

An Analysis on Disaster News from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

In early 2020, COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan, China. Since the founding of China, the COVID-19 has been a major public health emergency with the widest scope of infection and the greatest difficulty in prevention and control. Media at home and abroad have followed up on the sudden outbreak. In order to explore whether there is hidden ideology behind the news discourse, this paper takes Fairclough's three-dimensional model as the main theoretical support, selects *China Daily* and *The New York Times* as research objects, and conducts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the news discourse. Major tasks of the paper are to compare similarities and differences between the two media in text practice and discourse practice, and then analyze the causes of their different reportage. After analysis, the authors found that *China Daily* focused on the government's anti-epidemic work and the effective suppression of the epidemic in the news. *The New York Times*, on the other hand, focused on the epidemic and its impact, and reported the government's dereliction of duty and the people's fears through linguistic strategies, thus vilifying China's international image.

Key words: COVID-19; News discourse; Critical discourse analysis; Ideology

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

A novel coronavirus broke out in Wuhan, Hubei Province, during the Chinese New Year in 2020. Back in late December 2019, Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Hubei Province, monitored for cases of unexplained pneumonia. This was the time when the new coronavirus initially infected and spread to people. On January 12, 2020, the World Health Organization officially named the novel coronavirus that caused Wuhan pneumonia as "COVID-19". Because it was the Spring Festival, there was a massive migration of people all over the country. Before people realized the danger, the virus quickly spread throughout the country, affecting the life and work of people from all walks of life. In response to this disaster, the state set up the "Central Leading Group for Response to the New Coronavirus Pneumonia Epidemic". The city of Wuhan was closed on January 23, and all provinces and municipalities have entered the first level of response and taken severe preventive and control measures. In view of the seriousness of the epidemic, the media at home and abroad began to follow the situation of the epidemic and the progress of the prevention and control work.

1.2 Necessity of the research

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous news reports about this catastrophic event have flooded various domestic and international media platforms. According to Li Linjue (2017), catastrophic events are highly newsworthy because of their suddenness, shock and tragedy. The occurrence of natural disasters and major safety accidents not only causes huge loss of life and property, but also affects people's normal production

and life order. It is also a hot topic that news media focus on and pursue.

There is a famous saying in the Western press: "If it's not good news, it's good news"(Ma Shengrong & Xue Qun, 2004). The report of major catastrophic events has always been one of the important contents of communication activities. It covers almost all elements of news value: abruptness, significance, anomaly, importance, proximity, human touch, etc. The media environment is constructed mainly by discourse. "Speech is a combination of meaning, symbol and rhetoric, a way for people to understand the world and express facts or opinions"(Jiang Xiaoli & Wang Yiben, 2011). News is the most common public discourse. However, news discourse is by no means as "objective", "neutral" and "impartial" as it flaunted. In fact, the production, dissemination and interpretation of news cannot be separated from the specific ideological and cultural context. Through in-depth analysis of the news reports of domestic and foreign media, it can be found that the media's construction was in the field of ideology and the portrayal of China's national image.

To address the above necessities, this paper is presented in five chapters that will critically analyze the news coverage of *The New York Times* and *China Daily* under Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Three aspects of text practice analysis, discourse practice analysis and social practice analysis of news texts are presented to show the tendency of the two media in reporting and the reasons behind it.

2. Literature review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a new branch of modern linguistic research that aims to analyze the relationship between discourse and social contexts and to reveal the hidden ideologies in language use, especially in popular discourse. It not only carries on the description analysis to the discourse, but also combines language level and social culture for comprehensive analysis. For example, critical discourse analyst Wodak's (1988) discourse history research approach, Fairclough's (1995) social and cultural analysis model, Van Dijk's (2001) social cognition analysis model, and Scollon's (2001) media discourse analysis method, these scholars analyzed how discourse maintains rights and how rights affect discourse from different research approaches, and analyzed and revealed the ideology behind discourse.

