

# **Institutional Identity Construction of World's First-Class Universities: A Case Study of the Opening Speeches and Official Documents from Peking University and Harvard University**

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The president's speeches and official documents of a university not only embody its cultural spirit and humanistic attainment, but also reflects the institutional identity constructed by the university. Based on discursive strategy of Discourse Historical Approach and intertextuality, this paper makes a contrastive analysis on the texts from the presidents' opening speeches of Peking University and Harvard University in 2021 and documents from relevant official websites. The purpose of the study is to investigate the distinctions and commonalities in identity formation across these two educational institutions across varying cultural contexts. While there may be variances in the cultivation of talents and the pursuit of personal values, the ultimate goal of both is to establish a world-class university that is open, inclusive, innovative, and dynamic. The President of Peking University places considerable emphasis on social responsibility and encourages students to reflect on the past, whereas the President of Harvard University prioritizes personal character and inspires students to consider the future. The differences can be attributed to disparities in time perception, culture, and ideology. This research contributes to enhancing the study of university institutional identity construction and expands the scope and depth of DHA and intertextuality.

*Keywords:* opening speech, first-class university, institutional identity, discourse analysis, Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), intertextuality

In recent years, identity has become a topic of continuous interest across various disciplines. Many researchers widely believe that identity is not inherently fixed, but rather constructed within the context of social constructivism (Hall, 1996). Numerous studies have explored the relationship between discourse strategies and national identity (Bostanci, 2013; Cillia & Wodak, 1999; Enache, 2006), and have also focused on the identity construction in literary works and other media. For instance, Fawole (2019) has analyzed the construction of female identity in novel and Pan (2011) has investigated the role of multimodal metaphors in shaping identity through genre features and emotional orientation of political cartoons. Methodologies employed in identity construction studies have been diverse, encompassing fields such as ecolinguistics, adaptation theory, multimodality, and discourse construction strategies, among others (Li & Xu,

2021; Liu, 2020; Sengupta, 2021; Song, 2022). Additionally, Discourse Historical Analysis has been combined with identity construction in numerous research studies, leading to further advancements in the field (Qiu & Ding, 2022; Zhang & Chang, 2021; Zhao, 2021).

The construction of "institutional identity" plays a crucial role in organizations, and it is also beneficial to their institutional function (Zhang, 2017). The definition of the discourse commercialization of organizations cited by Fairclough (1992) has been introduced to non-profit entities, and this trend has also been observed in higher education discourse. The construction of institutional identity not only impacts the social image of universities, but also creates a distinct sense of identity, making it a key component of a university's institutional discourse system (Chen, 2017). However, limited research has been conducted on the differences in institutional identity construction between universities. Peking University and Harvard University are two top universities recognized by the public, and they have made significant contributions to talent cultivation and the

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modernization of education. The opening ceremony of a university and relevant official documents reflect its spirit and culture, as well as its current situation, which embodies high research value. By employing Discourse Historical Approach and intertextuality discursive strategies, this paper aims to analyze the opening ceremony speeches of Peking University and Harvard University, along with additional material such as President Gong's Message and Admissions at Harvard College from President Larry on official websites, to explore the differences in institutional identity constructions between the two universities. Specifically, the paper aims to address two questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences of institutional identity constructions between the two universities from the perspective of nurturing students?
2. How can institutional identity constructions facilitate high-level education and university administration in line with the changes in the light of globalization?

### Theoretical Framework

#### Discourse Historical Approach

Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) was originally put forward by Ruth Wodak and her team. Its primary objective was to address real-world issues by employing a critical interpretation of text. Wodak (1990) initially developed the theory while studying anti-Semitic stereotyping. The distinguishing feature of the Discourse Historical Approach is that it "integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded" (Wodak, 2009, p. 38). The theory is an interdisciplinary one and is a key research method in the field of critical discourse analysis, along with the Dialectical Relational Approach and the Socio-Cognitive Approach (Li, 2017; Xiang, 2013). According to Wodak, the theory can be divided into three dimensions: having identified the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse; discursive strategies are investigated and linguistic means and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations (as tokens) are examined (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The first dimension refers to establishing the specific content or a topic to be studied, and the second dimension studies a variety of strategies which are applied in different levels of communications and texts. As for the last dimension, it is a perspective that explores linguistic realization forms

and linguistic means at the levels of discourse, sentence and vocabulary (Ji, 2008).

