

# A Study of Intercultural Communication Barriers between China and the United States: The Case of American Media Reports on China

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**Abstract:** *For many years, China and some Western countries have been in constant conflict, especially with the United States, which mainly reflected in the news reports by the American media on China. In the final analysis, these conflicts stem from the intercultural communication barriers between China and the United States. Based on the framework of intercultural communication barriers proposed by Martin and Nakayama (2014), this paper analyzes the intercultural communication barriers reflected in American media coverage on China and their impacts by using qualitative research methods and theories of individualism and collectivism. The study found that there are four types of intercultural communication barriers in the American media coverage on China. In terms of ethnocentrism, American media news reports mostly criticize China and praise their own country. In terms of stereotypes, most of the American media news reports are very aggressive in language, and there is no reliable evidence to support the argument. In terms of prejudice, American news media usually do not have a thorough understanding of specific groups in China, and question the professionalism or authenticity of those groups based on their own feelings. In terms of discrimination, news stories in the U.S. media often use abusive words in headlines or text. Finally, this paper puts forward some suggestions to effectively eliminate these barriers.*

**Keywords:** *Intercultural Communication, Cultural Differences, Individualism and Collectivism*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

China and some Western countries have been in a state of strategic competition for many years. Taking the United States as an example, there seems to be a growing consensus to advocate a "getting tough on China" policy (Bush & Hass, 2019) <sup>[1]</sup>. However, most of the tough and provocative discourse might be due to the intercultural communication barriers between China and the West.

Intercultural communication barriers refer to the barriers caused by differences in culture, values, and discourse systems between two or more different cultural groups when they communicate. According to Martin and Nakayama (2014), intercultural communication barriers are mainly divided into two categories, namely, attitude barriers and behavior barriers <sup>[2]</sup>. In terms of attitude barriers, intercultural communication barriers refer to ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice. In terms of behavioral barriers, intercultural communication barriers refer to discrimination.

Intercultural communication barriers are inevitable in international communication. However, it should be noted that if they are not handled properly, it is easy to lead to misunderstandings between countries, and even intensify their contradictions. As a result, the friendly and cooperative relations between countries will be broken, and the current situation of economic globalization will also be dealt a heavy blow. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen the analysis of barriers to intercultural communication.

Since the 1980s, the academic status of intercultural communication has gradually become familiar to people, and related research has become more and more abundant. According to Zhang (2003), hundreds of articles covering important topics related to the study of intercultural communication had been published before 1993, such as the study of the cultural connotation of words, the relationship between culture and communication, cultural differences and foreign language teaching, pragmatics and culture, non-verbal communication and culture, etc. <sup>[3]</sup>. Although there is a large amount of research

literature nowadays, most of the researches are based on personal speculation on the theory of intercultural communication, which is more subjective and less empirical. As Zhang (2003) indicated, due to the lack of scientific research methods in current intercultural communication research and analysis, there is a common characteristic that "the description of materials is inevitably one-sided and subjective, and the analysis is mostly unsystematic and unscientific" (p. 7) [3].

### **1.2. Research purpose**

Intercultural communication barriers are caused by cultural differences, but cultural differences are not directly equal to intercultural communication barriers. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the barriers in American media caused by cultural differences through theoretical knowledge related to intercultural communication, and to explore how they are reflected in U.S. media coverage and other behaviors and what impact they have. In the framework of intercultural communication barriers by Martin and Nakayama's (2014), this paper uses qualitative research methods to analyze the intercultural communication barriers reflected in American media reports on China based on theories of individualism and collectivism, and to further analyzes the negative impacts brought by this result. Particularly, this study intends to address the following questions.

- (a) Are there any intercultural communication barriers in U.S. media coverage on China?
- (b) If so, how can they be reflected in ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination?
- (c) Are they consistent with the characteristics of collectivism or individualism?

### **1.3. Research Outline**

This paper can be divided into four chapters.

Chapter One mainly consists of three parts, including research background, research purpose and significance, and the overall framework of the paper.

Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework of the paper. This part mainly analyzes the barriers to intercultural communication, which consists of attitude disorder and behavior disorder, and explains theories of individualism and collectivism.