Critical discourse analysis provides "a theory and methodology for studying the relationship between discourse and socio-cultural development in different domains" (Fairclough, 1995). As an outstanding representative of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough draws on the theories of systemic-functional linguistics and sociology, and puts forward the theoretical paradigm of CDA: sociocultural analysis. He believes that discourse analysis should not be limited to linguistic phenomena such as discourse cohesion, coherence and structure, but should pay more attention to the deep construction of discourse on social reality, power relations and ideology.

Fairclough also argues that language is part of society, a form of social practice, and that any social practice can be conditioned and influenced by the entire social environment. Accordingly, he proposes three dimensions of discourse and describes discourse as a complete unity that includes text, discourse practice, and social practice. In this model, text is the linguistic analysis of content. Discourse practice refers to the process of text production, distribution and consumption, focusing on the creation of discourse and genre and the interaction between authors and readers. Social practices emphasize the dialectical relationship between discursive power relations, discursive practices and social practices. These three parts are closely related, each of them is essential for discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992), and each of them has a specific purpose. The three-dimensional nature of discourse requires that critical discourse analysis should also be three-dimensional. In his book *Critical*

Discourse Analysis: Discourse Analysis: the critical study of language, Fairclough (1995) proposes three steps of critical discourse analysis, description, interpretation, and explanation. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is based on a dialectical constructive view of language and proposes a strong operational model of analysis, which has a high reference value for the study of popular discourse (Ji Weining & Xin Bin, 2009).

The study of critical discourse analysis in China is still in its infancy, but there are still many scholars who have made efforts in this area. Pan Yanyan (2018) thinks that criticism is to reveal the implied ideological meaning in discourse and is based on rational speculation. It does not take revealing the negative meaning in discourse as the ultimate goal, but reveals how the discourse creator uses the strategy of obscure discourse to conceal his ideology and legitimize it, so as to achieve the purpose of public acceptance. Therefore, the purpose of critical discourse analysis is to reveal the power relations and ideologies that are not easily discovered by people.

2.2 Previous studies on the news of a catastrophic event

In the area of disaster news, there has been a lot of research. Deng Jie (2017) interpreted the reports of foreign media, such as the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and *CNN*, on the Tianjin port explosion from the perspective of transitivity and modality. In her paper, she pointed out that these media seemed to be objective reports beneath the surface, but in fact, hid their own political positions and emotional color.

Not only the Western media, but also the three major English-language newspapers in India are biased. Yang Jihe and Yang Yu (2018) researched the Indian media's reports on China's disaster events from 2013 to 2016, and through the analysis of the speech process, they came to the conclusion that the reports on China are full of distrust and suspicion of China.

In addition, some scholars have compared and studied the corpus of Chinese and foreign reports on the disappearance of Malaysia airlines. According to the *BBC* and *People's Daily* reports on the incident, Fan Congcong (2016) conducted the research that revealed the ideology behind the language of news. In her paper, she demonstrated by example that the ideology and position of the media and its representative rights organizations are often hidden behind the news language.

2.3 Enlightenment from the literature review

The above review of the research on disaster news discourse can provide us with a preliminary understanding of the history and development of news discourse research at home and abroad. It also helps us to have a general understanding of the current research status. Through the unremitting efforts and inspiration of our predecessors, fruitful results have been achieved. These studies show that critical discourse analysis has a certain academic status, and it is important to further study this path. However, the research on news discourse in China is far from comprehensive, and compared with foreign studies, there are still relatively few systematic and in-depth studies on news discourse in China. This paper attempts to make some contributions to the development of critical discourse analysis in China through the analysis of some disaster news discourses.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research questions

The study mainly focuses on following questions:

- (1) What are the language features of two media to report COVID-19? And what are the differences and similarities?
- (2) What are the reasons for the differences between Chinese and western news?

