

MASTER'S THESIS

Cultural nation versus political state: media construction of national identity: the case of China Daily

Wang, Yue

Date of Award:
2006

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Cultural Nation versus Political State
Media Construction of National Identity:
The Case of China Daily

Wang Yue

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. Yu Huang

Hong Kong Baptist University

May 2006

Abstract

The process of identity construction involved the perception and relation with significant others. Most previous studies on media's construction of Chinese nationalism and national identity were focused on media addressing domestic audience who was the subject of national identity. This study, through the case of China Daily, the national English language newspaper, examined the Chinese national identity discursively constructed in the paper's news content at the presence of western significant others, who had profoundly influenced the emergence and development of Chinese nationalism as well as national identity.

Ideologically contradictory, many of the western significant others held a negative attitude toward the People's Republic of China with a feeling of "fear and loathing". The international legitimacy of Communist China had always been a problem. Chinese traditional culture, on the contrary, was a convenient and safe solution to answer the question of "who are we". In order to entertain the audience and avoid any aversion feelings, would China Daily tend to construct an alternative national identity more from the aspects of a cultural nation than from a political state? If so, how would the paper, as a party propaganda organ, reconcile the crisis of dual legitimation caused by the contradictory attitude of Chinese Communist Party toward Chinese cultural tradition? And how could the paper fulfill its political function of promoting the party-state's international legitimacy at the same time evade the unfavorable political elements, which might keep its customers away? What strategies the paper used and how the strategies worked in constructing its national identity?

The study integrated firstly the data-based quantitative content analysis on 2240 news items of ten years' China Daily and 1565 news items from three years' People's Daily, its Chinese language counterpart and secondly qualitative text analysis of sample news items as well as thirdly two case studies of news report on Tibet and China's successful bidding for the 2008 Olympic Games. It was designed in the first place to test the hypotheses that China Daily tended to construct a more cultural China than People's Daily and then to have an in-depth analysis of the paper's national identity constructive strategies.

The result showed that China Daily portrayed a China that was more cultural (in both senses of traditional culture and anthropological culture) and less political than the China represented in People's Daily. In other words, China Daily was identified with a more cultural nation than a political state than People's Daily. On the other hand, when some sensitive topic, such as national unification or the party regime's legitimacy, was involved, political concern came before anything else. In cases when the crisis of dual legitimation emerged, China Daily tended to use strategies to evade the contradictions.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	IV
CHAPTER ONE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY...1	
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW6	
NATION	6
NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY.....	8
CHINA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS.....	14
MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY	18
ENGLISH MEDIA AND THEIR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	22
CHINA DAILY	27
<i>Editorial Autonomy</i>	29
<i>Readership</i>	30
<i>Pages and content</i>	32
PEOPLE'S DAILY	34
ASSUMPTION ON THE USE OF STRATEGY	34
SUMMARY	36
CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....38	
CHAPTER FOUR HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS44	
CHAPTER FIVE METHODOLOGY49	
RESEARCH PLAN.....	49
SAMPLING.....	50
RESEARCH SCOPE.....	51
<i>China Daily</i>	51
<i>People's Daily</i>	53
DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES	54
<i>News topic categories</i>	55
<i>Main actors</i>	62
<i>Location and size</i>	64
<i>Photos and illustrations</i>	64
<i>Autonomy Level</i>	66
<i>Traditional cultural issues</i>	70

<i>National identity constructive strategies</i>	71
INTERCODER RELIABILITY	72
RESEARCH PROCEDURE	73
<i>Phase one: Content analysis</i>	73
<i>Phase Two: text analysis</i>	75
<i>Phase three: case study</i>	75
CHAPTER SIX DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS AND FINDINGS	77
COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINA DAILY AND PEOPLE'S DAILY	77
<i>Political versus non-political</i>	77
<i>Cultural tradition</i>	83
<i>Editorial Autonomy</i>	85
<i>Summary</i>	89
COMPARISON OF CATEGORIES WITHIN CHINA DAILY	90
<i>Political versus non-political</i>	91
<i>Traditional culture versus politics</i>	92
<i>Traditional Cultural issues</i>	94
<i>Autonomy level</i>	95
<i>National identity construction strategies</i>	97
<i>Summary</i>	98
CHAPTER SEVEN TEXT ANALYSIS	101
CHAPTER EIGHT. CASE STUDY	118
CASE ONE: NEWS REPORT ON TIBET	118
DISCUSSION	128
CASE TWO: REPORTS ABOUT CHINA'S SUCCESSFUL BID OF 2008' OLYMPIC GAMES	
.....	129
CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	137
LIMITATIONS	146
SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES	148
CONCLUDING REMARK.....	149
APPENDIX I SAMPLED DATES.....	151
APPENDIX II CODING MANUAL	152
BIBLIOGRAPHY	163
CURRICULUM VITAE	171