Chapter Three is the main part of the paper, including research questions, research methodology, and research results. The analysis materials are based on news reports of China by American media.

Chapter Four is the last part of the paper. This part primarily sums up major findings of the study, points out limitations and offers some suggestions for further research.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Barriers to intercultural communication**

The subject of intercultural communication has been of interest to communication scholars since at least the 1960s. In 1959, American anthropologist Hall first proposed the concept of intercultural communication in *Silent Language*. However, the study of intercultural communication in China started relatively late in the 1980s. He (1983) defined intercultural communication as a process of studying different cultures, comparing their similarities and differences, finding out cultural differences and predicting the difficulties, barriers, contradictions and conflicts in people's communication [4].

Intercultural communication barriers refer to obstacles caused by differences in culture, values, and discourse systems when communicating between two or more different cultural groups. Wang (2020) believes that intercultural communication barriers are virtually synonymous with intercultural conflicts, confrontations and cultural shocks [5].

Martin and Nakayama (2014) classified intercultural communication barriers into two categories in their book *Experiencing intercultural communication: attitude barriers and behavior barriers* [2]. Attitude barriers involve ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice. The main barrier of behavior is discrimination, which is mostly caused by attitude barriers such as stereotypes and prejudice.

Ethnocentrism is a kind of belief, mainly characterized by over-recognizing one's own culture and deeming it superior to other groups. For example, when the teacher asks students to draw a map of the

world, the students will naturally put their own country in the center of the map first. This is a relatively common ethnocentrism caused by familiarity. But according to Martin and Nakayama (2014), extreme ethnocentrism is defined as: "one cannot believe that another culture's values are equally good or worthy" (p. 55)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Stereotypes "are widely held beliefs about a group of people" and are a result of people's classification and generalization of information (Martin & Nakayama, 2014, p. 55)<sup>[2]</sup>. Excessive pattern generalizations may lead to potential stereotypes. On the one hand, stereotypes can be negative. For example, if the teacher presupposes that one student is lazy and passive in leaning, then he will have a negative stereotype of that student in their communication. On the other hand, stereotypes can also be positive. For example, people tend to think that attractive people are smart and social, although it is not necessarily the case. In general, stereotypes can help people better predict the information they want and how they will react when they communicate. However, once a stereotype is formed, it is difficult to change because people prefer to receive information that is consistent with the stereotype, and discard information that is not.

Prejudice often arises because of insufficient understanding of a certain cultural group. Like stereotypes, once prejudice is created, it is difficult to eliminate. Different from stereotypes, prejudice is how people feel about a cultural group, as opposed to stereotypes, which are universal features of a cultural group. According to Martin and Nakayama (2014), the reason for prejudice is that it performs certain social functions: "adjustment function", "ego-defensive function", "value-expressive function". And prejudice may be due to an individual's need to feel positive about himself and negative about others, or it may be due to threats<sup>[2]</sup>. In addition, a form of prejudice related to race relations is very common, which is a color-blind way of handling intercultural relations. It promotes race relations mainly by pretending not to see differences. This common form of prejudice has derived two terms "Tokenism" and "Arms-length". "Tokenism" refers to the prejudice shown by those who do not acknowledge their own bias. "Arms-length" is the act of maintaining an ostensibly positive and friendly relationship with members of another group, but avoiding further contact.

Behavior barriers mainly refer to discrimination. Discrimination is the act of openly excluding others, often as a result of stereotypes and prejudice. Martin and Nakayama (2014) argue that discrimination is the prejudice of one stronger group against another weaker group because this prejudice is based on "ism"<sup>[2]</sup>. Manifestations of discrimination include verbal or non-verbal insults, rejection of opportunities, physical violence and planned genocide. In extreme discrimination, hate speech can cause or reflect prejudice and discrimination. For example, in recruitment, fresh graduates from "985" and "211" universities are often more favored by recruiters than those from non- "985" and "211" universities. People think that students from prestigious universities are always better than those from ordinary universities, which can easily lead to discrimination.

