

A Literature Laureate or A Political Stooge?: A Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representations of Mo Yan in the English-speaking World

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Abstract: The reception of modern Chinese literature in the English-speaking world has been marked by obstacles and challenges. Mo Yan, the first Chinese winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, has garnered much praise as his works go under global attention. This study collects the news reports on Mo Yan from 2012 to 2022 and adopts a corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis framework to investigate his representation in the English-speaking world. Specifically, this study builds two sets of comparable corpora: one comprising ten years' worth of news coverage of Mo Yan both domestically and internationally, and the other consisting of three years' worth of news articles on Mo Yan and Kazuo Ishiguro, respectively. An examination of word lists, keyword lists, and concordance lines reveals that the representation of Mo Yan in the English-speaking world is in part political, and the discourse around has shaped him into a political stooge rather than a literature laureate. To be specific, the study discerns a decline in the overall attention directed toward Mo Yan over time with decreasing salience of his political representation. In contrast to the news discourse from the Chinese press and the coverage centered on Kazuo Ishiguro, foreign media tend to portray Mo Yan as a political figure. Such framing serves to reinforce his perceived political alignment rather than highlighting his literary achievements.

Keywords: corpus-based CDA; Mo Yan; Nobel Prize in Literature; political representation; reception of Chinese literature

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1. Introduction

The “going out” of Chinese modern literature, which serves as a microcosm reflecting China’s cultural strategy in the era following the Reform and Opening-up (Gao & Xu 2010: 92, Zhu 2023: 5), has garnered discussion from the perspectives of writers, translators, target readers, sales figures, and other organizations concerned (Geng 2010; Hu 2010; Wu & Gu 2012; Li 2012; Bao 2015). Notably, reception studies such as an investigation into how foreign writers are coated (Xie 2020: 14) provide valuable insights into the current landscape of translated Chinese literature.

The reception of China’s inaugural Nobel laureate in literature, Mo Yan, has catalyzed extensive and contentious debates within the English-speaking world since his accolade in 2012. However, it’s imperative to recognize that media are “not a neutral, common-sensed, or rational mediator of social events, but essentially help reproduce preformulated ideologies” (van Dijk 1988: 11). An examination of news discourse surrounding Mo and his representations can, therefore, offer a glimpse into the foreign recognition of contemporary Chinese literature within English-speaking contexts.

Mo Yan, acclaimed as a leading figure in Chinese literature and a symbol of Chinese cultural identity, has been portrayed in diverse and sometimes conflicting manners across various international contexts, including France, Russia, Japan, America, and Sweden (Zhou & Gao 2013; Li 2013; He 2013; Lin 2015; Wang & Zhang 2018). Previous studies on the overseas reception of Mo Yan mainly adopt qualitative approaches using framing theory (Lu 2011; Ouyang et al. 2014; Jiao 2013; Zhao 2015; Zhang 2015), discourse analysis (Song 2018), van Dijk’s ideology square (Fan & Ding 2013), and Martin & White’s appraisal theory (Shi 2014). However, these studies are limited in scope, primarily focusing on reports from 2012 and featuring a relatively small sample size, with a maximum of 44 news pieces from ten media outlets at most.

To mitigate the potential bias stemming from selective sampling in prior research on Mo Yan’s representations, this study endeavors to scrutinize the coverage of the acclaimed writer in mainstream English-language newspapers from 2012 to 2022. Employing a corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis (corpus-based CDA) approach, the investigation delves into 1,644 news articles referencing Mo Yan, sourced from more than 300 English-language newspapers over the past decade. This research aims to unveil the evolving representations of Mo Yan and the discursive tactics employed to shape them. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following three research questions:

a) What overarching trends characterize the depiction of Mo Yan in English-language media, and have there been discernible shifts in his representations over time?



b) How do the representations of Mo Yan in English-language media within his home country and internationally diverge or converge from 2012 to 2022?

c) What disparities exist in the representation of Mo Yan (2012–2015) versus Kazuo Ishiguro (2017–2020) within the English-speaking world?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a corpus-based critical discourse analysis, an interdisciplinary approach. Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on “how discourse enacts ideology and power, and specifically, how discourse is implicated in creating and sustaining unequal power relationships, disadvantage, and discrimination” (Gillings 2023: 5). It is a further development of Critical Linguistics, also known as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) which takes a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach. In other words, by examining social issues such as class, race, gender, power, and ideology, as well as social mechanisms such as the domains of marriage, family, healthcare, education, and politics, CDA exposes the hidden ideological meanings behind the use of language, revealing how language is used to reproduce the social subject, to construct social realities, and to maintain or challenge existing social mechanisms.

