Media in China: Constructing "War Narrative" in Natural Disaster Coverage

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Declaration

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Abstract

This study examines how media can be used in contributing to control on-going crises following large-scale natural disasters. In investigating this research question this study conducts two case studies. Set in the context of the contemporary Chinese nationalistic culture this study dissects how Chinese media enhances crisis control by controlling the meaning of it. This thesis firstly takes a historical overview of the negotiations between discursive power and the control of information about natural disasters in Chinese media. Based on this cultural background, this study then conducts a case study of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake to examine how Chinese media is used to enhance crisis control in the context of contemporary Chinese nationalistic culture. In order to examine the research question in a global context this study also briefly examines the Australian media's coverage of the 2013 Tasmanian Bushfire.

A substantial corpus of data is built up and a systematic approach is designed in this study. In the case study of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the corpus of primary data is constituted by media texts from the state-controlled Chinese media, including the *Sichuan Daily, People Net, Southern Weekly, People's Daily, Guangming Daily* and *Xinhua Net*. In the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire coverage in Southern Australia, the corpus of data includes media texts collected from *The Australian* and *The Mercury*. Both sets of primary data include texts released during the period when the events were intensely traced by the media and the public. In analyzing these data a systematic theoretic framework is set up consisting of the theories of representation, discourse and power, identity, cultural identity, national cultural identity, media framing and narratives. The analytic method designed in this study is discourse analysis supplemented by cluster criticism adaptable to processing units of textual expressions in this study.

Through investigation this study finds that a war narrative and a discourse of resistance ensued, that are constructed to represent meaning of shared cultural identity from which a cohesive sense of belonging is generated and therefore the sense of crisis is reduced and relieved. In the war narrative, disorderly information in the natural disaster crisis is narrated, framed, and discursively formulated into a storytelling about the war of resistance from "we" as a collective identity to the disaster as an imagined "invader" and "the Other". In this interactive process of resistance the negative information is transferred to "the Other" and positive representation of "the heroic Chinese" or "the Tasmanians" as invincible, creates a cohesive sense of belonging which can relieve the disorientation and panic. It is found out that these signifying practices discursively engage with the broad social culture of Chinese nationalism. This thesis sees this discursive process as a power-driven practice structured to modulate and integrate the imaginations of the public about the event and therefore enforce crisis control. With these findings, this thesis produces an extended knowledge about the role of media and its mediated meaning production in contributing to crisis control in natural disaster situations. The two case studies in this thesis illustrate how frameworks underpinning the discourse of resistance and the construction of a war narrative can be applied to enhance disaster relief.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Figure 1   最危险的任务 (The Most Dangerous Task）(*Southern Weekly* 5 June, 2008a)

> *The earth is cramping. The disaster continues. In every minute, there is*
> *a possibility of death among our country fellows. Life is in crisis; our*
> *motherland is in* crisis.[1]   (*Southern Weekly* 22 May，2008)

On May 12, 2008 a serious earthquake occurred in the south-western part of
China. In the central area of Wenchuan County in Sichuan Province, the
severity of the earthquake reached 8.0 degrees on the Richter scale. Official
figures show that more than 69,197 people were confirmed dead, with 374,176

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[1] All translations of media texts in Chinese media are conducted by the author of this thesis, unless
otherwise specified.

injured, 18,222 missing (*Xinhua Net* 20 July, 2008). It was the deadliest natural disaster in Chinese history since the Tangshan earthquake in 1976. In the first several days after the earthquake the public had no clear grasp of information about the event, which caused rumour-producing and a highly intense sense of crisis (Yang and Liu 2010, p. 204). The public such as those in Sichuan Province's Mianyang City, close to the epicentre of the earthquake, were anxious for authentic and trustworthy information about facts from official channels. The public anxieties were eventually lessened after Chinese state-owned media provided reassuring information about the event (Yang and Liu 2010, p. 204). One research survey showed that in releasing earthquake information to the public, the media was a principal platform adopted by the Chinese government for information disposal. News reports of the disaster in official media outlets such as *Xinhua Net* and the *Sichuan Daily* claimed high credibility among the public due to the fact that China's mass media is seen as the most trustworthy source for acquiring crisis information (Yang and Liu 2010, p. 197).

In the period surrounding this tragic event, the Chinese media produced its own "media event" (Dayan and Katz 1992) which affected how the crisis was perceived by the public. After the earthquake, people were in a state of intense uncertainty and anxiety because of the disorderly information flow. In that event, people's reactions were highly associated with the information released from media and their understanding about the earthquake was tremendously impacted by how the media covered it (Zhang 2010, p. 456). It seems that the

crisis situation brought about by the earthquake was not limited to the destruction of the disaster, but also closely related to the crisis of information flow. In a natural disaster situation, the disaster is out of people's control, but the crisis of information flow can be managed by the media. In a crisis situation, it is argued that the media should guide public opinion, provide timely support with a constructive interpretation of the situation, placate any panic and cope with irrational sentiments caused by the pervasion of disruptive information (Shao 2009, p. 238). How the media deals with such information flows within a crisis is a question that needs further investigation. Therefore, this thesis chooses to address natural disasters and their ensuing media coverage as its research topic, however before going into more detailed illustration of existing knowledge on this topic, it is necessary to briefly examine and define a disaster event.

Disaster befalls when the peace between nature and humans is violently disrupted at a certain point. These uncontrolled cataclysms destroy property and threaten people's safety. In dealing with human responses to natural disasters, a variety of academic disciplines have initiated research, including the social and physical sciences in areas as diverse as geology, astronomy, meteorology, and psychology. However more recently this has become an area of interest for media scholars. Among the themes explored across these disciplines, one important focus examines the impact of media communications on social understanding and subsequent human actions in response to natural disaster situations.

From this perspective, the discourse constructed by the media during and after a natural disaster situation is an important focus for research. In natural disaster situations, how the media transmits information about the facts of the situation and sets up reporting frameworks clearly affects the way people in the disaster area (and beyond) orientate their perceptions and actions. The media's coding of disaster information and construction of images about people's state of suffering strongly influences the way the disaster is understood, attitudes to it and the social meaning that can be interpreted from it. Therefore, the media's communication in natural disaster situations becomes an essential focus not only in interpreting the disaster, but also in carrying out disaster relief. Before reviewing the existing research on this topic, it is necessary to define the concept of a natural disaster to clarify what is meant by natural disaster communications.

1.1 Natural disasters and natural disaster communication

Natural disasters are often termed "acts of God" which occur "without any apparent direct human involvement" and often strike without any warning (Coenraads 2006, p. 11). The natural reasons for the event could include seismic shifts that result in earthquakes or tsunamis, or other events such as natural bushfire or volcanic eruptions. It is necessary to differentiate between disasters caused by natural reasons and man-made disasters due to a qualitative

difference in the central logic between them and therefore the reactions to them. The key mechanism in a natural disaster is the conflict between humans and the natural catastrophe, while that of the man-made disaster is intrinsically an interaction between people which has an "element of human error, negligence, or intent" (Coenraads 2006, p. 11), such as a terrorist attack or a building collapse. This disparity produces different forms of reporting analysis, judgment, and commentaries in the media. The second defining feature of the natural disaster addressed in this study is its enormous influence at a humanitarian level. It is a large-scale event that leads to tremendous aftermath and arouses intense public reaction, such as the Wenchuan earthquake, the 2011 tsunami in Japan, or on a smaller scale, an incident such as the 2013 Tasmanian bushfires in southern Australia.

Natural disaster communication in this study also has specific connotations. Firstly, media communications in the context of this study are limited to those conducted by mainstream media in a nation-state (or province), especially the state media. This is because these media construct or represent natural disasters differently from small-scale media in their focus and discursive pursuits. Secondly, the natural disaster communications in this study focus on those media texts that intrinsically include news reports and commentaries on the event. This is due to the fact these texts are the specific traditional carriers of messages in the communication process to the mass or general public.

Even though the relations between media and audience, media and ownership, and even the relations between different forms of media, all affect the way natural disaster communication is conducted, the analytical objects in this study are media texts from newspapers and news releases from mainstream websites. The factors that contribute to shaping news reports and commentaries will be closely examined in a focused textual analysis of several disaster events. In sum, the central focus of this study is mainstream news reports and commentaries covering natural disasters.

1.2 Background, significance and methodology

After narrowing down the scope of this study, this section reviews the representative research, arguments and contributions in this field. In existing literature, three categories of research about natural disaster communications can be identified each with different perspectives, details and shifting focus.

The first category of research in this field focuses on the practical roles and functions of the media in enhancing disaster relief. The specific roles and functions of media are seen as forecasting, releasing factual information about disaster relief, facilitating regular communication in finding victims, mobilizing relief services, conducting fund raising, and giving emotional support (Goltz 1984; Sood, Stockdale and Rogers 1987; Rattien 1990; Piotrowski and Armstrong 1998; Jalali 2002; Perez-Lugo 2004; Chouliaraki

2006; Thomas 2011; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012). It is also the case that the media discourse in natural disaster contexts may be seen as "both crucial and problematic" (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012, p. 2), when containing insufficient information (Singer and Endreny 1993; Quarantelli 1996), biased reporting on disaster facts (Littlefield and Quenette 2007), or very limited support in enhancing fund raising (Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen 2003) in the aftermath of a disaster event. Research in this category puts emphasis on the quality and quantity of the information released by the media. It also questions the level of media practice, and examines the roles and functions of media organizations themselves. However, it tends to omit analysis of the mechanisms deployed by the media to produce information for achieving "effective" communication.

The question of achieving effective communication is partly addressed in the second category of research in this field, which examines how different groups of people are symbolically constructed in the larger media spectacle of the situation. In media discourses about natural disasters, information about disaster facts and how people react are the two principal components. Therefore, the media's construction becomes an essential issue. For example, scholars find that a "civil unrest" image is often constructed as an overlay for the disaster situation (Tierney, Bevc and Kuligowski 2006). In analyzing media coverage of damaging floods in Barrio Tortugo, Puerto Rico for instance, Perez-Lugo (2001) criticizes the unbalanced construction that downplayed the role of those community leaders, groups and institutions that were factually

critical in the disaster relief. Similarly, Chen (2008) critiques the commercialization of victims and argues that the ethical principles for covering victims were neither clearly formulated nor practiced in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake coverage.