## **2.2. Individualism and collectivism**

Geert Hofstede (2001), a Dutch social psychologist, summarizes "individualism-collectivism" as an important dimension of cultural value differences between the East and the West. De Mooij (2011) explains individualism and collectivism in a popular way: "The contrast individualism / collectivism can be defined as people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty" (p. 182)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Collectivism advocates that individual are subordinate to society, that individual interests should be subordinated to the interests of the group, the nation and the state, and that collective development and individual development should be unified. According to the social research report of Ralston et al. (2015), when collectivist individuals consider ethical behaviors, they are compartmentalizing these into three categories: (1) things you would do for in-group members (e.g., pro-organizational ethical behavior); (2) things you would be willing to do to out-group members (e.g., maliciously intended ethical behavior); (3) things you would do for yourself<sup>[7]</sup>. For the third category, it means the welfare of the group in the context of collectivism. In other words, the collectivist individuals, when considering the third type of behavior, will put the collective first and the individuals must obey the collective.

Individualism puts individual interests above collective interests. In addition, individualism also emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and individual rights, and the idea of widely emphasizing self-control also induces the awakening of self-consciousness. For example, when COVID-19 broke out, some people would engage in panic buying regardless of the epidemic situation in their communities. That is because, according to Maaravi et al. (2021), individuals' self-concept of "I" or "we" in turn determines that they are less concerned about the whole community or the larger whole they live

in, and only care about themselves and their immediate family members<sup>[8]</sup>. In the Social Research Report of Ralston et al. (2015), individualistic individual needs are divided into three types: "me, myself, I"<sup>[7]</sup>. It can be seen that individualistic self-consciousness is very strong, because the three major needs of individualistic individuals are all related to the concept of "self". Moreover, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in psychology, it is not the most effective way for individualistic individuals to achieve the highest level of self-realization by working for the organization.

In the Qin Dynasty, China realized national unification and formed Chinese culture with Confucian "benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom" as its cultural tradition, which is the reason why Chinese cultural tradition adheres to collectivism. Western culture originated from the ideological changes of ancient Greece, mainly emphasizing freedom, democracy and the protection of individual interests, which is consistent with the characteristics of individualism.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Research Questions

This paper focuses to examine how intercultural communication barriers are reflected in American media coverage of China and the impact of such barriers. Specifically, the following problems are addressed:

- (a) Is there any intercultural communication barrier in American media's news reports on China?
- (b) If so, how can it be reflected in ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination?
- (c) Is it consistent with the characteristics of collectivism or individualism?

#### 3.2. Research Method

The data of this paper are retrieved from the official websites of major American media, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and CNN, with a total of four representative news reports.

In terms of analysis method, this paper conducts a qualitative analysis of American media's news reports on China according to the classification of intercultural communication barriers by Martin and Nakayama (2014). In the process of analysis, the individualism and collectivism theories are combined to interpret the essential differences in attitude and behavior between U.S. media and China.

#### 3.3. Analysis

##### 3.3.1. Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is a belief characterized by an excessive recognition of one's own culture as superior to other groups. Such intercultural communication barriers are common in American media coverage of China. From the perspective of American media itself, they are not familiar with China and are often suspected of quoting out of context. From the perspective of the content of news reports, they are too one-sided and lack the analysis and explanation of the key essence of the event, that is, the focus is not accurate. Generally speaking, American media news reports based on ethnocentrism mostly criticize China and praise their own country.

## Scale of China's Wuhan shutdown is believed to be without precedent

By Michael Levenson New York Times, Updated January 23, 2020, 8:47 a.m.



Figure 1: Title from the New York Times<sup>[9]</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the shutdown of Wuhan became the first severest measure taken against a city with tens of millions of people since the founding of New China. Since 10:00 a.m. on January 23, 2020, Wuhan has been shut down. American media have different opinions on that. The New York Times reported the shutdown of Wuhan on January 23, 2020, with the title of "Scale of China's Wuhan shutdown is believed to be without precedent". The entire news report analyzed the damage of human rights caused by Wuhan shutdown, but there was not a single word indicated the reason for the

shutdown and why measures must be taken.