Traditional CDA is qualitative in nature and has advantages in the construction of theoretical models. However, it has been criticized by some scholars for its method of linguistic analysis, arguing that it can merely deal with a small sample of language, where the researcher selects preferred texts to argue his or her own ideological agenda and the texts that are not representative (Koller & Mautner 2004: 225; Partington 2004: 13). In response to the above problems, the corpus-based approach as it is able to deal with large-scale corpus is complementary to traditional CDA, as a good research tool for CDA to “enhance the empirical credibility of the analyses.” (Mautner 2007: 54). Corpus tools can demonstrate phenomena that are not immediately apparent in a given discourse and reveal implicit ideas that the researcher did not expect. (Qian 2010). Since Hardt-Mautner’s (1995) first attempt, corpus-assisted/corpus-based CDA has been increasing day by day (Fairclough 2000; Baker & McEnery 2005; Martin 2006; Qian & Tian 2011). Corpus-based CDA is a “marriage” between corpus methods and CDA. (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008: 8). Currently, this quantitative approach to studying CDA has almost become a “benchmark” (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 11; Gillings 2023) which has been applied in such fields as political discourse (Hardt-Mautner 1995; Flowerdew 1997), gender discourse (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon 2010), racial discourse (Mahmoud & Bahareh 2017), immigration discourse (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008; Calzada Pérez 2023), aging discourse (Gerlinde Mautner 2007; Yu 2019), and others.

There are many methodological similarities between these types of studies, as evidenced by (1) the use of a self-constructed corpus to compare the search results with a more extensive reference corpus; (2) the corpus examined is from the public media, mainly various types of newspapers and magazines in public circulation; (3) they usually examine the word list, keyword list, concordance lines, and collocations (Sinclair 1991), by

analyzing which the typical linguistic patterns and discursive strategies can be seen, revealing the reproduction of specific social groups or identities by public media, and (4) finally combines the analysis with more extensive social, historical, political and cultural contexts to critique the mechanism of the ideology embedded in the reproduction of discourse.

Similarly, this study will also adopt this theoretical framework of corpus-based CDA by examining the word lists, keyword lists, and the concordance lines of the search terms.

3. Data Collection and Selection

The main corpus of this research consists of all texts in English that include the words “Mo Yan” and “Chinese” published from October 2012 to October 2022 and is divided into sub-corpora 1 and 2 according to their sources, while the reference corpus, sub-corpus 4 consists of all texts in English containing the words “Kazuo Ishiguro” published from October 2017 to October 2020, which is to be compared with the sub-corpus 3 of Mo Yan (October 2012 – October 2015). The basic information on the main corpus and sub-corpora is provided below.

Corpora	Period	Sources	Pieces	Tokens	Types
Main Corpus of Mo Yan	Ten years October 2012 to October 2022	340	1,644	718,108	34,526
Sub-Corpus 1 of Mo Yan (Issued by China)	Ten years October 2012 to October 2022	21	651	272,507	14,664
Sub-Corpus 2 of Mo Yan (Issued by Foreign Countries)	Ten years October 2012 to October 2022	319	993	445,601	19,862
Sub-Corpus 3 of Mo Yan	Three years October 2012 to October 2015	336	1,295	578,973	27,259
Sub-Corpus 4 of Kazuo Ishiguro	Three years October 2017 to October 2020	337	1,347	697,326	28,097

Table 1 Basic information about each corpus

All data are collected on LexisNexis in accordance with three selection criteria. First, extraneous information like news date, location, reporter, website, and other redundant information are removed. Second, only the news content highly relevant to the search terms is retained. Third, repetitive or re-posted pieces of news are disregarded.