Research also shows that the media often puts less emphasis on individual victims and local communities than on governmental responses, such as in the case of Hurricane Katrina in 2006 in the U.S. (Barnes et al. 2008). Some scholars contend that the media often inaccurately represents the disaster situation and tends to construct reporting based on the myth of "large-scale panic, looting and criminal activity, public shelter utilization, disaster shock and general antisocial behavior" (Wenger and Friedman 1986). Research in this category starts to examine the texts in natural disaster communications, providing more nuanced analysis of the journalistic frames used. But these representations can also be further analyzed by setting them in a broader social, political and cultural framework, in order to explore the deeper reasons that shape them. This task is undertaken by the third category found in existing research.

The key approach adopted in the third category is that of social analysis. For example, the association of the 2011 tsunami in Japan with the issue of global nuclear security indicates that natural disaster communication intersects with social or political debates (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012). This phenomenon was not new because it was also shown in Sorenson's analysis on

ideological conflicts between the US and the Soviet Union in the past century over such disasters as the ongoing series of African famines (1991). In analyzing natural disaster reporting in the Chinese media, scholars (Pugsley 2006; Dong and Cai 2010; Yin and Wang 2010) also claim that reports about disasters intersect with broad social issues such as political propaganda. The common approaches in this category examine the phenomenon that reporting on natural disasters becomes transferred to social issues. In other words, it dissects the dichotomy of the disaster communication and the communication of other socio-political topics.

Instead of focusing on the questions illustrated in the literature above, this research examines *how* the media formulate discourses to enhance control of a crisis caused by a natural disaster. In a natural disaster situation, the turmoil of the event can cause uncontrollable collective actions among people affected by the event and produce possibilities of social disorder; therefore it is necessary to use media coverage to help control the situation (Tian 2005, p. 89; Ren 2008; Shao 2009, pp. 234-238). Existing studies in the disciplines of media and journalism studies shed scant light on the concept of control in discussing natural disaster coverage. Situated in this area of concern, this study will specifically look at how China's state media apply the means of information release and discourse formulation to contribute to the control of information flow and its contingent meanings in a crisis situation.

This research investigates the issue of control in terms of information and discourses rather than directly exploring other ways of control such as military control or administrative regulation. Even though the latter forms of control play critical roles in natural disaster coverage, this study is specifically setting discursive control within mainstream media as the major target for investigation. The expected outcome of this research will contribute to the existing knowledge about natural disaster coverage in the disciplines of media and communications, and the mechanisms of meaning production dissected in this study will provide practical implications for enhancing disaster relief.

In investigating natural disaster coverage this thesis conducts a case study of media responses to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in China. As a journalism graduate who has lived for more than twenty years in China, I am familiar with Chinese society and culture and can contextualize the media coverage of this event within the social, cultural and historical frameworks of contemporary China. In analyzing news reports and commentaries of this natural disaster event, this study therefore seeks to explore the discursive mechanisms mentioned above and examine the processes of discursive control in this event.

The corpus of texts sampled for this study includes news reports and commentaries on the Wenchuan earthquake. More specifically texts from three mainstream, state-controlled media sources in China are sampled: *Sichuan Daily, Southern Weekly* and *People Net*. The state-controlled media in this study means the ones administratively regulated by the Party committees at

various levels and ideologically supervised by the Party in their covering principles especially those concerned with socially significant events such as large-scale natural disasters. The corpus is supplemented by several critical news reports and editorials from *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily* and *Xinhua Net*. These outlets provided the news texts that were widely circulated during the earthquake period. The *Sichuan Daily* is the official organ of the CCP Sichuan Committee, and a form of mainstream state media at the provincial level and possessed immediate access to information about the earthquake. *People Net* and *Southern Weekly* are also part of the state media and have a nationwide audience. Their coverage illustrates how the mainstream media at the national level covered this event. The *People's Daily* is the official organ of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party; *Guangming Daily* is supervised by the Ministry of Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party. It is a comprehensive and nationwide official news media. *Xinhua Net* is the official website of Xinhua News Agency which is the state news agency of China the general office of which is based in Beijing the nation's capital. The media discourses constituting a news event are produced by a convergence of a substantial number of media texts coming from multiple media organizations. By examining the journalistic output of these examples of China's provincial and national media this thesis presents a cross-section of the discursive processes constructing the Wenchuan earthquake event.

These media organizations, from which the illustrative examples have been retrieved, all have a state background, which confers institutional legitimacy in

releasing authoritative information, especially during a time of crisis. Social institutions such as state media have authority and thus are regarded as more trustworthy (Foucault 1972). For a discourse to be broadly communicated in a society, it is said that it should have a "truth-claim" (Mills 2004) that supports the discourse as a reliable one. The authenticity of a discourse is therefore formed due to the socially legitimate status of the information provider, such as a state media (Foucault 1972).

This study also briefly examines Australian media coverage of the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire as a supplementary case. As I was in Australia at the time, I was able to see the media coverage as the event unfolded. The media texts used in this minor case study come from *The Mercury* and *The Australian*, both from Rupert Murdoch's News Limited, Australia's largest commercial network. *The Mercury*, a local media outlet for the state of Tasmania, depicted in detail the stories of the disaster, and exhibited a nuanced narrative in dealing with the crisis situation. *The Australian*, as a national media outlet, reports news events from a nationwide perspective. The significance in taking a brief review of the media coverage of this event is therefore to conduct a cross-cultural comparison of the discursive mechanisms used in the most widely read, mainstream media of both a Chinese and a representative Western context during the period when these respective events attracted immense public concern. In doing this, this study will address the related question of whether the discursive mechanism argued in this study is limited to a specific culture or still has cross-cultural implications.

The data analysis in this study employs a theoretical framework drawing on theories of representation (Hall 1997), discourse and power (Foucault, 1972, 1976, 1981, 2006), national cultural identity (Rutherford 1990; Hall 1996a, 1996b; Thoits and Virsbup 1997; Niebuhr 1999; Jenkins 2004; Anderson 2006; Wodak et al. 2009; Barker 2012;), media framing (Tuchman 1973; Gitlin 1980; Goffman 1986; Gamson 1989; Entman 1993, 2003) and narrative theory (Tomashevsky 1965; Eichenbaum 1965; Propp 1968; Chatman 1978). The analytic framework in this study adopts a systematic critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010; Van Dijk 2011) supplemented by a method of cluster criticism (Burke, 1959, 1966; Littlefield and Quenette, 2007), which is to analyze media texts, critique news discourses, and interpret interactions among news events, society and culture (van Dijk 1988b, 2001, 2011). The theoretical framework and method will be explained in more detail in Chapter Two.

1.3 Arguments in this study

Through a historical review of natural disaster coverage in Chinese media, this thesis argues that the coverage of huge natural disasters is determined by power relations that transform across different historical periods. In the Chinese media, the control of natural disaster crises is conducted through the ways that meanings are constructed for the audience. In contemporary Chinese society, the war narrative in media texts has emerged as a successful discursive measure to contribute to the control of a crisis through constructing a national

cultural identity. The identity articulated in this narrative serves as a shared meaning, which constructs a strong sense of belonging for the victims and other readers finding themselves in the uncertainty, confusion, panic or disorientation that surrounds such calamitous events. This study acknowledges that the term "war narrative" is touched on by scholars in describing the metaphor of war in storytelling or in explaining the genre of this kind in textual formation (Wu 2007; Li and Wen 2009; Zhang 2014); however, this study instead explores an alternative context of how this narrative enforces discursive constructions for producing meaning, and contributing to crisis control.

The war narrative is also vital in reporting on disaster events because it has the potential to construct a "discourse of resistance" and to provide nationalistic meanings for Chinese readers because of two factors. Firstly, the war narrative is embedded in cultural codes closely associated with Chinese nationalism; therefore, this narrative represents and broadens the possibility of meanings for Chinese nationalism. Secondly, the war narrative constructed in the Wenchuan earthquake coverage is intrinsically a differential mechanism to form national cultural identities. It is an intermediate discourse for delineating the line between the earthquake and the people, attributing negative information to the earthquake as a constructed "Other" and consolidating a positive shared meaning of national unison; in so doing the crisis control is enhanced and the disaster relief is facilitated.

This thesis maintains that the war narrative is a contextualized discursive measure used in natural disaster situations for engaging with Chinese nationalistic culture and framing meaning production in coverage of the disaster. It illustrates how the construction of a national cultural identity is a cultural practice for integrating the nation in modern nation-states. The minor case study of the 2013 Australia Tasmanian bushfire in this thesis also indicates that constructing an imagined "war of resistance" in natural disaster coverage is indeed a differential discourse for constructing meanings for communal belongings about "the Tasmanians" being invincible and therefore contributes to the crisis control despite the message being delivered through privately-owned media. The discursive process shown in this minor case exhibits commonalities in terms of cultural identification with the Wenchuan case, which shows how China's state-owned media effectively frames a disaster by utilizing similar themes of resistance and war to integrate the information.

1.4 Limitations

The war narrative studied in this thesis differs from other alternative discursive measures for integrating natural disaster situations. It draws from data found principally in the Chinese media (and some from the Australian media) which therefore limits the universality of some of its themes. The two chosen case studies highlight not only differing degrees of homogenization in natural

disaster reporting and cultural encoding, but also differences in nationhood, different levels of media ownership and varying degrees of media intervention.

This thesis does not claim that this discursive measure can exhaust the whole cohort of measures applied in natural disaster communications. The model is selectively used according to social contexts and decisions from the media, and is not a compulsory discursive measure. This study explores cultural communication in the context of natural disasters from one perspective among others based on one model that takes into account issues such as nationalism, the building of various virtual communities and its corresponding cultural codes.

1.5 Chapter structure of the thesis

Chapter One of this thesis introduces the research background of this study, and defines the terms of "natural disaster" and "natural disaster communication". Based on a critical review of the existing studies on this topic, a research gap is pointed out which can be explored for a meaningful study. This chapter also illustrates the methodology adopted to investigate the gap of knowledge on natural disaster coverage. In addition, it is noted that this study comprises qualitative research in which the "war narrative" in media texts is critically interpreted and examined in regard to how it contributes to the control of meaning in a crisis situation.

