

The Construction of Tibetan Image in American and Spanish Media

Luyuxuan Guo

Xi'an Internacinal Studies University, Xi'an, China
824343997@qq.com

Abstract: *Due to its geographical location and multi-ethnic background, Tibet has always been a hot issue for West. The New York Times and El Mundo, the representative media of the United States and Spain respectively, have covered Tibet in a large number of reports. While the American and Western governments have very different attitudes toward China, the media in the two countries have similar coverage of Tibet. This paper adopts Guoren Zang's three-level structure as the theoretical basis for the study and analyzes the two newspapers, finding that although there are positive reports, they are mainly negative and mostly involve political aspects; there are fewer reports on Tibet as a major event, but mostly secondary events; both newspapers tend to cite persuasive sources and are good at rhetorical strategies. Finally, the author proposes opinions and suggestions on the results in order to build a better image of Tibet and China.*

Keywords: *Framing analysis; New York Times; El Mundo; Tibet-related coverages*

1. Background of the study

Tibet is an autonomous region of ethnic minorities, mainly Tibetans, and has an extremely important strategic location as a natural barrier and a gateway to South Asia for China. [1] Due to its special geographical location and multi-ethnic background, Tibet has attracted much attention from the international community. It's a topic that is constantly reported by the Western media.

Due to the special relationship between China and the U.S., the U.S. is the most concerned about the Tibetan issues among Western countries. In November 2020, the U.S. Foreign Ministry publicly stated that it is a fact that Tibet is occupied by China by force. Spain formally established diplomatic relations with China in 1973, and the exchanges between the two countries in politics, economy and culture have been continuously strengthened. In June 2021, Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez expressed support for China and criticized the EU's reckless interference in China's internal affairs. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to explore the Tibet-related reports of the U.S. and Western media, which can help deal with the Tibet issues in the future, grasp the understanding and attitude of the West toward China, and build a better national image internationally.

The New York Times, founded in the 19th century, has a long history and is the most influential newspaper in the United States. El Mundo is the second largest daily newspaper in Spain in terms of circulation and "the most important recording medium in Spanish". [2] El Mundo's website is the most visited daily electronic newspaper in Spain and is popular with the Spanish people.

The study period of this paper is selected from 2019 to 2021. 2019 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and Tibet continues to develop under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, with its people living and working in peace and happiness. By December 2021, Tibet have implemented the 14th Five Year Plan for cultural projects. Tibet have flourished in these three years.

2. Study Design

2.1. Research Methodology and Theoretical Cornerstones

Based on Taiwanese scholar Guoren Zang's three-level frame theory, this paper studies Tibet-related reports based on content analysis and discourse analysis. Guoren Zang divides frames into three levels: high, middle, and low. The high level refers to the definition of a certain theme event, which mainly

answers questions about the news topic. The middle level consists of the main event, history, previous events, results, impact, attribution, and evaluation. The low level refers to the presentation of the frame, which consists of language or symbols, including words, phrases, sentences, and the rhetoric or metaphors formed by these underlying languages. [3]

2.2. Data collection

The paper selects and analyzes the news report data of the New York Times and El Mundo from January 1, 2019 to December 22, 2021. Using the Factiva news database, set the keywords as Tibet and T bet, respectively, for retrieval. As a result, the number of valid reports in The New York Times from 2019 to 2021 is 168, and the total number of reports in the El Mundo is 76.

3. Research Results

3.1. High-level framework analysis: There are many political issues, mainly negative reports

This section analyzes the high-level framework mainly from the topic of the report. Before the specific analysis, the author first briefly describes the two newspapers in terms of the number of reports and their attitude towards reporting.

3.1.1. Number of reports

From 2019 to 2021, there are 168 valid Tibet-related reports in The New York Times and 76 in the El Mundo. It can be seen that the United States is more concerned about the Tibet issues.

3.1.2. Reporting attitude

Most of the negative reports in the two newspapers (as shown in Table 1) mainly focus on political aspects. The New York Times' positive coverage focuses on Tibet's economic development, food and biodiversity; its neutral coverage focuses on archaeological research, environmental protection and biological research. The positive reports of El Mundo depict the yearning for Tibet; the neutral reports focus on epidemic prevention and control, extreme sports and archaeological research.

