

Differences in News Reports in Chinese and American Media: Taking the Tangshan Barbecue Restaurant Event as a Case Study

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Abstract: This article uses the Tangshan Barbecue Restaurant incident as a case study to examine the factors influencing the reaction to popular events in the narrative language of Chinese and American media. Through a literature review and content analysis, the study compares the differences in narration, including the use of vocabulary and expressions, interpretation methods, and reception between Chinese and American media. The findings indicate that political and cultural factors, interest orientations, and values, as well as the media market and communication environments, influence the narrative language of Chinese and American media. Furthermore, the language used in Chinese and American media narratives also affects public reactions and the formation of public opinion. This study provides important references and insights to deepen understanding of the differences in media narratives between China and the United States, and to promote cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: media language, communication, policy, cultural influence, public event

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In the early morning of June 10, 2022, an incident took place at a barbecue restaurant in the Lubei District of Tangshan City, Hebei Province, China. During the incident, four women were subjected to beat by seven men and two women. Once the incident came to light, it garnered widespread attention, leaving many netizens shocked by the assailants' brazen attitude and brutal tactics. According to news media reports and live surveillance footage, a man approached a group of women at a table and made unwanted physical contact with one of them. When the woman tried to evade him, the man proceeded to slap her. His companions then joined in, assaulting the woman and her three female friends. Subsequently, one of the women was dragged onto the street outside the restaurant and repeatedly kicked and punched by multiple men. Due to its association with various pressing contemporary issues such as gender equality, social security, and gang violence, the incident has sparked intense debates both within the local community and on a national and international scale regarding its focal points and implications. The background of the Tangshan Barbecue Restaurant

incident serves as the basis for comparing and analyzing the reactions of Chinese and American media in different narrative languages towards hot events.

Media plays a crucial role in the dissemination of information in society, and media narrative language is the means by which media present and interpret events. Due to the differences in historical, cultural, political, and values backgrounds between China and the United States, their media narrative languages may vary. When studying the reactions to popular events, it is common to focus on differences in coverage angles, vocabulary usage, emotional expressions, as well as the interpretations and evaluations of events by different media. These differences may reflect factors such as the stance, interest orientation, and values of the media in both countries when dealing with events.

1.2. Research Questions

This study aims to analyze the policy factors and cultural backgrounds behind the differences by comparing public discussions, official media, and the reporting and commentary of events in China and the United States.

By examining the narrative differences between Chinese and American media in the context of the Tangshan Barbecue incident, this paper seeks to gain in-depth insights into the values, stances, and reporting styles of the media in both countries. This contributes to a better understanding of the media environments in both countries, promoting cross-cultural communication and mutual learning.

The media serves as an important channel for information dissemination in society, playing a significant role in shaping public awareness and forming opinions. The narrative differences between Chinese and American media in the Tangshan Barbecue incident can lead to different public sentiments and opinions. Studying different media narrative approaches can reveal how the media interpret and shape events, as well as explore the influence of media narratives on public attitudes and behaviors.

1.3. Literature Review

Since the 21st century, numerous studies have been conducted on media bias in event reporting, attracting widespread attention and making significant progress. For instance, Si and Xu examined the subjectivity of newspaper editorials and their ideological implications, emphasizing the need for readers to interpret editorial content objectively and critically [1]. Additionally, the Topic Detection and Tracking (TDT) algorithm has been reviewed, providing theoretical support for understanding the differences in media reporting direction and subsequent popularity between domestic and foreign contexts [2]. Furthermore, van Dijk noted that critical discourse analysis is essentially a political stance and critical discourse can be identified in media coverage of social hot topics [3]. The representation of factual descriptions and subjective attitudes has become a crucial aspect of news reporting, inevitably influencing people's views and attitudes through media-biased discourse and mainstream social perspectives. In terms of ideology, Fairclough and Wodak summarize the overall ideological perspective of critical discourse analysis as a system of values formed by social groups during social cognition [4]. These values are generated in social discursive practices, possess certain schematic structures, and interact with social structures such as power, collectively constructing social group identities.

Media language, driven by cultural differences and political stances in China and the United States, exhibits intentional or unintentional biases that are inevitable and have a significant impact. However, despite the globalization of the news industry and the extensive exposure of the highly publicized violent incident at a barbecue restaurant in Tangshan, China, on June 10, 2022, there has been a surge of public opinion leading to various conflicts such as gender and regional divides. Different countries have seen the emergence of diverse voices, with the United States serving as a typical example.