Chapter Two constructs and explains the theoretic framework and analytic approach for investigating the research question of this study. The repertoire of theories used in formulating this framework includes theories of representation, discourse and power, cultural identity and national cultural identity, and theories of media framing and narrative. By establishing this theoretic premise as an epistemology for this thesis, this chapter develops an analytic approach for dissecting the media texts, which are the central object to be examined in this study. This analytic approach incorporates the methods of cluster criticism, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and socio-cultural analysis, in order to uncover how the meaning of crisis is produced and controlled. This approach provides a nuanced elaboration of the meaning production process. The theoretic premise and analytic approach presented in this chapter is therefore designed to investigate the control of meaning in natural disaster coverage in both a broad and in-depth matrix of discourse and power in the context of contemporary Chinese culture.

Chapter Three conducts a historic overview of the natural disaster coverage in China. This chapter reviews how natural disasters have been covered by Chinese media in history and in so doing, examines how natural disasters are interpreted in different cultural thinking when a society undergoes incessant changes. It is argued that the way a natural disaster is depicted in Chinese media texts is influenced by how the natural disaster is viewed in social culture. The analysis is based on the assumption that culture is inextricably associated with social power relations. The coverage of natural disasters therefore, is

determined by the needs of social power. In traditional Chinese society, the natural disaster was anathema to the dynastic rulers and therefore forbidden to be publicized. This chapter explains that the reason for this lies in *Tiandao* epistemology and its close relation to the legitimacy of social power relations. In the Mao Zedong Communist Revolution era from the mid-20th Century, the coverage of natural disasters was coded as a form of class struggle. This chapter then investigates how contemporary Chinese nationalism impacts on natural disaster coverage.

Chapter Four illustrates how the war narrative was constructed in the case of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. In using a qualitative interpretation of meaning production and control in the media texts sampled for this study, this chapter displays how the imagined concept of a war against the earthquake is manufactured through media narration and the construction of stories that serve the intentionality of the state. This chapter also investigates how the media spectacle of uncertainty and anxiety is presented in the media texts to create a setting for the war narrative. It explains how war narratives formulate information about the situation into a media story concerning the interactions between the actors of "we" (in this case, representative of "the nation") and the earthquake as the "Other". It is argued that by constructing a war narrative media texts attribute negative information to the earthquake as a constructed "invader". In doing so, a dividing line is drawn between the people's community as a nation and the earthquake.

Chapter Five investigates how the discourse of nationalism was activated using this war narrative in the Wenchuan earthquake coverage. This chapter examines the textual representation of Chinese nationalism and dissects *why* war narratives are called upon to produce contexts for representing the meaning of nationalism. In this chapter, it is maintained that the nationalistic discourse is specifically oriented towards constructing a national cultural identity. It is also contended that the reason war narratives invoke the imagination of Chinese national identity is that it is a sign of social identification within China's cultural memory. In presenting this sign, a nationalist discourse is evoked and the meaning production is embedded in a frame of nationalism.

This concept is further developed in Chapter Six. This chapter explains the more nuanced approach by which the meanings of Chinese cultural identity are negotiated in the texts. In doing this, this chapter discusses the dichotomies found in the process in which the meanings of cultural identities are discursively formed. Then it examines the differential and classificatory attributes of the cultural system and their reference to the formation of Chinese cultural identity in the Wenchuan texts. It is maintained in this chapter that the construction of the national cultural identity is not limited to perpetuate it as a cultural frame, but also has to fit into a differential structure through which the cultural system is created. Therefore, the construction of the national cultural identity in contemporary China is dependent upon adhering to the rule of differentiation and classification of the cultural system.

In Chapter Seven a brief cluster criticism is conducted of mainstream media coverage of the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire in southern Australia, to indicate the global implications of the war narrative and the discourse of resistance. This chapter contends that the meanings for communal identification of "the Tasmanians" are constructed in this event. The disorderly information flow is contained through media constructions of a dichotomized "community versus evil" narrative.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by summarizing the process of argumentation and notes the theoretical and practical implications of this study on the research topic of natural disaster communication in China and, where indicated, universally.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework and Methodology of the Study

Introduction

Having briefly reviewed existing studies of the role of media in natural disasters in the previous chapter, this chapter proposes a conceptual base for the study - the war narrative - which provides a potentially new understanding of this issue and establishes a theoretical foundation for justifying and critiquing this model. This chapter will draw on arguments from a number of key theories to set up a framework for analyzing the research question concerned with meaning production and control as proposed in Chapter One. Firstly, representation theory in this chapter will be discussed for its relevance in providing nuanced explanations for how meaning is produced through signification. Then, discourse theory will be drawn upon by defining the concepts of discourse and explaining how discursive formations control meaning production, and thus become the key issues for analyzing the "war narrative". And finally, the theory of cultural identity explained in this chapter will set a framework for analyzing how a sense of belonging to communities is constructed through the war narrative in natural disaster reporting.

Media framing and narrative are also elaborated on in this chapter and will be used to further examine how news events are framed to present a value-pursuing representation within the meaning system formed by broad social discourses. This section elucidates how media can technically create meanings through textual measures and how the representation of a war narrative is fulfilled through the integration of social discourse and media texts. These theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the war narrative in natural disaster communications and also set up a theoretic foundation on which to examine specific cases of media coverage of natural disasters. The final section of Chapter Two sets up and justifies the analytical method, which on the one hand, translates broad theories into operational approaches; on the other hand it contextualizes the procedure for examining the textual data of specific news reports in relation to the research question.

2.1 Representation

Representation is a term closely associated with Stuart Hall, who uses it to explain how meaning is produced (1997). Hall elaborates on the relations between material realities and the constructed system of meaning arguing that people communicate with each other through common meaning systems. He specifically examines the function of concepts and language in this system (p. 15). This theory is grounded on an assumption that there is no "a priori or

independent meaning" outside of the symbolic system created for meaning production (Pan 2012, p. 10). As Hall points out:

> Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (p. 17).

From Hall's definition of representation, it can be seen that there are two central relations contained in representation. Hall deploys a paradigm consisting of material objects, maps of meaning and signs in dissecting these intricate mechanisms. He states that the constituents of this paradigm produce two processes in completing the overall task of meaning production (p. 17). These two central relations or essential processes in meaning production act as "two systems of representation" (p. 17). The first system of representation is the primary stage, which concerns the relation between concepts, language and the "real" world. This system examines how a conceptual map is constructed of the material object that people perceive (p. 17). The meaning of the material object derives from this constructed conceptual map, as Hall explains:

> First, there is the 'system' by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads. Without them, we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all (p. 17).

This argument indicates that there is no meaning inherent in the material object, but rather, it is the set of concepts and mental representations that constitute meaning (Barthes 1972; Hall 1997). An individual material object is constructed with a concept and the meaning of this concept is interpreted

through "organising, clustering, arranging and classifying" in the conceptual maps (p. 17). For instance, we create meanings for traffic lights by associating the concept "go" with the green light and "stop" with red light. As Hall argues, "meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world – people, objects and events, real or fictional – and the conceptual system, which can operate as mental representation of them" (p. 18).

Going further than the first system of representation, the second system is about the relationships between the conceptual maps and signs. This system examines how the imaginary world of mental images is represented. According to Hall, this map of concepts is represented by each person's language system. As he explains:

> The general term we used for words, sounds or images which carry meaning is signs. These signs stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads and together they make up the meaning-system of our culture. (p. 18)

Signs are able to represent concepts because shared cultural codes establish conventional correlations between signs and concepts (Hall 1997, p. 21; Cavallaro 2001, p. 40). That is, each sign represents a concept in the maps of meaning constructed of the real world (p. 21). Hall argues that the codes connecting signs and concepts are "fixed socially" and "fixed in culture" (p. 22). In this sense, the social culture essentially consists of shared maps of meaning and communally accepted links between signs and the maps of meaning. Through this conventionalized system of signification, people can use signs to represent meanings, which can also be decoded by the recipients (p.

22). For individual social members, these meaning systems are learned through a process of socialization. As Hall explains:

> They learn the system and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture, which equip them with cultural 'know-how' enabling them to function as culturally competent subjects. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in their genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gradually become 'cultured persons – i.e. members of their culture'. (p. 22)

Hall's explanation suggests that a person is capable of using the two layers of systems for representing meaning in social communication through the process of his or her acculturation. The construction of the meaning system on the one hand creates a social culture in which individuals possess a medium (language) to communicate and cooperate; on the other hand this system constructs individuals' perception of the social reality by culturally limiting the means by which they get to make sense of the reality. This system of meaning production and reception is a form which individuals can use to see and make sense of social realities; otherwise these understandings would be beyond the consciousness of a culture (Pan 2012, p. 10).

The systems of representation discussed to date are more about a neutral and technical process in which material objects are conceptualized and the conceptual map is conventionally linked with signs. A further question that can be asked is what mechanism regulates the way meaning systems are constructed. There is a systematic exploration of this question in arguments about discourse and power, in which the meaning system, or discourse, and the power relations behind the process of meaning production is discussed.

2.2 Discourse

There are different definitions of the concept of discourse across a variety of theoretical and disciplinary frameworks (Howarth 2000, pp. 1-5). This thesis draws from the approach that maintains "discourse constitutes symbolic systems and social orders, and the task of discourse analysis is to examine their historical and political construction and functioning" (Howarth 2000, p. 5). The meaning production is seen as a discursive practice reflecting and controlled by social power relations (Foucault 1976, 1981, 2006, 2010; Sigley 1996). The forming segments of discourse are textual elements that imply cultural themes. An analysis of discourse is undertaken to investigate the patterns of meanings formulated through textual units, such as words, phrases, rhetoric and sentences (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). Although in different cultural contexts the discourses constructed by social powers may vary, the way social powers control discursive formations remains remarkably similar across cultures such in both Western and "non-West" settings (Sigley 2006, p. 491). These cultural themes draw on broad social meanings that are indicated and produced through the linguistic tools available to each culture (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). In this approach, the method of "discourse analysis" is intended to examine the social and cultural implications of texts that cannot be directly detected (Paltridge 2008, p. 2). In short, investigation of a discourse can be seen to be focused on the production of meanings about "material objects" (Barker 2012, p. 91).

