

A Research on Korea's National Image Framing in the People's Daily (2009-2019): Under the Frame of CDA

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Abstract

Since 2008, strategic partnerships have been established between China and Korea. From 2009 to 2019, the bilateral relationship kept a generally stable rate of development with conflicts and uncertainties. It is necessary to study national image construction in the respective mainstream media of the two countries. The present study analyzed Korea-related reports (N = 744) in the *People's Daily* from 2009 to 2019, aiming to examine the Korean national image framing under Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework: "whatness," "how," and "whyness." The results shed light on what the Korean national image in the *People's Daily* was and how and why it was framed in that way. This study provided some implications for readers to further recognize the role that media play in constructing a particular image of one country and a frame for researchers to study foreign national image framing in one of China's mainstream newspapers.

Keywords: Korea, national image, *People's Daily*, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), China

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National image contributes to the multi-faceted dynamics of international relations. As one of the most important sites in which and through which national agenda is articulated and disseminated, national newspapers play particularly important roles in creating national identities. The *People's Daily*, which was founded in the 1940s, is affiliated with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It has a daily circulation of 3.2 million and is the largest daily newspaper in the country. Undoubtedly, the *People's Daily* is one of the most credible and authoritative mainstream media in China. The present study attempts to study South Korea's (hereafter referred to as "Korea") national image framing in the *People's Daily* from 2009, the year after the strategic partnership of the two countries was established, to 2019. The intent of this study is to identify the nature of Korean national image framing in China's mainstream newspaper media. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study sheds light on what the Korean national image in the *People's Daily* was and how and why it was framed in that way.

Literature Review

Framing, Image, and National Image

Frames are information-processing schemata (Entman, 1991) that operate by selecting and highlighting some features of reality while omitting others (Entman, 1993). Gitlin (1980) defines media frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 7). As Lippmann (1922) noted, the entire environment is too complicated to learn, so humans make a simpler one, which was referred to as a "pseudo-environment". Images are the pictures in people's head formulated based on a "pseudo-environment." Lippmann stressed that these images (pictures) drawn previously offer a base on which people respond to all situations. Framing and "pseudo-environment" are closely correlated.

The "images" of countries held by the peoples of other countries have long been of research interest because they are generally acknowledged as having an important influence on the relations between nations (McCracken, 1987). The image of a country is complex,

which includes the general evaluation and recognition of the country itself, country's operation, and its activities, as well as the outcomes by the internal and external public (Guan, 2000). From the perspective of extraterritorial countries, Wang and Liu (2019) indicated that "the image of the country is the comprehensive assessment and overall impression from other countries" (p. 131). National image is multidimensional. It refers to "a representation of a country's positive or negative standing in media, in terms of historical, political, economic, military, diplomatic and religious context" (p. 142) (Saleem, 2007). In the same vein, Men and Zhou (2012) stated that a national image involves a political image, an economic image, a social image, a cultural image, a military image, a diplomatic image, and a citizen's image. Thus, in order to answer "whatness," the portrayed media image of Korea will be discussed in present study at the text of politics, economy, culture and technology, military, and diplomacy.

National Image and Media

What are the indicators of the evaluation and recognition? What will affect the formulation of the "pictures" in public's mind? As a complex conceptualization, national image can be influenced by plenty of variables. For example, in the case of Korean national image in China, it can be influenced by public diplomacy (Zhu, 2014), oversea peacekeeping action (Zhang & Liu, 2017), Korean traditional culture (Chen, 2019), Taekwondo (Guo & Liu, 2013), Korean variety shows (Wang, 2018), Korean drama (Shang, 2016), K-pop (Quan & Li, 2016), satellite TV shows (Seol, 2008), magazines (Wei, 2009), and social science textbooks (Quan & Shen, 2010). It is not difficult to find that most of the influential variables listed above are directly or indirectly related to media. As Li and Chitty (2009) suggested, media, as the essential channel for people to get information on international issues, contribute heavily to national image projection. Xu (1996) stated that the national image is the image of a country in the news media of other countries. National newspapers, through which a national agenda is articulated and disseminated, play a particularly important role.

