A study on the construction of China's image in Bangladesh's Prothom Alo report on China's epidemic

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Abstract: In the era of communication globalization, news media are the window for people to know the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign media reported on the epidemic in China, created a different image of China. In order to improve the perception of other countries' media's strategy when constructing China's image and strengthen the understanding of Bangladesh and other third countries in the field of international communication, this paper studies the construction of China's image in Bangladesh's Prothom Alo's report on the China-related epidemic from the perspective of the framework theory. Through stratified sampling and content analysis, it is found that Prothom Alo has different reporting emphases and attitudes at different stages of the epidemic. Besides, the reports mainly focus on political issues and tend to be negative, mostly from Western media. In view of this, the paper finds out the problems existing in the Western media, Bangladesh and China behind the media reports, and puts forward corresponding suggestions.
Keywords: Bangladesh Prothom Alo; COVID-19; Frame theory; Image of China; Reporting tendency

1 Introduction

From the end of 2019 to 2023, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a constant concern of the world, related to the survival and development of all mankind. As the "initial place of the outbreak", China has inevitably become the "center of public opinion" in the world's reports on the epidemic. Influenced by ideological, political and economic factors, foreign media have created different images of China in their reports on the epidemic.

We have observed that in a world where the information order is unbalanced and the sources of information are monopolized by Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Associated Press and other major news agencies, many third-party national media, influenced by the Western discourse system, also give a one-sided interpretation of China's image. As a country along the Belt and Road, Bangladesh has established friendly and cooperative relations with China in various fields. However, its most popular newspaper Prothom Alo still "politicized the virus" in its coverage of the epidemic involving China, focusing on Sino-US relations and the political crisis of the zero policy. At the same time, it emphasized that Covid-19 has intensified domestic and foreign

economic contradictions, as well as social crises such as casualties and rural problems. In the end, it constructs an negative image of China. In the political field, Chinese lacks freedom of speech and the government is short of transparency and credibility. And economically China endangers the domestic and foreign economies. Also, in the dimension of society, the epidemic in China threatens people's lives and declines in the quality of life. In this regard, we have doubts that how exactly does Prothom Alo construct China's image? What is the reason behind its construction?

2 Literature Review

2.1 A review of China's national image construction in China-related epidemic reports

China's national image construction has attracted the attention of scholars at home and abroad. Foreign scholar Michael Barr on Nation Branding as Nation Building: Starting from the relationship between China's national brand and national construction, China's Image Campaign shows the internality and extroversion of national soft power, including its role in China's national image construction. Under the guidance of framework and cultivation theory, Foreign scholars Whyke Thomas William, Chen Zhen Troy and Lopez Mugica Joaquin examines how user-generated content on national image affects social media users' perception of reality in An analysis of cultural dissemination and national image construction in Chinese influencer Li Ziqi's vlogs and its impact on international viewer perceptions on Youtube.

Bai Tingting, a domestic scholar, studied China Daily's construction of China's national image under the background of COVID-19 in her Research on China Daily's Discourse on COVID-19. Domestic scholar Cao Qian studied the construction of China's national image from the perspective of Narratology theory in her Research on the construction of China's National image in Documentaries from the perspective of Narratology theory. In the Research on the Construction of China's National Image in Popular Chinese Textbooks, domestic scholar Yan Lulu studied the construction of China's national image in Popular Chinese without background .

There are few foreign scholars who have studied the reports on the epidemic in China. In the research of domestic scholars, Liu Dingjia's Corpus Diachronic Analysis of American Media Reports related to China in the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak adopts corpo-based usage fluctuation analysis to discuss the relationship between diachronic discourse evolution and politics, society and ideology. Wu Weihua's "Anti-Intellectualism, Information Epidemic and" Post-Truth "Collusion -- U.S. Media's Coverage of the China-related Epidemic" interprets the connotation from the differentiation of the health communication field to the construction of news discourse, from post-mccarthy syndrome to the epidemic of misinformation driven by anti-intellectualism and the post-truth collusion of American news production. The characteristics and trends of U.S. media reports on China-related epidemic were summarized. In Ning Zhenjiang and He Xiaojing's book, The Transphysical Analysis of the headlines of China-related Reports of Spanish mainstream media El Pais, it is found that El Pais is positive about China's protest measures, but cautious about China's assistance to other countries.

However, Chinese and foreign scholars have little research on the construction of China's

national image by the media in Southeast Asia, Asia and Africa. There is also a shortage of articles that take into account both the "China epidemic report" and the "China image construction".

