

ICEMC 2021
International Conference on Emerging Media & Communication

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF
EAST ASIA'S ANTI-PANDEMIC EFFORTS**

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Abstract

The achievements of East Asian countries in their fight against Covid-19 have attracted attention from Western media, governments and academia. Previous studies were mostly concerned with what topics Western media focused on and what attitudes they adopted when reporting a specific East Asian country, lacking systematic analysis of the image of East Asian countries. Techno-Orientalism is ideological thinking and discursive strategies commonly used by Western countries to construct the image of Asian countries. This study uses cultural discourse analysis to investigate how Western media, such as The New York Times, the BBC, portrayed three Eastern Asian countries in their Covid-19 reports and explores how Western media applied techno-Orientalism to the image of East Asian countries during the pandemic. The study finds that when reporting concrete facts, Western media acknowledged the effectiveness of the anti-pandemic measures taken by Eastern Asian countries and the social cohesion people in such countries exhibited. However, ideologically, their reports of Western centrism dismissed the success of Asian countries as Confucian techniques.

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Keywords: Techno-Orientalism, Western media, East Asia, Covid-19



1. Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic as an emergency posed a serious challenge for countries around the world. The turbulence of public opinion about public health profoundly affected the world's news practices. The image of East Asian countries in the international community was influenced by Western media's agenda setting in reports about their fight against the virus, which also played an important role in shaping international public opinion. China and Korea, two Eastern Asian countries, have great cultural similarities and share many commonalities in their dealing with disasters and emergencies. Their strict and efficient policies were often criticized as deprivation of freedom and stereotyped as Confucian techniques by mainstream Western media, a dominant player in global discourse.

Techno-Orientalism, coined by David Morley and Kevin Robbins in 1995, is an orientalist discourse in which the West establishes global hegemony with its own power-knowledge structure, and in which Eastern countries are described as hyper-technical, dehumanized, and materialistic. In their reports, the Western media overlooked the validity of the "East Asian model" in fighting against the pandemic. Generally speaking, East Asian people are more collectivist in the sense that individuals are part of and in harmony with their groups which accommodate and care for the needs of individuals so they generally do not rebel against rules that are best for the group in the name of individual freedom. Moreover, with individual legal rights protected, citizens in East Asian countries are more generous with their personal information and less likely to refuse cooperation with public health authorities for privacy concerns. Government policies are delivered and implemented from the top to all levels of government and society, and citizens exhibit solitary and focus on the big picture when allocating human resources and reliefs. Some biased Western media do not understand East Asia culturally and misinterpret pandemic-related policies in East Asian countries as unreasonable. Mainstream media denigrate East Asian countries' anti-pandemic policies, set biased agendas, and negatively report East Asian countries for international audience, causing a distorted international image of East Asian countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Western media reported the "East Asian model" derived from China's anti-pandemic responses in a bad light from the perspective of techno-Orientalism. However, in the extant research, the image of the whole East Asia and the discursive construction by Western media of the East Asian Model have not been examined. The previous studies focusing on a particular country, though specific, lacked a comprehensive understanding of the region as a whole, and therefore missed the opportunity of dialectical thinking and deeper analysis. This study analyses how Western media reported and portrayed East Asian countries in COVID-19-related reports from the perspective of techno-Orientalism, in order to better understand how international media used discursive strategies to tarnish the image of East Asian countries and to get a glimpse of the fixed mindset and attitude of Western media.

2. Problem Statement

In the international community, the image that a country presents is crucial (Boulding, 1959). The image of a country is the public perception and evaluation of its political, economic, social, cultural and geographical conditions within and outside the country (Sun, 2002). For a long time, it has been difficult for news to be free of personal biases in narration and attitude. Individual journalists often lack the

background knowledge needed for accurate reporting, so news reporting is not absolutely objective (White, 2000). Biased, negative and insulting, news about developing countries from the Western media exhibited strong Western centrism (Amakiri, 2020). While each country can construct its own image within its own country by controlling or managing its domestic media, only countries with global hegemony are able to take the initiative to shape their own international image (Wallis & Baran, 1990). Western media's unreasonable assumptions in their discourse of the Other have led to frustration in international communication and obstacles to mutual understanding, and often caused international friction as a result (Dodd, 1991). Thus, it can be argued that Eastern countries are at a disadvantage in the global political and power hierarchy and that their cultural coherence is threatened.