3.2 Research methodology

The research objects of this paper is to analyze the news reports of *China Daily* and *New York Times* about the outbreak place in the early stage. Wuhan Novel Coronavirus Infected Pneumonia Prevention and Control Headquarters announced on the early morning of January 23 that the city's buses, subways, ferries and long-distance passenger transport will be suspended from 10 am on January 23, 2020. Therefore, this paper takes the period after January 23 as an important stage of epidemic prevention and control, and focuses on the study. The data range selected in this paper is from January 24 to January 30, 2020. The official websites of *New York Times* and *China Daily* were searched with keywords of "Wuhan", "China" and "Novel Coronavirus" respectively, and all texts were downloaded. Combined with artificial qualitative reading, it was found that some news reports mentioned keywords but had nothing to do with the epidemic. After screening out the irrelevant reports, a total of 41 results were obtained (*China Daily* 22, *New York Times* 19), which were taken as the research objects. Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this paper analyzes the selected news samples in three dimensions: text practice analysis, discourse practice analysis and social practice analysis. In this paper, both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be used to critically analyze the news samples. The quantitative approach focuses on the analysis of relevance and news sources to make the study more objective and credible. Meanwhile, the linguistic characteristics of the news samples are analyzed qualitatively to reveal the hidden ideologies in the news discourse. This paper reveals the ideologies hidden in the news discourse of *China Daily* and *The New York Times*, and provides a deeper explanation of their different views and attitudes.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The language features of two media

The analysis of language features in two media includes both text practice analysis and discourse practice analysis of news discourse. Text practice focuses on the linguistic description of a text. In the stage of text practice analysis, the author attempts to elaborate on both the classification and the transitivity system respectively.

At stage of discourse practice analysis, Fairclough pays particular attention to the intertextuality of texts, that is, any text is the absorption and transformation of other texts. Through intertextuality analysis, the analyst can observe the reproduction of discourse, discuss the change of discourse group, observe whether the discourse order has changed, and then relate to the social and cultural changes (Jing Weining & Xin Bin, 2009). In this paper, the analysis of discursive practices involves an analysis of the sources of news discourse as well as reporting mode.

4.1.1 Classification

The classification system of discourse refers to the naming and description of characters and events in a text, which is mainly realized through the choice of words (Xin Bin, 2005). Fairclough believes that the analysis of the linguistic features of a text is at a micro level and "can be organized according to four themes: vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and textual structure"(1992). Lexical selection is the best tool to implement the classification system, and different lexical choices reflect different attitudes and value tendencies (Li Qing & Wu Hua, 2019). Each media has its own perspective and choice in reporting the event, which forms different topics and positions in reporting the event. The analysis of high-frequency words can further confirm and judge the choice and bias of the media in reporting this event. The analysis of the high-frequency words in the reports of the *New York Times* and *China Daily* can provide a direct insight into the ideological tendency hidden in the reports of this event in the two countries.

In order to observe the attitude of *The New York Times* towards the Chinese government's prevention and control of COVID-19, the author chose the high-frequency subject words "China, Wuhan" to further analyze the relationship between "China, Wuhan" and its collocation words. A search of related words and sentences for high-frequency words revealed that the *New York Times* used more negative words in its coverage of the Wuhan outbreak. Here are some examples.

1) As Fears of Pandemic Grow, China Pens In 20 Million

The word "Pen" is usually used to describe an animal or a person is to be shut in a small space kept in a cage "Pen" is also short for "penitentiary," which seems to allude to the fact that Wuhan has become a government prison for its people. At a time when the Chinese people are strictly preventing the epidemic, the US media has used insulting words. This shows no respect for the Chinese people. The Chinese government has implemented strict prevention and control measures, such as restricting traffic, closing schools, strict quarantine and mandatory quarantine. The goal is to prevent millions of people from becoming infected with COVID-19 and to protect the safety and health of the general public. To a *New York Times* reporter, these measures appear to show the Chinese government's disregard for the human rights of its people by forcing them into captivity. The *New York Times* doesn't care about the brave Chinese doctors, nurses and ordinary citizens fighting the virus to the death; doesn't care about the unflinching devotion of these "rebellious" people; doesn't care about how the Chinese government mobilized its people to fight the epidemic, nor does it care about China's determination to sacrifice its own economy to protect the health of the world's people. The *New York Times* report did not reflect the efforts made by the Chinese people and government in the face of the epidemic and did not highlight China's initiative and national efforts to control the expansion and development of the epidemic. Instead, it attempted to tarnish the international image of the Chinese government.