The rationale of corpus building serves to answer the research questions. In order to provide insights into the changes in Mo Yan’s representation in the English-speaking world, this study collects ten years’ worth of relevant news in English (Chinese presses and foreign presses, respectively) from October 10th, 2012, when Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, to October 2022. Besides highlighting Mo Yan’s literary and political

representation, this study collects three years of data related to Nobel Literature laureate Kazuo Ishiguro as a reference corpus, also starting from his Nobel win. The decision to compare only the first three years is based on the observation that during this period, two laureates have gained the highest levels of attention, as evidenced by the number of news reports.

4. Data Analysis

This section utilizes AntConc 3.5.9 as an analytical tool to generate word lists, keyword lists, and concordance lines, facilitating a comprehensive examination of news coverage surrounding Mo Yan from 2012 to 2022. Initially, an overview of the news landscape pertaining to Mo Yan during this period is provided. Subsequently, keyword lists and word lists are compiled to underscore the prevalence of significant terms, with domestic news coverage of Mo Yan and reports on Kazuo Ishiguro serving as comparative reference corpora. Through an exploration of these linguistic patterns, Mo Yan's distinctive representation can be delineated. Moreover, an analysis of concordance lines will shed light on the discursive strategies employed in shaping Mo Yan's portrayal, encompassing both political and literary dimensions. This integrated approach aims to furnish a coherent understanding of Mo Yan's reception in the English-speaking world over the past decade.

4.1 An overview of news related to Mo Yan spanning from 2012 to 2022

Following Mo Yan's receipt of the Nobel Prize in 2012, his achievement sparks extensive coverage across a multitude of media platforms, including prominent outlets such as *The New York Times* (America), *The Guardian* (Britain), *Canadian Press* (Canada), and *The Straits Times* (Singapore). Over the course of the ten-year period under scrutiny, Mo Yan's representation has undergone notable quantitative and pragmatic shifts.

The name "Mo Yan" is referenced a total of 3,221 times within the main corpus, reflecting its significant association with various literary and political occurrences as shown in the following table.

Time	Big Events	Number of Reports	Number of Foreign Reports
2012	Mo Yan's literature laureate	732	532
	Calling on China to release Liu Xiaobo, a political prisoner		
2013	Compared with the 2013 Nobel Laureate Ms. Munro, Mo Yan is a more controversial choice	257	156
2014	Garcia Marquez's influence on Mo Yan and Chinese literature	180	87
2015	Hugo Award Winner Liu Cixin and Mo Yan as the representatives of Chinese literature	138	63
	Tu Youyou's Nobel prize in Medicine solving China's "Nobel Complex"		

Time	Big Events	Number of Reports	Number of Foreign Reports
2016	Mo Yan's presence as a CPPCC member at the opening ceremony of the fourth session of the 12th CPPCC National Committee	91	29
2017	The release and death of Liu Xiaobo	40	14
2018	Mo Yan and China's Reform and Opening up	68	28
2019–2022	China's cultural exchanges, Mo Yan as a non-European laureate and non-U. S. laureate, and introductions to Mo Yan's works adapted into films	132	36

Table 2 An overview of reports on Mo Yan

Table 2 illustrates various peaks of news reports related to Mo Yan, accompanied by the corresponding number of reports. Over the period spanning from 2012 to 2022, news coverage pertaining to Mo Yan extends beyond literary events, such as his Nobel Prize win and the passing of Garcia Marquez, to encompass political occurrences and figures like the CPPCC's National Committee and the contentious Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. This observation suggests that Mo Yan's portrayal in the English-speaking world transcends mere recognition as an icon of Chinese literature; rather, he is subject to political representation.

Moreover, the analysis indicates that foreign attention to Mo Yan, excluding coverage from China-issued English papers like *China Daily* and *Global Times*, initially focuses on his award and the ensuing political controversy during the first two years. However, subsequent coverage gradually shifts towards associating Mo Yan with broader themes of Chinese literature and cultural evolution, particularly from 2014 onwards.