Orientalism has two branches, traditional Orientalism and techno-Orientalism (Wagenaar, 2016). Techno-Orientalism is an Orientalist discourse of power-knowledge structures established by Western hegemony on a global scale (Lozano-Méndez, 2010). The core of techno-Orientalism is the Western discourse of the Other. The critique of the Other is considered to be a far-reaching and enduring theme in cultural studies. Discourse of the Other seeks to portray the West as a transcendent presence in contrast to others (Fürsich, 2002). Thus, Western media uses a common strategy of victimizing those who are different and making them passive victims. Western media's coverage of East Asian countries, especially China, has indeed been based on this strategy and a Cold War mindset, portraying them as bad others (Jiang, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the dangerous ideology of Yellow Peril, affecting a variety of areas such as public health, technology, and global trade, resurfaced in the imagination of techno-Orientalists due to the escalating trade war between the United States and China and growing concerns in the West about China's cyber and technological advancements (Siu & Chun, 2020). From the perspective of techno-Orientalism, Asians were stereotyped during the pandemic as technologically advanced, but morally and ideologically primitive (Kang, 2020).

3. Research Questions

International news involving the regional image of East Asia should be viewed as cultural discourse in which multiple factors such as language, culture, history, and politics play a role, and in the current international hierarchy dominated by the West exists extensive inter-regional, inter-state, and inter-cultural competition and cooperation in international media discourse. This study will examine the news texts of Western media on East Asia's fights against the pandemic through cultural discourse analysis, in order to identify the common methods used by Western media to shape the image of East Asia and to construct East Asia as the Other. This study hopes to find answers to the following two questions.

Q1: How did Western mainstream media portray East Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q2: How did mainstream Western media use discursive strategies to shape the image of East Asia in the fight against the pandemic?

4. Purpose of the Study

Examining the image of East Asia from the perspective of discourse studies can provide a new perspective and fresh ideas for international communication and studies of national image. This study will

explore how mainstream Western media shaped the image of East Asia from the perspective of techno-Orientalism and identify how they turned Eastern countries into the Other. It is necessary to actively engage in exchanges and dialogues between civilizations, especially with a changing global landscape. In order to enrich research and practice on the image of East Asia. Considering the image of East Asian countries in their fight against the pandemic as an integral part of contemporary East Asian studies can help enrich research and practice in the area of how East Asia is perceived in the international community and provide insight into how East Asian countries can improve their international image.

5. Research Methods

Interpreting meaning in context is very useful. Dutch scholar Van Dijk (1988) combines discourse studies with media studies and applies discourse analysis to the special discourse genre of news. He argues that discourse analysis of news explores the languages used to express media's social and political attitudes and clarifies the power structures behind the news. This new approach breaks away from the isolated, one-sided, abstract, and static linguistic analysis of sentences, and expands into studies of texts with the help of context. Context is used as an interpretative tool to explain the structure, function, and meaning of a text. Since the beginning of the 21st century, faced with new challenges and opportunities, the paradigm of discourse studies has been extended. A number of linguists, communication scholars, and cultural studies scholars focusing on local issues have announced new findings from discourse analysis in their pursuit of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. These findings of the emerging paradigm—cultural discourse analysis—reveal the foundation of and pathways to intercultural dialogue, and the directions and strategies of cultural development.

