

Analysis of the Harmonious Discourse of Publicity Documentary *Seasons of China* Based on Transitivity System

WANG Ming-qi, XU Xiao-ran, ZHOU Hong-hong

School of Language and Communication Studies, Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing, 100044 China

Publicity documentaries play an important role in shaping the image of one country during the international communication. *Seasons of China* is a publicity documentary introducing the traditional Chinese culture 24 solar terms. Under the guidance of the framework of Harmonious Discourse Analysis, this thesis uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the harmonious discourse of this documentary based on the transitivity system. The research finds that the discourse of *Seasons of China* conveys the China's ecological concept of respecting, following and protecting the nature, while telling the stories of Chinese traditional culture 24 solar terms, highlighting the image of China as a responsible country for ecological civilization construction.

Keywords: publicity documentary, *Seasons of China*, Harmonious Discourse Analysis, national ecological image

Introduction

Publicity documentaries are an important way to shape and spread the image of a country, influencing the public awareness of the country. *Seasons of China* is a large-scale publicity documentary produced by China Xinhua News Network Corporation, focusing on the Chinese traditional culture—the 24 solar terms and related folklore activities. The documentary begins airing on February 4, 2019, the Beginning of Spring, with one episode for each solar term, and finishes airing on January 4, 2020, the day of Major Cold. The host of the documentary is Dominic Johnson-Hill, whose Chinese name is Jiang Senhai. He is a British with many years of experience in China, who travels to 24 Chinese provinces and cities to experience different folk cultures during the different solar terms.

The 24 solar terms, as one of the traditional Chinese cultures, were listed as intangible cultural heritage in 2016. The 24 solar terms are a product of Chinese farming culture and also a summary of the seasons and weather conditions accumulated by the ancients over the years. It embodies the traditional Chinese philosophy of acting according to the time and the Chinese nation's ecological concept of respecting nature, responding to nature and protecting nature, providing some guidance for today's ecological awareness.

WANG Ming-qi, graduate student, School of Language and Communication Studies, Beijing Jiaotong University, research field: discourse analysis, social linguistics.

XU Xiao-ran, graduate student, School of Language and Communication Studies, Beijing Jiaotong University, research field: functional linguistics.

ZHOU Hong-hong, professor, doctor, School of Language and Communication Studies, Beijing Jiaotong University, research field: discourse analysis, social linguistics.

HDA is proposed in the specific context of China, relying on the Chinese development background and inheriting Chinese philosophical concept. This thesis presents the application of HDA in the publicity documentary *Seasons of China* and to explore the linguistic features of this documentary from the perspective of the Transitivity System of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), thus interpreting the ecological concept and image of China embedded in the discourse. On the one hand, this thesis expects to expand the applicability of harmonious discourse analysis to different discourse with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, it also aims to explore the path of harmonious discourse for the international communication of Chinese traditional culture.

Literature Review

As people are concerned about ecological issues, ecolinguistics has also emerged (Huang & Zhao, 2017, p. 586). While under the Chinese context, the discussion of issues about ecolinguistics cannot be separated from the traditional Chinese philosophy of unity between man and nature (Huang, 2018, p. 40).

Based on ecological discourse analysis, upholding the traditional Chinese philosophical thought and the Chinese reality, Huang Guowen (2016, p. 10) proposed Harmonious Discourse Analysis (henceafter HDA), aiming to promote a harmonious relationship between human and nature, language and ecology. Huang (2017, p. 880) put forward one basic assumption and three principles of HDA and constructed a framework for HDA and explored the applicability of the framework through case studies (Zhao & Huang, 2021, p. 44). Since HDA was proposed, some scholars have applied it into different types of discourse, such as new discourse (Liu, 2019; Zhao, 2022) and ecological civilization construction discourse (Yang, 2022). Some scholars also interpreted it from the Appraisal Theory (Sun & Yang, 2020).

At present, few scholars have explored the application of HDA to the publicity documentaries. Inspired by Liao Yajun and Lu Zhijun (2022), this thesis aims to present the application of HDA in the publicity documentary *Seasons of China* from the perspective of the Transitivity System of SFL.