Michel Foucault argues that discourse is "a means of both producing and organizing meaning" (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). For Foucault, discourse contains both the active process of meaning production and a notion about the result of this process. The process of meaning production is therefore a "discursive process", where social realities are given meanings and communicated through commonly shared signs (Cavallaro 2001, p. 90; Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). As Barker explains:

> The concept of discourse in the hands of Foucault involves the production of knowledge through language; that is, discourse gives meaning to material objects and social practices. Needless to say, material objects and social practices 'exist' outside of language. However, they are given meaning or 'brought into view' by language and are thus discursively formed. (2012, p. 91)

The result of this discursive process whereby certain meanings are "brought into view" (as discussed above) is determined by how signs are organized for producing a set of meanings while excluding alternative meanings because there are multiple ways to interpret meanings about social realities and social practice (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). That is, there is a deeper determinant behind the use of language tools for formulating meaning. The formulation of discourse is driven by the pursuit of power which latently governs meaning production "at a distance", differing from the manifest coercion that can occur through administrative measures in authoritarian states (Sigley 1996, p. 477). The meanings constructed for material objects are therefore seen as embedded in "regulated maps of meaning" (Barker 2012, p. 91) within a discourse.

Similar to Foucault's argument, Lyotard explains that the selection of one version of meaning structure is due to the purposes of agents (including the state, the church and a range of other institutional powers) who hold the controlling position in meaning production (p. 97). The field of discursive formulation is "at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favorable to those who dominate the field economically and politically" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 60). The version of meaning adopted in this context is seen to be truthful with any alternative versions excluded. In Foucault's thoughts, the selected version of meaning structure dominates other alternatives, finally becoming truth and knowledge, which constructs a "mental map of the social order" (Fairclough 1992, p. 82)

2.2.1 Discursive construction of social reality

The power of discourse is shown in the formation of meaning as a construct of social realities and social practices. The force of discourse is specifically embodied in institutional forces such as those found in state and church (Foucault 1972) and the discursive power to construct objects (Howarth 2000, p. 52). The institutional force in discursive formation essentially indicates the way an object or construct is created through symbolic tools and the underlying power relations. It comes from the legitimacy of social institutions in developing social discourses within a society (Foucault 1972). Generally speaking, social institutions such as state media assume an authoritative status and this confers greater trustworthiness on their ability to construct social

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realities and events through a credible discursive process (Foucault 1972). For a discourse to be broadly transmitted and accepted, it should have a "truth-claim" (Mills 2004, p. 61) which is ratified to be "in the true" by social institutions with social legitimacy (Foucault 1972). In Foucault's theory, institutions serve as the major source of meaning production and have the status and resources to collect, exclude, and construct social realities according to institutional purposes (Mills 2004, p. 54); therefore institutional force of a discourse helps to explain who speaks and what is said.

The discursive process also determines the target for which meaning is formulated (Howarth 2000, p. 53). In this way, an object is set up for which meaning is produced, which is a "constitutive role of discursive practices in forming and determining objects" (p. 52). There are three steps in creating the object for discourse formation. Firstly, partial information based on social realities is delimited and selected as a focus for elaboration; secondly, the institutional power determines in which framework the meanings about the object will be produced, for the same object will have different meanings when situated in different frameworks; and thirdly, a discourse about the object is formulated by meaningfully associating it with other concepts in a broad framework (Howarth 2000, p. 53). The essence of these three steps in creating objects for discourse formation is a process through which a social event or social fact is interpreted by the rules in existing cultural frameworks (Howarth 2000, p. 52). (For a further examination of how the selected cultural framework

is constructed, Foucault's conceptualization of episteme, truth and knowledge will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter).

Before explaining the broad cultural framework for meaning production, it is necessary to examine the signifying act in meaning production at a more nuanced level in the space between object and the meanings created. According to Derrida's argument, an object possesses a "minimal remainder of meaning" (Howarth 2000, p. 39) which "exhibits a minimal sameness in the different contexts in which they appear, yet are still modified in the new contexts in which they appear" (Howarth 2000, p. 41). This means that the minimal sameness of an object is the basic element in an object to be incorporated into signification. And in different cultural frameworks, this repeatable and alterable minimal sameness can create various meanings and hence formulate different discourses (Howarth 2000, pp. 40-41). This sameness has potential for producing associative images in signifying practices, such as those found in the use of metaphors.

This creates a virtual image which, in Jean Baudrillard's terms, is a simulation (Butler 1999). Baudrillard argues that the symbolic construction of the social realities produces a simulated version of the material matters; however, the constructed images are formed to "realize" the meaning of the social realities (p. 23). In realizing or formulating the meaning of a thing in reality, the discourse deals with two kinds of phenomena: the real phenomenon and the hypothetical one (p. 25). The role of simulation is to transform the real

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phenomenon into the hypothetical version by changing "how things actually are" to "how they could be" (p. 25). The simulation is the medium through which the realities are understood, for it is through the symbolically represented meaning in the simulation that the reality is interpreted and understood (Butler 1999, p. 43; Bignell 2002, p. 7).

2.2.2 Truth and knowledge: the legitimatized discourse

For Foucault, truth is a discourse formation for explaining social practices. It is constituted by the ordering of statements that lay the foundation for social perception and the socially legitimate way of understanding social issues. The discourse constructed can only attain its discursive legitimacy by being deemed as truth. Individual's conscious comprehension of social practices is an embodiment of truth in a specific context, which is constructed and constrained by power relations (McHoul and Grace 1993, p. 34; Song 2005, p. 35). As a dominant structure for conferring meaning to social practices, the truth in a culture is a dominant interpretation among possible alternative choices, as Foucault argues in the following way:

> Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints […] Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1979, p.46, in Mills 2004, p. 16)

Truth, therefore, is produced in the form of discourse in a culture through excluding other propositions from being considered as true (Mills 2004, p. 16). As discussed by Foucault the same factual reality can be interpreted from multiple angles through various value orientations where the resultant alternative discourse constructions compete for the status as truth and authority (p. 17). Through competition and subsequent exclusion, the dominant discourse therefore garners the legitimacy as truth.

Foucault states that in the process of power negotiation for formulating discourses, the version finally legitimized by social power has to meet three prerequisites: the truth of fact, the truth of opinion and the truth of science (Barker 1998, p. 17). The truth of fact demands that the discursive formation is grounded on tangibly realistic evidence; the truths of opinion and science require the discursive formation to be constructed from voices with the status of authority who "[s]peak their expertise, their 'science', and galvanise for themselves an authoritative place" (p. 18). The connotation of truth is similarly stressed in the concept of "knowledge" in Foucault's thoughts, where knowledge, like truth, is constructed through the mechanism of exclusion.

However, compared with truth, knowledge delimits what can be known about certain social realities and what cannot be known in a social culture, leading Barker to contend that "[k]nowledge is not something that pre-exists power and controls it from a value-free cultural perspective" (1998, p. 25). In Barker's

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argument, people in a given culture use sanctioned knowledge to form their idea about social realities.

When people perceive these realities, they are framed in a discursive structure that "deeply embeds power as cultural form" (Barker 1998, p. 25). The discursive structure that is applied to the perception and interpretation of social realities is both knowable and truthful and therefore becomes legitimized in a culture. Foucault argues that canonizing one discourse to be authoritative knowledge while excluding alternative interpretations results from the dominion of social power (Mills 2004, p. 19). As he explains:

> We must be clear on this point, however. It is quite possible that there was an expurgation – and a very rigorous one – of the authorized vocabulary […]. Without question, new rules of prosperity screened out some words: there was a policing of statements. A control over enunciations as well: where and when it was not possible to talk about such things became much more strictly defined; in which circumstances, among which speakers, and within which social relationships […]. Areas were thus established, if not of utter silence, at least of tact and discretion […]. This almost certainly constituted a whole restrictive economy, one that was incorporated into that politics of language and speech.
> (2006, pp. 491-492)

As Foucault stresses here, power relations determine the shape of knowledge. For Foucault, the power relation in knowledge production is represented in interactions among economic forces, social structures and discursive capabilities, which may all be involved in producing legitimized social discourse (Mills 2004, p. 32). However, the power to formulate discourses and establish knowledge about social practices in a culture could lead to a discursive monopoly (p. 32). For instance, Althusser states that state power

usually holds a supreme position in constructing social discourse and shaping social knowledge in order to attain social integration (Mills 2004, p. 38).

In sum, the Foucaultian notion of power is not imposed from above, but practised discursively by constructing a series of relations within this social system (Nealon 2008, p. 24). Power relations in discourse formation differ from conventional understandings where the body is the target of power; rather they are a cultural or discursive type of power for constructing ways of perceiving and thinking about social realities (pp. 26-27). This means that human beings can be restrained by economic limitations, military regulations and nation-state apparatus, as well as be controlled by constructing a "mental map of the social order" (Fairclough 1992, p. 82). This is a discursive control effected by masking its actions and hence seen as more tolerable for subjects (Sigley 2004, p. 562). The specific way by which social realities are discursively constructed also exhibits historical variations, as will be discussed in the following sections.