Indeed, Mo Yan's Nobel Prize initially provoked controversy primarily due to perceived political implications. However, over time, the discourse surrounding Mo Yan and his award has undergone evolution, with a notable shift towards emphasizing the origins and adaptations of his literary works. This shift serves to diminish the impact of the initial political controversy surrounding his accolade. As attention shifts towards Mo Yan's literary contributions and the various adaptations of his works, the political connotations associated with his Nobel Prize gradually fade into the background. This transformation underscores a broader recognition of Mo Yan's artistic merit and the profound cultural significance of his writings, thus shaping a more nuanced understanding of his legacy beyond mere political discourse. Further elucidation of the discursive strategies employed in Mo Yan's representation will be provided in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

4.2 Keyword/Word list analysis

This study compiles English news reports on Mo Yan from a diverse range of over 300 presses, including 21 from China, such as *China Daily* and *Global Times*. While the Chinese media outlets examined in this study constitute a relatively smaller proportion, they contribute a significant volume of reports in English, as evidenced in Table 1. Thus, it is reasonable to compare foreign news (sub-corpus 2) to English news published in China

(sub-corpus 1). In Table 3, a keyword list of foreign news reports on Mo Yan in the English-speaking world is presented. Additionally, to illustrate Mo Yan's ineradicable political representation in the English-speaking world, this section provides two examples with significant intervals between them.

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	495	+346.82	mr
2	848	+325.79	party
3	649	+310.18	communist
4	430	+236.55	Xiaobo
5	1124	+226	Liu
6	809	+217.43	government
7	481	+206.01	peace
8	602	+186.01	state
9	314	+151.29	dissident
10	691	+149.91	political
11	261	+143.65	freedom
12	402	+123.14	censorship
13	1749	+115.77	this
14	332	+101.33	official
15	177	+92.74	prison
16	183	+82.77	authorities
17	141	+80.35	jailed
18	93	+79.63	arrest
19	114	+77.02	Weiwei
20	102	+75.92	imprisoned

Table 3 Top 20 keywords of sub-corpus 2 with sub-corpus 1 as a reference sorted by keyness

Apart from honorific titles like men, mr, and deixis, the top 20 keywords of Mo Yan's reports can be categorized into three groups:

(1) Associating Mo Yan with dissidents: Xiaobo; Liu; government; peace; state; dissident; official; prison; authorities; jailed; arrest; Weiwei; imprisoned

Example 1:

But his [Mo Yan's] award is not without controversy. Although Mr Mo is the first Chinese citizen to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 2010 to Liu Xiaobo – a Chinese dissident currently serving a long prison sentence and whose wife has been under illegal house arrest for two years.

—*Times*. October 11th, 2012.

Example 2:

When the Chinese author Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, the response was

decidedly mixed. The Chinese government and state-run media outlets were euphoric ... But a number of prominent intellectuals and Chinese dissidents, such as the artist Ai Weiwei, were horrified. They noted Mo's silence on the fate of Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned Chinese writer and activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize two years earlier and was represented during the ceremony in Stockholm by an empty chair.

—*New Statesman*. October 23rd, 2022.

Example 1 and Example 2 above are excerpted from foreign presses' reports on Mo Yan in 2012 and 2022. Regardless of the changes of time, both of them endeavor to shift the public's attention from Mo Yan's literature prize and the progress of Chinese literature to China's domestic affairs. They capitalize on Mo Yan's win and associate him with dissident Liu Xiaobo's win of the Nobel Peace Prize, portraying Mo Yan not as a great writer but as a political pawn. By calling on the release of dissidents, these foreign presses stir controversy and discursively set a political trap for China and the audience.

(2) Mo Yan as a CPC member: party; communist; political

Example 3:

Mr Mo is a Communist party member and former soldier in the People's Liberation Army. As vice-chairman of the government's China Writers' Association he holds a semi-official role in the Chinese political system ... He has come in for strident criticism for his refusal to acknowledge or discuss the award to Mr Liu, who has been imprisoned, and for his public boycott of the 2010 Frankfurt book fair because of the presence of Chinese dissident writers. Mr Englund dismissed the notion that there was anything politically suspect about the choice of Mr Mo. "This is a literary prize, and it is given on literary merit alone," he said.

—*Financial Times*. October 11th, 2012.

Example 4:

Should he be chosen, the prize's political connotation would become a hot topic once anew, after 2012 laureate Mo Yan received substantial criticism for being too loyal to the Communist Party. Yan's relations with the government have been somewhat paradoxical, as he remains a member of the party despite the de facto ban on his books.

—*The Duke Chronicle*. December 16th, 2018.