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis of this paper are HDA and The Transitivity SFL. This part mainly includes one assumption and three principles of HDA. And how HDA is constructed under the framework of SFL is also introduced. Meanwhile, one aspect of SFL is chosen to illustrate the HDA. Thus, the three components of the Transitivity System are introduced.

Harmonious Discourse Analysis

HDA is proposed in the specific context of China, relying on the Chinese development background and inheriting Chinese philosophical concept. Huang Guowen (2017) put forward one assumption (human-orientedness) and three principles (Conscience Principle, Proximity Principle and Regulation Principle). Human-orientedness puts emphasis on people. At the macro level, “people” refers to the people as a group; at a micro level, “people” refers to specific groups in specific contexts. Under the assumption of human-orientedness, the three principles are closely related to people’s behaviors and thoughts. Conscience Principle refers to man’s ecological conscience of love and reverence for nature, which manifests itself as value judgment of ecological reality and ultimately leads to ecological behavior. Proximity Principle is a concrete manifestation of human-orientedness, which manifests itself as the closeness of human-based relationships between man and

others, other animals, natural resources and the environment. Regulation Principle is a qualification of human-orientedness, which qualifies human behavior at three levels: state, association and individual, and emphasizes human responsibility for themselves, others, society and the ecological environment. HDA is theoretically based on SFL. In the framework of Huang Guowen (2021), HDA mainly involves field, tenor and mode, which are mainly constructed through the transitivity system, modality and mood, the appraisal theory, theme structure and so on.

The Transitivity System of SFL

The transitivity system is a semantic system that divides what people see, hear and do in the real world into several “process”, i.e., the experience is categorized through grammar and the “participants” and “circumstances” associated with the processes are identified. Thus, a process consists of three components: the process itself, participants in the process and circumstances associated with the process (Halliday, 1994). According to Halliday (1994), the transitivity system can divide human experience into six processes: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process. And each process has particular participants systematically associated with it, such as actor and goal in the material process. Circumstance is to complement the information expressed by the process and participant and is syntactically equivalent to adverbial, such as extent, location, manner, cause and so on.

Research Methodology

Taking the publicity documentary *Seasons of China* as research materials and using UAM Corpus Tool 6.2, a transitivity labeling tool to annotate the transitivity of the corpus, this thesis uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct the HDA of this documentary based on transitivity system. It aims to answer the following questions: (1) what linguistic features does the discourse of *Seasons of China* present under the HDA analytical framework? (2) what ecological concepts and images of China do these linguistic features construct?

Corpus Collection

The corpus selected in this thesis is from the publicity documentary *Seasons of China* produced by CNC. This documentary consists of 24 episodes and is narrated in English with both English and Chinese subtitles. Each episode is 20 minutes long and the title of each is the name of one solar term. In this thesis, the English subtitles of the whole documentary are selected to establish a corpus, with the total number of words of 50,004.

Corpus Annotation and Statistics

This thesis uses UAM Corpus Tool 6.2 to annotate the transitivity of the discourse. This corpus labeling software has the function of extracting separately processes, participants and circumstances and it can also count the frequency and proportion of each grammatical component in the transitivity system, based on which the distribution and semantic features of transitivity of the discourse can be analyzed.

The annotation scheme is based on Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994). As shown in Figure 1, the annotation of processes includes material process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, behavioral process and existential process. As for the participants of the processes, the participants of the material process include actor, goal and range; the participants of the mental process include sensor and phenomenon; the

participants of the verbal process include sayer, receiver, verbiage and target; the participants of the relational process include carrier, attribute, identified and identifier; the participant of the behavioral process includes behavior; the participant of the existential process includes existent. And the circumstances cover extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, angle and matter.