In this report, The New York Times interviewed several experts in the fields of medicine and history. James G. Hodge Jr., director of the Center for Public Health Law and Policy at Arizona State University, said the shutdown would almost certainly lead to human rights violations and would be patently unconstitutional in the United States. He also considered that "the restrictions could prevent healthy people from fleeing the city, perhaps exposing them to greater risk of infection, " "is obviously an excessive response". The New York Times mentioned that some historians believe isolation is usually aimed at marginalized people, which is the dark side of isolation. During the plague epidemic of the 14th century, for example, the marginalized populations in European city-states were mainly merchants, lepers and minorities such as Jews. And during a wave of cholera outbreaks in Europe in the 1830s, the main marginalized groups were prostitutes and beggars.

The above experts and The New York Times all highlighted this point: the shutdown of Wuhan seriously violated human rights, and the American system was superior in protecting human rights. Based on this point of view, the intercultural communication barrier reflected in The New York Times report emerged - attitude barrier, ethnocentrism. The New York Times had over approved its own constitutional system with insufficient arguments, and dismissed China's efforts to protect human rights. This shows that The New York Times, as one of the mainstream media in the United States, supports its own national culture and believes that its constitutional system is superior to that of China. However, China does legally protect human rights, but The New York Times does not understand or just ignore it, for which the United States is reluctant to recognize China's institutional and legal achievements. Taking the United States as an example, some western countries look upon China with an extreme sense of national superiority and are unable to objectively view China's development achievements. While occupying the dominant position in the world, they insist on their central position and are reluctant to accept non-western countries as equals or even surpass them (Lu, 2013)<sup>[10]</sup>.

As an American media, The New York Times has a distinctive cultural colour of individualism. In this report, The New York Times argued that the closure of Wuhan in China was a gross violation of human rights, mainly the right to personal freedom. In the United States, where individualism culture predominates, more emphasis is placed on the interests of each individual. They will not sacrifice a few to save the many, because individualism culture values individual rights over group responsibilities.

In China, the opposite is true. China is a country with a collectivist culture, which pays more attention to the needs and goals of the collective rather than the individual's, pursuing the concept of "one heart, one Mount Tai will move" and "with the help of all people, nothing is invincible". In the face of COVID-19, the Chinese government has implemented the closure measures from the overall perspective, not only to protect the interests of more people in the country, but also to follow the legal basis. According to Article 43 of the law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases, "the people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government may decide to blockade the epidemic areas of class A infectious diseases within its respective administrative region." According to the law, the closure of Wuhan will inevitably restrict the personal freedom of citizens to some extent, but it is legal. In addition, The New York Times claims that China does not respect human rights, which is nonsense. According to Article 33 of Chapter II basic rights and obligations of citizens in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China: "all people who have the nationality of the People's Republic of China are citizens of the People's Republic of China. All citizens of the People's Republic of China are equal to the law. The state respects and safeguards human rights."

### **3.3.2. Stereotypes**

A stereotype is a deep view of a group and is the result of classification and generalization of information. Most of the American news media are aggressive in language. They usually point out the stereotypes of the report object directly in the report content or title. These stereotypes can often be traced back to many years ago, with a long time span. In addition, news reports involving stereotypes often have no reliable evidence to support such stereotypes.

In recent years, China's influence in various fields has been on the rise. After the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, some people in the West hyped a new round of "China Threat Theory". On December 3, 2020, The Wall Street Journal of the United States published an article titled "China is National Security Threat No. 1", accusing China of its development in national defense, science and technology.

<https://www.wjsj.com/articles/china-is-national-security-threat-no-1-11607019599>

OPINION | COMMENTARY

### *China Is National Security Threat No. 1*

Resisting Beijing's attempt to reshape and dominate the world is the challenge of our generation.

By John Ratcliffe  
Dec. 3, 2020 1:20 pm ET

*Figure 2: Title from the Wall Street Journal<sup>[11]</sup>.*

In this report, The Wall Street Journal hyped up China's threats, such as "Beijing's attempt to reshape and dominate the world", "Beijing intends to dominate the U.S. and the rest of the planet economically, militarily and technologically", "replaces the U.S. firms in the global marketplace". In addition, The Wall Street Journal also slandered Beijing, saying that "There are no ethical boundaries to Beijing's pursuit of power". At the same time, it instigated US allies to carefully consider their contacts with China, for example, "personally told U.S. allies that using such Chinese-owned technology will severely limit America's ability to share vital intelligence with them", "China should be America's primary national security focus going forward. Other nations must understand this is true for them as well. "