The research on the national image of Korea in Chinese mainstream is not as prolific as other areas. Concerning the studies on Korean national image in the *People's Daily*, as the retrieving result of the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) indicated, there were only two papers (Miao, 2013; Pan, 2018). Miao (2013) analyzed the national image of Korea presented in the *People's Daily* from 2007 to 2012. The results indicated that during the five years, the China-Korea political relationship was

most frequently reported, followed by cultural exchange. The national image of Korea was built through coverage of political, military, economic, cultural, and other fields. Pan (2018) emphasized “THAAD” (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, hereafter referred as THAAD) and compared the image construction before and after. However, both neglected the logic behind the display.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA deals with the relationship between language, power, and ideology, revealing how discourse originates from the relationship between social structure and power, and, in turn, serves them. What CDA aims to do is to show how social structures shapes the form of discourse and at the same time how discourse shapes social structures (Zhu & Ji, 2018). One of the well-known pioneers of CDA is Norman Fairclough, whose three-dimensional framework include “whatness” of the text, “how” and “whyness” of the text interpretation and explanation (Rahimi & Riasati, 2011). In addition, CDA examines “whyness,” focusing on social ideology (Kang & Jiang, 2020). In the same vein, Chen (1995) believed that text is a kind of socialized ideology under the cover of language form; language is just the form of text; and the content of text is the hidden ideology (Chen, 1995). CDA was widely applied to probe into injudicious use of language news stories. For instance, Shojaei et al. (2013) examined how three cases of ideologically conflicting ideas are interpreted and represented in western print media, and the findings have revealed systematic ideological bias in representing the Iranian side, thereby giving a differential treatment of Iran; Rashidi and Rasti (2012) studied morpho-syntactic modes through which social actors implicated in Iran's nuclear activities discourse were represented in news reports of four western quality papers. The findings have revealed systematic ideological bias in representing the Iranian side, thereby giving a differential treatment of Iran. However, very few studies have been conducted to analyze national image framing in a newspaper under the paradigm of CDA. I have only found one paper. Zhu and Ji (2018) investigated what images of China were constructed in the *China Daily's* reports on the G20 summit, and how this was done. Although data was analyzed under Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, this study was not conducted in the vein of displaying and analyzing the distorting contents. The findings indicated that Chinese national images were constructed in a positive way with the language resources. Thus far, no study has been

conducted to explore the foreign national image framing in China's mainstream newspaper media.

Methodology

Data Collection

Electronic copies of the *People's Daily* from 2009 to 2019 were selected from the newspaper database of CNKI. The keyword "Korea" was searched from the pool. Invalid samples that had display errors were excluded. Some articles only mentioned Korean names or Korean locations, but their themes are irrelevant to this study. Thus, they were also excluded. As a result, 744 valid samples were collected.

The Process of Data Analysis

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, three elements are applied to do CDA: text, discursive practice, and social practice. Text is the outcome of "discursive practice," and both text and discursive practice were determined by social practice. In a word, three elements are inter-involved and closely connected. Based on this, Fairclough proposed three dimensions in the process of CDA's actual application, which are to "describe," "interpret," and "explain." In order to "describe" and "interpret" what kind of Korean national images were present, two-step content analysis was conducted. For the first step, using Rost CM 6.0-word frequency analysis software, the most frequent words of each topic were acquired. Second, combining text analysis of relevant news reports, national image of politics, economy, culture & technology, military, diplomacy was presented through presenting the choice of certain words and headlines. The summary part was unfolded from the dimension of "explaining," focusing on media ideology, which is the main determinant of media practice. When "ideology" was mentioned, some people tend to think of it in a negative way and relate it to beliefs that are politically undesirable. However, ideology has proved to be increasingly significant in maintaining country safety, as the collapse of the Soviet Union showed (Liu, 2016). CDA provides a neutral definition: "the sum of the ways in which people both live and represent to themselves their relationship to the conditions

of their existence” (p. 24). Thus, ideology is shared by social groups. When an ideology is the ideology of a particularly powerful social group, it is said to be dominant (Yu, 2008).