2.2.3 Episteme and ideology

In the Foucaultian explanation of discourse the concept of episteme is used to examine the entanglement between discursive control and its historic context. Foucault argues that an episteme consists of "the sets of discursive structures as a whole within which a culture thinks" (Mills 2004, p. 56), concept close to the notion of ideology, which, according to Marx and Engels, is the "ruling ideas

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of the epoch" that undergoes transformations in different historical phases due to the shift of power relations (1992, p. 47). As discursive structures, the episteme limits the way meanings about an object are produced (Mills 2004, p. 57). And in different historic periods the same material object is constructed in different symbolic forms because the episteme is changed (Mills 2004, p. 57; Barker 2012, p. 20)(Barker 2012, p. 20). The following example illustrates Foucault's thinking:

> [W]ithin the set of epistemes available within the Victorian era, scientific thought was characterised by a tendency to produce detailed tables, to label and systematise seemingly heterogeneous materials into very rigidly defined systems of classification. (Mills 2004, p. 57)

Arguably, the episteme is an epistemological frame selected during specific historical periods to give meaning to material objects. In addition to this illustration of the different classificatory systems in scientific knowledge applied in different historic periods, Foucault puts forward another example that illustrates the changes in understanding about the relations between natural phenomena and the divine order (pp. 58-59). He states that within Early Modern Europe, every event had to be explained within an episteme that maintained that events carried signs from a supernatural divinity. Thus, as Foucault states, a natural phenomenon such as a storm may be seen as an ominous sign from the divinity. The essence of this episteme is characterized by the meaning construction in relation to issues within frameworks of either primitive cosmology (p. 59) or creating "a state or habit of the mind" which is called culture (Williams 1987, p. xviii). But in the twentieth century, this

cosmological episteme that had been used in the past to explain natural phenomena was replaced by a modern scientific episteme (p. 59). In van Dijk's explanation of the similar cultural phenomenon, he argues that the epistemology affecting the production of discourse consists of "context models". As he explains:

> [Context models] […] feature instantiations of sociocultural knowledge we share about social and communicative situations and their participants. Models are the mental representations we call the *definition of the situation*. I call such mental models of communicative episodes *context models*, or simply *contexts*.
>
> (2009, p. 7)

The "mental models of communicative episodes" in van Dijk's words are epistemological restraints constructed by "total set of relations" that in a given time and space, determine the discursive practices that formulate social knowledge and truth (Foucault 1972, p. 191; Gramsci 1971, 2001). The relations determining the form of the episteme are based on social power, which construct a methodology that structures the ways that social discourses are formulated in each historic period (p. 191). By analyzing the episteme in this discourse formation, it is possible to discover the constraints and limitations imposed on a particular discourse (p. 192).

These constraints are termed "rarefactions" by Foucault, which means that any discourse circulating in a society is restricted by socially agreed boundaries, much like the mechanisms of exclusion in creating knowledge mentioned earlier (Mills 2004, p. 63). It is an exclusive measure that consolidates the truth status of a discourse while other alternatives are ruled out, and "only through

this process of constraint can knowledge be produced" (Mills 2004, p. 64). The constraints produce a dominant form of discursive formation, where:

> In a sense, they ensure that what can be said and what can be perceived to count as knowledge is very limited and occurs within certain very clearly delimited and recognised bounds. This ensures that the knowledge produced within a particular period has certain homogeneity. (Mills 2004, p. 67)

The dominant episteme in a given historic period correlates with the mainstream ideology in a society. Foucault assumes that the ideological function of the episteme comes into effect through discursive formations where the episteme establishes its socio-cultural legitimacy through exclusions found in competing discourse powers which bring about a truth status to the hegemonic epistemology (Foucault 1972, p. 187). This discursive influence is evident in the construction of identities in the society. The following sections further this discussion by outlining the relationship between discursive constructions and national cultural identity. In doing this, concepts about identity and cultural identity are clarified.

2.3 Identity

Identity is one of the key issues in understanding communication. For news events such as natural disasters, one question that has to be addressed is how information can be constructed in the media and for which audience. In order to analyze this question and to initiate media coverage, the media must examine on what basis and with what intention and perspective it should

process and present information. In addressing this question, the orientation of the identities of both message sender and message receiver plays an important role, for the selection and structuring of information are impacted by who the author and reader are. In the case of media coverage of natural disasters, for example, public information will be constructed into media discourses, with social identities inevitably taken into consideration. In addressing these questions, it is necessary to explain the concept of identity formation in a social culture.

As identity is about group belonging, Barker argues that the concept of identity elucidates the process in which an individual person is constructed in a social role through language descriptions (p. 222). Identity conceptualizes a mechanism by which a meaning about "who I am" is formed and accepted by people. Furthermore, Mead argues that the mutually shared interactive discourse within the community not only produces a social self, but also that the community is maintained by the self's acknowledgments of the "common response" (2003, p. 39). As he explains:

> We cannot be ourselves unless we are also members in whom there is a community of attitudes which control the attitudes of all. We cannot have rights unless we have common attitudes. (Mead 2003, p. 40)

Identity formation is a process of signification from which individuals acquire their identities by "employing metaphor as an instrument of contrast and comparison" (Rousseau 1783, in Leach 1973, p. 38). That is, "identities are wholly social constructions and cannot 'exist' outside of cultural

representations" (Barker, 2012, p. 220). The shared cultural meanings in different identities such as those for community, class, nation or profession are a type of "differently-established sameness", from which people identify who they are (Jenkins, 2004, p. 4). In other words, people having the same identity (for instance, identifying as "Chinese") share the same meanings. Social identification is therefore closely related to social meaning among different groups (Jenkins, 2004, p. 5), as Jenkins explains:

> Identifying ourselves or others is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation. (p. 4)

In addition, defining identities through discursive descriptions is a contingent signification practice (Barker 2012, p. 220). Giddens contends that attributes of an identity will change if set in a different cultural background and different sociocultural context (Barker 2012, p. 222). In the next section, the cultural nature of identity will be examined.

2.4 Cultural identities

The focus of cultural identities is "constituted through language as a series of discourses" (Barker, 2012, p. 229) and the cultural nature of identity, as Hall contends, lies in an assumption that identity is articulated and constructed through discursive descriptions (1996b, pp. 5-6). Identities are not essentially out there in the physical world; rather they are shared meanings articulated for

social identification (Hall 1996b, p. 6; Pan 1999; Eschle 2011, p. 366). The arbitrariness of cultural identities is also shown by the fact that the connection between a sign of identity and the mass are not in direct one-to-one correspondence (Hall 1996b, p. 14; Barker 2012, p. 228). In fact, this connection is defined according to social conventions.

The formation of cultural identities is therefore based on an attachment to shared values (Hogg and Abrams 1990, p. 53). This attachment is an evocative power given that a discourse can articulate a meaning shared by individuals who, through this meaning, identify themselves within an identity (Hall 1996b, p. 6). For instance, this identity may be a particular nation (China, Australia) or religion (Catholic, Protestant). The evocative meaning contained within these cultural identities is grounded in the fact that cultural identities are a discursive resource, and as Simon During states there are "[t]raditions clustered around such identities to be empowering and an aid in the construction of strong and vibrant communities and futures" (2005, p. 152). The shared values in an identity therefore impact on individuals.

The formation of identities is also related to individual subjective values. How meaning, value and principles can be shared within an individuals' subjectivity is essential in understanding identity formation (Mansfield 2000, p. 3). From a socio-cultural perspective, an individual's subjective values are inevitably interrelated with the values of others, because the contents of those values might be equally shared by others (Mansfield 2000, p. 3). Nick Mansfield

maintains that "[t]he objects of need, desire and interest" are part of the "necessary shar[ing] of common experience", as forms of cultural codes and principles, that ultimately prove to be fundamental to cultural identification (2000, p. 3). As he explains:

> One is always subject to or of something. The word subject, therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and principles. It is the nature of these truths and principles, whether they determine or are determined by us as individuals – in short, the range of their power – that has dominated theory and debate.(p. 3)

The "truths and principles" in identity formation mentioned by Mansfield attract concern from theorists. These principles for communal identification derive from constructing, reinventing and combining cultural resources such as a community's historical memories (During 2005, p. 57). During implies that cultural resources are narratives about historic events or moments shared in the communal memory (p. 57) as stories repeated within a discourse. A social culture emerges as a discursive system constructing cultural perceptions in a society and producing a macro structure in social maps of meaning (Hall 1997, p. 25). As Foucault observes, in this way, individual persons are given identities and cultural cognition about self-identification and social relations (Mills 2004, pp. 20-22). This social discourse is broadly circulated and repeated as a social truth where the cultural resource or codes are seen as non-trivial notions, concepts or frameworks that form an epistemological frame for interpreting meaning and are "instrumental to the constitution of subjectivity" (Cavallaro 2001, p. 95). These include concepts and notions about nation, state,

community, groups, humanity, power, wealth, historic narratives, cultural myth,

which are all structures of meaning for identification. As Cavallaro points out:

> However, we must also be aware that such structures entangle us in a net from which it is virtually impossible to escape. Therefore, the absorption into the symbolic order simultaneously releases the subject to the possibility of social intercourse and condemns it to a forever divided status. (2001, p. 96)

In Cavallaro's argument, individuals cannot be free of being discursively identified in a cultural system nor the process of acculturation, both of which are closely related to acquiring cultural identities by drawing on the discursive resources that exist in this culture. These resources for the identification of a societal "cultural memory" (During 2005, p. 57) and cultural "heritage" (2005, p. 58) are cultural codes shared by the people immersed in this culture. They are the "basis for identity" (2005, p. 57), and even though there are individualized and localized meanings for each person, the cultural codes within a culture are communally shared and can generate a "straightforward identification" of community belonging (2005, p. 57). Without these codes, people are unable to get "personal coherence and intelligibility" (Rutherford 1990, p. 24) and "a sense of belonging" (p. 25) in the society. The wholeness or coherence of communal meaning is produced on the "threshold between interior and exterior, between self and Other" (Rutherford 1990, p. 24). Importantly, the cultural identity is not fixed but is "continually being produced within the vectors of similarity and difference" (Barker 2012, p. 233).

2.5 Difference and identity formation

This relational contrast between different identities delineates boundaries between shared meanings of different identities. Hall claims that cultural identities are defined through contrast with their counterparts (1996b, p. 6) where the interior cohesion of an identity is attained through an oppositional relation to other identities (During 2005, p. 151; Barker 2012, p. 220). Hall adds that the differential mechanism in identity formation is intrinsically a form of discursive inclusion and exclusion, as he explains:

> [I]dentities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally – constituted unity. (1996b, p. 4)

In this explanation of cultural identities, Hall clarifies the ultimate reason why it is the difference and division that create cultural identities. In his argument, the essence of a cultural identity, as noted earlier in this chapter, is a group of meanings shared by a group of people. In sharing the same meanings individuals are united mentally in a community that confers on individuals a cultural identity as a member of a community, such as a nation or a religion. However, the meaning is communicated in the discourse most closely influenced by power relations; it is through the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion that this discursive power is practiced. That is, in order to produce a cluster of meanings used for constructing a community, another corresponding

group of meanings will be set as a contrast and excluded by which the former becomes salient and legitimate.