The discourse analysis theory is composed of five distinct strategies. These include nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation. The nomination strategy aims to construct identity by referring to social actors, objects, events, phenomena, and processes. Predication strategy involves the discursive qualification of positive or negative discourse. Within the context of political issues, argumentation strategy explores author's positive and negative attitudes. Perspectivization strategy serves the purpose of conveying attitudes and views through specific reporting and narration. Finally, intensification or mitigation strategy is utilized to either enhance or weaken the illocutionary force. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2014)

#### Intertextuality

During the late 1960s, Julia Kristeva (1980) introduced the concept of intertextuality, which posits that a given text is composed of and transformed from other texts. What she emphasizes is the internal process of textual rearrangement or transformation, and subjects from other discourses will be combined into a new meaningful discourse according to their functions (Xin, 2000). Therefore, the concept of intertextuality enables the examination of the relationships between different texts; numerous scholars have thus proposed different typologies of intertextuality. For example, Kristeva (1980) divided intertextuality into horizontal intertextuality and vertical intertextuality at first, and Fairclough (1992) believed that intertextuality was made up of manifest intertextuality and constitutive intertextuality. Based on combination and development of previous studies on intertextuality, Xin (2008) put forward that intertextuality can be classified into specific intertextuality and generic intertextuality, where specific intertextuality encompasses a range of subcategories including reference, quotation, and literary allusion.

In the context of DHA, intertextuality between different texts is an important content for in-depth discourse analysis (Li, 2017). To sum up, this current study mainly takes nomination strategy and prediction strategy in DHA into consideration as well as the reference and quotation in Xin's classification of intertextuality, and explores the institutional identity constructions of both universities by analyzing the Presidents' speeches and designated documents from official websites.

## Discursive Strategies in Institutional Identity Construction

### Nomination Strategy

The nomination strategy can be effectively implemented using linguistic devices like membership categorization, biological and naturalizing metaphors, and depersonalizing metaphors, etc (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). References serve as indicators of a university's criteria, position, and ideas. Upon analyzing the speeches of the Presidents of two universities, it can be observed that they used the first-person plural pronoun "we" to represent their respective institutions.

#### Example 1

And we both look forward to getting to know you and to hear about your College experience. (Harvard University)

#### Example 2

百年前蔡元培老校长所强调的“教育者，非为已往，非为现在，而专为将来”，一直是我们的办学理念。（北京大学）

A hundred years ago, our president Cai Yuanpei emphasized that "education was not for the past and present, but for the future", and this became our philosophy. (Peking University)

The first-person plural pronoun "we" can be divided into "exclusive we" and "inclusive we" according to whether the listener is included or not (Xu, 2006). All the "we" used in the speech of Harvard are "inclusive we," which can largely shorten the physical and emotional distance between freshmen and the university to a large extent, and enable the students to feel that they are in a big family. The context of Peking University has applied several "exclusive we," which emphasizes what the university needs to be done as a single subject and shows the dominant position of the subject.

Instead of using the words like "our university," "the university" and so on, these two Presidents have also chosen to employ official names.

#### Example 3

If you leave this place with your backs to those who do not share your views, you will have failed to take advantage of one of Harvard's greatest strengths—the diversity and dynamism of our community. (Harvard

University)

#### Example 4

北大为大家提供了开放多元、交叉融合的广阔学术天地，任由大家去探索前沿、激活思想。（北京大学）  
Peking University offers a wide academic world that is open, diverse and interdisciplinary, allowing students to explore the frontiers and activate their ideas. (Peking University)

The use of references can demonstrate the self-reliance and credibility of the university, portraying its unique position in the educational world. Additionally, it provides a sense of reassurance and inspiration for freshmen, instilling them with confidence and drive upon admission to the institution. Evidence of this can be found on official policy documents and in various statements by prominent leaders. For instance, President Gong and President Larry at different institutions have employed distinctive nomination tactics, as highlighted in their respective statements. Ultimately, employing differing nomination strategies has the power to establish a clear distinction between in-groups and out-groups and shape the reader's perception of the subject matter.