These two examples are excerpted to showcase the emphasis on Mo Yan's political identity as a member of the Communist Party of China. In general, reports on the Nobel Literature Prize mainly focus on the writer's style, work, and global contributions. In comparison, his identity as a party member has been frequently referenced, as seen by the prominence of keywords like "party" and "communist". Besides, while Example 3

acknowledged that the Swedish Academy's choice is apolitical, his win has been consistently associated with his political identity. Therefore, the media in the English-speaking world endeavor to highlight his political representation by describing his political conviction as "too loyal".

(3) Discussion on literary freedom in China: freedom; censorship

Example 5:

In comments to the press last week, Mr. Mo, who is vice president of the Communist Party-backed Chinese Writers' Association, avoided any mention of Mr. Liu. He has refused to join an international appeal for Mr. Liu's release. And Mr. Mo defended China's policies of censorship, likening them to airport security.

—*Sarasota Herald Tribune* (Florida). December 10th, 2012.

Example 6:

Media coverage also plays a major role in the reception of the literary work, as the example of Chinese author Mo Yan. The decision to award him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 was criticized by many observers, who felt that Mo Yan was not committed to freedom of expression in China strongly enough and that he seemed to avoid confronting the Chinese government.

—*Newswire*. December 11th, 2019.

Examples 5 and 6 are excerpted to illustrate the context in which keywords like freedom and censorship appeared. It seems that the critics of censorship in China are often linked to literary creation, but the foreign presses tend to portray Mo Yan as a rebel and fabricate conflict between him and China, as evidenced by Example 6. In this way, Mo Yan is also perceived as an attack against China, despite his own assertion that literary censorship in China is akin to necessary airport security checks, as depicted in Example 5.

To summarize, these three keyword groups, the association with dissidents, his political conviction, and the discussion on censorship, are all in essence linked with Mo Yan's political representation, discursively fabricating his rebellious image and emphasizing his political identity and China's domestic affairs, instead of attaching importance to Mo Yan's literary representation which he as a Noble laureate deserves.

The above compares the English news at home and abroad by generating a keyword list to illustrate foreign presses' emphasis on Mo Yan's political representation. In addition, to suggest their discursive strategies in detail, Table 4 presents the word lists of Mo Yan's news from 2012 to 2015 (sub-corpus 3) and the Nobel Literature Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro's news from 2017 to 2020 (sub-corpus 4). To highlight their differences, this study keeps different words or the same words in different categories and removes function words like articles, pronouns, possessive forms, and coordinating conjunctions.

	Sub-corpus 3 (Mo Yan)	Sub-corpus 4 (Ishiguro)
Basic information about the laureates	Mo Chinese Yan name Gaomi speak Shandong Guan	Ishiguro Kazuo English British
Adaptation and transmission of their literary works	Red sorghum culture film English Zhang translated family language tales real Hong folk fiction rural Yuan translation Japanese director hallucinatory village child realism critics	film storyfiction British black love Covid death John Metha class digital Let expressive series pandemic Grant
Political activities	Liu government party political communist state cultural peace censorship Xiaobo dissident Mao death freedom politics criticism Gao policy critics	

Table 4 Differences in the Top 300 words of Mo Yan and Kazuo Ishiguro sorted by frequency

In general, both Nobel winners, Mo Yan and Kazuo Ishiguro, received continuous attention three years after their win. Their basic information and their famous and recent works are both frequently mentioned in the news reports. Discursive differences that highlight Mo Yan’s political representation, however, lie in the following three aspects:

- (1) Excessive reports on his political activities

Example 7:

Among the complaints leveled at Mo is his participation in a project to commemorate a speech by Chairman Mao Zedong, his apparent support of some state policies and an alleged failure to use his influence to speak up for political prisoners and dissidents. “On the political front, he is singing the same tune with an undemocratic regime,” prominent rights lawyer Teng Biao said before the award. “I think for him to win the Nobel Prize for literature is inappropriate.”

—*Deutsche Welle World*. October 11th, 2012.

Example 8:

Thousands of proposals on the future of China are debated since yesterday at the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the government’s highest advisory body but lacking real power, and which was inaugurated by the country’s president, Xi Jinping, in the Great Palace of the People of Beijing... The CPPCC, composed of more than 2,000 members from the military, academic, business, religious, cultural or sports fields, appointed with honorific character, cannot pass laws, but tries to represent the whole of Chinese society, and among the participants. They include personalities such as the Nobel Prize for Literature Mo Yan and the actor Jackie Chan.

