A Comparative Analysis of the Media Presentations of the Korean War by the People’s Daily and the New York Times

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Abstract: The Korean War is the war after the second World War with the largest number of participating countries and the largest number of casualties. However, there are significant differences in social perceptions of the war between China and the United States. Therefore, we focus on how the media construct the reality of war for the public and examine the causes of this cognitive difference. This study adopts critical discourse analysis to investigate the reports on the Korean War by the mainstream newspapers of China and the United States, People’s Daily and the New York Times. The conclusions are as follows: first, there is a gap between the media prospects of war and the realistic prospect of war. Second, ideology is rooted in the construction of media discourse. Thirdly, the discourse practice of war report has commonality.

Keywords: Korean War; To resist America and aid Korea; Discourse analysis; Media comparison

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1. Introduction

The Korean War, which broke out nearly 70 years ago, was the one with the largest number of participants and the largest number of casualties after the Second World War. Since the Opium War, China has won the great victory of “defending our country” on the overseas battlefield. It is also a “Limited Warfare” that is often “Forgotten” and “Forgotten” by American society. There are many reasons for this cognitive contrast, but one that cannot be ignored is how the media presents the war. At present, most studies on the Korean war at home and abroad follow the following three

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paths: first, the political and military historical orientation, which focuses on the ideological game behind the war, the political struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Korean War, the combat experience on the front line, the armistice negotiation process, and the significance of the war to Asia and even the world pattern. Secondly, the socio-cultural historical orientation mainly focuses on how war affects social life, and integrates war propaganda and mobilization movements into daily life and values, so as to promote or restrict the development of war. Thirdly, the media construction orientation focuses on how the Korean war, as a war event, is constructed by the media, analyzes the media production process and media frame characteristics in different social environments, and discusses the influencing factors that affect media production.

The above three research paths take into account both the “fact” and “understanding” of the Korean War and their mutual construction, which helps to present the overall picture of the Korean War. However, the comparative media research on the Korean War has not received the attention of previous scholars. This study will analyze the war reports of the two major warring countries -- China and the United States, and the major domestic media “People’s Daily” and “New York times”. And try to answer the following two questions: first, how do Chinese and American media shape the picture of war? Second, what factors have influenced the presentation of the media war in the two countries? Through theoretical analysis and comparative analysis, we can more clearly identify the characteristics and generality of media discourse practice in a special historical period and under different social and cultural backgrounds.


News production itself is a kind of discourse practice, which constructs news facts by means of the arrangement of discourse. In the “news schema structure”, van Dijk listed a series of categories of news texts as analysis elements, mainly including the title and lead in the summary, the main events and consequences in the story, the history and previous events in the background, and the oral reactions, comments and predictions in the evaluation. It is in the selection and construction of these categories that the media highlights the theme, implies the connection and shows the attitude and tendency towards events.

(1) Outbreak of war: support Korean reunification vs. defend the free world

On June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out. Both the People’s Daily and the New York Times ran stories in the first place, but with very different headlines:
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“The subject matter of news discourse is often presented in the form of headlines,” despite the fact that the two newspapers had very different assessments of the facts of the war: the *People’s Daily* pointed to Syngman Rhee’s attack, while the *New York Times* pointed to North Korea’s declaration of war. However, there are similarities in the construction of news themes. First, “Syngman Rhee puppet army” and “communist regime” are selected as subjects with additional value judgment. Syngman Rhee has long been described by China as a “traitor” and “obstructing the reunification of Korea”; While “communism” is regarded by the United States as the “aggressor” and “dictator” of the free world, such subjects choose to give readers a clear thematic implication, namely, “maintaining the Korean people’s fight for the reunification of the motherland” and “preventing the invasion of the communist regime”. Second, each accused the other of aggression, “the mistake of aggression is that it forces people to defend their rights at the risk of their lives.” It does not accord with the moral principle of “just war” and contravenes the international law. Instead, it strengthens the “legitimacy” of our own war. Finally, both “denouncing the war peddler Dulles” and “holding the Soviet Union responsible” attributed the responsibility for the war to external forces, and readers relied on this judgment to presuppose the attribution logic of the subject of the report, that is, the game between the two camps behind the war.