### Prediction Strategy

As is mentioned in the DHA theory, the technique of predication involves assigning positive and negative social labels to actors through the implicit and explicit use of predicates, along with evaluative attributions that may conform to stereotypes (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Certain evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits in the speech have influence on the construction of specific identity, which will also give readers a corresponding impression. These conceptualizations have been clarified according to different goals.

#### Example 5

If you leave this place with your backs to those who do not share your views, you will have failed to take advantage of one of Harvard's greatest strengths—the diversity and dynamism of our community. (Harvard University)

#### Example 6

高质量的国际学术交流也是北大的特色和优势。（北京大学）  
High-quality international academic exchanges are also characteristics and strengths of Peking University.

(Peking University)

For Harvard University, the core of its community environment is diverse and dynamic, which reflects that it encourages students to embrace varying perspectives and ideas during the academic exchanges. In contrast, Peking University places a strong emphasis on fostering the high quality of international academic exchanges to broaden students' international horizons, and understand the world and enrich their knowledge systems in learning and research. As a result, both universities highlight the importance of academic exchanges and thought diversity.

When it comes to the COVID-19, both universities have employed positive clause and apposition constructions to further enhance their brand identities.

*Example 7*

Being part of this community—this year in particular—means bearing special responsibility for the health and safety of others. Please, please care for one another, and please, please care for yourself. (Harvard University)

*Example 8*

这让我想起了去年武汉疫情期间，北大援鄂医疗队“90后”青年们在一线抗疫的青春风采。他们不畏艰险，冲锋在前，舍生忘死，日夜坚守在重症病房，为抗疫做出了重要贡献。（北京大学）

This reminds me of the the “post-90s” young people from Peking University’s medical team who were on the front line of the epidemic in Wuhan last year. They made an important contribution to the fight against the epidemic by staying in the intensive care units day and night, rushing ahead and risking their lives. (Peking University)

These words show distinct attitudes from two dimensions: firstly, students have an obligation to tend to their well-being and that of others, exemplified by the President’s call for the same during these exceptional times; secondly, students with the capacity ought to shoulder the duty of combating the outbreak. Without difficulty, the address given by the President of Peking University reveals a conviction and doggedness to triumph over the epidemic from a societal point of view.

The aforementioned assertions find substantiation in the designated documents from official websites, wherein explicit predicates have been employed by both institutions to establish their identities. Peking University, for instance, uses

verbs such as “nurture,” “refine,” “integrate,” “invigorate” and “bolster” to introduce their education system, thereby demonstrating their guiding principles and goals in student cultivation. Similarly, the documents of Harvard University employ verbs like “celebrate” and “nurture” to underscore the significance of individuality on campus.

## Intertextuality in Institutional Identity Construction

### Reference

In the analysis of discourse, the incorporation of reference serves as a notable aspect. In this regard, both Peking University and Harvard University have established their distinct identities with the use of references to individuals. Specifically, the discourse of Peking University highlights many representative and famous people, including President Xi, celebrities who used to serve and teach in Peking University in history, famous scholars from different colleges and foreign professors who are teaching in Peking University. Similarly, Harvard University includes a reference to the celebrated Jewish spiritual icon, Ben Zoma, in its discourse.

*Example 9*

今年7月，习近平主席亲自致贺信，赞扬了学院为推进南南合作发挥了重要作用。（北京大学）

In July this year, President Xi Jinping personally sent a congratulatory letter to our university commending the important role in advancing South-South Cooperation. (Peking University)

*Example 10*

百年前蔡元培老校长所强调的“教育者，非为已往，非为现在，而专为将来”，一直是我们的办学理念。（北京大学）

A hundred years ago, our president Cai Yuanpei emphasized that “education was not for the past and present, but for the future”, and this became our philosophy. (Peking University)