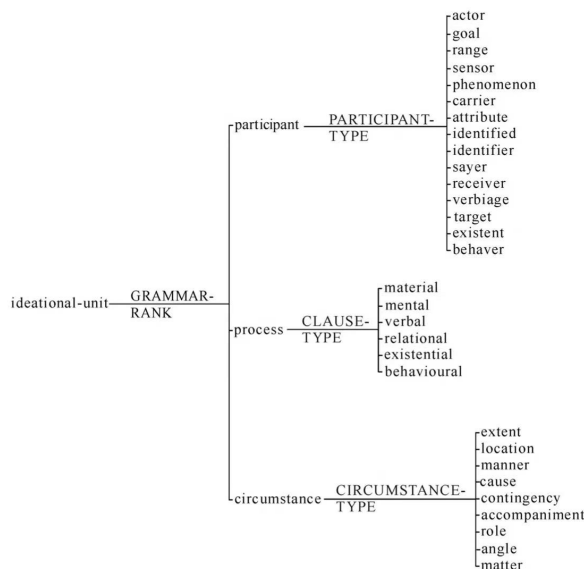


Figure 1. The Transitivity Annotation Scheme (He & Wei, 2017, p. 598).

Results and Discussion

Transitivity Features of the Discourse

The distribution of participants

Participant is one of the core elements of the transitivity system. According to Halliday (1994, p. 12), it includes 13 different types of participants in the transitivity system. The results of participant numbers are presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1.

The Distribution of Participants

Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Actor	2535	27.76%
Goal	2434	26.66%
Range	59	0.65%
Sensor	243	2.66%
Phenomenon	170	1.86%
Carrier	1648	18.05%
Attribute	1565	17.14%
Identified	40	0.44%
Identifier	36	0.40%
Sayer	87	0.95%
Receiver	56	0.61%
Verbiage	96	1.05%
Target	5	0.05%

Existent	149	1.63%
Behaver	8	0.09%
Total	9131	100%

As the figures in the Table 1 show, the participants show up 9131 times in the whole discourse. And actor, goal, carrier and attribute are the most frequent participants, the frequency of which is much higher than other participants. Among the participants, actor shows up 2435 times, accounting for 27.76%; then goal shows up 2434 times, accounting for 26.66%. Both actor and goal belong to the participants of material process, so it can be seen that the participants of material process occupy the largest proportion. Thus, the discourse of this documentary tends to use participants of material process to present the events related to the 24 solar terms. Besides, carrier shows up 1648 times, accounting for 18.05% and attribute shows up 1565 times, accounting for 17.14%. Both carrier and attribute belong to the attributive mode of the relational process, which assigns some quality to some entity. The participants of the relational process occupy the second largest proportion. It shows that there exists much discourse describing the quality or characteristics of things in *Seasons of China*.

The distribution of processes

Halliday (1994) maintains that the world of experience consists of “going-on”—happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. And the transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types. In this discourse, the distribution of process types can be shown in the following Table 2.

Table 2
The Distribution of Processes

Types of Process	Frequency	Percentage
Material process	3822	61.57%
Mental process	289	4.66%
Verbal process	124	2.00%
Relational process	1797	28.94%
Behavioral process	25	0.40%
Existential process	151	2.43%
Total	6208	100%

According to the result of statistics, material process (3822 times) accounts for 61.57%; relational process (1797 times) accounts for 28.94%; mental process (289 times) accounts for 4.66%; existential process (151 times) accounts for 2.43%; verbal process (124 times) accounts for 2%; behavioral process (25 times) accounts for 0.4%. It can be seen that the discourse is mostly construed by material process and relational process, followed by mental process and existential process and relatively less by verbal process and behavioral process.

The distribution of circumstances

Circumstance in the transitivity system is equivalent to adverbial. It can be typically expressed as adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. Halliday (1994, p. 152) holds that there are totally 9 types of circumstance: extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, angle and matter. Table 3 presents the distribution of circumstances in the discourse. The most frequent types of circumstances are location (995 times), extent (222 times), cause (154 times) and manner (143 times), which account for 85.73% in the whole circumstances. Other types of circumstances only occupy a small proportion with role (91 times) accounting for

5.15%, accompaniment (89 times) accounting for 5.04% and matter (42 times) accounting for 2.38%, followed by contingency (27 times) accounting for 1.53% and angle (3 times) accounting for 0.17%.

Table 3

The Distribution of Circumstances

Types of Circumstances	Frequency	Percentage
Extent	222	12.57%
Location	995	56.34%
Manner	143	8.1%
Cause	154	8.72%
Contingency	27	1.53%
Accompaniment	89	5.04%
Role	91	5.15%
Angle	3	0.17%
Matter	42	2.38%
Total	1766	100%

5.2 Ecological Concepts and Images Constructed by the Discourse

The construction of participants

According to the statistics above, the participants of material process and relational process consist of the largest part of the participants, accounting for 90.45% in the whole discourse. Then through searching the frequencies of these participants, it is found that the most frequent word is “people”. It can be seen that the role and value of “people” make a big difference in the development of 24 solar term.