—*CE Noticias Financieras English*. March 4th, 2019.

First, as a well-known Chinese writer, Mo Yan's political engagements have received excessive attention from the Western media, as exemplified by the two examples above. Mo Yan's involvement in government initiatives and his presence at official meetings pique the interest of the English-speaking world, a phenomenon less common among other literature laureates. In this sense, Mo Yan's name transcends being merely an icon of Chinese literature. Despite his Nobel Prize accolade, discourse on Mo Yan persists within political contexts.

(2) Fabricating the origin of Mo Yan's pen name:

Example 9:

Mo Yan is a pen name, and it means: Don't Speak. And he said he took on that name because when he was growing up during the Cultural Revolution, his parents told him not to speak or to say what he really thought outside of his home. And he says that's very ironic because he's speaking all the time.

—*NPR Morning Edition*. October 11th, 2012.

Example 10:

Perhaps by keeping his settings rural and placing his work in times before the Cultural Revolution, Yan was trying not to offend anyone. But there are also numerous exceptions to this in his work. Moreover, the man's adoption of the name 'Mo Yan' (Guan Moye was his real name) suggests a more complicated relationship with the powers-that-be. Mo Yan means 'Don't speak.' That's a gesture, right?

—*New Indian Press*. April 26th, 2016.

Second, Mo Yan as a pen name attracts international attention, and its origin has been distorted and associated with politics. In Examples 9 and 10, the pen name of "Mo Yan" is erroneously attributed to his suffering during China's Cultural Revolution and is even misinterpreted as a symbolic "gesture" against political oppression. However, the reality is that Mo Yan is adopted as a pseudonym for two reasons: firstly, as his mother's desire for him to be a contemplative instead of a talkative person; and secondly, due to the homophonic resemblance to his name "Moye". The distorted explanation indicates that Mo Yan is against China's policies and could wrongly paint him as a dissident similar to Liu Xiaobo, aligning him with anti-China sentiments.

(3) Misleading representations of China: stressing story genres and backgrounds

Example 11:

I would like to bring to the reader's attention that this does not mean that the work of Mo Yan has never been critical of the Chinese government. If you read his 2009 work *Frog*, you will come to know the powerful description of the horrors of the family planning campaign. In another of his work in 1992, *Republic of Wine*, he wrote about the drinking culture and the corruption feeding at all levels of government. Sometimes, he did

face criticism from some quarters for not speaking out against censorship forcefully. But it should be noted that his criticism of the government was not enough but at least he did raise his dissent in some of his work.

—*Youth Ki Awaaz*. October 19th, 2012.

Example 12:

FROG, by Mo Yan. Translated by Howard Goldblatt. In rural China, a respected midwife who was humiliated during the Cultural Revolution chooses to demonstrate her political loyalty by ruthlessly carrying out the government’s draconian one-child policy. The author, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, depicts the horrors of the Chinese Communist Party and its devotees in this novel.

—*The New York Times*. February 21st, 2016.

Third, when it comes to describing the background of Mo Yan’s works, these news stories tend to mix the fictional settings or the past with the status quo of China. Despite Mo Yan’s magical realism, his depiction of reality cannot be equated with reality. In Example 11, Mo Yan’s critical thinking in his works is misconstrued as criticism of the Chinese government, leading the audience to believe that there are inherent flaws within China, and that Mo Yan is actively combating the Chinese government. In example 12, the technique of realism is replaced by “the real,” implying to readers that the fiction mirrors actual events in China, as seen in the change of tense, from “was” to “depicts the horrors.” In this way, the English-speaking world conducts a temporal and spatial framing in which the fictional world is a parallel of China’s contemporary conditions.

To sum up, as seen in the keyword list analysis and the comparison between the wordlists of Mo Yan and Kazuo Ishiguro’s news coverage, this study reveals that the representation of Mo Yan in the English-speaking world is brimmed with political elements. News of Mo Yan, from his Nobel win to the subsequent introductions to his works and activities, is consistently intertwined with his party affiliation and political events, and even the distortion of his pen name. All these elements shape the reports on Mo Yan into a form of political discourse.