Table 1: Statistical table of attitudes towards Tibet-related reporting in the two newspapers

| Reporting Attitude \ Newspapers | New York Times | El Mundo |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Negative | 124 | 63 |
| Positive | 14 | 3 |
| Neutral | 30 | 10 |

3.1.3. Reporting topics

Reported topics are divided into six areas, namely politics, economy, social life, literature, art and sports, personalities and scientific research (the statistical results are shown in Table 2), and most reports involve two to three topics at the same time.

Table 2: Statistical table of topics in the two reports

| | New York Times | El Mundo |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------|
| politics | 126 | 71 |
| economy | 71 | 4 |
| Social life | 34 | 25 |
| literature, art and sports | 37 | 8 |
| personalities | 23 | 12 |
| scientific research | 3 | 2 |

The New York Times and El Mundo mostly cover politics, with topics such as foreign relations, human rights issues, religious policy, party policy, and freedom of expression. Both papers focus on human rights, territory and freedom of expression, and both see China's crackdown on the Tibetan separatists' riots as an oppression of human rights, and the terms "Tibet", "Taiwan", "Hong Kong" and "Xinjiang" mostly appear together.

Unlike the New York Times, which directly refers to Tibet as a country, El Mundo juxtaposes it with other countries, which also shows an infringement of China's sovereignty. In addition, the New York

Times focuses more on foreign and religious policies and party policies, while El Mundo focuses on military aspects. This may be related to the military and political strength of the two countries. The Spanish media holds the opinion that China's nuclear weapons demonstration in Tibet will pose a threat to world security, while the U.S. considers that China is not yet strong enough to surpass its own position and then turns to interfere in China's internal affairs through diplomacy and other means.

In terms of economy, the New York Times reported 71 articles, while El Mundo only reported four. The U.S. media reports on international trade, foreign trade and investment, and trade policies are mostly negative; the Spanish media reports on railroad construction and Tibetan development are all positive. Compared with Spain, the trade dependence between China and the United States is higher.

In terms of social life, the US media pays attention to the customs, environmental protection and agricultural production of the Tibetan people. Most of them are neutral reports, while those involving Tibetan Buddhism, temples, language, etc. are negative reports. The US media criticized China for destroying Tibetan culture, demolishing temples, and despising Tibetan language. El Mundo deals with topics of environmental protection and spiritual meditation, and most of them are neutral reports.

In terms of literature, art and sports, the two newspapers talked about the Winter Olympics and expressed their resistance to China's hosting of Olympics, arguing that "a country like China, which has suppressed Tibet and practiced tyranny, has no right to host the Olympics. In terms of personalities, both newspapers mentioned the Dalai Lama, expressing sympathy for his plight and affirming his status as a Tibetan leader. At the same time, they satirized China's aggression against Tibet. In terms of scientific researches, the reports mainly concern the investigation of Tibetan ecology and the discovery of the fossils of the Denisovan people.

In conclusion, although both newspapers have reported positively on Tibet, they are inevitably influenced by their own ideology or the situation they are in, using it as a tool to interfere in China's internal affairs and threaten Chinese territory.

3.2. Mid-level framework analysis: focus on previous events and secondary events

This section analyzes the mid-level framework according to the major events, secondary events, previous events, impact, and evaluation (statistical results are shown in Table 3). Primary event refers to Tibet being reported as the primary event; secondary event refers to Tibet being reported as a non-primary event; previous event refers to the referenced event in Tibet occurring before the primary event; impact refers to the positive or negative impact that Tibet had on the reported event; assessment refers to the evaluation of Tibet's image, humanities, etc., or the resulting perception of China.