Analysis

The National Image of Korea Itself

Political Image: Unreliable Government

The words that appeared most frequently related to political coverage are "THAAD," "deployment," "the United States," and "North Korea," with a total frequency of 1416 times. The reports mainly involved the issue of the president’s confidante’s intervention in state affairs, the presidential election, and the deployment of THHAD. There were 66 news reports on THAAD; 98% of them reflected opposition to it from within and outside of Korea. Some sample headlines are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample headline list of coverage on “again THAAD”

September 21, 2017	(1) A man in Korea died of self-immolation after protesting the deployment of "THAAD"
July 26, 2017	(2) American pacifists opposed the deployment of the "THAAD" system in Korea
June 2, 2017	(3) Russia will not sit back and watch the US deploy the "THAAD" system in Korea
July 9, 2016	(4) China expresses strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to “THAAD”

In one article (article 4 on Table 1) the collocation of “make no contribution to...make no contribution to...severely damage...” clearly narrated the reason why Chinese government “oppose” “THAAD.” Two types of voice (active and passive) can be employed in a news report. Active voice is applied to show the certainty of the speaker’s determination of achieving a goal. Among the coverage of THAAD, active voice was widely used to transmit the strong attitude of the Chinese government. For example, “China strongly urge Korea to stop... and not to..., not to...” (July 9, 2016). Over half of the 66 THAAD reports focused on Korean people’s opposition to the deployment of THAAD. For instance, “The deployment of THAAD is a rash decision” (July 13, 2016)

reported that “the opposition to THAAD is from all fields of Korea and it was rude for the Korean government to make the decision without soliciting public opinion widely”; “Against THAAD, we fight to the end” (February 28, 2017) reported that protesters in Korea expressed their distrust and resistance to the Korean government in the street, shouting “the Korea-US agreement on deployment of the THAAD is invalid!” The agenda “THAAD was not only opposed by China and other countries, even also by most of Korean people” was set. In addition, on October 24, 2016, one Korean domestic TV program revealed that President Park Geun-hye’s confidante intervened in state affairs. Since then all coverage on this female president was about this issue. The report content mainly focused on “impeachment” and “trial.” The image of an “unreliable” government was emphasized.

Economic Image: In Good Cooperation with China

The words that appeared most frequently in economic coverage were “China,” “enterprise,” “trade,” “development,” and “market” with a total appearance frequency of 1,629 times. “China” is the word that appeared most frequently (849 times). Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, relations between the two countries have developed rapidly. In 2013, for the first time, the Chinese government clearly regarded neighboring countries as China's primary diplomatic direction, and paid more attention to cooperation and common development of neighboring countries including Korea (Zhao & Wang, 2014). On December 20, 2015, a bilateral free trade agreement signed by Korea and China came into force; in 2016, three China-Korea industrial parks were established in China (Baidu, 2016); in 2018, the population that traveled between the two countries had reached nearly 9.5 million (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). These economic practices were clearly demonstrated in the relevant coverage in the *People’s Daily*. Some examples are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample headline list of coverage on China-Korean economic cooperation

September 16, 2012	(5) China-Korea Economic Ministers' meeting emphasizes deepening cooperation between the two countries
December 2, 2015	(6) Li Keqiang (China PM) attended the welcome luncheon of the Korean economic community and delivered a keynote speech
March 29, 2016	(7) China-Korea economic and trade cooperation reaches new heights

In the news reporting the China-Korea relationship, positive adjectives and adverbs were used. For example, “conductive” (September 28, 2011), “rapidly,” and “mutually beneficial cooperative” (April 14, 2012). In addition, some news reported the positive evaluation from the Korean side. For instance, on November 14, 2018, it quoted Jeon Byeong Yoon, the director of the China Economics and Finance Institute of Korea as saying, “China firmly opposes protectionism, maintains the multilateral trading system, and expands Asia-Pacific development space with practical actions. This will certainly enhance the confidence of the Asian region in development.” The notional words “maintains,” “expands,” and “enhance” reflected the importance of China’s role in the Asian economy development attached by Korea. So even when “a continuous downward trend” (March 23, 2016) appeared in Korea, in the first half year of 2019, Korea’s imports from China reached US \$54.01 billion, with an increase of 4.3% (Sohu, 2019).