(2) Landing in Incheon: attempting to save the losing battle VS the unexpected military adventure

The Incheon landing campaign, launched by the United Nations army on September 15, 1950, had a major impact on the course of the Korean War. The continuous victories of the Korean people’s army were ended, and the “United Nations army” was turned around from the critical state of failure. The *New York Times* first ran the story on its front page, while *People’s Daily* published its first story four days later.

*New York Times*, September 15, 1950:

Title: U.N. Forces Land Behind In Korea; Seize the Inchon, Port Of Seoul. Move Inland

(UN forces land behind North Korean communists, capture the port of Incheon and move inland.)

*People’s Daily*, September 19, 1950:

Title: the Korean people’s army continued to attack south of Pohang to annihilate the enemy of more than 4,000 American troops to the Far East landed Incheon in an attempt to save the invasion of the Korean War
(3) Volunteer troops to Korea: the military and people spontaneously defend the country VS red China’s armed intervention

After landing in Incheon, the “United Nations army” gradually occupied the battlefield advantage and occupied Seoul on September 28, 1950. On October 1, South Korean troops crossed the “38th parallel”, firing into the Chinese border. At this critical juncture, the Chinese people’s volunteers to Korea war once again to reverse the situation of the war.

Since November, People’s Daily has been full of reports about military and civilian volunteers. The slogan “resist the US, aid the DPRK and protect the country” was first seen in the joint declaration of all democratic parties issued on November 4. “Why can’t we just ignore the U.S. invasion of Korea? “, compared the “Oriental plan” of the United States with the “northernism” and “mainland policy” of Japan, expounded the interests between China and the DPRK when the lips are dead and the teeth are cold, and “supported the just efforts of the Chinese people to fight against the United States and aid the DPRK to protect the country”. On November 8, published the first report with “volunteer forces” as the key words, “in the Chinese people’s volunteer forces to participate in the next Korean people’s army to achieve important victory 11 days annihilate the enemy 6,000 recaptured the vast area”, declared the volunteers in the Korean “first battle victory”. From “military and civilian volunteers to fight in Korea” to “support the just efforts of volunteers to protect the country” to “the important victory of volunteers”, People’s Daily successfully created a new group image with unique temperament -- patriots to protect the country.

By contrast, the New York Times featured a front-page commentary on Oct. 31 on the Chinese Red Unit helping Korean Foe. The choice of “Red Unit”, on the one hand, is ideological and hostile. On the other hand, the word “army” is not used to mean “regular army”, but “Unit”, which indicates that the US side has not received accurate information about whether the army is from China’s regular army, which reflects the “objective” news value orientation to some extent. However, in subsequent reports, except in the news quoted by Xinhua, “volunteer” (volunteer army) or “Chinese red army” or “Chinese communist armies” are used as subjects in other cases. This practice strengthened the construction of the “enemy-US” identity of the war, and simplified the nature of the Chinese people’s war of defending their country to the aggressive war of the “communist gang”.

(4) Kaesong negotiations: peace first vs. interests first

After five campaigns, both sides suffered heavy losses. On June 23, 1950, Soviet ambassador to the United Nations Alexander Malik delivered a radio address titled “the price of peace” and proposed a peaceful solution to the Korean issue, which pro-
provided an important opportunity for peace talks between the two sides.