*Example 11*

物理院校友钱绍钧院士在罗布泊基地工作时，住的是临时帐篷和地窝子，生活与工作环境极其恶劣……生命科学学院吕植教授，荣获了第16届全球华人慈善领域最大的公益奖项“爱心奖”。（北京大学）  
Academician Qian Shaojun, an alumnus of the School of Physics, lived in temporary tents when he worked at the Lop Nor base where the living and working environment was extremely harsh...Professor Lv Zhi from the School

of Life Sciences was awarded the “Compassion Award,” the 16th largest charity award in the field of global Chinese philanthropy. (Peking University)

*Example 12*

许多外国专家克服重重困难来到北大，其中包括图灵奖得主、算法及数据结构设计和分析领域的奠基人、82岁的约翰·霍普克罗夫特先生，这学期他将继续为“图灵班”同学授课；还有国际知名的汉学家安乐哲先生，也将继续为本科生讲授“东西方哲学比较”课程。（北京大学）

Many foreign experts have overcome many difficulties to come to Peking University, including Mr. John Edward Hopcroft, 82, winner of A. M. Turing Award and the founder of design and analysis of algorithms and data structures, who will continue to teach the “Turing class” this semester. The internationally renowned sinologist, Mr. An Lezhe, will also continue to teach the course “Comparison of Eastern and Western Philosophy” to undergraduates. (Peking University)

*Example 13*

In the volume, *Ethics of Our Fathers*, Ben Zoma, a scholar, asks three wonderful questions for the ages. (Harvard University)

As a result, reference to people can show some meanings from the authority. Firstly, by referencing President Xi, it instills a sense of pride and acknowledgement from officials and the education community in Peking University’s contribution to advancing South-South Cooperation. Secondly, acknowledging former president Cai Yuanpei and several famous scholars from different colleges, it not only highlights Peking University has a considerable number of dedicated scholars who have made great contributions to specific field, but also shows that it has a succession of novel ideas related to education. Thirdly, by mentioning many foreign professors who have devoted themselves to teaching Chinese students, it shows that this university extensively recruits talented scholars to promote the further development of students’ understandings of the subjects. Additionally, to American students, the reference to Ben Zoma, a renowned historical scholar, it can also show that the President wants students to attach importance to three core points in his speech.

**Quotation**

Apart from reference, incorporating quotations is also commonly utilized in pertinent written works. As an essential

component of intertextuality, it denotes the author’s purpose by employing specific discourse elements. What’s more, employing direct quotations not only substantiates the veracity of the stated words, but also underscores the argument of the context.

*Example 14*

So, who is wise? The Talmud answers, “The person who learns from all people.” (Harvard University)

*Example 15*

Who is mighty? The Talmud answers, “The person who exercises self-control.” (Harvard University)

*Example 16*

So, who is wealthy? The Talmud’s got a great answer for this one as well. “The person who rejoices in his or her portion.” (Harvard University)

Upon a thorough review of the speech delivered by the President of Harvard University, it has been observed that there were only three instances where direct quotations were utilized. As exemplified by the institution’s motto, Harvard University focuses mainly on correct cognition, self-control and self-development. A person who possesses the ability to assimilate diverse perspectives, exercise restraint in the face of temptation, and discern their authentic goals throughout the course of their college journey will inevitably attain a heightened level of cognition and mental acuity.

Different from that of Harvard University, Peking University’s president chooses some words from famous professors who devoted themselves to specific field in his address.

*Example 17*

30余年来，她以非同寻常的毅力开展野外研究工作，足迹遍及祖国的深山密林，为保护濒危野生动物和我国的生物多样性做出了重要贡献。她说，“爱国无须借助华丽的词藻。中国的保护还是要靠我们自己！”（北京大学）

For more than 30 years, she has carried out field research with perseverance and been to isolated forests of our country. She has made great contributions to the protection of endangered wild animals and the biodiversity. She says, “Patriotism doesn’t need fancy words. China’s conservation is still up to us!” (Peking University)

*Example 18*

钱老回忆说，寒冬时外面常常是零下三四十度的低温，但就是在这样的条件下，他仍然坚持在戈壁沙漠工作了长达 25 年。他说，“其他都不重要，重要的是要使每一个数据都精准无误，让祖国和人民放心。”（北京大学）

Qian recalled that it was often as cold as minus 30 to 40 degrees outside in the winter. Although the environment was harsh, he still kept to work in the desert for 25 years. He said, “Nothing was more important than the precision and accuracy of every statistic, and he wanted to reassure the country and people.” (Peking University)

The President of Peking University utilized quotations from notable professors who possess strong senses of responsibility and patriotism, to underscore the institution’s central idea. As a result, the institutional identity becomes evidence-based and authoritative. It seems that the President of Peking University places great value on social responsibility and employs illustrations from past eras to motivate current students. In a word, the act of direct quotation is imperative when evaluating institutional identity formation, as it adds an additional perspective to the discourse.