Cultural and Technology Image: Cultural and Technologically Strong Nation

According to word frequency analysis, words such as “culture,” “movie,” “program,” “game,” and “Korean wave” appeared frequently, with a total frequency of 1,986. The success of Korean culture export was fully admitted. “Popular” and “powerful” appeared 478 times. For instance, “Its powerful cultural output includes not only a broad sense of Korean culture – food and clothing, but also a narrow interpretation of the cultural contents, such as the dramas, K-pop singers’ concerts and variety shows,” (May 11, 2012). Some data was presented by the *People’s Daily* to

demonstrate Korean culture export, for instance, "...from 2008 to 2011, the export scale of the Korean cultural industry increased at an average annual rate of 22.5%. In 2012, the export value reached 4.32 billion US dollars with a year-by-year increase of 34.9%," (July 2, 2013) Strong cultural output is the source of cultural confidence, and also raises the national image and soft power of Korea.

Along with culture, Korean technology is also constructed in a very positive way. "Internet," "car," "development," "electric," and "advanced" are high frequency words, which appear 454 times in total. Using "Internet" as the example, the expressions frequently used to describe it include "outstanding," "very advanced," and "high rates of broadband penetration." The superlative word "fastest" appeared several times in the headline to describe the speed of the Internet in Korea. Some examples are presented in Table 3:

Table 3

Sample headlines that include "fastest"

September 24, 2011	(8) Global Internet download speed rankings released: Korea is the fastest and China is listed after 80 th
May 14, 2015	(9) Inventory of worldwide broadband development: Korea keeps fastest Internet speed for many years
March 1, 2017	(10) Survey: Korea continues to be the fastest country in the world

In addition, the benefits brought by advanced Internet technology were also reported. For instance, the article titled "Global Recent Development of Internet" (December 15, 2015) reported that "With the power of the Internet, the way of Koreans seeking medical care is changing. In September of last year, the Korean Internet medical service started trial operation, and the cost of diagnosis and treatment only required 24,000 won per person per month (about 127 Yuan)."

Military image: increased military strength in response to conflicts with North Korea

During the last 10 years, there were 37 military-related articles. The word frequency analysis results indicated that "North Korea," "United States," "missile,"

"military exercise," and "Korean peninsula" appeared most frequently, with a total frequency of 718 times. These 37 articles mainly reported that Korea enhanced military strength in response to the conflicts with North Korea. "Crossfire between South and North Korea, sudden tensions of the Peninsula" (November 24, 2010) reported "two sides fought near the disputed 'Northern boundary' in the western waters, firing more than 180 shells at each other and injuring many people." The conflicts between the two sides are constant. In response to the conflicts, Korea increased their military strength and sought protection from the USA. For instance, "In response to the dispute over the 'Northern boundary,' the Korean marines stationed in Shirahama and Yanpyeong islands exercised K9 self-propelled guns and 81 mm mortars during training." (February 20, 2012), "Korea initiated emergency mechanisms in response to a satellite launch in North Korea, and maintained close ties and cooperation with U.S. forces," (March 30, 2012).