In this documentary, “people” are not only creators of 24 solar term, but also the inheritors and promoters of this Chinese culture. By observing the astronomy weather, Chinese ancient ancestors summarized the laws and created a calendar that changed according to the times, which was used to guide agricultural production. Meanwhile, they also summarized the different folklore and agricultural activities suitable for different solar terms. Through the transmission from generation to generation, the ecological concept of living with nature contained in 24 solar term culture has been integrated into people’s daily lives.

This is a representative of man and nature living in harmony. While enjoying the wisdom of production and living brought by the solar term, people are also the subject of its formation and development, which epitomizes the human-orientedness assumption of HDA. While human-orientedness doesn’t mean that man is the master of nature. It values the importance of human in the universe (Meng, 2004). Through researching the most frequent ten words in the participants, it is found that these words are “people”, “term”, “year”, “Chinese”, “time”, “life”, “rice”, “water”, “tea” and “scholar”. And these participants can be divided into two categories: human participants and non-human participants (Sun & Guo, 2022, p. 70). The combinative use of human participants and non-human participants is to be acknowledged, because this recognizes the ecological status of both man and nature and creates a positive discourse atmosphere (Cao & Yang, 2022, p. 136). Therefore, this is not only a vivid representation of Chinese ecological concept of unite of man and nature, but also an emphasis of man’s crucial role in handling the relationship between man and nature.

The construction of processes

There are six processes in the transitivity system. The statistics results show that there are significant differences in the use of these six processes. Material process (61.57%), relational process (28.94%) and mental process (4.66%) are the main grammatical resources for constructing the discourse of this documentary, which account for 95.17% totally.

Material process is the process of “doing”, which expresses that some entity “does” something or something may be done “to” some other entity (Halliday, 1994, p. 110). In this discourse, material processes embody the interaction between humans and environment and describe human ecological behaviours in the formation and development of 24 solar terms culture. The high frequency words in the transitivity system are “make” (55 times), “go” (38 times), “have” (34 times), “use” (33 times) and “do” (27 times). These verbs, which indicate doing something or carrying out some activities, reflect the initiative of people during the development of 24 solar terms. For example, people “do” the spring chanting to welcome the arrival of spring; at the beginning of summer, people “have” the Rice Planting Festival; at the arrival of autumn, people “do” the harvesting; in winter, people “make” farming tools for the preparation of the farming of the next year. Different farming practices, food cultures and folk activities have been shaped by different solar terms. The 24 solar terms culture, which has been developed over the centuries, is a reflection of people’s careful observation of the changing patterns of solar terms and their respect for nature, which epitomizes the Proximity Principle of HDA. This creates a harmonious context of respect and care for nature and leads the public to develop an awareness of the protection of the ecological environment.

Relational process is the process of “being”, reflecting the attribute or identifying relationship between things (Halliday, 1994, p. 120). In this documentary discourse, the main markers indicating the relational processes are “have”, “be” and “become”. Some example sentences from the discourse are as follows:

Examples:

- (1) We have a saying known as Glimmering White Dew which refers to this ripening of a golden field.
- (2) Li Bing became an object of veneration and worship.
- (3) For An Hua locals, Guyu is a day of making tea but also of worshipping ancestors.

The use of relational processes clearly illustrates the concepts, attributes, status, etc. associated with the culture of 24 solar terms. Just as the first example shows, the relational process expresses the formation of one traditional proverb during the White Dew solar term. The second example introduces that Li Bing won the respect and worship of people because he found the Dujiangyan water conservancy project according to that episode. The third example shows the customs of An Hua locals during the Guyu. Thus, the use of relational processes in this documentary discourse demonstrates the recognition of people towards the 24 solar term culture, presenting the image of China as a great country which has a profound history of the relationship between the nature and the Chinese people.