Over the past few decades, American media have been making various judgments and predictions about China, one of which is the "China Threat Theory". From the perspective of stereotypes in intercultural communication barriers, American media tend to depict China as a cultural group in a stereotyped way. At the same time, this kind of prejudice will continue to exist, just like the renovation of "China Threat Theory", because American media choose not to pass the information that contradicts the prejudice. Walter Lippmann said: "in most cases, we do not understand first and then define, but define first and then understand." From the "Yellow Peril Theory" in the 19th century to the "Red Threat" in the middle of the 20th century, such labels are western demonization propaganda to China, that is, to think China is an inferior alternative. It was not until a new round of "China Threat Theory" that the internal language of belittling China's strength gradually turned into the fear of China's strength. But what has not changed from beginning to end is the stereotype of China in the West.

Once the stereotype of intercultural communication barriers is established, it is difficult to eliminate. The United States and other western countries are keen to use their strong international discourse power to label China (Wang, 2020)<sup>[12]</sup>. For example, the "China Threat Theory" in the above news reports is one of the labels attached to China. The United States and other western countries enjoy a strong voice in the world because of their highly-developed military and political strength. It is this voice that promotes the spread and deepening of stereotypes of China. The West first hyped the "China Threat Theory", and then, due to territorial and maritime sovereignty disputes and geopolitical factors, some neighboring countries also joined the ranks (Lu, 2013)<sup>[10]</sup>. A public opinion is first released by a group with strong discourse power, and then convinced by some neighboring countries, forming a non-conscious stereotype in advance, which is the cause of stereotypes.

As China continues to develop, a new version of the "China Threat Theory" has emerged. However, it is not tenable because facts speak louder than words. In response to the new round of "China Threat Theory", China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has made such a fact: "China is the main contributor to global economic growth, with an annual contribution rate of over 30%, which exceeds the total sum of the United States, Japan and the eurozone countries; China is a major contributor to global poverty reduction, with a contribution rate of more than 70%, creating a miracle in human history; China is a major contributor to the maintenance of world peace and has the largest number of UN peacekeepers among the five permanent members of the Security Council, with the second largest contribution of peacekeeping funds in the world; major initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative over the past five years has also been a major contributor to global governance, trade liberalization and an open world economy." However, the fact of China's development demonstrated by Wang Yi's response cannot be the same as that demonstrated by some western countries. They filter out effective information such as "global economy", "global poverty reduction", "safeguarding world peace" and "global governance". They only consider China's achievements as a threat from the perspective of individualistic individual interests.

### **3.3.3. Prejudice**

Prejudice is often due to a lack of in-depth understanding of a certain cultural group. As with stereotypes, prejudice is hard to eliminate once it is created. But different from stereotypes, prejudice is people's perception of a cultural group, rather than the stereotyped general characteristics of a cultural group. Generally speaking, prejudice in American media coverage is characterized by the following: the U.S. media often lack a thorough understanding of specific groups in China, and question the

professionalism or authenticity of those groups based on their own feelings.

In the year of 2020, when COVID-19 was ravaging, China achieved excellent results in epidemic prevention and control, and also made breakthroughs in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatment. In this context, many American media were scrambling to report on China's anti-epidemic experiences. In a news report titled "Beijing is promoting traditional medicine as a 'Chinese solution' to coronavirus. Not everyone is on board" on March 16, 2020, CNN expressed its doubts and disapproval of TCM. Overall, this report is full of prejudice against China.



Figure 3: Title from CNN<sup>[13]</sup>.

This article began with a Chinese patient, surnamed Xiong, who questioned the efficacy of Traditional Chinese Medicine. This patient believed that TCM "is a sheer placebo", "was skeptical of its efficacy and refused to drink it". Then, foreign experts of Western medicine also hold a skeptical attitude towards TCM, "Abroad, the herbal remedies could face even more skepticism from Western medical experts, who have long questioned their safety and effectiveness." Foreigners or foreign organizations questioned TCM, especially according to the statements about the views of the Chinese patient surnamed Xiong. The prejudice against TCM can be seen everywhere in the article: "State-backed industry", "Is it safe?". CNN attributed the good application of TCM to the compulsory promotion of China's national system.