The National Image of Korea in Diplomatic Relations

A Nation Which Has a Close Relationship with China

There were 578 reports that covered the exchanges between two countries. According to the result of word frequency analysis, "cooperation," "exchange," "development," "economy," and "communication" appeared most frequently. Generally, China-Korea relations were reported positively. Even when reporting about conflicts, the *People's Daily* selected objective and fair expressions. On February 27, 2012, at the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Korea raised the issue of "North Korean defectors." The next day, in response to it, at a regular press conference, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei stated that, "It was not conducive to the solution of the problem. We hoped that the Korean government would treat it calmly." (February 29, 2012). "Not conducive" is the negation of "conductive," which is a positive word. He selected the negation of a positive word rather than the antonym of a positive word or one negative word. The choice of vocabulary was mild. For instance, "She is not beautiful" is milder than "She is ugly." In addition, compared with "require," or "demand," "hope" is much milder. Here, the selection of vocabulary in Hong's statement, as the spokesman, indicated the government's attitude. Even when reporting the THAAD issue, the strongest word applied was "opposes:" "China's stance on opposing the deployment of the 'THAAD' system by the United States and Korea is

definite, and the relevant actions will be resolute” (October 1, 2016). Compared to “condemn” or “strongly condemn,” “oppose” is a comparatively mild word.

A Nation Being Protected by the USA

High frequency words included "alliance" (123 times), "North Korea" (98 times), "Korean peninsula" (78 times) and "military" (69 times). Most of the USA-Korea reports covered the military cooperation and joint military practice. The image of being protected by the US was built through a series of headlines and selection of vocabulary. For example, “Joint document specifies U.S. to provide nuclear umbrella to Korea” (June 18, 2009). “Umbrella” is a protection for people from rain. The reporter selected this word to indicate Korea is being protected by the US. This image was enhanced by coverage on joint military practice by the US and Korea in response to the conflicts with North Korea. On March 26, 2010, the Korean warship the Cheonan exploded and sank in the waters west of Korea. Later the official findings of the joint survey team stated that the Cheonan was sunk by a torpedo launched by a small North Korean submarine. After that, it was reported that “as part of its military response to North Korea, Korea and the United States plan to hold a joint military exercise every month until the end of this year,” (July 29, 2010). Afterwards, Korea-US joint military exercises were covered by the *People’s Daily* almost every year (e.g., August 17, 2011; January 27, 2012; March 11, 2013; February 24, 2014; January 14, 2015; March 7, 2016; August 21, 2017; August 6, 2019), which sent Chinese subscribers a strong message that two countries were closely tied, and the United States kept making an effort to protect Korea.

A Nation in Conflict with North Korea

The high frequency words were "talks," "Korean peninsula," and "the United States," with a total frequency of 2,246. As can be easily inferred from the above discussion on the relationship with the United States, there are conflicts and confrontations between North and South Korea. From 2009 to 2016, the Korea Peninsula related coverage mainly focused on conflicts between the two sides.

Table 4

Sample headline list of coverage on conflicts between North and South

January 19, 2009	(11) North Korea announced entering comprehensive confrontation with Korea
May 27, 2009	(12) North Korea will take tough military measures against South's joining 'Proliferation Security Initiative'
February 30, 2011	(13) North Korea announced the severance of contact with Lee Myung-bak's government
April 5, 2013	(14) Peninsula tensions show signs of worsening

As an example, in headline 11, the notional words “announced” and “confrontation” indicate the official conflict between the two sides, and the modifier “comprehensive,” indicated that the conflict is involved in politics, military, economy, and other aspects. Korea joined the "Proliferation Security Initiative" in response to nuclear testing by North Korea (May 26, 2009). In report 12, "resolute," "relentless," and "serious provocation" were used to describe North Korea's attitude. This vocabulary shows a strong willingness of North Korea to fight against it.

In recent years, as the report titled “North Korea-Korea economic and trade cooperation welcomes new opportunities” (September 18, 2018) indicated, the tensions have eased. On January 7, 2020, at the New Year address, “Moon Jae-in proposed to North Korea the implementation of a border cooperation project, and expressed his willingness to continue the dialogue with the North Korean leaders and continue his efforts to restart the Kaesong industrial complex and the Mount Kumgang tourism project,” (January 7, 2020).