Table 3: The number and proportion of Tibet-related reporting structures in two newspapers

| | | major events | secondary events | previous events | impact | evaluation |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------|------------|
| New York Times | number of reports | 20 | 60 | 66 | 11 | 11 |
| | Proportion (%) | 11.9% | 35.7% | 39.3% | 6.5% | 6.5% |
| El Mundo | number of reports | 8 | 31 | 23 | 6 | 8 |
| | Proportion (%) | 10.5% | 40.8% | 30.3% | 8.0% | 10.5% |

According to Table 3, the Tibet-related reports of the two newspapers both focus on previous events and secondary events, and the major events, impacts and assessments account for a small proportion. The two newspapers did not report much directly on Tibet, but mostly introduced Tibet as a historical background while reporting on another news. For example, in several Sino-US diplomatic reports in The New York Times, they talked about the criticism of American officials on China's aggression against Tibet; in the report on the establishment of Hong Kong in El Mundo, they criticized China's repressive measures against Tibet. In terms of impact, the two newspapers focused on the boycott of China's hosting of the Winter Olympics, using China's suppression of Tibet as a reason to criticize China's deprivation of human rights, arguing that China has no right to host the Winter Olympics.

Although the proportion of major events reported by the two newspapers is similar, the content analysis is not consistent. New York Times has a mix of positive and negative coverage, with positive stories focusing on Tibetan life and economic development, and negative stories focusing on politics; El Mundo has mostly negative stories, also focusing on politics, and positive stories on meditation. In terms of assessment, both papers directly criticized China's "brutal" image over Tibet, but the New York Times also reported on the lack of freedom of expression for the Tibetan people and the gradual disappearance of Tibetan culture.

Therefore, the structural framework of the two newspapers' report of Tibet is composed of secondary

events and previous events, the tone of the report is mostly negative, the attribution framework appears in the reports, and the coverage of Tibet events is attributed to the political level.

3.3. Low-level framework analysis: mostly official sources, good at using metaphors and analogies

In the low-level frame analysis, attention should be paid to the style and rhetoric of discourse, including the syntactic structure of sentences, vocabulary skills, and language-rhetorical strategies. [4] At the same time, sources of information cannot be ignored, and individuals or organizations all hold specific discourse forms and fixed ideologies. Therefore, this section conducts research through two aspects: source and discourse analysis.

3.3.1. Source Analysis

The news sources of the two newspapers are diverse (statistical results are shown in Table 4). Both newspapers tended to choose domestic official media and experts and scholars as their sources of information, reflecting their authority. Spanish media are more inclined to foreign media than American media (The New York Times, Global Times, The Times), which shows the influence of American and British media on Spanish media.

There are no Spanish domestic government and government officials as sources in El Mundo, but mostly quotes from foreign government officials (U.S., Lithuania, Taiwan, China); the U.S. government and officials as sources account for 7.7% of the total sources. Although the U.S. media is not fully subject to the government and plays a supervisory role over the government, it has always played a role in maintaining the mainstream ideology of the U.S. The U.S. government's propaganda through the media reflects the state's desire to use the media to influence and control society and achieve its internal and external political goals. [5] While Spanish media have certain political tendencies, they are not associated with political parties, publishers seek more economic interests. In 1966, Spain promulgated the Press Law, although it still strictly prohibited the publication of public comments on the political system, but recognized the independence of the media. [6] Thus, to a certain extent, the Spanish media does not represent the ideology of the government.

Table 4: Statistics of two reported sources

| Source \ Newspaper | New York Times | El Mundo |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Domestic media | 95 | 42 |
| Foreign media | 1 | 4 |
| Domestic government | 3 | 0 |
| Foreign government | 0 | 1 |
| Domestic institutions | 1 | 0 |
| Foreign institutions | 0 | 2 |
| International organizations | 4 | 3 |
| Experts and scholars | 24 | 9 |
| Foreign government officials | 5 | 8 |
| Domestic government officials | 10 | 0 |
| Domestic civilians | 15 | 0 |
| Foreign civilians | 4 | 6 |
| Dalai Lama | 1 | 1 |
| Fuzzy sources | 5 | 0 |

3.3.2. Discourse Rhetorical Analysis

The essence of rhetorical behavior is to use some implicit language symbols and rhetorical strategies such as metaphors, analogies, and hints to express the deeper meaning that the author wants to convey. [7] This section uses examples to illustrate the rhetorical strategies used by New York Times and El Mundo.