2.2 A review of research on frame theory

The concept of "frame" was first proposed by American sociologist Goffman in 1974. In 1993, Professor Zang Guoren, a researcher from Taiwan, first used frame analysis to study the text of news reports. Since then, the theory of frame analysis has attracted much attention and been studied by scholars at home and abroad.

Foreign scholars Zulfiqar Kanwal, Farid Huma, Luqman Uzair, Ilyas Kausar, Bashir Ulfat in Utilization of three-dimensional framework theory in identifying the motivational factors for selecting a In the postgraduate dental specialty-A pilot study, the motivational factors influencing the choice of major after graduation for dental students and interns were identified based on three-dimensional framework theory . Foreign scholars Bullock Olivia M. and Shulman Hillary C. in Utilizing Framing Theory to Design More Effective Health Messages about Tanning Behavior among College Women promotes the framework research on outdoor tanning behavior of college students by testing a series of framework theory models to design more effective health information on college students' women's open behavior. Foreign scholar Horrie Chris combines framework theory with the media industry in News agency output and the framing of television news crisis output: 9/11 as a case study, testing the effectiveness of existing work on framework theory in the news 'processing' stage of discussing crises and disasters.

The vast majority of domestic scholars analyze media news reports based on frame theory. Among them, Li Jianwei and Fu Shengkai's Comparative Analysis of Central and local Media Reports on Natural Disasters from the Perspective of Frame Theory -- The People's Daily and Henan Daily's Reports on the Heavy Rainstorm in Henan as an Example is a representative one, which summarized the framework characteristics of central and local media reports on natural disasters with the support of frame theory.

However, these studies did not study the phenomenon of China's national image construction in China-related epidemic reports from the perspective of framework theory, and therefore did not answer how to construct and the reasons behind it.

2.3 Problems Posing

In conclusion, based on the framework theory, this paper adopts the three-hierarchy analysis method of scholar Zang Guoren to analyze the number, theme, content, tone and information sources of the reports on the epidemic related to China in Bangladesh's Proyhom Alo in different periods. To try to answer the question: How do these reports construct China's image? What kind of image of China has been constructed? What are the reasons behind it?

3 Research Technique

In this paper, the content analysis method is adopted to try to answer the above questions.

3.1 Sampling Method

The research object of this study is the Bangladeshi press.

First, we selected Prothom Alo, a daily newspaper in Bangladesh, as a representative sample of this type of media. The reason for choosing it is that it is considered to be the most popular newspaper in Bangladesh and therefore has a strong representation due to its influence.

Secondly, due to the large number of total samples and the difference of data between months, stratified sampling method was adopted to sample all the reports related to the epidemic in China in Bangladesh Prothom Alo from February 12, 2020 to January 26, 2023 (including the current day) within 1,080 days. Among them, February 12, 2020 is the day that the World Health Organization named COVID-19, and it is feasible to take it as the initial date of the sample.

Three groups of samples (three time periods) were obtained based on every 360 days, namely, February 12, 2020 to February 5, 2021, February 6, 2021 to January 31, 2022, and February 1, 2022 to January 26, 2023. Secondly, the number of reports related to the epidemic in China was calculated for the three groups of samples, which were 272, 79 and 75, respectively. The ratio of the number of reported cases related to China was 63.85%, 18.54% and 17.61%, respectively. In the end, the total number of samples is supposed to be 50 reports, and the number of samples in 3 periods is calculated according to the ratio, which are 32, 9 and 9 respectively.

3.2 Hypothesis Establishment

Based on the above questions, corresponding hypotheses are proposed here:

H1: Bangladesh's Prothom Alo reports on the epidemic mainly focus on political themes.

H2: As the phase of the epidemic changes, the focus of the Bangladesh Prothom Alo's reporting changes.

H3: Bangladesh's Prothom Alo reported on the epidemic in China in a negative way.

H4: As the phase of the epidemic changes, the tone of the Bangladesh Prothom Alo's report on the epidemic has changed.

In order to prove the hypothesis, the content analysis method was used in this study to sample the population.

3.3 Coding Schedule

In this study, variable x was reduced to different stages during the epidemic, from February 12, 2020 to February 5, 2021, February 6, 2021 to January 31, 2022, and February 1, 2022 to January 26, 2023. The variable Y is reduced to the source of news at this stage, which is represented by Agence France-Presse, Bangladeshi media or Chinese media such as Xinhua. It can also be reduced to the fact that the media politically constructs an image of China that lacks freedom of expression or lacks transparency or credibility in its policies; Economically, it constructs an image

of China that harms the domestic and foreign economies; The society has constructed an image of China in which people's lives are threatened and their quality of life is declining. Or the tone of the report at this stage is positive, negative, or neutral.