On June 25, the front page of the *People’s Daily* carried an editorial titled “Soviet representative to the United Nations Malik delivered a radio speech explaining the Soviet Union’s policy of peace, denouncing U.S. aggression and once again proposing a peaceful solution to the Korean issue.” “Denouncing American aggression” took the United States as the subject of the war and defined the nature of the war as “aggression”, while “once again” emphasized the widespread expectations of the outside world for “peace”. By means of intertextuality, the United States is associated with threats to world peace such as “invasion of Korea”, “intervention in Taiwan”, “establishment of the north Atlantic alliance” and “arms race”. “The Soviet union, the People’s Republic of China and other countries have repeatedly proposed a peaceful solution to the Korean conflict. The only reason war is still going on in Korea is because the United States has consistently blocked acceptance of these peace proposals.” It is worth noting that on the same day, the 4th edition also published the report “to commemorate the first anniversary of the Korean War, the Indian people will organize the assembly and demonstration to demand a peaceful solution to the Korean issue” to create a peaceful atmosphere. In the following days, “peaceful settlement of the Korean issue” became the main agenda frame of People’s Daily. The front page published a long editorial “strive for a peaceful solution to the Korean issue” on January 29, creating a positive atmosphere of public opinion for the smooth progress of the peace talks. The United States had to “beg” for peace when Truman wailed to stop internal quarrels and was forced to agree to the Malik peace proposal. July 2: Kim Il Sung, Peng Dehuai and Mattew Bunker Ridgway informed of the agreement to hold Korean armistice talks. The oft-repeated argument is that China has always supported a “peaceful solution” to the North Korean issue and that the purpose of the talks is “peace”. The “peace talks” have been portrayed as a result of the US military defeat and popular opposition to the talks.

(5) Signing of armistice agreement:

**The great victory of the Chinese and Korean people against aggression vs. the great victory of the United Nations in maintaining peace**

The truce talks have been honed for two years because of the disparity in terms. In order to obtain favorable conditions at the negotiating table, the “United Nations army” launched the “summer offensive” and the “autumn offensive” successively. Without achieving the goal, it carried out large-scale aerial bombing. After the battle of Sang-gamryong, the war situation remained stalemate. In November 1951, Eisenhower was elected President of the United States. One of his campaign slogans was to end the Korean War. After Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Soviet Union once again called for a peaceful solution to the war, and China and the DPRK proposed peace talks. After
the resumption of peace talks on 26 April, the two sides signed the Korean armistice agreement on 27 July. Interestingly, both People’s Daily and the New York Times regarded the signing of the agreement as a “victory” for themselves.

In the three months since the resumption of the peace talks, People’s Daily reported a total of 140 articles with “armistice” as the key word, accounting for 63% of all relevant reports (223 articles in total). A large number of reports focused on the peace talks created a public atmosphere for the smooth progress of the peace talks. On July 27, the DPRK-China delegation issued a communiqué on the Korean armistice negotiations. Two editorials published on July 28th, for one thing, the great Chinese people’s movement to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea, lay a solid foundation for the realization of the north Korean truce “, the “background” war cause (review) and “evaluation” schemata, praised the country from all walks of life “is a person, have the money to pay, that there was corn grain” dedication, “the victory of the fight for the Korean, the Korean armistice, laid a solid foundation.” Second, “victory belongs to the Korean-Chinese people who fought for justice and peace,” an illustrated review of the Korean War, notes that “the great victory of the Korean-Chinese forces and the defeat of the American forces on the Korean battlefield forced the U.S. aggressors to accept the proposal of the Soviet Union’s representative to the United Nations on the Korean armistice negotiations.” These two editorials once again attributed the responsibility for the war to the collusion between “the American imperialists” and “the puppet forces of Syngman Rhee”, and attributed the “victory” of the war to “the campaign launched by the people of the whole country to resist the US and aid Korea”. The above schema constructs a macro proposition, that is, “the Chinese and Korean people worked together to win the great victory against aggression”.

In contrast, The headline on the front page of the New York Times on July 27, transiting Is Signed, Ending The Fighting In Korea; P.O.W. Exchange Near; Rhee Gets U.S Pledge; Dwight Eisenhower Bids Free World Stay corvette (armistice agreement has been signed, ended the Korean war. A prisoner exchange is imminent; Syngman Rhee was assured by the United States; Eisenhower’s call for vigilance in the free world) is still an ideological statement regarding “communism” as a threat to the “free world.” The article is based on a “verbal response” and quotes Secretary of State John Dulles as saying that the Korean armistice was a great victory for the United Nations in keeping world peace. And Lincoln’s dedication: “that is our resolve and our dedication.” On the surface, the insertion of quotation weakens subjective trace and creates objectivity, but in fact, it skillfully expresses official views to readers.
3. Conclusions