Cultural discourse analysis emphasizes that due to the differences in cultural traditions and social conditions, there's no universally applicable theory that can explain the development patterns of all cultures. The concept of culture in cultural discourse analysis refers to a certain social group's collective practices, including ideologies, ways of thinking, and social relations, which are the influence target of different discourses. Discourse refers to verbal communication activities which involve six interconnected elements, i.e., subject, format, medium, effect, cultural relations, and historical context (Xu, 2008). The research method of cultural discourse analysis is widely accepted by scholars from Eastern countries, who keep digging into local discourse issues and try to highlight the discourse identity of Eastern societies.

This study mainly uses cultural discourse analysis to comprehensively examine the texts of Western mainstream media, such as BBC and CNN, about East Asia's anti-coronavirus efforts. In practice, the first step of cultural discourse analysis is to have a comprehensive examination of the background against which the discourse is produced (Xu, 2015). Therefore, this study compares the current discourse with similar ones in the past to discover how discourse evolves. Second, cultural discourse analysis emphasizes a dialectical perspective and abandons dichotomy and essentialism, so this study doesn't ignore the textual, contextual, media, discourse, social, and ideological elements of Western media's reporting on East Asia's anti-coronavirus efforts, and analyzes the differences and interdependencies between these elements. Moreover, previous discourse analyses focused on empirical evidence of observable phenomena and neglected subjective experiences. Cultural discourse analysis, on the other hand, combines empiricism and

subjectivism. Therefore, this study, after drawing valid conclusions from rigorous reasoning in the analysis of the media texts, appropriately adds researchers' interpretations and ideas to the findings.

Within the framework of cultural discourse analysis, this study selects China and South Korea as the representatives of East Asian countries and explores how Western media constructed their discourse when reporting East Asia's anti-coronavirus efforts in terms of intention, strategy, frame and power structure and how they employed language, persuasion, metaphor and emotional appeal in their texts, and then analyzes the connection between their journalistic practices and history, culture, ideology as well as power structure.

6. Findings

Western media employed a series of discursive strategies when shaping East Asia's image during the pandemic. These discursive practices show the pragmatic functions of the biased news texts, reflecting techno-Orientalism in Western media's reporting.

6.1. Freely Given Information in East Asia v. Human Rights First in Western Discourse

Self-isolation is an effective tool for control of infectious diseases, as the World Health Organization (WHO) stated in Statement on the Second Meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee Regarding the Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV): The Committee believes that it is still possible to interrupt virus spread, provided that countries put in place strong measures to detect disease early, isolate and treat cases, trace contacts, and promote social distancing measures commensurate with the risk. In light of this statement, East Asian countries are actively promoting smart information systems in this fight against the COVID-19 pandemic under the law and guidance from WHO to identify people from high-risk areas with the help of Internet services providers. Technologies, such as big data from cell phone networks have helped East Asian countries get hold of information about confirmed cases, reduce potential COVID-19-transmission cases, and effectively delay the peak of the pandemic.

Western media have been mostly positive about the results of anti-pandemic measures in East Asia, praising their effective use of information and communication technologies. The most common focus of reporting was that "these countries have succeeded in fighting the pandemic by adopting rigorous tracking techniques, but the success has come at the cost of the loss of liberal democracy, for example, the story on Equal Times tilted The risks of teaming up with Big Brother to protect health (see Example 1).

(Example 1) If you feel like you are being watched in China, be it at the train station or the airport, the shopping centre or the restaurant, the bank or the university, you are not necessarily being paranoid. China is headed towards an Orwellian dystopia. For decades, it had to satisfy the inherent security obsession of any dictatorship with in-person surveillance methods, but technological development now provides it with the means to keep a close watch over its 1.4 billion inhabitants. This arsenal of surveillance technology has proved indispensable in the war against coronavirus, not only in China but also in Asian countries with democratic forms of government (Foncillas, 2020).

Despite the undeniable fact that East Asian countries took advantage of big data to effectively contain the spread of coronavirus, Western media has deliberately linked the fight against the pandemic to human rights issues in an attempt to invoke emotions and resentment in the West against East Asian countries. The author of the above report tried to present a demonized image of the Chinese government who uses big data to maintain an authoritarian regime, ignored the great benefits big data brought about in term of social development and disease control, and took the moral high ground to instigate dissatisfaction with China in the international community. The mention of Chinese government's regular surveillance in places such as train stations and airports was intended to arouse fear among the international public and intensify the stereotypes about China's anti-pandemic efforts.