Table 1 Statistical table of sample data

Time Phasing		20200212-20210205	20210206-20220131	20220201-20230126
Prothom Alo' sreports on the China-related epidemic	Total quantity	272	79	75
	Sampling amount	32	9	9
Information source	Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Associated Press and others	27	4	9
	Indian,Asian News Agency	2	1	0
	Bangladeshi media	2	4	0
	Xinhua News Agency, Asia United TV	1	0	0
News category	politics	14	4	7
	economy	9	0	2
	society	2	1	5
	Disease-related conditions	12	4	0
	Other	0	0	0
Political subject	Sino-foreign relation	5	1	0
	The Hong Kong and Taiwan issues	1	0	0
	Epidemic policy	4	3	5
	Freedom of speech, human rights,democracy	6	0	4
Economic subject	Domestic economy	4	0	1
	Global economy	7	0	2
Social theme	People's life and health	0	0	1
	Living in poverty	1	0	0
	Traveling abroad	1	1	0
	Environmental pollution	0	0	1
	Social panic/popular protest	0	0	3
	Social activity	1	0	1

Attitude tendency	Positive	0	0	0
	Negative	16	1	9
	Neutral	16	8	0

4 Results

In this study, the content analysis method was used to analyze the three stages of the China-related epidemic reports of Prothom Alo in Bangladesh. The comparison was made from the dimensions of information sources, news categories, reporting attitudes and tendencies, and specific contents.

4.1 In Bangladesh, Prothom Alo's report on the epidemic is dominated by political themes

Among the reports on the epidemic in Bangladesh, Prothom Alo has the largest number of political topics. It is found that in the first stage, the news categories of Bangladesh's Prothom Alo are more concentrated, among which the single-topic reports related to diseases and politics account for the highest proportions, accounting for 34.4% respectively. Economics ranked third, with 15.6 percent. Therefore, in the period of COVID-19, foreign attention on China is focused on the epidemic itself and political issues. In the second stage, the news category concentration of Prothom Alo is also obvious. Among them, disease-related and political single topics accounted for the highest proportion, accounting for 44.4% respectively. The economic topic, which ranked third in the first stage, did not appear in the sample, and there was only one report on social topic. This shows that in the second phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the attention of foreign countries to China is focused on political issues besides the epidemic itself.

In the third stage, the news categories of Prothom Alo and are more concentrated and comprehensive. Among them, disease-related topics reported a large decrease, the sample did not contain disease-related topics. News topics other than the disease itself appeared more comprehensive and balanced characteristics. The reports with political themes still accounted for the highest proportion, with 44.4% of reports with political and social themes, 11.1% with political and economic themes, and 22.2% with single political themes. Although the proportion of economic and social topics increased compared with the previous two stages, the single topic of economic and social reports only accounted for 11.1%.

This fully reflects the political nature of international communication. As one of the Commonwealth countries, Bangladesh is heavily influenced by Western discourse. In order to protect their own political interests, when reporting on the epidemic in China, the media focus on selecting political-themed news and politicizing the Coronavirus.

4.2 The focus of the Bangladesh Prothom Alo's coverage changes with the phase of the epidemic

As the coronavirus situation has changed, so has the focus of Bangladesh's Prothom Alo. On the one hand, from the above data analysis, it can be seen that in addition to the main topics of the report, the proportion of economic, social and disease topics itself is constantly changing. Among them, the proportion of disease theme reports is particularly prominent. In the first and second stages, the proportion of disease itself topics is as high as that of political topics, while there are no disease topics in the third phase sample. It can be seen that since 2022, countries have conducted more in-depth research on the virus and the vaccination has become more popular. China has been in the stage of stable epidemic and gradual return to normal production and life before the epidemic. Fear and attention to the disease itself has decreased, so there has been less media coverage.

On the other hand, when we further coded the reports on politics, economy, society and other topics, we found that the specific content under each topic report was also changing. Among the 15 politically-themed news items in the first stage, 9 of them were about "lack of democracy", "policy opacity" and "restriction of freedom of speech", which were closely in line with Western stereotypes of China and common topics criticized by Western media about Chinese political parties. In addition to the comments on China's epidemic policy and situation, there are six other news items on the topic of Sino-foreign relations, including comments from China, the United States, Japan, India and the rest of the world. This not only reflects the signature conspiracy theory of the West, but also shows that as the world's second largest economy, China's comprehensive national strength and international status are constantly improving. The diplomatic issues represented by Sino-US relations are always the international focus. In the second and third stages, political issues focused on epidemic policy. Among the four reports selected in the second stage, two focused on China's epidemic policy, one was "China criticizes Bangladesh's vaccine policy", and the other was about international cooperation. In the third stage of political topics, "zero removal policy" accounted for 57.1%, which was the most concerned political issue in the report. With the establishment, development and abolition of the "zero clearance policy", the comments of other countries' media on China's epidemic policy have changed from criticizing the "zero clearance policy" as sweeping and contrary to the world trend to the political crisis and restricted freedom of speech after the abolition of the "zero clearance policy".