2) In Wuhan, the Hubei provincial capital of 11 million where the outbreak began, anxiety and anger prevailed as worried residents crowded into hospitals and teams of medical workers in hazmat suits sought to identify the infected.

3) Anger and frustration spread among Wuhan residents lined up at hospitals seeking diagnosis and treatment for coughs and fevers.

Example (2) and example (3) are related discourses obtained by searching the keyword "Wuhan". In the *New York Times'* report on Wuhan, the fear of Wuhan citizens on the novel coronavirus has been mentioned many times, and the negative emotions of Wuhan people after the outbreak of the epidemic have been highlighted. In the report, people in Wuhan were extremely angry because of poor medical facilities and services in hospitals, the lack of timely treatment for suspected cases and confirmed cases, and the government's slow handling of the incident. In fact, after Wuhan was caught in the epidemic, medical workers from all over the country rushed to Wuhan's aid and sent medical supplies and supplies to the medical workers and people in Wuhan. In just four days, nearly 6,000 medical workers from 30 provinces went to cities in Hubei province with their own supplies. However, we did not see any of these protesters in the *New York Times* report. Instead of highlighting China's unprecedented efforts to protect the people of China and the world, the *New York Times* has unjustifiable accusations that the Chinese government is slow to respond. It fabricated the residents' disappointment and anger against the Chinese government, attacked and denigrated China's epidemic and anti-epidemic measures, and spared no effort to denigrate the Chinese government. It has obviously lost the objective, true and impartial significance of news reports.

4.1.2 Transitivity

The Transitivity System can be divided into six Processes, namely, Material Process, Mental Process, Relational Process, Behavioral Process, Verbal Process, and Existential Process. In practice, language users implicitly express their intention by selecting different processes and cleverly placing participants and related

sentence elements. In order to better understand the media's attitude and evaluation of China's anti-epidemic work, this paper selects two news articles about the epidemic from the *New York Times* and *China Daily*, and classifies the clauses of news articles according to the six processes of transitivity system. According to the statistics of the distribution of each process, the process distribution mainly concentrates on the material process and the relational process. Typical examples of material and relational processes are selected for analysis below.

4.1.2.1 Material Processes

The material process is just the process of doing something. This process is generally represented by a dynamic verb, while "Actor" and the "Goal" of the action are generally represented by a noun or pronoun (Hu Zhuanglin, 1989).

Here are some examples from the *New York Times*:

4) And act decisively they did -not against the virus, but against whistleblowers who were trying to call attention to the public health threat. A doctor who told a WeChat group about the virus was disciplined by the Communist Party and forced to admit wrongdoing.

In example (4), the actor is "they (the Authorities)", and the goal of the action is "act". The reporter cleverly adjusts the positions of the participants to achieve the effect of inverted emphasis. Language users are using the inversion to highlight the authorities' missteps and to denounce their actions in punishing doctors for revealing the virus.

5) The coronavirus has already reached the Xinjiang region in the Far West of China, and one risk is that it will spread in the internment camps where China is confining about one million Muslims with poor sanitation and limited health care.

The actor of the main clause here is "coronavirus". Verbs such as "reached", "spread" indicate process. The goal of action is "the internment camps". A figure of speech is used here, comparing Wuhan to a concentration camp with poor medical and sanitary conditions. This shows that the US media intentionally portrays China as a hegemon who oppresses the people, and expresses its strong negative attitude towards China with various incorrect and irrational words.

