

Media Discourses in the Google Pullout from China (2010)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of government controlled media discourses in the event of Google's pullout from China in 2010. Particularly, I pay attention to the discourse strategies in the print media in relation with this topic, and address how Chinese Communist Party deploys the Chinese nationalism to stifle debate about censorship through the manipulation of these discourses, as well as how these have served as a defense to justify the Chinese authorities' censorship control. In addition, I analyze the role of the media discourses in an attempt to bundle Google together with other recent disputes with United States that have stirred nationalist rancour in China. Analysis of media discourses is approached from three major perspectives: (1) The manipulation of several discourse systems and their ideologies (Scollon, Scollon and Jones 2012); (2) Discourse Identity (Scollon 1996); (3) Difference in the ground of argumentation (as seen in the analysis of Fallaci's interview with Kohmeni, Jonhstone 1986).

Background

As a rising power in the context of global economy, China is known for its great potential market for many major multinational companies across various industries from the West, including IT companies such as Microsoft, Google, as most recently, Apple. In 2010, however, the technology giant Google surprised many in the IT industry by retrieving its search engine services and products from China, reportedly due to issues of conforming to the requirement of censorship by Chinese government to filter its search results on sensitive keywords.

Formally established in 2005, Google China had satisfied the censorship requirements in its first four years in China, before the massive hacker attack of the Gmail accounts of the Chinese human rights activists (which is incidentally the most hot topic right now as the Chinese blind human right activist stirred discourses about Chinese human rights and Sino-American relations) in January 2010. Subsequent investigations by Google suggested that there are strong evidences that the Chinese government is behind this attack¹. In January 2010, Google therefore announced that it will stop censoring the search results in China. On March 23, 2010, Google started to redirect all search queries from Google.cn to Google.com.hk. (Google Hong Kong), thereby bypassing Chinese regulators and allowing uncensored Simplified Chinese search results. However, search on all Google sites (including Google.com, Google.co.jp, Google.co.uk, etc.) are banned in mainland China. In June 2010, On June 30, 2010, Google ended the automatic redirect of Google China to Google Hong Kong, and instead placed a link to Google Hong Kong to avoid getting their Internet Content Provider (ICP) license revoked². As of March 2010, Google may choose to conform to the law and to satisfy the requirement on censorship by the Chinese government, but eventually it chose to pull its search engine out from mainland China, a decision based on its value of no evil-doing, advocacy for human rights and internet speech freedom.

Many articles from the Chinese national media have attributed the Google pullout from China to its lack of understanding and adaptation to the Chinese culture and the value system of China, while others analyzed Google's actions and intentions and concluded that the political statement is only an excuse to pull out over its dissatisfaction of its business in China (and its disadvantage in competing with local IT companies, especially search engine companies such as baidu.com). Within China and in the US, many see this as a failure of Google while others support Google's decision. In this process, many Chinese internet users react strongly to the pullout, yet these media discourses played a crucial role in manipulating and redirecting the Chinese citizens to make their peace with the fact that Google is no

¹ The attack is later expanded to over 20 US companies and agencies.

² Although Google pulled out its main search engine products from China, it still has a valid license in China in order to continue several behind-the-scene business investments.

longer part of their daily life.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this paper, by examining media sources from Chinese national newspaper People's Daily (including its subordinate companies that produce newspapers under different names, totaling 65 entries³) as well English sources (mainly consisting of the media report on the speech and comments by the US government officials regarding this matter, and Google official blog), I attempt to analyze the role that media discourses (particularly print media) have played in this process, as well as the forces behind Google's pullout from China. A major part of analysis will focus on the role of discourse strategies and discourse systems seen throughout these media texts.

Specific issues/themes of interest in my study include: ideology and value system; difference in framing strategies; strategies in argumentation in print media (such as ways associated with increasing modality) as manipulation discourses with a political agenda; constructing self and others (Google being the other) to portrait Google as too naive to adapt to the cultural context of China, where in reality there may exist a clear boundary between "cultural" and "political" context.

In order to address these themes, analysis of media discourses is approached from three major theoretical perspectives: (1) The mixed use and manipulation of several discourse systems and their ideologies (Scollon, Scollon and Jones 2012); (2) Constructing discourse Identity in print media (Scollon 1996), and its relevance to modality; (3) Difference in the ground of argumentation as a source of

³ Accessed in original Chinese text at <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/179618/179674/index.html>; <http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/155936/155938/180643/180758/index.html>; <http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/155936/155938/158835/index.html> (each contain multiple entries).

intercultural (or interdiscoural) miscommunication (which is intended and manipulated in this case) as seen in the analysis of Fallaci's interview with Kohmeni (Jonhstone 1986). Finally, I consider literatures from studies in media communications, and examine the ways that media uses techniques to represent and construct their version of reality.