Currently, there is still a lack of research analyzing the linguistic differences between Chinese and American media concerning this incident.

An increasing number of contemporary researchers have focused on cross-media narrative studies, shifting their attention from text and literature to the relationships and interactions among media, society, and viewers. Foreign researchers, like Brenda Laurel, have attempted to integrate digital media technology with traditional narrative by combining Aristotelian theories from "Poetics" with human-computer interaction to create interactive aesthetics and new forms of artistic expression [5]. Domestic researchers have also conducted a series of studies on media narratives.

However, there has been an excessive pursuit of the formal aesthetics of digital media technology in Chinese journalism, aiming for popular recognition and resulting in a homogenization of visual representation. At the same time, attention given to the application of digital media in narrative content expression remains superficial, failing to consider the interactive connection between narrative content and the use of digital media. This has led to a separation between the two and even competition for attention. Therefore, interactive media narratives built on journalistic content have become an inevitable trend.

1.4. Research Methods

Firstly, conducting a literature review to gather and analyze existing research on the narrative language of Chinese and American media provides background information and theoretical foundations for the study. This research systematically analyzes the texts of Chinese and American media coverage to explore differences in narrative language, expression methods, and narrative structures. Qualitative analysis methods such as semantic analysis, discourse analysis, and frame analysis can be used to identify and interpret factors such as themes, keywords, emotional tones, and attitudes in different media narratives.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of Chinese and American media coverage is adopted. Reports from American CNN, as well as the Chinese Women's Federation, regarding the violent incident at the Tangshan barbecue restaurant on June 10, are analyzed. News coverage, editorial opinions, and special reports from mainstream media are selected for comparison. By comparing differences in angles, focal points, cited sources, interpretations, and evaluations of the events, this research aims to reveal the disparities in narrative approaches between Chinese and American media.

Finally, a survey is conducted to understand the impact and reactions of Chinese and American media narratives on the audience. This will provide empirical evidence for the study and further explore the influence of Chinese and American media narrative differences on public perception and attitudes.

The reporting differences between Chinese and American media bring about diverse perspectives. China and the United States have different histories, cultures, and social backgrounds, which influence how the media interpret and evaluate events. By engaging with media reports from different countries, people can learn about viewpoints from various cultural and social environments, thereby broadening their ways of thinking and cognitive scope. The reporting differences between Chinese and American media reflect different values and positions.

2. Differences in Narrative

2.1. Event Description and Emphasis

There were differences in event descriptions between Chinese and American media. Chinese media tended to use relatively stable and neutral vocabulary to describe events, focusing on specific details and individuals or communities affected. They emphasized the objective presentation of events and avoided exaggerating their impact. For example, the official Weibo account of the All-China

Women's Federation (ACWF) exhibited a proactive and uncompromising official attitude in over 30 reports posted from the day of the incident on June 10, 2022, until July 25 [6]. The language used in these reports was precise, often employing words such as "allegedly" to convey caution. However, there was a lack of critical reflection with negative emotions, and the overall approach seemed to focus on appeasing public sentiment and increasing trust in government institutions, rather than utilizing the ACWF's stance and discourse power on gender issues.

In contrast, American media leaned towards using stronger and more emotive vocabularies to describe events, emphasizing severity and their impact on society. They attempted to capture public attention and evoke resonance through strong language and emotions. For instance, in a CNN report on June 21, 2022, a segment was quoted from a social media article, suggesting that this incident was a microcosm of "systemic gender violence" in China. This viewpoint clearly holds some merit but is also subjective. At the same time, CNN stated that similar discussions "did not appear to sit well with the Chinese government, which has long cracked down on China's feminist movement by arresting and silencing activists and censoring online debates" [7]. Some netizens were angered by the police categorizing the incident as a case of provocation rather than recognizing it as a gender-related act of violence.

