and coherence as analytical tools to compare lexical choices, conjunctions, referential expressions, and overall organization. Three research questions are addressed: (1) Which lexical relations are salient in the selected texts from each period? (2) How do

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conjunctions and referential expressions function in the selected passages? (3) How does each text organize its main concern and assessment? The comparison aims to identify differences of emphasis within this sample and to show how cohesion and coherence can be examined together in diplomatic reporting.

2. Literature Review

News carries more than just information—it can also carry ideology. Van Dijk [7] argues that news should be studied as a form of public discourse, and that ideology is reproduced precisely through the structures and uses of discourse. Linguistic choices in news reporting constitute a set of socially and ideologically controlled constructive strategies rather than purely passive technical operations. Billig [8] further proposes the concept of "banal nationalism", suggesting that national consciousness is repeatedly flagged through everyday symbols and deictic expressions, through which readers unconsciously absorb presupposed national identities and affiliations. Li's [6] empirical study similarly demonstrates that different linguistic forms can construct radically divergent versions of "reality". Collectively, these studies suggest that linguistic selection in news discourse can carry ideological meaning and is not merely a neutral technical matter.

Cohesion and coherence are foundational concepts in discourse analysis. Halliday and Hasan [1] divide cohesion into two major categories: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion encompasses reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Conjunction refers to the use of connectives to signal logical relations between clauses or utterances, while reference refers to the use of deictic elements such as pronouns to direct readers to referents either inside or outside the text. Lexical cohesion is subdivided into reiteration and collocation. On this basis, Miao [2] further clarifies the relationship between cohesion and coherence: cohesion pertains to the surface structural relations of a text, whereas coherence concerns the semantic or functional connectivity of a text; cohesion contributes to coherence, but it is not a necessary condition for coherence.

Building on the above literature, this study uses an analytical framework comprising micro-level cohesion and macro-level coherence. At the micro level, it examines lexical cohesion, as well as conjunction and reference within grammatical cohesion. Recurrent expressions and their semantic relations are identified, and selected connectives and referential expressions are interpreted in context. At the macro level, the analysis considers how each text introduces, develops, and assesses its main concern. Reading these levels together helps explain differences of emphasis in the selected texts.

3. Methodology and Corpus

This study examines five publicly available Chinese-language texts published around Trump's state visits to China: two China News Service reports dated November 5 and November 10, 2017, and three Ministry of Foreign Affairs texts dated May 11, May 14, and May 15, 2026 [9]–[13]. The texts cover expectations before the visits, interactions during them, and subsequent assessments. Three criteria guided their selection. First, the texts are Chinese-language originals issued by official or quasi-official sources—the state news agency for 2017 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2026—so that the analysis bears on how the relationship is officially framed rather than on commentary from other outlets. Second, they cluster around the two visits and together cover the period before, during, and after them, so that the two periods can be compared at corresponding stages of the visit cycle. Third, each text addresses the bilateral relationship directly and contains passages dense enough in cohesive devices to support all three research questions.

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The 2017 texts are news reports that incorporate expert comments, while the 2026 texts include a spokesperson's remarks, a report on a welcoming banquet, and a post-visit briefing. This difference in genre may influence lexical choices and the prominence of particular speakers: expert commentary distributes evaluation across named analysts, whereas the official texts attribute assessment to state representatives. Comparisons below are therefore drawn at the level of the cohesive and organizational patterns that both genres share—recurrent lexical items, conjunctions, referential expressions, and overall organization—rather than at the level of any single speaker's wording. The analysis identifies tendencies in these selected texts rather than treating them as statistically representative of all Chinese media coverage.

Lexical cohesion is examined through recurrent and semantically related expressions. Grammatical cohesion is examined through conjunctions and referential expressions in the Chinese originals, with attention to whether a statement belongs to the reporting voice or to a quoted speaker. Macro-level analysis considers how each text introduces its main concern, develops it, and presents an assessment or proposed response. English renderings of Chinese passages in the following section are the author's translations.

4. Results and Discussion

The comparison proceeds from lexical cohesion to conjunction and reference, and then to the organization of the selected texts.

4.1. Lexical Cohesion: Cooperation, Outcomes, and Managed Stability

The 2017 pre-visit report builds a lexical chain around cooperation and the search for common interests. Su Ge urges the two countries to "focus on cooperation and manage differences" (聚焦合作、管控分歧) and presents cooperation as the preferred course for bilateral relations [9]. The two expressions cooperation (合作) and differences (分歧) each recur 8 times in the passage and form the lexical spine of the argument. The reference to differences matters: the report acknowledges difficulties but places their management within a cooperative outlook.

The post-visit report links descriptions of diplomatic interaction, hospitality, and commercial agreements through the expression "success plus" (recurring 3 times) [10]. It reports 34 cooperation projects worth USD 253.5 billion and describes the reception given to the visiting president. Together, these details support a positive assessment of the visit and foreground its visible outcomes.