This enunciative strategy in social identity formation is specifically embodied in constructing one identity by comparing its position towards an "Other" (Hall 1994, 1996b; MacKinnon and Heise 2010, p. 104). The juxtaposition of "Other" and "our" identity contains context-specific inter-group differences and through and against an "Other" a corresponding "we" identity is formed (Hogg and Abrams 1990, p. 53). Through inter-group differences, two identities can be formed and this inter-group division creates a situational stimulus that makes the conception of identity salient (Thoits and Virsbup 1997, p. 116). As Jenkins emphasizes this mechanism works in the following way:

> Identity is a matter of knowing who's who (without which we can't know what is what). It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference. Taken – as they can only be – together, similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identification, the heart of social life. (2004, p. 5)

Jenkins' discussion of identity formation as expressed in this quotation focuses on the function of the differential mechanisms that enhance people's grasp of the social realities. This is complimentary to Hall's focus which is principally on the discursive power underlying this differentiation. For Jenkins, the "dynamic principles of identification" based on differentiating people in a society, helps us understand the mass by categorizing "them" into different communal identities. That is, the differential mechanism produces a structure

to "know" the people in a society: either they are real in existence or imagined in the mental representations.

However, the relation between the Other and a central identity is not just limited to formulating a structure in identity formation, but also related to shaping the interior meanings of both. Firstly, a fixed identity of the Other synthesizes "heterogeneous possibilities of meanings" outside the central identity (Rutherford 1990, p. 21). In this way a dichotomy is established to clarify the meaning of both the Other and the central identity (Rutherford 1990, pp. 21-22); secondly, the oppositional contrast between the "Other" and the central identity not only marks the differential line between them, but also uses the Other to measure "what the centre lacks" and "what it needs in order to define fully and confirm its identity" (Rutherford 1990, p. 22); thirdly, the "Other" is also a place to transfer the meaning that is disruptive in establishing a central identity, as Rutherford explains:

> Binarism operates in the same way as splitting and projection: the centre expels its anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities onto the subordinate term, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity; the Other, in its very alienness, simply mirrors and represents what is deeply familiar to the centre, but projected outside of itself. (1990, p. 22)

In Rutherford's argument, the binary structure and the position of the "Other" is indispensable in constructing the cohesive meaning of the central identity. In his dissection of meaning formation, the interaction between the central identity and the Other enforces the cohesiveness of the shared meaning of the central identity. The reason Rutherford claims that the Other is familiar to the

central identity is due to the interaction by which the meanings disruptive and disintegrative to the central identity are transferred to the cluster of meanings symbolized by the Other. Essentially, this is a process by which a catharsis of negative meanings is attained.

Through this interaction between the central entity and the "Other", the meaning is negotiated, produced and clearly articulated (Hall 1997, p. 235). Saussure maintains that by making a difference two categories of meaning are established, and this binary opposition is not static but rather a dialogic interaction (p. 235). That is, the ultimate aim in establishing an "Other' is to construct a continual process by which the homogeneous meaning about the central entity is formed. The interactive feature in meaning production is especially stressed in Bakhtin's argument that the interplay between the Other and the central entity generates the meaning, for meaning is relational (p. 235).

Without a binary difference established, Saussure argues there is no meaning at all (Hall 1997, p. 234), or, that there would be confusion in the meaning making. This claim is relevant to cultural identity formation, because the unambiguously defined shared meaning is the ground for distinctive cultural identification. Saussure explains that the meaning of "black" doesn't come from some objective existence of "blackness". The notion "black" is not the meaning; rather it is the difference between "black" and "white" that creates the meaning of being "black" (p. 234). In explaining how the difference creates a meaning for cultural identity, Hall provides a telling example:

We know what it is to be "British", not only because of certain national characteristics, but also because we can mark its 'difference' from its 'Others'– 'Britishness' is not-French, not-American, not – German, not-Pakistani, not-Jamaican and so on. (1997, p. 234)

As shown in Hall's discussion, making the difference in meaning production also implies the relevance to the way social culture is shaped. The social culture is composed of various classificatory systems where the different positions in a classificatory matrix stand for different conventional meanings and "the marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture" (Hall 1997, p. 236; see also: Woodward 1997, p. 30). In his seminal research on the relations between nature and culture, Lévi-Strauss argues that the symbolic system of social culture is articulated by classificatory and dualist rules and constructs a discursive order over a world once only ruled by the law of nature (Jenkins 1979, p. 100; Lévi-Strauss 1984, p. 211; Hénaff 2009, p. 186). Lévi-Strauss stresses the "symbolic origin of society" and sees the society "as the order of culture" and the social activities as discursively structured (Hénaff 2009, p. 186). In describing, interpreting and understanding certain objects in this symbolic system, they have to be placed in a classificatory system in order to achieve cultural meaning or identity (Hall 1997, p. 236).

However, the positions of the two meanings in this binary structure are not even, and as Jacques Derrida considers, one of the two poles in this structure is dominant and determines the central meaning to be constructed (Hall 1997, p. 235): which meaning is to be set in the dominant position is determined by

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discursive power, which prioritizes one meaning, but still "includes the Other within its field of operations" (p. 235). The uneven relations between the two meanings in the binary structure therefore "stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal" (p. 237). The next section will examine how the theories in cultural identities are embodied in the formation of national cultural identity.

2.6 National cultural identity

National cultural identity is a form of cultural identities (Hall 1996a, p. 611), closely related to the notions of nation and nationalism. In analyzing these concepts there are different perspectives from different disciplines such as political science, ethnic studies and cultural studies. This study will principally use theories developed from media, cultural and discourse studies in which national identity is interpreted as a discursive formation (Hall 1996a; Wodak et al. 2009). A key focus of this study is the approaches by which national identity is able to be constructed through signification in media texts.

Understanding nation and national culture is necessary for an elaboration of national identity (Gellner 1983; Smith 1995; Hall 1996a; Anderson 2006). Hall maintains that nation is a construction of certain tenets under the name of "nation" in the mental representations of the people in a country (1996a, p. 613). He explains that these shared values produce emotive attachments and

work in the interests of national sovereignty and integration, where constructed

communal perceptions form a sense of national consciousness and national

belonging (Hall 1996a, pp. 611-615).

In the modern world, the national culture is "one of the principal sources of

cultural identity" (Hall 1996a, p. 611) and this identity as a form of constructed

cultural imagination is most famously dissected by Benedict Anderson in his

work *Imagined Communities*, in which he interprets the nation in the following

way:

> [I]t is an imagined political community […]. It is imagined because the
> members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-
> members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the
> image of their communion. (2006, p. 6)

Based on this constructed imagining of the nation, the concept of national

identity specifically determines how the nation is identified and accepted and

the shared "beliefs or opinions" within the imagined nation are internalized by

members of the nation in the process of socialisation (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 28).

This argument is premised on the assumption that:

> The question of how this imaginary community reaches the minds of those who
> are convinced of it is easy to answer: it is constructed and conveyed in
> discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is
> thus the product of discourse. (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 22)

Evidently, the discourse for constructing a national identity is nationalistic and

as Ernest Gellner argues, "[i]t is nationalism which engenders nations, and not

the other way around" (1983, p. 55). As a form of social culture, nationalism

relates to "the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically" (p. 57). The nationalistic culture in a country creates national identity by a "system of cultural representation" which makes people "participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture" (Hall 1996a, p. 612). In this way, a notion of a "we-group" as a national identity is constructed (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 28), and since the nation is constructed, this identity is characterized by its "symbolic artificiality" (Stratton and Ang 1994, p. 130). As Hall explains:

> National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our perception of ourselves […]. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about the 'nation' with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. (Hall 1996a, p. 613)

As Hall emphasizes here, the production of meaning of a national identity and the maintenance of a national culture is supported through a series of institutionalized approaches. He explains that national culture is essential to industrialization and the modern nation-state, which is enhanced by creating the standard of national literacy, a vernacular language for social communication (p. 612). And the nation-state produces a homogeneous meaning of its national identity through a broad range of cultural institutions such as its educational system and media (p. 612).

The construction of national identity is also closely related to the narrative of myths of the nation and the "cultural association" such as the historic memory of a nation (Cameron 1999, p. 4). This includes stories such as the "founding myths and myths of origin, mythical figures, political success, times of prosperity and stability, defeats and crises" (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 31). The historic memory of a nation is also referred to as its "collective memory" (Halbwachs 1992), and is an indispensable part of the shared meanings of national identity, which create a bedrock for the common origin of a nation, providing a historical legitimacy for its national identity (Hall 1996a; Anderson 2006). These memories are carriers of shared meanings that fill the mental construct about national identity and are communicated in the form of narratives which consistently consolidate the national identity, as Hall explains:

> [T]here is the narrative of the nation, as it is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historic events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. (p. 613)

In Hall's explanation, in addition to the fact that cultural resources such as historic memory work as a means of collective identification, there are other particular discursive and narrative strategies for constructing national identity. Similarly, in *The Discursive Construction of National Identity,* Wodak et al. summarize a set of narrative strategies for constructing national identities that are specifically formed by "argumentation schemes" and "means of realisation" in discourse. Among a cluster of schemes and means, a particular set of

strategies are closely relevant to this study (p.36) and are illustrated in the following table:

Strategies of justification and relativisation in constructing national identity		
Strategies	Argumentation schemes	Means of realization
Shift of Blame and Responsibility *Strategy of emphasising the difference between 'us' and 'them'/ strategy of isolation and/or singularisation	*Topos of comparison/ topos of difference *Topos of external constraints and/or of external force/ topos of heteronomy	*Lexical units with semantic components creating difference/singularisation (to put into an alien uniform) *naturalizing metaphors ('catastrophe') *insinuations, allusions, evocations, vagueness *comparisons (including negations), analogies *stories, anecdotes, fictious scenarios

Table 1

The discursive measures illustrated in this table display how textual techniques can be incorporated into the argumentative process of national identity construction. In Wodak's words, these discursive orderings "establish a certain national identity by promoting unification, identification and solidarity, as well as differentiation" (p. 33). In this strategy, the central point emphasized is the dialectical mechanism of contrast between sameness and difference in building up national identities. As Craig Calhoun explains, the internal unification of the national identity is the "mirror image of the notion of external differences" (1997, p. 7; see also Niebuhr, 1999, p. 317). On explaining meaning, discourse, power and their association with cultural identities, the next section will discuss how media is deployed to produce meaning and therefore implement discursive power.