Mixing Discourse Systems: Ideologies

Scollon et al (2012) defines "ideology" within the broad system of discourse, and defines it as "the worldview or governing philosophy of a group of people or of a discourse system", with the core of ideologies consisting of certain sets of assumptions held by the people regarding such things as epistemology, values, ethics, and norms. More importantly, according to Scollon et al, ideologies always are associated with the interest of certain groups of people and the maintaining of their power. In this section I analyze the ways ideologies from multiple discourse systems are used in the Chinese print media discourses in order to redirect the attention of Chinese citizens and to provoke nationalism in the aftermath of the Google pullout.

Scollon et al (2012:343) point out that "no ideology is purely practiced" (and also by extension, no one belongs to only one discourse system). Indeed, the multiplicity of discourse systems applies on various levels from the individual to the national level in a collective sense. In examining the case of modern China, I ask the question: how are discourse systems and their ideologies represented in the national print media? First, I outline the several most visible, large-scale discourse systems that are represented in modern China, each with a brief description of its historical trajectory:

(1) Confucian Discourse System: originates from the thousands of years of history in China, continues to have a strong presence in the day-to-day interactions and ideological values in modern China (as well as the East Asia in general);

(2) Utilitarian Discourse System: Modern day worldwide discourse system in professional and business settings. Scollon et al (2012) summarizes the ideological position of the Utilitarian discourse system in seven points, most importantly comprising of "good" defined as what will give the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, and progress as the goal of society, as well as the role of individual freedom and economic, material wealth. The forms of discourse in this system is expressed by C-B-S(Clarify, Brevity, and Sincerity), widely practiced in professional and business context;

(3) Communist/Marxist Discourse System: The Chinese communist discourse system is historically rooted in the philosophical ideologies of the works of Karl Marx, as first spread to China from the former communist Soviet Union. This system has evolved to become localized through the decades of practice in the Chinese context, most prominent from 1940s to the 1980s, and becomes less visible (especially comparing to UDS) since 1990s, although remained strongly visible in national media discourses⁴;

In addition, due to the nature of the current topic of study, I also consider the Chinese political discourse system as a form of discourse system that comprises a mixed ideology from the three systems above, but especially emphasizes the nationalistic/patriotic aspects often by invoking the pre-modern history of China being invaded and ruled by foreign powers, known as the imperialism.

As I have indicated, the presence of these multiple discourse systems can be visible in print media discourses, especially among state-run media such as the national newspaper. In the particular case of Google's pullout, I will show two observations here: (a) the differences between the Chinese media discourse and the Western discourses on this matter, notably, Google's own account and the comments by the US government; (b) the intentional mixing of ideologies of these different discourse systems in provoking the nationalistic responses among Chinese readers.

⁴ Due to the complexity of each discourse systems, it is beyond the scope of this paper to define each system's characteristics in greater detail. I will invoke certain aspects of the ideologies in the following analysis as necessary.

The decision of Google's pullout from China, as Google claimed, is mainly based on its objection to the political censorship by the Chinese government and its support to human rights (speech freedom in particular) in general. Another reason that directly provoked Google's decision to stop censorship is the hacker attack that targeted the human rights activists' Gmail account in China. Google's statement, naturally reflects a UDS styles of clarity, brevity, and sincerity, can be seen in its official announcement in Google Blog (the only official document issued by Google that is accessible by the general public) :

" ...We also made clear that these attacks and the surveillance they uncovered—combined with attempts over the last year to further limit free speech on the web in China including the persistent blocking of websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Docs and Blogger—had led us to conclude that we could no longer continue censoring our results on Google.cn..."

The ideology behind the Google's statement is clearly rooted in the ideology of UDS: the freedom of speech, basics of human rights, among others, are fundamentals for societal progress within the UDS ideology of serving good to the biggest number of members of society, which in turn has the closest connection to the fundamental elements in the US such as freedom of speech and democracy. Although it is not absolute that this is the only discourse system at work for Google, it is safe to say that considering the level of representation in this context (a multinational company versus Chinese government) and the nature of the conversation (on the ways of conducting business), UDS ideology is most strongly manifested here in the words given by Google.