The 2026 texts retain cooperation while giving greater attention to stability and management. Before the visit, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson connects expanding cooperation and managing differences with the aim of adding stability and certainty to an unsettled world [11]. At the welcoming banquet, Xi Jinping states that the two sides agreed to build a constructive China–U.S. relationship of strategic stability [12]. Wang Yi later explains this proposed relationship through four parallel formulations in which stability (稳定) recurs as the head of each clause: 合作为主的积极稳定 ("positive stability centered on cooperation"), 竞争有度的良性稳定 ("healthy stability with competition within limits"), 分歧可控的常态稳定 ("normal stability with differences under control"), and 和平可期的持久稳定 ("lasting stability with peace in prospect") [13]. The repetition of the same head noun across four consecutive clauses, each distinguished only by its modifier, condenses cooperation, competition, and the management of differences into a single governing concept.

The contrast is therefore a difference in emphasis, not a replacement of cooperation by risk. Cooperation appears in both periods; the selected 2026 texts more explicitly describe the work needed to sustain a stable relationship.

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4.2. Grammatical Cohesion: Conjunction and Reference

In the 2017 post-visit report, a paired Chinese construction equivalent to "both ... and ..." (既……也……) appears in an assessment attributed to Commerce Minister Zhong Shan. It links a record in China–U.S. economic and trade cooperation to a claimed record in the history of global economic and trade cooperation [10]. The two clauses form an additive relation: the second extends the significance of the first. Conditional reasoning is not unique to 2026; the pre-visit report also considers resolving problems through consultation: 如果能以磋商方式解决问题，这将是好事 (it is a good thing if problems can be resolved through consultation) [9].

Contrastive and conditional relations are prominent in selected 2026 passages. Wang Yi acknowledges competition between major countries but rejects defining the entire relationship by competition: 大国之间存在竞争不足为奇，但不能以竞争来定义全部中美关系 ("competition between major countries is not surprising, but it cannot define the whole relationship") [13]. In a passage concerning Taiwan, he contrasts the possibility of overall stability if the issue is handled well with the risk of conflict if it is handled badly: 处理好了，两国关系就能保持总体稳定……处理不好，两国就会碰撞甚至冲突 ("handled well, the relationship can remain generally stable … handled badly, the two countries will clash or even come into conflict") [13]. The parallel structure expresses a conditional relation without an explicit Chinese equivalent of "if". These examples illustrate different rhetorical functions; they do not establish a corpus-wide difference in the frequency of conjunction types.

Both periods use expressions that present the countries as participants in a shared relationship, including "the two leaders" (两国元首) and "both sides" (双方). The 2026 texts also name China and the United States separately when describing particular positions (e.g., 中方愿同美方一道…… China is willing to work with the U.S. ...) [11], [13] . The "we" (我们) in Xi Jinping's reported statement belongs to the quoted speaker, rather than to the journalist's narrative voice (我们一致认为…… We agree that..., 我们同意构建中美建设性战略稳定关系 We agree to build a constructive China-U.S. relationship of strategic stability) [12]. The examples therefore do not support a categorical shift from collective to separate reference.

4.3. Macro-level Coherence: Outcomes and the Conditions for Stability

The 2017 pre-visit report begins with expectations for the visit (e.g. injecting new and strong impetus), discusses areas of disagreement through expert comments, and returns to opportunities for cooperation (e.g., seeking convergence of interests) [9]. The post-visit report moves through interactions and reception details (e.g., welcoming ceremony, Forbidden City tour, Acappella performance, performance of *The Star-Spangled Banner*) to commercial agreements (e.g., USD 253.5 billion in deals) and an overall positive assessment (e.g., "success+") [10]. Difficulties are acknowledged, but the reports foreground the visit's expected or reported achievements (e.g., stabilizing and consolidating bilateral relations, positive foreign media reports).

The selected 2026 texts make the conditions for stability more explicit. The pre-visit remarks connect the visit with an unsettled international setting and call for cooperation alongside the management of differences (e.g., injecting more stability and certainty into a turbulent world) [11]. The banquet report presents the leaders' stated agreement on constructive strategic stability [12]. The subsequent briefing explains that proposal through four dimensions of stability and discusses the consequences of handling a major issue well or badly [13]. Across these texts, the emphasis develops from a concern with stability to a proposed direction and the conditions for sustaining it.

As Miao [2] argues, coherence depends on meaningful relations and contextual interpretation; cohesive expressions alone cannot establish it. The lexical and grammatical observations above

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help explain the different emphases in these selected texts. They do not, on their own, prove a fundamental change in all Chinese official perceptions of China–U.S. relations.

5. Conclusion

The selected 2017 reports foreground cooperation and the visit's outcomes, while the selected 2026 texts more explicitly connect cooperation with strategic stability and the management of differences. Additive, contrastive, and conditional relations help develop these concerns in context. Both periods use collective references, so the examples do not establish a categorical change in referential form.

This comparison illustrates how cohesion and coherence can be examined together in diplomatic reporting. Its conclusions are limited by the small sample and differences in genre. A larger corpus with consistent selection and counting procedures would be needed to test whether these tendencies extend across wider media coverage.

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