Comparative Analysis of the Frames of Chinese and English Mainstream Media Coverage of Elizabeth II's Death in the International Communication Perspective

Xinyue Li[1*]
Northwest University, Xi'an 710127, China
[*]**Corresponding author E-mail: violetl_9501@yeah.net**

Abstract: The former Queen of United Kingdom, Elizabeth II, died In September 2022. The event involved a wide range of cultural and political factors that triggered media coverage in various countries. It has been observed that in response to this event, Chinese and English media coverage has shown obvious differences in their news frameworks. This paper will focus on this issue, question the phenomenon and give a detailed analysis on it. The content analysis method is adopted in the research. As for the object of the study, reports from Chinese mainstream media Xinhua, People's Daily, CCTV, China Daily and the English mainstream media BBC are selected. After data collection and analysis, it is found that the two media have different characteristics in terms of reporting means, attitudes, the selection of specific frame and their respective deep-seated reasons.

Keywords: international communication, Elizabeth II's death event, framing theory, Chinese and English media comparison

1 Introduction

On 9 September 2022 (8 September 2022 the UK time), the United Kingdom announced that the former Queen Elizabeth II passed away on that day. As the national symbol of the United Kingdom, the Queen's death involved a wide range of factors and had a significant impact. Once the news was released, it sparked a high level of attention worldwide, and was continuously tracked by the media of many countries, including English and Chinese media. According to our observation, the English mainstream media reports showed the following distinctive features: in addition to stating the basic facts, a large part of the report focused on the Queen's life experience and the description of the national mourning emotion; on the contrary, the Chinese reports were mostly limited to the basic factual reports of the event. In this regard, we cannot help but wonder about the framework of the news coverage of Elizabeth II's death in the Chinese and English media: what are the differences between the two? What are the underlying reasons for this?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of international communication theory

International communication refers to transnational exchanges in which countries are the main actors. The concept has long been defined in both a narrow and a broad sense, with differences in the subject of communication and in the process of its activities. The narrow concept emphasizes transnational communication and dissemination practices through the mass media in national societies, while the broader concept refers to the transmission of information covering values, attitudes and ideas by individuals, groups, governments and other multiple actors without political boundaries [1].

In the face of rapid social development and changes in the international landscape, theoretical or empirical re-examination through the lens of "international communication" has been an enduring hot topic in the academic world. For example, in Prof. Zhang Yuqiang's latest study, the purpose of international communication in the new era has become a topic of discussion, and the author points out that the current development of international relations have put forward higher demands on the ability of international communication. International communication is required to complete the transformation on its pursuits of purpose from “the effect of immediate and certain” to “the power of permanence and plurality” and build up an awareness of “internationalization” and "globalization" to break away from the traditional division between “domestic” and “foreign”[2].At the same time, a number of interdisciplinary studies based on "international communication" are also flourishing in China. For example, scholars Yang Lianrui, Zhang Hui and Yan Yinglun have combined the theory of international communication, explored the construction of foreign language disciplines under the new liberal arts perspective, and proposed a new path for foreign language talents training[3].

2.2 Existing studies focusing on different coverage of the same event in home and other countries

The phenomenon of "different media coverage in multiple countries focusing on the same event” has been studied in the context of several events in recent years. For international studies, most of which are researches on content analysis. For example, the Swiss scholar Valerie Hase et al. compared the climate change reporting in ten countries from 2006-2018 by the method of content analysis, noting the differences between the northern and southern hemispheres in their focus[4]. There are also some foreign analyses based on the textual perspective of coverage, for example, Israeli scholar Gail KAuslander and Canadian scholar NoraGold extracted the terms related to the disabilities respectively used in newspapers in both two countries in 1999 and analyzed the factors that influenced this issue and the nature of those terms [5]. In general, however, most of the available international studies are multinational cross-national studies

or studies limited in the researcher's country, mainly in Western countries. The Comparative analyses of Chinese and Western news reports are less common.

In the Chinese academic community, in recent years, it has become a research hotspot to analyze the differences between Chinese and Western media coverage of events that took place in China. For example, since 2020, several scholars have compared Chinese and American coverage of the Huawei event from different perspectives. Among them, scholar Wang Kehan used frame theory to conclude that the respective news frames were influenced by national economic and technological interest[6], while scholar Li Qiuping conducted a critical discourse analysis of the reported texts from a corpus perspective, and explored the language of the texts to conclude that the U.S. reporting language tended negatively to portray China [7]. However, there are fewer comparative studies of Chinese and other country's coverage of international events in China. A similar study is the research conducted by scholar Zhai Zheng in 2002, the paper is titled by "Chinese and American Portrayals in Each Other's Major Media - A Comparative Analysis of the 1998 Coverage of People's Daily and New York Times", in which the author took Chinese and American feature reports on each other's countries as objects, and had a quantitative and qualitative study, focusing on the differences in the presentation of the two countries' images in each other's media, as well as the differences in the focus and writing style of the reports[8].