New York Times uses metaphorical rhetorical tactics to reinforce its reporting points. "It had been a cosmopolitan trading hub and cultural powerhouse for hundreds of years", the trading hub refers to the trade of tea and musk in Tibet. However, despite the positive portrayal of Tibet, the term "powerhouse" defines Tibet as a powerful country, clearly politically wrong. "Tibet dries up like a husk", the report described Tibet as a harsh, barren land with wild asses, grass and thin air. There are also positive metaphors, such as comparing Tibet to "the roof of the world".

El Mundo uses more analogies and personifications to construct images of Tibet. "Ruanda es un país pequeño y montañoso, el Tíbet de África", which is "Rwanda is a small mountainous country, the Tibet of Africa". Spanish media have compared Tibet to Rwanda in Africa and regarded it as a country, and also compared France's criticism of Rwanda's colonization to China's liberation of Tibet, violating China's territorial sovereignty. "Tíbet recuerda su marzo sangriento contra China", which is "Tibet remembers his bloody March against China". On March 10, 1959, the upper-level reactionary clique of the local government in Tibet blatantly tore up the "17-Article Agreement" and fully armed. In the end, the People's Liberation Army quelled the rebellion. For Spanish media, this has become a bloody and cruel repression in China. In a positive report, "Retiro espiritual en el Tíbet español", which is "Spiritual Retreat of Tibet in Spain". It compares O Sel Ling (Land of Light), a Buddhist center in Granada, to Tibet, where one can escape from the world, to purify the mind.

Generally speaking, both newspapers tend to choose authoritative and persuasive sources, describe the geographical environment, history and current situation of Tibet, and are good at constructing the image of Tibet through rhetorical strategies.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In 2019-2021, the framework of the coverage of New York Times and El Mundo can be highlighted by the three aspects of the analysis above. Both newspapers considered the Tibetan issue as an issue of aggression and human rights, directly or indirectly expressing that "Tibet is a country". Both newspapers portray Tibet as a "country" with a rich culture, rich in biological species, and capable of purifying the soul, but subject to Chinese aggression, with an image of a country that aspires to independence, has no human rights, has no freedom of expression, and is oppressed all the time. Both newspapers focus more on the riots in Tibet, the lack of shelter for displaced people and religious problems, but ignore the current development and improvement of people's lives in Tibet. Both newspapers have falsely constructed the image of Tibet based on their own ideologies or self-interests, causing the audiences to form negative stereotypes of Tibet.

Nowadays, with the continuous development of globalization, China's development cannot be separated from the world and from the change in the West's image of Tibet. We cannot put aside how other countries view China and how China views itself. [8] The change of the image of China and Tibet in the West is not only conducive to the development of cooperation between China and the West, but also to the solution of global ecological issues, such as the environment. At present, the world is undergoing momentous changes unseen in a century, and the epidemic continues to spread. Global cooperation is particularly important.

However, in the context of long-term and complex Sino-Western relations, the West's image of Tibet cannot be changed overnight. For China, domestic security is the priority. It is reasonable to deal with the Tibetan independence forces first. In addition, besides developing the Tibetan economy, it should pay more attention to Tibet's long history and culture, protect and inherit Tibetan language and intangible cultural heritage.

Secondly, it is necessary to focus on the dynamic grasp of the Western media's reporting orientation on Tibet, and adjust the strategy of Tibetan communication; it is important to know how to use new media and other means to spread the real image of Tibet through the Internet, therefore, more westerners can understand the real dynamic Tibet, instead of the false static Tibet that exists in the Western media; it's also essential to strengthen the policy of foreign students visiting China, hence they can truly experience the local culture of Tibet, and build an offline bridge between China and the West. Finally, strengthen the dialogue between China and the West on the basis of firm cultural self-confidence, change the existing dialogue mode, and break down all Western-centric interpretation frameworks.

Paying attention to Western Tibet-related reports will not only help grasp international public opinions and better handle Tibet affairs, but also help build China's international image and promote global cooperation and development.

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