4.3 Collocates and concordance analysis

To investigate the representation of Mo Yan, this study selects “Mo” and “Ishiguro”, respectively, as nodal points and generates their collocates and concordance lines. The following table presents the differences in the Top 200 collocates of Mo and Ishiguro and categorizes them into four groups.

	Sub-corpus 3	Sub-corpus 4
Basic information about the laureates	Chinese china name mo pen guan contemporary communist gaomi speak hometown Stockholm Shandong moye became province vice history association	Kazuo British Japanese japan Nagasaki English selection moved booker committee

Other Names	Liu Goldblatt Xiaobo	Danius Kafka Dylan Stevens
Basic information about their works	realism hallucinatory red sorghum real frog tales historical popular translated stories reality	never let great fiction story Britain themes return remains day moment introduced associated literary characters buried war memory London connection film early creates giant undercurrent reality cold butler honour family mix emotional
Political activities	Beijing people media social news censorship government state party political official speech member criticism national freedom committee citizen	

Table 5 Differences in the top 200 collocates (5L to 5R) of Mo Yan and Kazuo Ishiguro

Table 5 clearly illustrates the differences between the introduction to Mo Yan and to Ishiguro in the English-speaking world. News reports in the first three years after their wins are supposed to mainly focus on their awards and works, as seen in sub-corpus 4. News of Kazuo Ishiguro mentions a great number of his works, such as *Never Let Me Go*, *The Remains of the Day*, and *The Buried Giant*, characters like Butler Stevens, and other literati like Bob Dylan and Kafka, with no political activities involved. In comparison, Mo Yan is less associated with his works and the characters he created. Instead, the names frequently mentioned alongside his are “Liu Xiaobo” and “Goldblatt,” a dissident and a translator, respectively, and are often mentioned in a political context. Therefore, the representation of Mo Yan diverges greatly from a literature laureate who should be typically associated with his works and character, as exemplified by Kazuo Ishiguro, and instead, Mo Yan’s portrayal is highly intertwined with political icons.

Table 6 below compares the concordance lines of sub-corpora 3 and 4. It is found that apart from the normal patterns, such as the Nobel laureate, Chinese writer, and the Japanese-born British novelist, the concordance lines introducing Mo Yan’s identities and his win are charged with political comments, while Kazuo Ishiguro’s depiction is merely associated with his writing style, famous works, and praises for his literary performance.

	Sub-corpus 3	Sub-corpus 4
Clauses and compositions reflecting the laureate’s identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Communist Party favorite a CPPCC member a party member a cuddly Chinese Communist Party puppet a longstanding member of the ruling Communist Party a man who has no principles an officially sanctioned writer a Chinese who is not a critic of the authoritarian government a scathing critique of the politics of China’s only son sweetened with magical Asian realism first Chinese citizen political stooge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has been enjoying a sharp uptick in book sales in South Korea is best known for his novel <i>The Remains of the Day</i> known for his spare elliptical prose style and his inventive subversion of literary genres

	Sub-corpus 3	Sub-corpus 4
Description of the laureate's win	unexpected, overenjoyed and scared complete injustice a catastrophe incredibly upsetting a slap in the face won sweeping courage an insult to Lu Xun a breakthrough a fairy tale deep-seated insecurities	delighted inventive applauded surprised amazing will encourage good and peace

Table 6 Concordance lines of Mo and Ishiguro

As it is shown above, the description of Mo Yan and his win is surrounded by negative prosody, such as political stooge and complete injustice. In comparison, Ishiguro's win is overwhelmingly positive, with his introduction emphasizing his masterpiece, *The Remains of the Day*, instead of focusing on his political identity, as in the case of Mo Yan as a CPPCC member.

Example 13:

I think it's a complete injustice that Mahasweta Devi has not won the Prize yet, given that people like Yo Man, sorry, Mo Yan, a cuddly Chinese Communist Party puppet, has won (2012).

—*Mail Online*. October 11th, 2014.

Example 14:

Herta Mueller, the 2009 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, says the choice to give this year's award to Mo Yan is a "catastrophe" that never should have happened, and accuses the Chinese writer of praising the Asian country's tough censorship laws.

—*The New York Times*. October 23rd, 2014.