From the analysis of CNN's cultural background, it can be seen that CNN, as an American TV news media, has a distinctive characteristic of individualism. For example, in the headline of this news report, "Not everyone is on board" is used to directly indicate that CNN is not sure about "Chinese solution". In this report, CNN repeatedly quoted the views of interviewees as shown below: "WHO overlooked the toxicity of some herbal medicine and the lack of evidence that it works", "It is surely problematic to force people to drink it without knowing (their conditions) first", "the government is seizing upon rising nationalist sentiments in China to push for TCM". These views reflect CNN's ignorance of or even blindness to Chinese traditional culture, national spirit and research achievements of Chinese medicine.

CNN's prejudice against TCM treatment is essentially due to a lack of in-depth knowledge of TCM. First of all, the interviewees are not representative, and their views indirectly represent CNN's prejudice against TCM. This report is dominated by a Chinese patient surnamed Xiong, who mentioned in many places in the article that he refused to use TCM treatment and was skeptical of it. In fact, CNN tended to express its rejection and query of TCM through Xiong's judgments. Secondly, all the specific problems of TCM listed in this report are nonsense. CNN believed that "it will further endangered animals such as the tiger, pangolin, bear and rhino, whose organs are used in some TCM cures". It is illegal to use these endangered species as medicines in China. How can they be promoted in TCM? Let's just say that CNN conflated Chinese criminal gangs with Chinese people, and misinterpreted the status of endangered animals in China. Thirdly, in terms of the social function of prejudice, CNN's query about TCM is probably due to the biased ego-defensive function. The distrust of TCM therapy and its prejudice by CNN may come from their unwillingness to admit their country's lack of epidemic prevention. Because when China's combination of Chinese and Western medicine has achieved certain therapeutic results, the United States, which advocates Western medicine, has not made a great breakthrough in medical treatment. In this case, it is much easier to blame China for its development achievements than to admit that it has not made any progress.

### 3.3.4. Discrimination

Discrimination refers to the public's exclusion of others, usually caused by stereotypes and prejudice. Therefore, discrimination is closely related to stereotypes and prejudice. Forms of discrimination include verbal or non-verbal insults, exclusion of opportunities, physical violence and planned genocide. American media coverage mainly reflects verbal insults as a form of discrimination, which is more common in the use of insulting words in headlines or text.

On February 3, 2020, The Wall Street Journal published a discriminatory news report titled "China is the Real Sick Man of Asia" against the backdrop of the COVID-19. This news report used the COVID-19 epidemic to attack China with racist discourse, and the title of the article was covered with racism and discrimination.





Figure 4: Title from *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>[14]</sup>.

The discrimination against China from *The Wall Street Journal* actually stems from its stereotypes and prejudices. Discrimination, as a kind of behavioral barrier in intercultural communication, refers to the behavior of openly repelling others. In the headline of this report, *The Wall Street Journal* publicly pointed out that China is the real sick man of Asia. Besides, the report portrayed China as a country with opaque government, unscientific decision-making systems, and selfishness. It said in the text: "There are signs that Chinese authorities are still trying to conceal the true scale of the problem", "The Wuhan government was secretive and self-serving", "the decisions that allowed the epidemic to spread as far and as fast as it did were all made in Wuhan and Beijing.". Moreover, *The Wall Street Journal* spoke out against China in its report, arguing that the long-term result of the epidemic is the "de-Sinicization" of the global supply chains, "The most important longer-term outcome would appear to be a strengthening of a trend for global companies to de-Sinicize their supply chains."

What this report shows is mainly *The Wall Street Journal's* linguistic discrimination against China. As one of the mainstream newspapers and media in the United States, *The Wall Street Journal* is filled with a very strong cultural color of individualism in its reporting language. In addition, Chinese communication is based on a specific context. If the two parties in the communication are in different contexts and have two different discourse systems, it is easy to cause misunderstandings. China's collectivist cultural characteristics are likely to be one of the fundamental reasons for *The Wall Street Journal's* prejudice and stereotypes towards China. It was the stereotype of China's opaque government, unscientific decision-making, and selfishness that led to discriminatory coverage of China.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Major Findings

This paper aims to study the Chinese intercultural communication barriers reflected in American media news reports. By adopting the framework of intercultural communication barriers proposed by Martin and Nakayama's (2014) and combining the theories of individualism and collectivism, this paper analyzes intercultural communication barriers reflected in American media news reports on China and draws the following conclusions.