In addition, Western media have linked tracking systems to totalitarianism, as exemplified by a report from *Les Echos*, a French newspaper, headlined *Covid-19 et traçage : ne sacrifions pas nos libertés individuelles !*

(Example 2) Tandis que la Chine met en place depuis plusieurs années une surveillance numérique et une répression terrifiante de ses citoyens, la Corée du Sud fait de même... Elle est d'ailleurs devenue une deuxième championne de la surveillance et de la délation en tout genre, si bien que des milliers de Coréens sont formés dans des écoles dédiées aux techniques de traquage-délation et rémunérés pour dénoncer les manquements de leurs concitoyens (ce qui va du simple mégot jeté dans la rue à la corruption, en passant par l'adultère...). Il va sans dire que ces pays ont une culture de l'hypersurveillance et de la délation qui n'est heureusement pas encore la nôtre. Cela fait bien longtemps qu'ils ont mis de côté les libertés individuelles, si tant est qu'elles aient déjà existé... (For several years, China has deployed extensive digital surveillance technologies for horrific repression. Next to China, South Korea is not shy from surveillance or infringement of privacy. Tens of thousands of South Koreans study at schools where tracking practices are taught and get rewarded for reporting their fellow citizens for any human failing from throwing cigarette butts on the ground to having an affair. Needless to say, China and South Korea share a culture of hyper-surveillance and condemnation which fortunately doesn't exist in our society. All concerns about personal liberty, if they ever existed, have been put aside for a long time in these repressive countries....) (Pradel, 2020, par. 1).

This opinion piece argues that the French government shouldn't learn from China and South Korea who adopted tracking measures, undermining human rights, and that both China and South Korea are totalitarian states whose cultural traditions include surveillance and denunciation. Its discourse stigmatized China and South Korea although based on its own social, historical and cultural characteristics, China has already established modern governance suitable for its own situation after World War II and South Korea also accepted Western democracy long before. For what reason should China and South Korea be called totalitarian states? The root of the problem is that Western media, under geopolitical pressure, are trying to cover up their own countries' inefficiency in dealing with the pandemic and distracting the public with how East Asian countries used big data to win the war against the pandemic.

In ancient times, East Asian countries had household registration systems that required all citizens under government jurisdiction to have their names, ages, places of origin, and identities registered. In modern times, East Asian countries have relied on digital technology to govern, as shown in the fight against the pandemic. Citizens in Western countries, on the other hand, are inherently reluctant to share personal

data and skeptical of the use of new technologies. As a result, unwilling to delve into the historical context of social governance in East Asian countries, Western media can't understand the justification of using big data to control the spread of coronavirus in China and South Korea. Such coverage of East Asian countries' anti-pandemic efforts is mostly based on stereotypes, demonized East Asian countries from a dichotomous view, and took advantage of long-established dominance of Western media in international communication.

6.2. East Asia's collectivism v. the Western media's individualist discourse

In spite of different political and economic systems, collectivism is a universal characteristic in East Asian countries. Collectivism is a cultural proposition that emphasizes the superiority of collective goals over individual ones. During the COVID-19 pandemic, collectivism in East Asian countries contributed to the willingness of citizens to obey anti-pandemic policies, such as social distance, self-isolation, and wearing masks. Exhibiting a high degree of social cohesion, the public was able to effectively implement anti-pandemic policies to reduce virus transmission, on which Western media and politicians all agreed to an extent.

However, when mentioning collectivism which helped East Asian countries fight against the pandemic, Western media have always tried to portray a traditionally patriarchal state, i.e., East Asian societies are hierarchical and homogeneous. For lack of an understanding of collectivism in East Asian societies, Western media assume that the efficient implementation of policies in East Asian societies was due to government oppression and authoritarianism, ignoring the willingness of East Asian people to follow social rules, for example a report from The New York Times headlined Power, Patriotism and 1.4 Billion People: How China Beat the Virus and Roared Back (see Example 3).