2.2. Attribution of Responsibility

There are also differences in attributing responsibility and expressing blame between Chinese and American media. Chinese media expressed attribution of responsibility relatively cautiously, avoiding exaggerating the impact of events. They focused more on individual behavioral responsibility or management deficiencies without easily attributing blame to the government or relevant institutions. Taking the official account of the Chinese Women's Newspaper as an example, within a week after the incident, almost every daily update mentioned the "local criminal gang forces" and the national "anti-crime and anti-evil campaign" behind the Tangshan incident, as well as the progress in apprehending the suspects [8]. Undoubtedly, these are real social issues. However, the disproportionate focus on "gang violence" in the reporting raised suspicions of an attempt to avoid discussions on sensitive structural gender inequality issues. This incident has sparked intense discussions among Chinese netizens on gender inequality. For example, there have been condemnations and even online harassment towards other men in the restaurant for not helping the victimized women. Some voices questioned the legitimacy and reasonableness of the victimized women going out for barbecue late at night, engaging in victim-blaming. Additionally, there were inquiries as to why the involved men felt entitled to harass women. It is suspicious that the Chinese Women's Newspaper did not use this exposure to address various forms of inequality faced by women in society at the official and national levels. Instead, in their reporting, the responsibility was shifted to local governments and criminal gangs.

Furthermore, Chinese media emphasized the government's proactive responses and management measures in their reporting. They highlighted the government's role and responsibility, conveying messages of maintaining social order and harmony, and gave reports on the government's swift responses, rescue efforts, and subsequent management measures to showcase the government's decision-making capability and sense of responsibility.

On the other hand, American media were more inclined to hold individuals or entities accountable, using strong accusatory language to criticize those responsible for the events. They attributed responsibility to the government, relevant institutions, or systems and strived to hold them accountable through public scrutiny. CNN, in its two reports, disregarded the factor of gang violence and instead focused on the more resonant issue of gender inequality in China. In their report on June 11, 2022, CNN used the Tangshan barbecue restaurant violence incident as a lead-in to highlight other heinous gender-related events that occurred earlier. For example, in 2021, "a Tibetan vlogger died

after her ex-husband set her on fire while she was live-streaming to her fans on social media," and in 2022, "a mother of eight was shown in a video chained by her neck in a shed", although "authorities eventually admitted that she was a victim of human trafficking" [7]. However, the report lacks comprehensiveness and suffers from a generalization bias. Blaming all the issues solely on the Chinese government is overly broad and lacks academic objectivity.

In conclusion, Chinese and American media demonstrated different attitudes when it comes to explaining and evaluating the event. Chinese media placed more emphasis on explaining and evaluating events, providing government solutions and positive responses, and emphasizing social stability and public interest. They attempted to maintain social stability and public confidence by conveying the government's positive actions. In contrast, American media focused more on criticism and analysis, providing multiple viewpoints and opinions and paying attention to underlying causes and systemic issues. They delved deeper into the motivations behind events and called for structural reforms.

2.3. Emotion and Opinion Shaping

Chinese media prioritized maintaining audience emotions, reporting events with positive and inspiring vocabulary and expressions and emphasizing the importance of social cohesion and cooperation. They tried to stabilize public emotions through positive reporting, promoting societal harmony. In contrast, American media paid more attention to the audience's emotional resonance, using emotive vocabulary and expressions to evoke public attention and resonance towards the events. They aim to incite public emotions to drive social change or initiate broader discussions.

The narrative language used by Chinese and American media in the Tangshan barbecue restaurant incident had different effects on public reaction. Here are some perspectives on the influence of media narrative language on public reaction in China and the United States. Chinese media evoked a sense of stability and confidence among the public, encouraging them to trust the government's ability and decision-making in maintaining social stability. This kind of reporting aimed to make the public calmer, reducing panic and anxiety. Conversely, American media reporting may evoke skepticism and criticism of the government, leading to a more challenging attitude towards the government's actions. They prompted the public to criticize and question the government, leading to deeper reflection and discussion of the incident, as well as calling for government oversight and reform. Therefore, the differences in narrative language between Chinese and American media may elicit different responses of trust and skepticism from the public.

Moreover, Chinese media reporting tended to play a role in guiding public opinion to some extent, encouraging the public to be more united and actively participate in social action. In contrast, American media reporting emphasized the public's independent thinking and judgment, encouraging the formation of personal viewpoints and the expression of opinions. This kind of reporting may prompt the public to engage more in discussions and debates, leading to diverse opinions.

In summary, the narrative language used by Chinese and American media can have distinct effects on public emotion and opinion formation. Chinese media aimed to shape a more unified and optimistic public response while American media fostered skepticism, critical thinking, and diverse opinions among the public. These differences in narrative language can lead to variations in public trust, stability, engagement, and opinion formation between China and the United States. These comparative analyses highlight the distinct differences in narrative language, vocabulary, expressions, and event interpretation between Chinese and American media. These differences are shaped by varying values, political systems, and cultural backgrounds.