Mental process is the process of “sensing”, which represents the process of mental activities such as perception, reaction and cognition (Halliday, 1994, p. 113). High-frequency words used in this documentary to indicate mental processes include “need”, “see”, “think”, “know”, “observe” and so on. These words present people’s mental perception and value orientation towards the nature during the development of solar term culture.

Examples:

(4) Ancient Chinese scholars observed the changing patterns in our natural world.

(5) I think ancient Chinese have rich inner life.

(6) They know that on the day of Guyu, tea-pickers need to hurry to process the new tea leaves.

For instance, these mental processes in the above examples are realized by the words “observe, think, know”, which express the people’s perception of the laws of the nature. Example (4) shows the observation of ancient Chinese scholars on the changing ways of the natural world. Example (5) reflects the perception of 24 solar terms and related ancient customs from the first-person perspective. Example (6) shows people’s inheritance and development of folk activities and culture of 24 solar terms that have been handed down from generation to generation. Furthermore, in addition to expressing people’s perceptions, this also reflects the practical activities that people carry out on the basis of their perception of natural laws. Thus, Regulation Principle in HDA can be shown: with the perception and cognition of the nature, people’s behaviors are restricted, which not only conveys people’s care and love for nature, but also the positive responsibilities of Chinese nation towards the ecological environment.

The construction of circumstances

Halliday (1994, p. 151) regards circumstantial elements as indirect participants and accompanying components of the processes. Location (56.34%), extent (12.57%), cause (8.72%) and manner (8.1%) are the main circumstances used in this documentary discourse, which totally account for 85.73%.

Location occupies the largest proportion of the circumstances. It includes place and time. The typical structure of location is an adverbial group or prepositional phrase. In this discourse, the use of a large amount of location phrases indicates the changing patterns of different solar terms and changing practices according to the changes of time, which is an embodiment of traditional Chinese philosophical thinking “act according to the time”. For example:

(7) In Spring plant just one grain and in Autumn you can harvest ten thousand.

(8) In most parts of China, Qing Ming is about remembering your own family ancestors.

(9) Every year around May 5th, Chinese people welcome in the first summer solar term.

Example (7) shows that different seasons mean different crop growth characteristics, thus indicating different farming methods. Example (8) shows that when it comes to Qing Ming, there is a custom of honoring family ancestors. Example (9) introduces the arrival of a solar term at a specific time. These location phrases point out the background information of processes and indicate a kind of subtle perception of changes of nature, conveying Chinese nation’s ecological concept of following the nature.

The second largest circumstantial element is extent, which includes distance and duration. Generally, the typical structure is a nominal group with quantifier, either definite or indefinite. The use of extent expresses a long-term orientation towards the use of natural conditions (Cao & Yang, 2022, p. 139). The examples of extent can be shown by Example 10-12.

(10) Different soups are consumed during different solar terms playing different roles on physical fitness.

(11) For thousands of years silk and cotton have warmed the backs of Chinese people.

(12) The smell of yellow sand has accompanied civilization through the millennium.

These phrases “during different solar terms”, “for thousands of years” and “through the millennium” indicate a long-term development of the 24 solar term culture, constructing a context that carries a sustainable development. Thus, it reveals the China’s concept of protecting the nature, a vivid image of ecological country which focuses on sustainable development of the nature jumping off the page.

The circumstantial element cause shows up 154 times in the whole discourse, occupying 8.72%. This element represents the reason and purpose for which a process takes place and the entity, typically a person, on whose behalf or for whose sake the action is undertaken (Halliday, 1994, p. 112). The use of cause can clearly illustrate the reasons and consequences of stories related to each solar term. Some examples can be seen below:

Examples:

(13) In order to resist invasions and wild animal attacks, families lived together as clans.

(14) Because of war, over 2,000 years ago, they migrated from central China to the south.

(15) The silver-leafed money is for the dead people.

Example (13) explains the purpose of clan-style living. Example (14) shows the reason why people migrated to the south in 2,000 years ago in China. Example (15) illustrates the concrete usage of silver-leafed money. Through the use of cause, the details about the 24 solar terms can be thoroughly presented to the public. This also gives a clear demonstration of interaction between man and nature, presenting the intimacy of man and nature.