Intercultural communication barriers are common in American media news reports on China. Some of them are very intense, while others are obscure. But basically, they are in line with the attitude barriers and behavior barriers in intercultural communication barriers. In terms of ethnocentrism, American media are not familiar with China, and they often take quotes out of context. Besides, news reports are too one-sided and lack the analysis and explanation of the key essence of the event, that is, the focus is not accurate. In general, American media news reports based on ethnocentrism tend to criticize China and praise their own country. In terms of stereotypes, most of the American media coverage are very offensive in language. They often explicitly present stereotypes of the report object in the content or title of the report. These stereotypes often go back many years with a long-time horizon. In addition, news reports involving stereotypes are often not supported by reliable evidence. In terms of prejudice, the understanding of Chinese specific groups does not suffice for American media, most of which arbitrarily question the professionalism or authenticity of those specific groups in China. In terms of discrimination, news reports are full of verbal insults, which are extensively used in headlines or text.

Intercultural communication barriers are two-sided. It not only enables American media to report highly inflammatory and stigmatized contents about China, but also constantly serves as a reminder of China's lack of discourse power in international public opinion. From the above analysis, it can be seen that intercultural communication barriers could lead to further misunderstandings in the dialogue between the two parties, which is not conducive to the healthy and sustainable development of either party. Nevertheless, based on the current analysis, barriers to intercultural communication can also become an opportunity, that is, to remind China of its rapid and good development, and more importantly to balance international public opinion.

In order to eliminate the barriers to intercultural communication as much as possible, this paper puts forward the following two approaches. First, American media must treat American culture and the culture



of other groups equally. The prerequisite for equality is to learn about the culture of other groups as much as possible and integrate into the cultural environment of other groups. For example, before reporting Traditional Chinese Medicine, they can go to China to learn about TCM locally and reduce unnecessary misunderstandings. Second, the U.S. media need to avoid using stereotypes and prejudices to simply define a cultural group. They should not blindly accept information related to stereotypes and discard one that is inconsistent with the stereotypes so as to believe in the uniqueness of individuals. Moreover, the American media must be stricter with the censorship of news reports. Media coverage that is obviously insulting and has insufficient evidence should be revised or banned in a timely manner.

For China, on the one hand, although some U.S. media hold very stubborn views on China, which are hard to change, as the mouthpiece of the country, the Spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry must adhere to the stand of the country. For example, in the face of unprovoked accusations from the outside world, one of the most powerful ways to respond is to refute the false accusations by facts. But it should be noted that it is necessary to accurately identify the other party's utterance intentions. In the face of accusations with ulterior motives, it is necessary to fight back severely. However, in the face of accusations that are ignorant of the facts, it is necessary to explain more tolerantly, and try to eliminate the adverse effects of intercultural communication barriers. In addition, relevant personnel in the Chinese media industry must play a good role in guiding public opinion. First of all, Chinese media practitioners must accurately identify the authenticity of the information. And information from unknown sources should be verified in time, likewise, information with problems should be revised and then released in an appropriate form. For instance, when the U.S. media deliberately slander China out of ignorance, Chinese media personnel must make timely responses and clarifications. It is important to pay attention to less empty talk and more facts.

#### 4.2. Limitations and Suggestions

This paper still has certain limitations. First of all, the data sources of this study are limited, and only four news reports from one country are analyzed. Therefore, the analysis conclusion may not be universal. Secondly, the analysis of this study is not in-depth enough. It just analyzes the case text superficially, without combining horizontal and vertical dimensions of analysis. At the same time, the reporting form of American media on China is constantly changing, which means that American media's attitudes towards China cannot be generalized, but should be analyzed in detail. Moreover, it is necessary to conduct a more in-depth comparative analysis of American media in different stages and countries over the years in order to better summarize the essential characteristics of American media's intercultural communication barriers.

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