(Example 3) In the year since the coronavirus began its march around the world, China has done what many other countries would not or could not do. With equal measures of coercion and persuasion, it has mobilized its vast Communist Party apparatus to reach deep into the private sector and the broader population, in what the country's leader, Xi Jinping, has called a "people's war" against the pandemic — and won (Myers et al., 2021).

The New York Times clearly has a preconceived notion that China's success against the pandemic was achieved by means that violated individual interests and rights. When Western media talked about government failures in the fight against the pandemic around the world, they usually focused on East Asian countries, for example, a BBC report in Chinese titled Covid-19: Abuse of Power in Countries' Powerful Fight Against the Pandemic Leads to Concerns. It notes that

(Example 4) Lockdowns, border closures, curfews, and isolation are happening all over the world right now, and the pandemic seems to be changing people's lives as well, with anxious citizens more tolerant of and even happy with the abuses they used to despise. Police in Taiwan used a phone-tracking system to enforce mandatory home quarantine. Such action would normally be condemned by the public, but instead has received widespread support for its effectiveness in deterring quarantine violations and controlling virus transmission. Similarly, the invasive surveillance systems used in Singapore and Korea have also been praised for their success in curbing the spread of the disease (Xie, 2020).

It's worth noting that the report used a range of rhetorical strategies to shape the image of East Asia in the pandemic. Without explicitly stating the meaning of "invasive", the author insinuated that

surveillance systems in Singapore and South Korea might be against universal values and with ulterior motives, leading to misunderstanding among international audience. In addition, the author didn't focus on the facts but repeatedly speculated on the possible public reactions towards abuses of power, maliciously stating that people's lives in East Asian countries seemed to have changed and implying that East Asian governments have committed many abuses in the past. It is through such forced subjective assumptions that the author delivered the idea that East Asian countries' success in fighting the pandemic has come at the expense of individual interests.

6.3. Save the People in East Asia v. Save the Economy in Western Media's Discourse

East Asian countries have experienced numerous pandemics and natural disasters in the past, so they tend to prioritize life when facing various emergencies. Therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, East Asian countries focus on implementing policies to control virus transmission, demonstrating agency and flexible to adjustments typical of East Asian culture. After all, economic development is for a better life, while virus control is for survival. Faced with the pandemic, Western countries are mostly concerned with economic consequences. Instead of paying a definite cost for curbing the pandemic in full force, Western countries tend to act in a risky way to guarantee that the economy won't grind to a halt and aversion to economic fallout is a determining factor in all government's decisions. As a result, Western media have a confrontational attitude toward the mindset of saving the people first in East Asian countries, arguing that their successful handling of the pandemic has set back their economies and put people's lives in dire straits.

A common tactic of the Western media is to use dichotomous thinking and pit anti-pandemic efforts against economic development, acknowledging East Asia's success while claiming that these countries have paid a heavy economic price. At the same time, Western media glorify the less rigorous anti-pandemic policies of Western countries and their emphasis on economic growth. In this way, a potential framework is created for readers to compare strict anti-pandemic measures at the expense of individual interests with lenient ones which protect individual economic interests, and in the self-obsessed West, it is clear that the latter is more popular, for example, the Wall Street Journal report headlined China Beat Back Covid-19, but It's Come at a Cost-Growing Inequality (see Example 5).

(Example 5) It's also unclear whether Beijing's methods of controlling the virus will work in the long term, as the country attempts to reopen. Its curtailment of personal freedoms was severe, even by the standards of a highly authoritarian country. The Xi administration faced significant domestic dissent for its mishandling of the crisis at first. And China's strategy also seriously damaged its economic growth, which for decades has been the primary pillar of the Communist Party's legitimacy at home and abroad (He, 2020).