In contrast, as I have already discussed, the Chinese official (regarding which the primary source is not accessible but mostly reconstructed through national print media) and media discourses exhibits a mixed nature of discourse systems and ideologies. More importantly, although these different ideologies and their historical trajectories are well known and visible in the Chinese context, they are usually mixed together in the media discourses without a clear presence of consistency and distinctions. Therefore, the

media discourse is especially in an advantage position to manipulate the argumentations by navigating across the boundaries of different discourse systems and exploit their support.

My analysis of the 75 entries of media articles in the national media reveal that the Chinese print media utilized several strategies to divert the discourse away from human rights and speech freedom and to provoke nationalistic sympathies, as well as to construct Google as the evil "other" that chose to abandon China based on its own interest, as shown in Table 1:

Topic	Chinese Media (discourse systems involved)	Google/US GOV
Political Censorship	Communist/Confucian/UDS	UDS
Hacking Attack	No comment	UDS
Chinese Culture and Law	Blurring boundaries between UDS vs. Confucian	UDS
Commercial Interest	Contradiction between UDS vs. Communist	UDS
US Government Political Criticism	Communist (vs. capitalism, ideology)	UDS
Pornography	Contradiction between UDS vs. Confucian	No comment

Table 1 Chinese media discourse systems in articles on Google pullout 2010-2011(Original data source: 75 entries from People's Daily newspaper company renmin.com.cn)

Table 1 shows the several topics/themes that are constantly explored in the Chinese media discourses on Google pullout. It can be viewed as an explanation on the side of the Chinese government as to the real reason why Google left China, and to counter force against those sources (mostly non-Chinese sources) that represent Google's voice as well as the US government's voice. It is noticeable that while the Google/US side has maintained its UDS ideology quite consistently throughout its announcement and speeches, the Chinese media utilized multiple discourse systems in support of its own story (and ideology), in often contrasting ways of usage. Here I briefly analyze three items in the table:

(1)Political Censorship: The strategy of media discourse in response to the criticisms on political censorship rests upon multiple discourse systems working together. The concept of political censorship, although often oriented towards the particular power group and individuals, is in general substituted by the term "to maintain the safety of our nation" and to "protect the nation from those who wants to destroy the happiness of our people". Under this expression, the media can then argue from either of the ideology two discourse systems to invoke nationalism: on the one hand, as communists, we want to maintain the safety and stability of our society, and no one has the right to disturb that stability no matter what; on the other hand, speaking of Confucian ideology, the harmony of society is to be maintained at all cost (including the restriction on freedom of speech and human rights). In addition, Chinese media also extensively cites censorship requirements from the government of other countries to illustrate that this is a universal means to the public relations of governments in the modern world (UDS).

(2)Chinese Culture vs. Law: in the Chinese context, law is a rather modern concept rooted in the Western ideology(invoking UDS), whereas culture is usually associated with the long and continuous history of China as a nation and as a collective "ethnicity" in terms of identity, as related to nationalism (although such collective ethnicity does not exist in any point of the history). The most common manipulation in the media discourse in the Google case is the interchangeable use of "Chinese law" (UDS) and "Chinese culture"(Confucian) in the accusation towards Google as not mature enough to conform to the Chinese context. In the most technical sense, by not censoring its results, Google may have violated the Chinese law (although that is also questionable since which results is restricted by which article of the law is highly debatable and must be subjected to the judgment of people, the officials), and it has nothing to do with Chinese culture. However, since law is a rather cold and abstract term (and it is subject to judgment varying from case to case), the media writers often preferred to use the term "culture", which is emotionally more accessible and thus facilitating the stirring of the nationalism.

(3) Another common strategy of the media discourse is to point out the disadvantage of Google in its competition with local Chinese search engine companies and to accuse Google of leaving China due to commercial interest rather than the claimed political censorship and hacking attack. In contrast to the argument discussed earlier, this argument usually utilizes the contradictions between the ideologies of the communist discourse system and the UDS: whereas the communist ideology is elevated to the level of public good over personal benefits at all occasions, Google is being criticized for its utilitarian ideology of being too greedy on the profits (although an element of UDS is often invoked: being in China, Google must obey the Chinese law—censorship).

Discourse Identity

Analysis on the 75 entries of news articles yield the classification of two kinds of articles: (1) descriptive; (2) analytical. While the former merely reports news regarding Google's developments (often negative), the latter assembles various facts and discuss the various forces behind Google's pullout from China (which accounts for most of the examples seen in the last section). A sharp contrast between the two emerge regarding authorship: whereas in the descriptive/reporting articles, most of the articles have the uniform byline that identifies one author's name (only), in the analytical articles, the byline is more informative and diverse: some identifies up to 10 co-authors; many identifies the name as well as the profession of the author (e.g., the author is the professor of economics at Tsinghua University in Beijing); in the cases where the authors are professional journalists, the specific location of the journalists are individually specified (e.g., journalist in residence in Berlin, in Moscow, etc).