3. Discussion of Influencing Factors

3.1. Political Factors

In the case of the Tangshan barbecue restaurant incident, Chinese and American media were influenced by political and cultural factors, resulting in differences in the narrative language and reactions to the event. State media reports have largely focused on the swift police action in arresting the suspects, and the two-week “thunderstorm” campaign announced by Tangshan authorities to crack down on organized crime [9]. Many Western advocates of freedom of expression point to these developments as a sign that the information revolution has catalyzed an irreversible stream of politicized thought that, once unleashed, will inevitably lead to demands for political liberalization [10]. From a political perspective, as a developing country under one-party rule, China is committed to maintaining government authority and social order, prioritizing unity among the masses and the integrity of the regime over discussions of stubborn issues such as gender and other topics that involve structural reforms, as well as discussions on overall education and spiritual civilization. The transformation of gender issues would involve movements such as feminism and LGBTQ rights, which would give rise to certain civil organizations and forces. However, under the current political situation in China, these movements are not highly tolerated. Shifting public attention to gang-related issues precisely reflects the government's absolute will to deal with non-governmental forces.

In contrast, the United States, as a multi-party system, prioritizes democracy and freedom of speech over the stability of the regime. As an external country, the U.S. does not need to consider the impact of its speech on the Chinese public or bear responsibility for Chinese society. The media in the U.S. is also not constrained by the Chinese government. The hit of their reporting is clearly more important at this time. Deepening the American public's stereotypical impressions and negative evaluations of Chinese society will not have adverse effects on the media or the United States.

3.2. Cultural Factors

From a cultural perspective, the women's rights movement in China emerged relatively late, and public awareness has not been fully awakened. Therefore, there is not much sensitivity towards the projection of gender issues in real events. The collision between an incomplete and immature value system of gender equality and the existing and relatively backward institutions can lead to radical and extreme gender opposition. However, this opposition is usually limited to venting dissatisfaction and social expression. True effective equality requires the safeguard of the law. Policy formulation is often hindered and time-consuming, and China is still on the path of developing economic strength and improving the popularization of general education.

In contrast, the discussion of gender issues in the United States is relatively mature and presents systematic logic and theories, permeating aspects such as social education and employment. The public in the U.S. is relatively more sensitive to these issues. Beyond the understanding of gender equality, even the subjective definition of gender has emerged. In comparison, gang-related issues have less emotional appeal to the public, although violence associated with them is more common in the United States, which makes it more rationalized.

It should be noted that the differences in interest orientation and values between Chinese and American media are a general trend but do not represent the stance of all media outlets. In actual reporting, individual media may have variations and special circumstances. Therefore, specific differences in the narrative language require further in-depth research and discussion through case studies and content analysis.

4. Conclusion

Chinese and American media demonstrated different perspectives and standpoints in their coverage of the Tangshan barbecue incident. Chinese media emphasized the impact of the event on social stability and public order, focusing on the government's response measures and the public's reactions. They positioned the event as an isolated case, emphasizing individual responsibility. In contrast, American media paid more attention to the impact of the event on individual rights and freedom of speech, highlighting regulatory failures and demands for an investigation. They viewed the event as a systemic issue, focusing on social structures and institutional factors.

There are also differences in language and expression between Chinese and American media in their reporting. Chinese media used more formal and official language, emphasizing government decisions and leadership, as well as the swift response to the event. They prioritized conveying government decisions and proactive measures, delivering messages of stable social order and harmony. On the other hand, American media focused more on individual case reporting, using direct and vivid language to highlight the human aspect and social impact of the event. They employed emotional vocabulary and expressions to attract readers' attention and emotional resonance.

In conclusion, under the backdrop of the Tangshan barbecue incident, there are evident differences in the narrative between Chinese and American media. These differences reflect the cultural disparities, value differences, and media environment variations between China and the United States. Chinese and American media focused on different aspects, emphasized different issues, and adopted different languages and expressions in their coverage of the Tangshan barbecue incident. These differences had an impact on the formation of public perception and opinions and also significantly influenced public opinion exchanges and the international image between the two countries. Therefore, conducting in-depth research and understanding the narrative differences between Chinese and American media is of great significance in promoting cross-cultural communication, enhancing mutual understanding, and advancing the development of international media reporting.

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