Here are a few examples from *China Daily*:

6) The government of Wuhan announced on Thursday morning that as of 10 a.m it was indefinitely suspending the city's public transport system.

7) On Wednesday, the Wuhan city government released a notice requiring residents to wear face masks in public places, as required by China's laws on infectious disease control and prevention and emergency response

8) The government must ensure that all necessary and available resources are mobilized to bring this pandemic under control.

In Example (6) and Example (8), the actor is "government". "Announce, released and ensure" denote the action process. The goal of the action is the government's work directive against the epidemic. The verbs "announced" and "released" are relatively formal and neutral words, which reflect that *China Daily* is able to follow the objective requirements of news reporting when reporting the current situation of the fight against the epidemic and present the real situation and progress of the fight against the epidemic to the public. This will help readers to have a positive and objective understanding of the reality of China's fight against the epidemic. The series of directives released show that the Party and government have dealt with the epidemic in a timely manner, calmly issued instructions and actively took measures.

9) Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang admitted on Monday that the local government failed to disclose information in a reasonable time frame in the early stages of the novel coronavirus epidemic.

In this example, the actor is "Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang". The action process is "admitted". The goal of

the action is the fact that the local government failed to disclose information. The report shows that the Chinese government is quick to admit to the public when it finds that the decision is wrong. In the follow-up, the strategy of anti-epidemic work was adjusted and mistakes were corrected. In the following reports, the number of infected people and the disaster situation in the affected areas were reported truthfully. In the *China Daily* report, the government did not conceal the fact in order to suppress public panic, as foreign media claimed.

4.1.2.2 Relational Process

Relational process is a process of being that reflects how things relate to each other. It falls under the two broad categories of “belonging” and “identification”.

10) President Trump has hailed China's president, Xi Jinping, as a "brilliant leader," and Michael Bloomberg says Xi is "not a dictator". But we're now seeing the dangers of Xi's authoritarian model, for China and the world. (From *The New York Times*)

Example (10) itself is also a speech process, but discourse is presented through a relational process. Here, the word "brilliant leader", "not a dictator" is in quotation marks, using an ironic figure of speech that implies Xi Jinping's outstanding leadership in the field of dictatorship. *The New York Times* represents the American side of the ideology, and its inherent bias is fully displayed through language tactics.

11) It's not fair to say the lockdown is belated, because the decision will effectively step up the fight against the virus. It is also worth looking back on the process in the future to draw lessons and gain experience. (From *China Daily*)

This example is a relational process, which is taken from the answer to this question "Wuhan went into lockdown at 10 a.m on Thursday. Was it a belated decision?" in a *China Daily* report. Experts say the closure of the city involves issues in public health, the economy and society, as well as the traditional family reunion during the Spring Festival. This sentence emphasize that the decision to close the city was not "delayed" and conveys to the reader that the Chinese government made the decision after careful consideration and that it will learn from the experience.

In summary, after analyzing these news discourses, it is easy to see that the language of the *New York Times* is biased and unjust, which also shows the strong negative attitude of the American media towards China. In contrast, the news language of the *China Daily* is relatively objective, and the media tries to use positive language to guide the people under the epidemic.

4.1.3 Source

Source refers to the origin of speech. In the analysis of news discourse, the source of information is an important part of the analysis. In the reporting process, since the reporter cannot witness the whole event, the development of the event process and the evaluation of others afterwards, they need to interview relevant personnel or institutions to increase the reliability and persuasiveness of the report. However, the number of alternative sources of information is huge, and the choice of sources is often easily exploited by the reporter and loaded with a particular ideology.

Zhang Jian (1994) mainly divided news sources into three categories: specific sources, semi-specific sources and unknown sources. The specific source is to specify the name, occupation, identity, etc. of the information provider. Semi-specific sources do not refer to the exact information of the information provider and present only some broad information. Unknown sources are completely omitted information sources.