Scollon (1996) analyzed the discourse identities in communication and revealed the contrast between the indication of authorship in the bylines of Chinese and English newspapers in Hong Kong and mainland China, and discussed its implication on drawing conclusions from these data. Specifically,

Scollon discussed the discourse identity in terms of productive and receptive roles, as seen in animator/author/principal vs. receptor/interpreter/judge, as well as framers/players/observers in a given interaction.

Here, instead of going into detail regarding these roles, I want to discuss the role of discourse identity (as it is indicated to different extents in the newspaper bylines) and its relevance in boosting the modality of the information.

First, it is worth pointing out that under this framework, in the Chinese context, the role of the government news agency as the framer of the discourses in media entails enormous power over the flow of information and discourses elsewhere in China (going back to the freedom of speech that Google is concerned with). In this structure, the players (newspaper staff writers) who co-authored these articles have very limited control over the discourse, while the observers (the readers) also has limited access to information outside of this discourse system (either outside of Chinese or outside of China, in print or over internet). Therefore the framer in this scenario assumes a greater power than usually one would assume.

Second, I argue that the detailed information in the byline of the authors of the articles is related to the purpose of increasing the modality of the information. This strategy is also seen in the quotations of comments from various foreign celebrities and news media articles (e.g., Bill Gates' comment and a news paper article from Russia that criticizes the US in this matter) to increase the modality of the arguments in the media discourse.

Ground of Argument

In her article on arguments with Khomeini, Jonestone (1986) adopted a model to analyze Fallaci and Khomeini's argumentation, based on Aristotelian notion of the syllogism, the three-part structure in which

a major premise (a generally accepted statement, like 'all men are mortal'), a minor premise (a true statement about the situation at hand, like 'Socrates is a man') are placed together to demonstrate the validity of a conclusion ('Socrates is mortal'). This condition can be also stated in terms of 'law'+ 'case' → 'result'. Jonestone argues that any claim in an argumentation can be asked to present more data in support of the claim, until it reaches a ground level of argument which cannot be attributed to any more levels of evidence to support it. This is exemplified by Khomeini's use of "Islam", which is a main cause that many of their arguments cannot be resolved effectively, and eventually result in strong miscommunication.

This model can be very well applied to the case at hand: as the media discourse in China clearly demonstrates, the basic ground level of argumentation that Chinese government does not agree with Google (and the US government) is the question of "what is freedom", be it freedom of speech, internet information freedom, or other types of freedom. In fact, this ground is quite explicitly articulated in many news articles in China regarding this matter, which again is often associated with different understandings of "culture" and nation. The Chinese media claims that they define freedom in a different way than the Americans, and they cite various evidences from countries around the world to support that restriction: freedom is not free without limit—it has to be within the limit and restrictions of law, and to ensure the greater good of the people. By that logic, if certain speech and information is against that principle, then it should not be allowed to spread freely. By the same logic, American government also has its requirements to limit the freedom of its citizens (e.g., in the name of counter terrorist operations and investigations) and like many other countries of the world, US government also has a record of asking Google to remove certain information from the search results (such as the Google Street View's pictures taken around the Pentagon). In fact, the People's Daily devoted a whole article condemning Google as not acting by law but acting by "ideology" (ideology of the UDS system and of the US government, but not by ideologies that are not conforming to that ideology, such as the communist ideology).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have analyzed the role of media discourses in the Google Pullout from China from three different theoretical perspectives. I have shown the ways that ideologies of different discourse systems work together or against each other in the manipulation of media discourses in stipulating the nationalism among Chinese readers. In addition, I also demonstrated the different levels of discourse identity in the authorship of newspaper bylines and its relevance to increasing modality, as well as the ground of reasoning on which the two parties (China and Google) differ drastically in their "miscommunication" which resulted in the strong reaction of Google pulling out from China completely. My findings suggest that while the two has major conflicts regarding ideology and discourse systems, the Chinese media did a good job in terms of utilizing this differences and identifying the ground of argument in stifling the national debate about censorship and internet speech freedom. Nonetheless, as Scollon et al suggested (2012), the international political-economic conflict is usually very complex and cannot be reduced only to a discourse dimension. In this case, I want to argue that even it can be analyzed clearly in the discourse dimension, it does not lead to a solution.

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