2.3 A theoretical overview of framework theory

Framing theory first originated in the sociologist Goffman's 1974 book Framing Analysis, in which he first introduced the concept of "framing" to communication area. After Goffman, a group of sociologists expanded this theory. For example, Tuchman applied it to study the effect of mass media in social reality construction and interpreted "frame theory" as the construction of news reports by journalists. With the development of time, the interpretation of frame theory has become more specific and widely accepted. Foreign studies by Gitlin, Entman and others, include the continuous combing and definition of the theory, while the representative theories of Chinese studies include the "three-level frame" by Taiwanese scholar Zang Guoren[9].

In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of framing theory-based research on different events around the world. But about the phenomenon of different coverage of the same event in two countries, comparative studies with frame theory are less common in other countries than in China, Most of the Chinese studies analyzed the differences in Chinese and foreign media coverage, and drew their deep reasons such as political elements. For instance, researcher Li Jing took CGTN and CNN as examples to analyze the differences between Chinese and American media coverage of the "first phase of the US-China economic and trade agreement". The author used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and concluded that both reports are characterized by multiple perspectives and tend to support the agreement, while she also pointed out the bias existed in CNN's reporting[10]. The researcher, Hu Ying, took People's Daily and the New York Times as examples, who adopted content analysis method to explore the framing of Chinese and American media coverage of poverty alleviation events, found that both

Chinese and American media had problems with attribution framing, as Chinese media coverage did not sufficiently explore the background causes of poverty, while American media attributed poverty directly to the shortcomings of the Chinese economic system, and also suffered from a flaw about its caring framing, i.e., focusing only on poor minorities rather than the whole population[11].

To sum up, there are hardly comparative studies on Chinese and Western media coverage by using the framework theory, especially on Western events.

2.4 Presentation of issues

Therefore, concerning the passing of former Queen Elizabeth, the event taking place in the UK, this study will pay special attention to the differences in the framing of the coverage by the mainstream media in China and the UK. From the perspective of international communication theory, we are going to analyze the content of the coverage in an attempt to answer the following questions:

What are the differences in the coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth II between the Chinese and English media? What are the underlying reasons behind the differences in the framing of the coverage?

3 Method

3.1 Based on the above questions, the corresponding assumptions are made here:

H1: There are significant differences in the attitudinal tendencies of the mainstream media in China and the UK in relation to the coverage of Elizabeth II's death.

H2: There are significant differences in the means by which the mainstream media in China and the UK have reported on the death of Elizabeth II.

H3: There are significant differences in the framing of mainstream media coverage of the death of Elizabeth II in China and the UK.

To prove the hypothesis, this study will use content analysis method and sample from the total.

3.2 Sampling

First, the research period starts from the releasing of the official obituary on September 9, 2022 (September 8, 2022 UK time) to September 30, 2022 (September 29, 2022 UK time). In this study, the reports of influential media in China and the UK were selected for content analysis, which were posted within their websites. For the Chinese media, Given the amount of reports by individual media is small, Xinhua, People's Daily Online, CCTV and China Daily

Online were jointly selected as the objects. When the keyword "Elizabeth II" was searched in the those webpage, from September 9, 2022 (September 8, 2022 UK time) to September 30 (September 29, 2022 UK time), there were 166 relevant results all told. After removing individual and duplicate reports, 87 relevant reports left, numbered from new to old 1-87. For the English media, after checking the BBC-Queen Elizabeth II homepage, there were 980 reports in the same period, numbered from new to old 1 - 980.

Second, this study proposes a simple stochastic sampling of UK media reports to match the number of English reports with that of Chinese reports.

3.3 Category construction

3.3.1 Attitudinal tendencies

1) Reporting tendencies

Reporting tendencies reflect the attitudes held by the media towards the events. This study divides the reporting tendencies into three categories: the negative tendency, the neutral tendency, and the positive tendency.