2.7 Media framing

Before explaining media framing, it is necessary to examine what defines a frame. This concept is used to describe an inclination of people to use certain frameworks to explain the occurrences in a society (Goffman 1986, p. 24). It helps people to read the meaning of social activities and comes from a process in which the information about the social activities is selected and arranged in a pattern easy to understand (p. 26). In comprehending the meaning of a social event, the process of information processing adopts a frame that propels the audience into having a perception about the event corresponding to that frame (p. 26). In framing a social event, other alternative frames are usually excluded (p. 26), therefore the framing process will create a seemingly natural way of perceiving social occurrences and a new event may easily be interpreted according to existing frameworks, as Goffman contends:

> [W]hen an astounding event occurs, individuals in our society expect that a "simple" or "natural" explanation will soon be discovered, one that will clear up the mystery and restore them to the range of forces and agents that they are accustomed to and to the line they ordinarily draw between natural phenomena and guided doings. Certainly, individuals exhibit considerable resistance to changing their framework of frameworks. (pp. 28-29)

In Goffman's explanations, a frame is an epistemic tendency in human cognition by which the information about an event is interpreted by being situated within a familiar culturally-determined schema. In this theory, people use these schemata (which he calls frames) to name, understand and imagine material realities. When an event happens in the material reality, a disorderly information flow appears which produces a "mystery" that is often demystified

by drawing on familiar frames to sort out the information and construct a clear structure of meaning of the event. In this process, mediation plays a critical role.

The mediation in this process of framing is put into detailed theorization in the field of media studies which aims to explain how these frames are impacted and used by the media. In his paper *Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected*, Tuchman states that the media constructs social realities "through redefinition, reconsideration, and recounting" in an "ongoing process" (1973, p. 129, see also Gitlin, 1980, pp. 6-7). As he continues to explain:

> [I]ndividuals, groups, and organisations not only react to and characterize events by typifying *what* has happened, but also they may typify events by stressing the *way* "things" happen. Of particular importance may be the way events may be practically managed, altered, or projected into the future. (1973, pp. 129-130)

In this explanation, Tuchman emphasizes the notion of typification, which, similar to Goffman's argument, is the tendency to copy and project existing frames of understanding to facilitate interpretation, evaluation and prediction of ongoing events. Another point specially stressed by Tuchman as indicated in this quotation is the idea that the typification influencing perceptions is artificially produced. Following this thought, Entman explicitly explains the media construction of frames about events in his paper *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (1993, p. 52)

This comprehensive elaboration of media framing exhibits specific steps in constructing the frame concerning an event in media texts. The definitive explanation of frames in media texts includes four stages in formulating a structure constituting the meaning of an event. The first is to "define the problem", in which the media uses a cultural value as a standard to express the key concern in the event (p. 52). This is because there are plural points, various actors and plots in an event. Entman stresses that "defining the problem often virtually predetermines the rest of the frame" (2003, pp. 417-418). Which aspect should become a focus for evaluation is also decided by the pursuit of particular values in the media coverage as influenced or determined by those state or private entities in control of the media outlet.

The second step in media framing is to "diagnose the causes", in which a target for investigation is delineated among other murky factors to guide media coverage (Entman 1993, p. 52). After selecting the focus of coverage, defining it from a cultural value point of view and then explicating the relations among actors in an event, the media begins to evaluate the problem. Therefore in the third stage, the media makes judgments on the problem (p. 52). The fourth stage is to propose practical suggestions for solutions to this problem according to the judgment and evaluation made in the earlier stages (p. 52). Media

framing therefore determines how the mechanism of representation is applied in media practice.

Entman points out that there are four key influencing factors in determining the meaning constructed through media framing. He terms these factors the "four locations" (p. 52) and cites them as the point where the communication process is affected. These locations are the communicators, the text, the receiver's thinking and the culture. The communicator pins down the central issue in an event, defines it as a problem and then organizes corresponding coverage (p. 52). However, the covering practice of the communicator is "guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems" (p. 52). Specifically, the frame that guides a communicator's decision making is the value to be substantiated mainly from the perspective of the media institutions.

The next two locations affecting media framing are the text and the receiver's thinking. The text in media framing is the site where the communicator (the journalist, photographer or editor) utilizes textual techniques to work towards the purpose of coverage. As Entman explains:

> The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (p. 52).

In framing the meaning of an event by the media, the platform of the media text is fraught with tactics that can be used for signification. To contextualize this through Hall's theory of representation, the texts frame the conceptual

maps over the event and utilize signs to produce meanings. In media framing, the process of signification includes selecting information, making pieces of information salient, repeating key statements and "associating them with culturally familiar symbols" (p. 53, see also: Gamson 1988, 1989; Gamson et al. 1992). Synthesizing textual features with cultural implications tends to bring the cultural propensity of the receivers into close consideration in framing (p. 53).

Culture, the final location mentioned by Entman, plays a critical role in meaning production through framing. Intrinsically, Entman's explanation of culture in the context of media framing accords with Hall's summary of culture as shared maps of meaning and Foucault's argument about culture as a discourse; however, Entman localizes the connotation of culture in media framing by contending that the text used in a media frame should adhere to the cultural context and be equipped with the potential of being "commonly invoked", "empirically demonstrable", and "exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping" (p. 53).

The function of cultural factors in media framing is further explained in more detail in Entman's seminal paper on this theory: *Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11* (2003). In this paper, he further explains his key points through a discussion of the way social culture is localized in the media framing of individual events. These points deconstruct the way media texts intermingle with social culture in producing the meaning

of a social event. Since the social culture is too abstract to be understood in the process of media framing, in this paper he dissects it through the more specific concepts of "cultural resonance" and the "magnitude" of signs in media framing (2003, p. 417). He explains cultural resonance in the following way:

> Those frames that employ more culturally resonant terms have the greatest potential for influence. They use words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say noticeable, understandable, memorable and emotionally charged
> (p. 417).

The concept of resonance in framing is intrinsically an embodiment of the relation between signs and maps of meaning as discussed by Hall (1997). The signs, such as words and images, are connected to conceptual maps in people's meaning systems, and this connection is sustained by codes in a culture such as customs and conventions (Hall 1997, pp. 21-22). To make a sign culturally resonant is to comply with the cultural codes, which "establishes the translatability between our concepts and our languages which enables meaning to pass from speaker to hearer and be effectively communicated within a culture" (p. 22). This cultural code functions in an imaginative way and "more by custom and convention than by the principles of valid reasoning or syllogistic logic" (Entman 2003, p. 417).

In a way, for a sign in a media text to be "noticeable, understandable, and emotionally charged", the journalists' words and images must represent a map of meaning salient in the "public consciousness" (p. 417). They activate the conceptual map and thus, using the cultural imaginations, constitute meaning of the event (Entman 2003, p. 417). As Hall argues, these resonant cultural

codes are internalized in the way the public interprets the object, and the signifying practice applies this code to guide the public "to interpret ideas which are communicated to them using the same systems" (1997, p. 22).

In addition to selecting culturally resonant signs, their magnitude also contributes to framing media coverage (Entman 2003). The term magnitude refers to the degree of salience by which the media uses special signs to frame the meaning of an event (p. 417). The signs, such as words and images, are selected to shape meaning, while the "prominence and repetition" of their appearance enhances and consolidates the meaning constructed (p. 417). In framing the meaning of an event, the more culturally resonant signs are repeated, circulated and enhanced, "the more likely the framing is to evoke similar thoughts and feelings in large portions of the audience" (p. 417).

The overall process of media framing is driven by power and the dissection of this framing process helps to examine how media texts implement power through signifying practice (Entman 1993). This is a discursive power that journalists use to construct identities of actors and structures their relations in forming dominant narratives of stories in covering an event (Entman 1993, p. 55). The means of exerting power in media texts produces a particular meaning that is "heavily supported by the text and is congruent with the most common audience schemata" (p. 56). Entman states that the Bush administration framed 9/11 as "an act of war" and used signs such as "war" and "evil" to signify a battle story in the cultural imagination; in doing so, the media promoted

government actions against terrorism (pp. 417-418). The facts in 9/11 were the devastation of the Twin Towers and the resulting death of their occupants. However, by using culturally resonant signs in this situation, the media were able to frame or insert dominant meanings about this event. In explaining media framing, Gitlin maintains that the media use the textual tactics of definition, exclusion, association and justification to make the ideology behind the reporting become "manifest and concrete" (1980, p. 2). As he adds:

> They sometimes generate, sometimes amplify a field of legitimate discourse that shapes the public's "definitions of its situations", and they work through selections and omissions, through emphases and tones, through all their forms of treatment. (1980, p. 9)

In Gitlin's discussion, the framing process targets at constructing the public's comprehension of news events by deploying textual techniques such as "selections and omissions" in structural configurations of news reports, and "emphases and tones" in providing nuanced details. That is, the process of media framing is completed through textual signification. How meaning is framed through media text is related to the narration of stories. It is critical to examine the way texts construct stories through skills of narration and this question will be discussed in the next section by engaging with narrative theory and explaining key concepts used in narrative analysis.

2.8 Narrative

Narrative is the way of ordering statements to structure a story in a text. In narrating stories, the text producer synthesizes the constituent elements according to the purpose of the story telling. Bal (1997, p. 5) argues that "[a] *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates a story in a particular medium, such as language, image, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof". As a method for constructing discourses, narratives exhibit the procedures of using textual tools to construct the social event for promoting producers' viewpoints. Cull argues that the opinion to be presented in a story is the "force of narrative" (1981, p. 108). And this force is determined by a "double logic" (p. 107) in which texts incorporate stories with opinions.