Table 3: Proportion distribution of news sources in the two media

	Specific	Semi-specific	Unknown
<i>The New York Times</i>	43.8%	55.1%	1.1%
<i>China Daily</i>	58.7%	41.3%	0

After categorizing and aggregating the sources in the news corpus, it can be concluded that both media sources are overwhelmingly from specific sources and semi-specific sources, with 98.9% and 100%, respectively. Objectively speaking, the more specific sources there are and the larger the percentage, the more valid and feasible the story will be perceived by the readers.

Through analyzing the sources of the *New York Times*, it can be found that the reporters quoted a lot of quotes from ordinary people, accounting for 35.9%; quotes from government agencies and official media were less frequent, accounting for 16.2%. This makes the reports less authoritative. An analysis of *China Daily's* sources reveals that government and official sources account for most of the quotes, with government agencies accounting for 38.3% and the voice of the general public missing for 14.6%.

The various voices in news reports often intermingle, and reporters are prone to subtly blend their personal positions in the quotation of different information sources to reach a new construction of meaning. This kind of meaning construction is especially evident in the quotation of semi-specific sources, which are difficult to find the exact source of information and can hide key information and achieve the purpose of implicitly expressing ideology. The source of the *New York Times* in Example (11) is a semi-concrete.

12) One man, an architect from Shanghai, cried as he told me that his stepmom had died of pneumonia just a few days earlier. He said the hospital forced his family to cremate her body almost immediately, without a proper goodbye.

Although the specific information of the source here is not known to the reader, the reporter's evaluation of the event is incorporated into the discourse through the paraphrasing of the information, making it a norm that is not easily perceived by the reader, and then becomes easily accepted by the reader and internalized into his or her own opinion (Huang Shuyun, 2017). The media quotes similar semi-concrete information sources, implicitly presenting the emotional tendencies and attitudinal stance of the reporter, and implicitly manipulating the perception and understanding of the news reader.

In summary, the above analysis shows that the sources of the *New York Times* and *China Daily* are overwhelmingly well documented. The difference is that *China Daily* has more specific sources than semi-specific sources. *The New York Times*, on the other hand, has more than half of its semi-specific sources, with more quotes from ordinary people, reflecting the Times' desire to express its opinions through the mouths of others.

4.1.4 Reporting Mode

Reported speech is an important part of intertextuality, which mainly directs the use of other people's words. The news reporter realizes the expression of his potential ideology through the reportage of others' words. According to Fairclough's research, it can be divided into two types: direct discourse and indirect discourse. The former is taken entirely from the original words, usually in quotation marks. The latter was retold by the reporter who processed the language on the basis of the original text.

After studying the reports in the *New York Times* and *China Daily*, it can be seen that these reports make extensive use of direct quotes, most of which have exact sources. The use of direct quotation strengthens the objectivity and credibility of the report.

The *New York Times'* February 24 story "As Fears of Pandemic Grow, China Pens In 20 Million" uses a large number of direct discourses (40.74%) and indirect discourses (59.26%). The following is analysis of the

paraphrased forms in this report.

4.1.4.1 Direct Speech

13) "They can't take proper care of all the people here," said Sun Ansheng, a man in his 50s who was waiting outside a hospital while his wife was tested for the coronavirus, so named because of the spiky halo around the microorganism. "The city government told us there was a virus, but they didn't explain enough what we should do," Mr. Sun said. "They left it sounding too minor. Now look."

14) Mao Shoulong, a professor of public administration at Renmin University in Beijing, said the Wuhan government had made a series of missteps that had eroded public confidence. "They failed the test," Professor Mao said. "They just copied the SARS situation, making small things turn into a big problem."