In addition, the proportion of western media reports on Chinese social topics in the third stage increased significantly compared with the first two stages, and the specific content also changed. As an important national event in the third stage, Western media reported the progress of the Winter Olympics under the shadow of the epidemic. In addition, it also shifted its attention from cities to rural areas, such as the epidemic, panic buying in supermarkets, and public protests caused by sudden changes in the epidemic policy. It is very consistent with the thinking inertia of western media reports, highlighting the social contradictions in China after the abolition of the "zero clearance policy". What’s more , the method of linking environmental pollution, a globally sensitive topic, with the epidemic is also a common Western method of blurred vision.

The specific content of the economic theme does not change obviously. The economic reports in the three stages all focused on the economic downturn during the epidemic in China or the impact of the epidemic on China's foreign trade, and even the economic impact on Asia and the world. For example, it reported the issue of "harming exports and mobile phone supply".

4.3 The Bangladesh Daily Dawning's report on the epidemic in China was mainly negative and originated from Western media

Of the 32 articles sampled during this period, half were negative and half were neutral, according to the analysis of attitudes toward China in the reports. By cross-analyzing the attitude toward China and the sources of information in the reports of Prothom Alo, it is found that among the 16 reports with negative attitudes toward China, 12 of them are from AFP and the other 3 are from Reuters. Of the neutral reports, seven came from Reuters. In the second stage, a total of 9 samples, according to the analysis of attitudes toward China reported in the report, most of them are neutral, accounting for 88.9%. The negative report came from Agence France-Presse and was politically themed, criticizing China's opaque epidemic policy. In the third period, the 9 samples were all negative, and all came from AFP and other Western media.

It can be seen that Bangladesh Prothom Alo's reports on the epidemic in China are mainly negative and mostly come from Western media represented by Agence France-Presse. In the face of the conflicts of ideology and national interests between China and foreign countries, Western media construct a negative image of China with biased agendas in order to safeguard their national image and divert domestic contradictions. They are in violation of the principles of objectivity and balance of news. Moreover, by taking advantage of the world discourse power, it deeply influenced the media of other countries such as Bangladesh under the pretext of the free flow of information, damaging the subjective national image of China among overseas audiences.

4.4 The tendency of Bangladesh's Zarya newspaper to report changes with the phase of the epidemic

At different stages in the evolution of the epidemic, the tone of the Bangladesh Prothom Alo's reporting has changed. The study found that the tone of the first phase was half negative and half neutral. Cross analysis of reporting tendency and news categories showed that the majority of disease-related report samples were neutral, with specific 11 reports. Among the 16 samples of negative attitude, political theme accounted for the highest proportion, with a total of 8 articles, accounting for 50%. For example, the report pointed out that the Communist Party of China restricts citizens' freedom of speech, or the Chinese People's Congress is highly decorated and so on. In addition, there were some negative reports on the economic theme, highlighting that the epidemic in China has caused great damage to the Chinese and world economy.

Most of the second stage reports are neutral reports. This indicates that during this period, the global epidemic spread. China adopted the normal "zero clearance" policy and the situation of the epidemic control was good. The number of reports related to China by the media decreased significantly and the topics focused on the disease itself or the epidemic policy. Therefore, the attitude was mostly neutral.

Phase three coverage was all negative. It can be seen that at this stage, with the improvement of the epidemic situation in China, there was a strong contrast with the epidemic management in

the West. Therefore, the western media also hoped to report on China through negative publicity to shift the dissatisfaction of the local people on the epidemic control. Besides, since the end of 2022, when China cancelled the "zero clearance " policy, Western media highlighted the contradictions such as media narrative crisis and public protest after China's policy change, so as to construct a negative image of China.

4.5 The construction of Chinese image in the use of negative words

In all the samples collected, the negative words in the reports were classified and word frequency statistical analysis showed that the negative words were mainly divided into five categories: shadow of the epidemic, inculcation, public protest, public negative emotion, and economic decline, contraction and interruption. Among them, negative words meaning economic decline, contraction, interruption and so on had the highest frequency of 91 times, which constructed the image of China that the epidemic has damaged the economic development of both China and foreign countries.