Manner is also an important circumstance in the whole discourse, accounting for 8.1%. It refers to the mean whereby a process takes place or characterizes the process in respect of any variable that makes sense (Halliday, 1994, p. 154). In this discourse, manner totally shows up 143 times. And the most frequent occurring preposition is “with”, which occupies 46.9% of the whole manner circumstantial element.

Examples:

(16) The rice is dyed with natural edible vegetable juices.

(17) Any attempt to quickly get a grasp on a city’s history, culture and customs should start with a visit to a local museum.

(18) The next step is ploughing the rice fields with a buffalo.

As these examples show, the circumstantial element manner tends to express the concrete methods that people created or summarized to do some folklore or farming activities according to different solar terms. This shows the initiative of man to respect the natural laws, an embodiment of China’s ecological concept of respecting the nature.

Circumstances, as accompanying components of the processes, play a major role in the construction of this documentary discourse. As the main circumstance resources used in the discourse, location, extent, cause and manner not only conveys the Chinese traditional philosophy of acting according to the time and emphasis of long-term development but also shows the closeness between man and nature and human’s initiative in dealing with the relationship between man and nature. Thus, this ecological concept also makes people aware of the principles of respecting, following and protecting the nature, which is also an embodiment of Conscience Principle of HDA. On the basis of this kind of awareness, Conscience Principle will guide the public to develop an awareness of ecological protection. This constructs a harmonious Chinese context of respect and care for nature.

Conclusion

Publicity documentary discourse can influence the awareness of the public to the image of China, which makes a great difference in telling Chinese stories and spreading the Chinese wisdom. As a publicity documentary about traditional Chinese culture 24 solar terms, *Seasons of China* not only spreads this great Chinese culture to the abroad, but it also tells the Chinese way of dealing the relationship between man and nature. What's more, Harmonious Discourse Analysis, rooted in traditional Chinese philosophical wisdom, is a new path of ecolinguistics research in specific Chinese context. It emphasizes the human-orientedness assumption and its basic principles are Conscience Principle, Proximity Principle and Regulation Principle. From the structure and use of language, HDA places language in the context of an ecosystem.

Based on the Transitivity System of System Functional Linguistics and the framework of HDA, this thesis analyzes the harmonious discourse of *Seasons of China* from participants, processes and circumstances of the Transitivity System, trying to reveal the linguistic features of this discourse and the ecological concepts or images of China constructed by this discourse. Here are the research findings:

The participants of the material process and relational process are the main participant resources used in the discourse, which also corresponds to the main processes (material process and relational process) used in the process resources. And through the research of frequency words of all the participants, it is found that "people" is the most frequent word and key word of this part. Thus, it conveys the human-orientedness assumption and the crucial role of man in the relationship between man and nature.

In terms of the processes, this discourse tends to use material process, relational process and mental process. The use of material processes reflects the interaction between human and environment, an embodiment of Proximity Principle of HDA. The use of relational processes illustrates the status, attribute and concepts of the 24 solar terms, as well as the recognition of people to this profound Chinese culture. Through the use of mental process, Regulation Principle can be seen by people's perception and cognition of natural laws and their restricted behaviors. Also, the image of China as a responsible ecological country is vividly presented.

For circumstances, these elements location, extent, cause and manner occupy the largest proportion of the whole circumstantial resources. Location expresses the changing practices which corresponds to the changing patterns of solar terms. Thus, it reveals the Chinese ecological concept of following the nature; Extent conveys the China's long-term orientation towards the development of 24 solar term culture and demonstrates the image of China which focuses sustainable development and protects the nature; Cause illustrates the details such as reasons or consequences of the stories about solar term culture, which is a concrete embodiment of the intimacy between man and nature; manner embodies the initiative of people to obey to the natural laws, an expression of respecting the nature.

The harmonious discourse analysis of *Seasons of China* from the perspective of the Transitivity System reveals its unique linguistic features from participants, processes and circumstances. Meanwhile, it conveys China's harmonious ecological philosophy from the human-orientedness assumption, Proximity Principle, Conscience Principle and Regulation Principle and it also constructs the image of China as an eco-friendly country who respects, follows and protects the nature. Furthermore, by revealing the ecological concepts embedded in the 24 solar term culture of China, it also effectively tells the Chinese stories to the public.

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