Different from direct quotation, indirect quotation caters to the content largely rather than the form, and discourse is often used to modify or explain the content of the speech.

#### *Example 19*

As the Supreme Court has recognized many times, race matters in the United States. (Harvard University)

The utilization of indirect quotations by President Larry in designated online documents highlights the importance of race issues and underscores the university’s unwavering commitment to robust admission policies. Similarly, the President of Peking University incorporates indirect quotations in his speeches, which imbue the institution with a distinct identity and subjective influences. These instances of textual reference signify that indirect quotations can effectively shape a positive institutional image in line with the public perceptions.

### **Differences and Causes in Institutional Identity Construction**

According to Chen (2016), the institutional identity construction of university can be analyzed from three dimensions, which include social responsibility, knowledge

transfer and personality development. Under the guidance of nomination strategy, they all build their images as gentle guides and authoritative speakers, and the President of Peking University emphasizes its long history and prominent role in education. When it comes to the prediction strategy, it is found that Peking University usually shows the emphasis on individual contribution to the society as well as calling for students to keep personal development, and Harvard University sheds light on the vital role of student’s individual development. Despite these differences, both presidents recognize the importance of thought diversity and exchanges in achieving institutional goals. At the same time, the intertextuality also provides valid evidences, and enriches the analysis. Moreover, some differences also could be found in the philosophy of nurturing students and personal values that two universities promote to achieve. The President of Peking University encourages students to learn from the history and use it to guide their future practice, while the President of Harvard University fosters students to have long-term perspective.

There exists a discrepancy between the education systems of the United States and China, which can be attributed to a number of factors. One such factor is the difference in time perception between the two countries, as Chinese culture has a strong focus on the past and using it as a metric for present action (Rao, 2005). The president of Peking University points out history and something happened in the past during the construction of institutional identity. For example, the history of the university, the celebrities of the past and the contributions mentioned in the speech, all reflect the influence of the past-oriented concept. The president hopes that students will learn something useful from the history and use it to guide their future practice. However, Americans prioritizes future personal growth and achievement. They think that future is more important than the past, and everything is developing. As a result, Harvard University always pays more emphasis on future improvement of individuals, and hopes that students will realize personal value in the future study. Another reason is culture and ideology. Although both universities are all focusing on the development of individuals and encouraging the freshmen to devote themselves to studying and obtaining the degree, it is clear to see that the education notion of Peking University is not just limited to individual development. What the president calls for more is that students can inherit the will of predecessors and be useful to the society. Simultaneously, he also expects that students can tell Chinese stories well and devote to the construction of

a community with a shared future for mankind. This extension of Peking University's ideals bears witness to the institution's commitment towards fostering a social responsibility amongst its students. Furthermore, China espouses the principles of Confucianism which holds that collective interests are higher than individual ones, and individualism makes Americans accustomed to relying on their own strength to struggle and develop rather than rely on others (Rao, 2005).

### Conclusion

The aforementioned analysis holds practical value and can serve as a valuable reference for other universities seeking to promote educational philosophy and foster the development of capable individuals. In the wave of globalization, countries are becoming closely connected with each other, which also requires higher education to seize the opportunity and follow the trend. First of all, it is necessary to expand international exchanges and cooperation. As outlined by the two universities, international communication in education can harness strengths, thus making the university a center for academic exchanges among world-renowned scholars. Secondly, universities must build excellent faculty teams. To improve the level of university operation, universities need to cultivate interdisciplinary, multi-level faculty teams. Lastly, they also need to enhance cultural confidence and promote the construction of advanced socialist culture so as to form a first-class university culture, which could promote education process and identity.

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