In Example 5, the author commented that China's strategy has seriously damaged its economic growth and emphasized the huge downside of halted economic growth for the Communist Party of China (CPC) without supporting evidence. The story only mentioned the downside of China's strict and rigorous anti-pandemic measures, i.e., a brief slowdown in economic growth, while ignoring the enormous benefits of these measures for public health. Moreover, the report's concern over CPC'S legitimacy is also unsupported. CPC's legitimacy stems from nationalism, its excellent performance, and meritocracy so economic growth mentioned in the report is only part of its performance. Ignoring nationalism and

meritocracy in East Asian societies, the Wall Street Journal based their concern over CPC's legitimacy solely on an economic hiccup due to its belief in Chinese Collapse theory.

As we can see, Western media's worry about the economic damage caused by Chinese government's anti-pandemic measures is ideologically based. In defence of Western countries' mishandling of the pandemic, coverage of South Korea's economic recession tries to show citizens in the west that failures to control the disease are excusable, for example, CNN's report, South Korea's economy just recorded its worst contraction since the Great Recession because of the coronavirus pandemic (See example 6).

(Example 6) Future growth prospects are more troubling. Capital Economics forecasts the Korean economy will contract by 6% in the second quarter compared to the prior quarter, and shrink by nearly 3% over the year as a whole. Before the virus hit, South Korea's exports-reliant economy had already grappled with a trade dispute with Japan and declining shipments to China. The latter country saw its own economy tumble during the US-China trade war, too. And while South Korea appears to now have the virus under control, the economic pain is tangible (Zongxian, 2020).

This report emphasizes the economic difficulties South Korea has been facing, even though it has achieved success in pandemic control, and reviewed the conflict between South Korea, and China, and Japan in trade before the pandemic, leaving the impression that South Korea is suffering a severe economic downturn due to its anti-pandemic responses. The intention is to show the US public that not only the United States, but also South Korea who has won the war against COVID-19 are suffering from a severe economic downturn due to the pandemic. Thereby, the report excuses US government's failure and understates South Korea's success. It's implied that it is useless to have the pandemic under control since it won't help recover the economy.

7. Conclusion

Structural frameworks exist in how Western media report East Asia's fight against the pandemic. Deficient in facts or examples, their reports rely on a series of rhetorical strategies such as questioning, comparison, and assumption from the perspective of techno-Orientalism. That is to say without such discursive strategies, techno-Orientalism is invalid. However, it's wrong to generalize Western media's reports on East Asia's anti-pandemic efforts as techno-Orientalism. It's worth noting that the main purpose of these rhetorical strategies used by Western media is to prove Western centrism and Oriental backwardness.

Western media as part of the Western society, deeply influenced by its politics and culture, are not familiar with East Asian culture or history. Therefore, they have become the main international arena for promoting techno-Orientalism. Techno-Orientalism implies a dichotomy between East and West and is a continuation of the Cold War mindset. It is urgent for East Asian countries to deconstruct the deep-seated divisive thinking and hostility. In addition, it is also necessary to put forward a replacement concept from a multicultural perspective to build a rules-based international order.

East Asia has its unique history, culture, and traditions, so we shouldn't equate its anti-pandemic responses with techno-Orientalism from the perspective of Western centrism. The East Asian cultural traditions of harmony in diversity and pursuit of grand harmony under the sky are conducive to a right interpretation of East Asia's efforts against the pandemic. Western media should also take into account its

history, traditions and social development and adopt a neutral and unbiased attitude when reporting on East Asia.

This imperfect paper requires further development in future research. First, using textual studies as the only way to explore Western media's discursive strategies is lacking, as the audience's perceptions and evaluations of the media coverage and their corresponding behaviours are more reflective of the effectiveness of media discourse. Second, discourse analysis should be multidimensional, but this study fails to show how media discourse changes at different phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, this study focuses on mainstream media and neglects social media, so it's worth studying what kinds of discourse appear on social media, how effective these discourses are and how resonance works on social media platforms.

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