2) Typology of attitudes

In order to visualize the attitudinal tendencies reflected in the reports, this paper draws on the Thurston (the scales of equal appearing intervals) attitude scale in the field of market research and reclassifies the relevant reports. The scale divides attitudes into seven categories, which are presented in this study in the following manner: attack, direct accusations of individual or organizational misconduct; denial, rational points to individual or organizational missteps; hidden concerns, concern about the possible negative impact of the event on the economy; Neutral, objective statements without attitudinal bias; Positive, approval of the individual or organization's behavior; Expected, showing confidence and expectation in the behavior of an individual or organization; enthusiastic, praising the contribution of an individual or relevant measures of government managers.

3.3.2 Means of reporting

The different means of reporting also reflect the emphasis that the media places on the issue. This study considers the specific operationalization of the reporting means of the two media in the following two dimensions.

1) Form

Different forms of coverage have different costs, and from that perspective the categories are specified into three categories: text-only or picture-only report, report of images or videos with text and report of images and videos with text.

2) Richness of pictures or videos attached to the report

The number of pictures or videos attached to the report reflects the depth and breadth of it

and shows the level of importance attached to it by the media. Therefore, from that perspective, the categories were specified as follows: no pictures or videos, 1 picture (video), 2-5 pictures (video), 6 pictures (video) and more.

3.3.3 Framing for reporting

De Vreese has put forward seven types of generic news frames[12]. Drawing on this theory, the generic frames of journalism covered in this study include the following five and are defined in this study as follows: the matic frames, direct statements of the facts of Elizabeth II's death; conflict frames, controversies and conflicts that occur between individuals or groups; human interest frames, reporting that presents an emotional perspective, such as expressing feelings of mourning or telling personal stories; leadership frames, attention to the words and actions of the leaders of the two countries and the English royal family; economic consequence frames, reporting from the perspective of the economic impact on a group or region.

4 Results

4.1 Significant differences in attitudinal tendencies between Chinese and English media reports, with the English media being more positive

A comparison of the differences in the attitudinal tendencies of the Chinese and English media in the coverage related to the death of Elizabeth II using a chi-square test revealed a significant difference in the tendencies of the Chinese and English media (X^2=32.082, p=0.000). Specifically, Chinese media tended to choose a neutral attitude, while English media tended to choose a positive attitude. For example, in the coverage of the English state funeral on September 19, the Chinese media Xinhua's reports were basically limited to the objective facts of "the funeral process and the introduction of the people who were present", without any value judgment language indicating attitudes; in contrast, the English media BBC's content was more concerned with the expression of "respect" in addition to the basic facts. It conveyed a lot of positive words such as "respect", "honor", and "tribute" to express the reverence for the Queen. Moreover, a chi-square test used to compare the types of attitudes of Chinese and English media in their coverage of Elizabeth II's death also showed a visible difference (X^2=97.271, P=0.000). The Chinese media was mostly "neutral" and "positive", while the English media was mostly "expectant" and "enthusiastic". Take the coverage of Charles III's ascending to the throne on September 10 as an example, the Chinese media only reported the objective facts and took a neutral attitude on the event. In contrast, the English media, BBC, generally included praise for Charles III in its coverage of the event and presented the national glorification of the English royal family and the expectation of Charles III's accession to the throne, which shows that the English media clearly held a stronger and more positive attitude in their coverage. Therefore,

research hypothesis H1 is supported.

4.2. There are differences in the means of reporting between the Chinese and English media, with the Chinese media being significantly less rich in form than the English media

A comparison of the means of reporting on Elizabeth II's death-related coverage by Chinese and English media using a chi-square test found that there were significant differences in the form of coverage between Chinese and English media (X^2=96.346, p=0.000). Among them, Chinese media reported mostly in text, while English media reported in all forms of pictures or videos. At the same time, Chinese and English media existed in the richness of pictures or videos attached to the report (X^2=105.279, p=0.000). Among them, Chinese media were significantly lower than English media in that term, with Chinese media being mostly text-only reports, a few single images with text reports, and a very few multi-image reports, while English media had the vast majority of reports with video or picture numbers more than two. For example, in the coverage of Charles III's televised speech, Chinese media CCTV extracted part of the speech and presented it as a text-only report, while English media BBC reported it several times in the form of video with text and multiple pictures with text, respectively. In addition, the frequency of coverage by the English media was greatly higher than that of the Chinese media. Overall, with the exception of September 9, Chinese media coverage tended to be the only report of the day, while English media coverage was in a overwhelming number with a total of up to 45 or more reports on the same day. Therefore, the research hypothesis H2 was supported.