In 2010, on the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War, President Barrack Obama suddenly declared that the United States had won the Korean War and refused to accept a “draw”. Whether the US President is grandstanding or appeasement, it is at least a sign of a “chasm” in perceptions of the Korean War between different countries or entities of interest. There is a lot of debate about facts and values in the human discussion of the historical facts of war, but what we can do is to study how different countries construct the reality of war for the audience, so that we can examine the source of this “gap” in collective memory. Through a comparative analysis of the media presentation of the Korean War, People’s Daily and the New York Times present two totally different war scenarios.

First, there is a gap between the media prospect of war and the reality prospect. At the textual level, from the selection of keywords and facts to the embedding of intertextuality, comments and predictions, the trace of media operation is gradually obvious, objectivity is gradually weakened and subjectivity is gradually enhanced. From the perspective of theme/framework, mass media actively constructs media framework through the selection of facts and emphasis. By choosing some aspects of the reality of war (such as military victory) and ignoring others (such as anti-war protests), it limits and influences the audience’s perception of the war. The harsh reality of war, so that people can not recognize the real war. From the perspective of value evaluation, the media judge the added value of war mainly by “I”, and constantly vilify and discredit the enemy when they occupy the moral high ground for themselves. After filtering and adding the facts and values of the war, ordinary people could not observe the real picture of the war through the media, but could only see a framed “mock war”.

Secondly, ideology is rooted in the thematic construction of media. In the early days of the cold war, when the Korean War broke out, media reports were always ideological, and more than 90% of them showed ideological tendencies. “As an instrument of governance, ideology is the sums total of emotions, appearances and ideas that represent the fundamental interests of the ruling class. Its fundamental feature is to consciously or unconsciously replace and cover up the connection of reality with the connection of fantasy. National Security Council officials made it clear in a memo to Truman that “it is more important at this time to direct news media coverage in the service of war mobilization than to provide accurate, ideological guidance.” Combined with the research results, the media in both countries take the ideology of the ruling class as the reference and become a powerful tool for government political propaganda and war mobilization.
Thirdly, the discourse practice of war report has commonality. The media concretize core concepts and demands into specific discourse to seek political and military purposes such as military mobilization, public opinion guidance and consensus building. Through the comparative analysis of discourse practice, the Chinese and American media reports on war have certain commonalities. (1) Attach importance to the theme of “morality” and enhance the legitimacy of war. Media from “humanitarian, defend human rights”, “patriotism (defend, resist aggression)” and “ideology (maintenance free world, against imperialist aggression)” three dimensions, will be the core concept of “just war” condensed into such as: “support”, “resist aggression” and “necessary” war, “upholding democracy” can be concise expression of discourse, shape their own moral superiority. In the process of concrete expression, the enemy will be “demonized”, such as “United Nations army” and “volunteers” were demonized as “American emperor” and “red army”, so as to simplify the complex reasons for war into “armed aggression”, to suppress the justice of the enemy war. (2) Strengthen the theme of “strength” and highlight the dominant position of our own battlefield. In the comparison of forces between the two warring parties, the media used a large number of words such as “achievements (rich)”, “advanced” and “high morale” to highlight the difference in strength between the two sides. (3) Make good use of the theme of “victory” to resolve negative war situations. The media uses such words as “victory in the first battle”, “victory in sight” and “march forward” to shape the image of “our own advantage”. However, when the enemy is in the ascendant, it adopts such words as “active evacuation” and “no concern about the gains and losses of one city” to resolve the negative war situation. (4) Keep the theme of “peace” and promote the end of war. Although the theme of “peace” was adopted in the early stage of the war, it was to strengthen the legitimacy and necessity of “fighting back in self-defense and countering violence with violence”. But as the war continues, the widespread use of the “peace” theme has helped advance the peace process and avoid unnecessary casualties. Therefore, the media will retain the theme of “peace” behind the propaganda of “common hatred”.

Works Cited