The two examples above are quoted from the patient's family and the professor, respectively. In example (13), the direct quotation from the patient's family reveals that the local hospital received the patient but failed to provide timely medical treatment. Moreover, the government informed him about the outbreak of the virus but did not do its duty to tell the people what measures should be taken to prevent the virus. And in Example (14), the professor's direct quotation uses the words "failed" and "big problem" to criticize the Chinese government's failure to do its job, and the failure of government agencies to take substantive action in response to the outbreak, causing the outbreak to become more and more serious. The outbreak became more and more serious.

4.1.4.2 Indirect Speech

15) Most residents interviewed said they could see the logic of travel restrictions. But many accused officials of having failed to ensure that enough medical workers were properly trained, while medical workers reported shortfalls of critical protective gear such as masks and goggles.

16) In Beijing, officials announced that they would temporarily close the Forbidden City.

17) Experts said that the mass travel restrictions, while understandable, would do little to stop the spread of the virus outside China, as many infected people had already left Wuhan.

Examples (15) to (17) are indirect quotations, and the paraphrased verbs use the more formal and neutral words "said" and "announced" to enhance the authenticity of their reports. The part after "that" in Example (17) is not completely guaranteed to be the original's words. And the words "residents, officials, experts" are not clear and ambiguous, and their credibility is yet to be confirmed. In these excerpted examples, officials attempt to discourage panic and limit public commentary on the government. The use of both direct and indirect quotes is the result of a deliberate choice by the U.S. media, echoing the current context of ongoing friction between China and the U.S. These statements are clearly biased and off-base, attempting to discredit China to serve the political needs of the U.S. government.

4.2 The reasons for the differences

At the level of social practice, critical discourse analysis rises from micro textual analysis and macro discourse practice analysis to hyper-textual analysis of ideological and socio-cultural contexts (Zhu Guisheng & Huang Jianbin, 2019). The consistency of the reporting discourse and the social context of the *China Daily* and the *New York Times'* new crown reports can be seen when they are placed in a domestic context and in the international community.

The *China Daily* also highlighted the following aspects of the campaign. The centralized and unified leadership of the Party effectively curbed the spread of the epidemic and stabilized the hearts of the people. The unified leadership of the Party made the command of this epidemic prevention and control consistent and unified, and decisions were made quickly in a relatively short period of time, allowing the epidemic to be effectively suppressed. Thus, in the reports of the *China Daily*, much was seen of the important decisions made by the Party and the government and the strength of the implementation of the policies once they were issued. In particular, it reported that under the Party's command, various departments quickly took up the important task of

preventing and fighting the epidemic, and several departments introduced relevant initiatives to ensure the smooth implementation of the anti-epidemic work. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics adheres to the people as the center. Historical development has proved that the main position of our people cannot be shaken, and the safety of the people is the most important in the face of public health emergencies. The *China Daily* has repeatedly emphasized in its reports that China's anti-epidemic work has always put the safety of people's lives and physical health in the first place, which is an important embodiment of the socialist system's respect for and protection of human rights.

The New York Times, on the other hand, considers the "Wuhan closure" to be a decree that sacrifices people's freedoms and rights. It labeled the quarantine under the new pneumonia epidemic as a "human rights violation" and used discriminatory reporting to attack the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government. The media used the opportunity to accuse the Chinese government of maintaining authoritarianism, authoritarianism and brutal repression, and to vilify China as one of the most unequal countries in the world. It has undoubtedly become the best choice to blame China for the virus, which serves the basic interests of its political and economic blocs, and also gives an outlet to the country's raging public opinion. Essentially, the *New York Times'* coverage of the New Coronavirus outbreak in China was not motivated by concern for human health, but rather by the evolution of the New Coronavirus into a "political virus".