4.3 Significant differences in the news frames used by the Chinese and English media, with each using a completely different framework for the same event

A chi-square test was used to compare the differences in the framing of the coverage of Elizabeth II's death between the Chinese and English media, which demonstrated a arresting difference between the two media. (X^2=58.335, p=0.000). The Chinese media mostly used the "matic frame" and "leadership frame", while the English media mostly used the "human interest frame". The Chinese media tended to report from the basic facts of the events that have taken place, and reported with objectivity and neutrality, thus favoring the matic frame. At the same time, the Chinese media's reported on the words and actions of leaders, such as "state leaders' expressing condolences on the Queen's death" and "state leaders will attend the Queen's funeral", were another major characteristic for the Chinese media, and through such reports the Chinese media. So Chinese media also focused on presenting China's official attitudes through this type of coverage, on the leadership frame. In the English media, a large proportion of the reports were about the Queen's life and her memory and praise by the public. So the human interest frame was widely used. In summary, research hypothesis H3 is supported.

5 Discussion

5.1 Overall objectivity and simplicity in the frame of Chinese media coverage

Chinese media coverage was mainly "factual", with some coverage concerned with China-UK relations. The overall amount was small and the style was formal and objective, and the media were relatively conservative as well as cautious in their framing, tending to opt for the matic and leadership framing.

When reporting on events in other countries, especially political events, the Chinese mainstream media took the official Chinese position into account in the choice of news frames. The coverage was mainly a matic frame, such as the coverage of the death event itself, the coverage of the funeral form and process, and the basic factual coverage of the objectivity of Charles III's succession; these reporting attitudes do not involve tendencies and value judgments. In terms of format, the Chinese media mostly reported in words rather than pictures, and were relatively conservative in the number and angle of their reports. In general, these reports reflect the Chinese media's characteristic of reporting on their own country's stands and presenting a neutral position on events in other countries, with a simple and formal format and a relatively calm tone.

In addition, Chinese media coverage also focused on presenting official attitudes on political events and delved into diplomatic behavior level to present content related to the development of China-UK relations. The King or Queen of England is the head of the Commonwealth, so the death of the Queen of England is a political and diplomatic event for the Chinese authorities, and China needs to express its official attitude towards it. Therefore, certain reports referred to the Queen's experience with China and recognized the Queen in terms of the development of the country's relations. In addition, as the attitude of China's leaders is the most visible manifestation of the country's attitude, the media also used the leadership frame to concentrate on the words and actions of the country's leaders in relation to the event, such as calling to express condolences, attending the funeral and expressing expectations for the development of national relations between China and the UK.

5.2 A high level of breadth in the framing of English media coverage, highlighting the sentiment of tribute to the Queen

English media coverage was heavily framed using a human interest frame, with most of the content showing mourning and glorification of the Queen or the Royal Family, and more focused on people within the UK and Commonwealth countries. And there was a significant positive tendency in the attitude of the coverage with a wealth of means and quantity, but the comprehensiveness of its coverage frame flawed to some extent. For the English media, the death of the Queen is a major event all over the country. This perception comes from the

political or factual level, but also from the English cultural tradition and the emotional aspect nationwide. In the English political and cultural system, the Queen of England is an honored symbol of the country's history and culture. The English royal family, which has been presented in a positive light to the public for many years, possesses an enduring emotional attachment and following among the public. The English media was focusing on the point in its extensive national coverage.

Besides, the English mainstream media also has an important function of presenting the image of the UK to the world. It is therefore part of their choice of framework to try to present a good image of the Queen and a harmonious social picture of the people's support for the royal family. Meanwhile, however, it is worth noting that in recent years there has been much global controversy over the monarchy and its associated colonial history, but in this case the issue was not discussed in the English coverage and the conflict frames were rare in it. This suggests that the English media has been selective in its coverage and relatively subjective in its avoidance of negative information.

6 Conclusion

In international communication theory, the state is the most active and powerful subject of international communication. As the official platform for the presentation of national subjects, the news reports of national mainstream media are oriented both to the home and to the board, and often carry the function of reflecting the national image and spreading the national attitude. In this theoretical framework, domestic and foreign political situations, national interests, social culture and other factors are important considerations for the national mainstream media when reporting international events and choosing the framework.

As national mainstream media, both the Chinese and English media based their reporting on the background and needs of their national societies. The Chinese media, when dealing with events taking place in other countries, presented an objective and neutral frame for their reporting, and therefore focus on the basic facts of the events in a concise manner. The English media, on the other hand, when dealing with events in their own country, especially those involving national emotions such as the death of the Queen, would focus on the official level as well as the domestic public level, and provide a lot of reports with the human interest frame. At the same time, the English media paid attention to their own reporting requirements to present a positive image of the country, and it is still somewhat one-sided in terms of its frame although the coverage is rich in means.

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