For example, in the reports on economic issues selected in the first stage, the reports from AFP and other western media used a lot of words such as fall, drop, contract and recession when describing the harm of China's epidemic to the economy of the Gulf or exporting trade. Second, negative words implying Chinese people's dissatisfaction with China's epidemic policies came in second, with 41 times, including fear, mistrust and worry. The term "protest" appears 29 times, mostly in protest. The intention is to highlight the problems that the Chinese government lacks credibility and the epidemic policy goes against the people's will. There were also 8 times when the state "indoctrinated" the public with a policy or idea. For example, in a report about the political cost of China's "zero clearance" policy, "spoon-fed to the public" appears, aiming to build the image of the authoritarian and undemocratic Chinese government. At the same time, these also show that Western media mainly from the economic, political two aspects of China's image to the outside world.

5 Conclusion

By means of the content analysis method, this article studied the construction of China's image in Bangladesh's Dawning Daily's report on China's epidemic, and tried to answer the mechanism, content and reasons behind the construction of China's image by the newspaper. The results show that all the four hypotheses are valid.

For one thing, the newspaper has focused on political issues in three different phases of the coronavirus pandemic. In the first phase, political issues and issues related to the disease itself are the focus; The second phase focuses on the topic of the disease itself; In the third phase, the focus is still on political issues, and the disease itself is absent. According to further coding of reports on political, economic and social issues, it is found that democracy, human rights and freedom of speech are common political issues. Economic recession is a common economic issue at home and abroad. Popular protest is a common social issue. Second, the newspaper's coverage

of the three different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic was mainly negative in tone. In the first stage, half of the reports were negative and half were neutral. Most of the second stage reports are neutral reports. Phase three coverage was all negative. In addition to proving the hypothesis, we can also find that the information sources of Prothom Alo are mainly Western media represented by AFP and most of them hold negative attitudes.

Therefore, this study finds that Prothon Alo constructs an image of China that lacks political freedom of speech and policy transparency, endangers domestic and international economy economically and threatens people's lives and degrades life quality.

As far as Western countries are concerned, due to the ideological differences between China and the West and the conflict of national interests, Western media, under the stereotypical cognitive model of China, politicize the virus in order to divert domestic epidemic contradictions and maintain their international status. They stigmatize and demonize China's image with a negative framework and biased agenda, which will continue to harm China's national image under the "snowball effect". Therefore, Western media workers should adhere to the principles of objectivity, neutrality, truthfulness and fairness in international communication work. Keep loyal to the overall truth of news, and change the stereotype of China. Nextly, they ought to correctly understand the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind" to conform to the trend of development of the times. In order to promote world peace and development, actively shouldering corresponding international responsibilities is of necessity.

For Bangladesh, due to the imbalance of the world information order and the control of discourse power by Western countries, the media of Bangladesh is deeply influenced by Western discourse. It also constructs a more negative image of China. According to Wallerstein's "World system Theory", if Bangladesh and other less developed countries want to get rid of the world pattern of "center -- semi-periphery -- periphery" and build an independent discourse system, they have to actively exploring their own development paths while learning from the development mode of developed countries. Only by improving their comprehensive national strength in economic, political and cultural fields, can they enhance their international discourse power.

For China, its discourse communication power does not match the comprehensive national strength level. It still lacks international communication influence in spite of the world situation: "rising east and falling west". As a result, "other narration" replaces "self-narration" and it is tough to rectify its own name. In the future, under the guidance of the global concept of "a community of shared future for mankind", China should vigorously build an external publicity flagship matrix composed of traditional mainstream media, new media and overseas Internet enterprises. Build a multi-dimensional communication pattern, and enhance discourse influence and communication power. In the meanwhile, we should actively innovate the content system, enrich the forms of communication, and promote the communication of "cultural transformation". Struggle to overcome the "cultural iceberg", enhance the appeal of Chinese culture, and build a respectable, lovely and credible image of China.

Nevertheless , due to the large sample size and the difficulty of language translation, this study did not analyze the reporting framework from the aspects of rhetorical devices, language symbols and news pictures. In the future, scholars should pay more attention to the use of introduction, rhetoric and language symbols in the reports when studying the construction of China's image in

the reports on the epidemic with the framework theory. Also , scholars can expand the research on the communication effect of overseas media reports on the China-related epidemic on foreign audiences through audience survey.

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