A Nation That Has a Historical Conflict with Japan

The conflicts between Korea and Japan that were covered by the *People's Daily* mainly include the issues of “comfort women” (69 times), “Dokdo” (57 times), and “visit to the Yasukuni war shrine” (45 times). The root cause of this animosity is that Japan conducted a large-scale aggression against Korea but refused to acknowledge it (February 23, 2014). “Strongly condemn” appeared several times in the headline. For example, “Korea strongly condemned Japanese Prime Minister taking Dokdo issue as campaign promise” (September 11, 2012) and “Korea strongly condemned Japanese

government visiting the Yasukuni war shrine” (December 26, 2013). Concerning the comfort women issue, the coverage mainly focused on asking for an apology from Japan. Notional words that can refer to strong attitudes were employed, like “demand,” for instance, “Korean comfort women demand Japan apologize sincerely” (August 15, 2013). Combining the employment of the active voice and modality of strong willingness, Korea was framed as a nation that will never compromise when it comes to these historical conflicts. For example, “Moon Jae-in: Japan must formally apologize for ‘comfort women’” (June 22, 2017).

Discussion and Summary

Drawing on CDA, the Korean national image framing in the *People's Daily* was examined. According to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, text is the outcome of “discursive practice,” and both text and discursive practice are determined by social practice, which is determined by ideology. He proposed three dimensions in the process of CDA's actual application, which are to “describe” (what), “interpret” (how), and “explain” (why).

First, what and how: combining text analysis of relevant news reports, the national images concerning politics, economy, culture & technology, military, and diplomacy were presented through the choice of certain words. Notional words can indicate core information, especially notional words with high frequency. The condition of being modal, such as possibility (may, might) and obligations (have to, must, need) can be indicated by the modality. So the choice of modality can show the speaker or writer's attitude. “Must” can indicate an attitude that shows no concession. “Should” and “need” can indicate that the speaker's attitude is weaker. In addition, two types of voice—active and passive—are employed in news reports. Active voice is applied to transmit positive information and to show the certainty of the speaker or writer's determination of achieving that goal. Therefore, the employment of the active voice certainly takes superiority, and the use of the passive voice can denote weakness. Therefore, according to the results of my analysis, Korea was constructed as a country with an unreliable government. This framing tone was determined by its policy toward China. Lee Myung Bak government's pro-USA diplomatic bias (Moon & Lee, 2011) and

Park Geun-hye's decision on the deployment of THAAD with the US interfered with the harmonious relationship between Korea and China. Korea was also framed as a country that needs protection from the US especially when confronting conflicts with North Korea. The China-Korea political relationship was most frequently reported, and the cultural and technological image was framed in a quite positive way, which was consistent with a previous study by Miao (2013).

Second, why: The "Outline of the Five-Year Plan for the Work of Making Laws and Regulations within the Central Party (2013-2017)" clearly states the principle of the party governing the media in China (Central Government of China, 2013). Thus, in China, media ideology is equal to government and party ideology. It is always emphasized that propaganda and ideological work is to consolidate the guiding position of Marxism in the field of ideology, as well as to vigorously cultivate and promote the core values of socialism (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship) (Chen & Yang, 2015). Thus, Chinese media must support China's national interests, as well as practice the core values of socialism while framing other countries' image. In the context of the core values of socialism, China has been trying to strengthen the national economy for decades, as well as keep a positive relationship with the international community. In order to create a benign development environment, neighboring countries have been regarded as China's primary diplomatic direction since 2013. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, relations between China and Korea have developed rapidly. Although there are still some conflicts between the two countries, the two sides maintain good diplomatic relations on the whole. They need to keep it for mutual benefits. So, conflicts caused by the government's decisions were covered while the relationship between the two countries was reported in a positive way. Also, the cultural and technological images of Korea were framed in a very positive way.

This research offers some implications for future studies. First, it verified the feasibility of news text based CDA study under Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. Second, this is the first study that analyzes the foreign national image framing in a Chinese newspaper by drawing on CDA. It has practical and theoretical

implications for researchers who are interested in foreign national image construction in Chinese mainstream media.

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