Western media coverage of China is generally influenced by their country's fundamental position on China and its deep-rooted ideology and bias. The main reason for the above negative coverage of China's new crown epidemic in the *New York Times* is that the United States is fearful of China's development trends. China has leapt from a backward country to the world's second largest economy in only a few decades, and it is catching up at an accelerated pace in the fields of science, technology and military. The rise of China and the intensification of the game of Chinese and Western interests have led to an increasing number of voices in the Western media suppressing and inhibiting China's development. The "China threat" narrative is in full swing. The news media of a country is bound to carry out its news reporting activities with its national interests in mind. In order to contain China, the U.S. is suppressing China on all fronts, and the court of public opinion is one of the important areas of struggle. Many U.S. media outlets are happy to attack and smear China, cooperating with U.S. politicians to attack China on every event they can.

In addition, the ideological differences between China and the West greatly affect the perception of China by Western countries and their media. Although some reports do not stand up to scrutiny, they have to some extent catered to the ideological bias and even hostility toward China that exists in Western society. The U.S. media and politicians have always believed that their own system is the best in the world, and are accustomed to labeling others as "undemocratic" for systems that are different from their own. When China achieved great development under its own socialist democratic system, many U.S. media raised the banner of "political correctness" and blew the whistle on China, even distorting facts to discredit China.

5. Conclusion

Based on the previous analysis, we conclude that the use of language can never be considered neutral and value-free. Rather, it should be seen as the embodiment of a range of institutional and political discursive practices.

5.1 Major findings of the analysis

In this paper, a critical discourse analysis was conducted on 41 COVID-19 related news reports using Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model. Through the analysis of the text practice, discourse practice and social practice in the news discourse, it is found that the content of *China Daily* reports is mainly government

work instructions and the report of the progress of the epidemic, and the language description of the reports is basically objective, which reflects the authenticity of the news. In the news section, Chinese Daily will report the government's positive attitude and measures in response to the epidemic as much as possible, so as to show the advantages of the socialist system and give the general public hope and confidence in preventing and fighting the epidemic. It also reflects the importance that the Chinese government attaches to the epidemic and shows the world the image of a responsible power.

The *New York Times*, however, distorted the facts and called COVID-19 the "Wuhan virus" without any basis. Most of the news reports focused on the government's failures and the people's discontent and anger, portraying the Chinese government as disorderly, passive, and hegemonic, reflecting a clear ideological bias. The United States has long been prejudiced against China's political system. As China's national strength is growing stronger and its status as a superpower is threatened, the U.S. often smears the Chinese government through the power of public opinion and discredits China's image in the international arena, causing China's reputation to be tarnished.

The different social cultures of the two countries, China's growing international status and the social tensions facing the United States itself have all influenced to some extent the media's choice of specific discourse. It is thus clear that news reports are tools to reflect the government's will and convey ideology. Readers should be aware of critical reading when reading relevant news and political discourse, and discern the ideological and value tendencies between the words in the context of society, so as to avoid being manipulated and misled by language and misconceptions.

5.2 Implications of the research

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous news reports about this catastrophic event have flooded various domestic and international media platforms. According to Li Linjue (2017), catastrophic events are highly newsworthy because of their suddenness, shock and tragedy. In terms of the audience of the news, the people affected by the disaster are eager for relevant information. This requires the news to provide objective and accurate information in a timely manner. That's why there's so much coverage of the disaster. According to Yu Yingtian and Yang Yutong (2016), Chinese and foreign cultural forms treat problems in different ways, because there are differences between cultural history and ideology. In addition, Chinese and foreign news media report the news in the angle, the content, the way and the thought that have a very big discrepancy. Therefore, people need to look through the language strategies used in the text and comparatively analyze the ideology implied in it, which is an effective way to avoid being misled by some news. Because it is difficult for people to perceive or identify the ideologies and positions embedded in news texts from a single source, critical analysis of news texts is an effective way to do so.

Then, it is crucial to develop readers' critical language awareness. With the development of communication technology, especially the rapid development of Internet technology, all kinds of foreign information are pouring into China through news websites, microblogs, video platforms and so on. In this sense, critical discourse analysis has practical significance in modern society. That is why it is necessary for people to have a critical attitude when reading news reports.

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