Examples 13 and 14 are excerpted from *Mail Online* from England and *The New York Times* from America. Both express a negative attitude toward Mo Yan's win and his identity, a cuddly CCP member who appraises censorship. Although their criticism is presented in an indirect way, they quote from other literature laureates to show the credibility of their views, shaping Mo Yan as a political stooge instead of an inventive writer like Kazuo Ishiguro, whose win is worth celebrating.

Besides, the image of Mo Yan has also undergone a subtle political change in the English-speaking world, as evidenced by the following concordance lines.

Example 15:

Mo Yan, the new Nobel laureate who strenuously avoided antagonizing the Communist Party during much of his literary career, stepped into a political minefield on Friday by calling for the release of Liu Xiaobo,



the imprisoned writer and fellow Nobel winner who is serving an 11-year sentence for subversion.

—*The New York Times*. October 13th, 2012.

Example 16:

Along with Mo Yan, perhaps the most famous example, many Chinese writers appear to be avoiding controversial subjects. But if those topics don't really incur the wrath of the government, why are these authors censoring themselves at all? In fact, the social cohesiveness of the literary establishment, rooted in traditional Chinese attitudes toward authority, is far more corrosive to Chinese writers' artistic independence than the state itself.

—*The New York Times*. June. 17th, 2015.

Example 17:

In the novel *Frog* by Mo Yan, the first Chinese citizen to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, the main character imposes a reign of terror involving the compulsory implantation of IUDs and tries to catch women who surreptitiously remove them.

—*The New York Times*. January. 7th, 2017.

The three examples cited above are all extracted from *The New York Times*, spanning from 2012 to 2017, providing insights into the evolving representation of Mo Yan over time. Example 15 portrays Mo Yan as a courageous figure willing to confront criticism and advocate for dissidents, as evidenced by the depiction of him "stepping into the political minefield". Conversely, Example 16 portrays him as politically timid or even complicit, particularly following his refusal to advocate for the release of Liu Xiaobo, suggesting tacit support for oppressive regimes. Five years after his Nobel win, there is a noticeable decline in the political representation of Mo Yan, as demonstrated in section 4. 1, with discourse shifting from political commentary to literary discussions, exemplified by the reference to his work *Frog* in Example 17.

In summary, the concordance analysis indicates that unlike laureate Kazuo Ishiguro, Mo Yan's literary merit has been overshadowed by unfair political criticism. However, these discursive strategies demonstrate a downward trajectory, which could be attributed to either a growing interest in Mo Yan's literary works or a waning focus on Mo Yan himself.

5. Conclusion

For Chinese literature and humanities scholarship to go global, it must first succeed in going English-

speaking (Wang 2023, p. 107). Medio-translatology asserts the importance of scrutinizing the portrayal of foreign writers in translations, a factor crucial in facilitating the reception of foreign literature. Likewise, this study underscores the significance of examining Mo Yan's representations, particularly given his distinction as China's inaugural Nobel laureate. Employing the theoretical framework of corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research conducts a comprehensive analysis of news discourse surrounding Mo Yan in the English-speaking world, utilizing word lists, keyword lists, and concordance analyses to elucidate major findings.

Firstly, the study notes a decline in media coverage of Mo Yan within the 2012 – 2022 timeframe, particularly evident in coverage from foreign presses, indicative of diminishing interest in his work. However, a discernible trend emerges toward objective recognition of his literary contributions, presenting an opportunity for the media to construct a positive image of China by highlighting his achievements. Consequently, the reception of Mo Yan and the broader role of Chinese literature globally merit further examination and clarification.

Secondly, comparative analysis between domestic and foreign news reveals politically charged keywords in Mo Yan's discourse, often linked to events such as the release of Liu Xiaobo, his political beliefs, and China's policies. Moreover, foreign media's misinterpretations of Mo Yan's pen name and misrepresentations of his writing style contribute to distortions in the representation of both Mo Yan and Chinese literature.

Thirdly, in contrast to literature laureate Kazuo Ishiguro, the semantic prosody surrounding Mo Yan and his Nobel win tends to be predominantly negative, depicting him as a political puppet and characterizing his win as unexpected and undeserved.

In conclusion, the examination highlights the intertwining of Mo Yan's representation with political discourse in the English-speaking world from 2012 to 2022. This insight offers valuable perspectives on the dynamics of constructing and disseminating Chinese literature and culture in English-speaking contexts, as well as navigating initiatives and discourse power within this sphere.

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