Stories are specifically narrated according to forms of "narrative grammar" (Prince 1982) which are regularly used in texts for constructing the story flow. In analyzing textual structures for narrating stories, scholars find that certain regular grammars are found in texts dealing with issues of the same kind (Lévi-Strauss 1955; Propp 1968; Prince 1987; Bal 1997; Keen 2003). In analyzing folktale texts in Russia, for instance, Propp (1968) found that there is a regular order of story flow. The classic order of folktales is "the hero leaves home", "the hero and the villain join in direct combat", and "the hero is married and ascends the throne" (Propp 1968). In addition to this syntagmatic narrative grammar, Lévi-Strauss (1955, p. 432) assumes that the linear flow of narratives could be divided into several thematic sections that contain regular themes.

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This is further explained by Tsvetan Todorov in his dissection of the story flow in the following way:

> a state of equilibrium at the outset - situation 1
> a disruption of the equilibrium by some action
> a recognition that there has been a disruption
> an attempt to repair the disruption
> a reinstatement of the equilibrium - situation 2
> (Lacey 2000, pp. 23-45; 101-102, in Fulton et al. 2005, p.35)

From this structural explanation of narrative, it can be seen that the dialectal changes between equilibrium and disruption create the major storyline. The overall story is produced by portions of text that serve different functions for completing the flow of the story.

2.8.1 Narrative function

The narrative function is found in the principal phases constructed in the text that are relevant to the storytelling. As noted, this concept was originally proposed by Russian scholar Vladimir Propp (1968), in his study of texts about fairy tales where he discovered that the names and attributes of actors vary in different stories of the same type (fairytales of Russia), but the major actions employed are structurally identical; and each action in the story serves a function required for completing a plot (Propp 1968, p. 20). These actions repetitively appearing in stories are constructed for attaining narrative functions. Propp explains it in the following way:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant in a
   tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled.
   They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.
3. The sequence of functions is always identical.
4. All fairy tales are of one type in regards to their structure.

(pp. 21-23)

In Propp's analysis, narrative function examines the indispensable role played by the constituent parts of a story in contributing to the flow of the narrative. In his argument, the specific contents of each part of the story may be different, but the role or modality of it is similar. Although Propp's theory was limited to Russian fairytales, it initiated a new perspective for analyzing narrative structures, called formalist criticism. Summarizing the narrative structures that organize storytelling contributes immensely to the knowledge of the textual formation (Keen 2003, p. 84). The formalists investigate the "functional significance" of narrative devices in constructing a story (Eichenbaum 1965, p. 132). The study makes a landmark contribution to narrative theory, as Gerald Prince evaluates: "Propp's functional account is often considered to mark the birth of modern narratology and the structural analysis of narrative and it has constituted a starting point for many influential models of narrative structure." (1987, p. 37)

According to the theory of narratology, narrative function is centred around the key "dramatis personae" and their "sphere of actions" (Propp 1968). The dramatis personae are the actors in the story, and the sphere of actions is the narrative function that actors complete. For instance, the sphere of actions

undertaken by the hero and villain in the text is categorized in the following
way:

> The sphere of actions of the villain. Constituents: villainy (A); a fight or other
> form of struggle with the hero (H); pursuit.
> The sphere of actions of the hero. Constituents: departure on a search (C↑);
> reaction to the demands of the donor (E); wedding (W*). The first function (C)
> is characteristic of the seeker-hero; the victim-hero performs only the remaining
> functions. (Propp 1968, p. 80)

As seen in the regular actions undertaken by narrative characters, it is
maintained that both the construction of actors and their actions is repetitive in
different stories. In Propp's argument as discussed above, the functions of
actors and those of their regular actions create a structure of storytelling. As a
form of discourse formation method, the narrative functions are structured
according to the purposes of storytellers, and the text producer structures the
narrative function in favour of his discourse orientation: to emphasize one
function and downplay another. As Fairclough argues:

> [T]exts set up positions for interpreting subjects that are 'capable' of making
> sense of them, and 'capable' of making the connections and inferences, in
> accordance with relevant interpretative principles, necessary to generate
> coherent readings. These connections and inferences may rest upon
> assumptions of an ideological sort. (1992, p. 84)

In this explanation of textual formation, Fairclough traces the source of the
construction and the way it is formulated in a coherent discourse. In his
argument, it is the "position" of the storyteller who tells stories "upon
assumption of an ideological sort" which makes the textual process happen. In
achieving the purposes of the storyteller, *how* the actors are specifically shaped
is an aspect that cannot be ignored.

2.8.2 Narrative characters

The narrative characters are the key actors in a story. The concept of the narrative character begins with Aristotle's analysis of the tragic heroes where he argues that the narrative characters, shaped by different attributes, produce narrative actions by which the story is constructed (House 1956, p. 85). Narrative characters complete the actions in the story and are the "guiding thread which makes it possible to untangle a conglomeration of motifs and permits them to be classified and arranged" (Tomashevsky 1965, p. 88). In a story, the narrative characters are depicted by conferring particular attributes on them that are determined by both the purpose of narration and the social realities. For instance, Aristotle contends that it is essential that narrative characters should resemble the prototypes of these characters in social thinking, whereby audiences' understandings resonate with the narration (House 1956, pp. 83-91). As Keen explains in the following way:

> Characters, those anthropomorphic entities who carry out the plot actions of narratives, strongly resemble real people (or plausible people in fantastic situations). (2003, p. 57)

In narrating a story, the narrative characters are shaped by various attributes. These attributes are assigned to narrative characters through textual methods. In getting to a cumulative "character-effect" (Bal 1997, p. 118), the narratives for image shaping are applied. Chatman proposes a paradigm of character "traits" for constructing character images with narrative lexicons (1978, p. 122). He argues that the events and actions under narrations are vectors that

constitute storylines, while the traits applied to the characters create parameters for the whole story (pp. 129-130). Hochman (1985) contends that the lexicons used for constructing narrative characters generate the cumulative images of the characters in texts, where the lexicons and sentences will finally contribute to the author's attitudes towards the characters; they are clusters of signs "participating in the construction but subordinate to the character of the dominant formal idea" (Eichenbaum 1965, p. 138). The types of evaluations constructed to different narrative characters can be explained as:

Stylization	Naturalism
Coherence	Incoherence
Wholeness	Fragmentedness
Literalness	Symbolism
Complexity	Simplicity
Transparency	Opacity
Dynamism	Staticism
Closure	Openness

(Hochman 1985, p. 89)

This continuum of characterisation dissects the qualities textually produced for characters involved in narrative actions. These are similar to Chatman's paradigm of character traits for analyzing overall narrative character image representation, and are applied to understand the character's position and significance in story constructions.

More specifically, Foster (1927) divides the narrative characters into those who are "flat" and those who are "round". A flat character is "directed or teleological, whereas the round is agglomerate" (Chatman 1978, p. 132), so therefore the key characters highlighted in a story are stressed to construct "round characters", while actors of peripheral status are constructed to be "flat" (p. 132). The constructed image of flat characters is stereotypical and static while that of round characters is positive and prominently highlighted (Forster 1927; Chatman 1978; Phelan 1989; Bal 1997; Keen 2003). Viewing from the functions served by the flat characters in the story, the flatness of the minor characters is constructed for "provoking a sense of roundness on the part of a central rounded character" (Keen 2003, p. 67). Through this contrast, the author's attitudes are communicated. These concepts in narrative theory produce a useful approach for examining textually-constructed stories such as in media texts. The next section will explain the approach used for analyzing the texts in this study in detail.

2.9 Method of this study

This study adopts a multi-modal approach to process data collected from media texts in the form of newspaper articles and online reports from news websites. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the objective of this study is to examine the relations between media discourse and social culture and how this link is deployed to control crisis situations caused by natural disasters. To reach

this objective and therefore to address the research question of this study, it is necessary to examine the media texts, discourses used, and their socio-cultural contexts. In doing this, a systematic and theoretically justified analytic method is indispensable for rigorous research. As stressed by Van Dijk:

> It goes without saying that an adequate analysis of the relations between media texts and contexts requires a more systematic approach to media discourse. All levels and dimensions of analysis need to be attended to, from 'surface' properties of presentation, lay-out, graphical display in printed discourse [...] to the 'underlying' meanings, connotations or associations [.] (2011, p. 5)

The necessity of adopting a systematic approach as proposed by Van Dijk is determined by the fact that discourse formation is a progressive process. In his discussion, it is maintained that the discourse constructed in media texts in a context includes "surface properties" that can be directly perceived and the deeply buried factors not self-evident such as cultural frames and ideology. Only through dissecting each layer's contribution to the overall discursive process and signification, can the media texts be systematically, contextually and thoroughly analyzed.

Considering the demand for a multi-level analytical approach necessary for addressing the research question of this study, this thesis deploys the analytical framework created by Norman Fairclough (2010, p. 59) for dissecting text and its relation to broader sociocultural practice. In his work *Media Discourse*, he maintains that texts in contemporary media platforms create a "communicative event", by which he means that the social events or social realities are represented in textual forms (see also "media event", in Dayan and Katz 1992).

As he contends, the texts being communicated are always formulated by "drawing upon familiar types and formats" which he names to be "the order of discourse" (p. 56). And the construction of "the order of discourse" is closely associated with sociocultural factors such as cultural power (2010).

Based on this understanding, Fairclough creates a three-dimensional analytical framework for analyzing media discourse, which includes the levels of "text", "discourse practice" and "sociocultural practice" (p. 59). "Text" refers to a focus in which the textual features or the way texts are organized should be examined; "discourse practice" is the process of textual production; and "sociocultural practice" denotes the underlying driving forces of the discursive process such as institutional restraints or political pursuits (pp. 54-60). This analytical framework is particularly valuable in its examination of the relations among the three levels, which helps researchers to adopt a systematic dissection of text. As he explains:

> I see discourse practice as mediating between the textual and the social and cultural, between text and sociocultural practice, in the sense that the link between the sociocultural and the textual is an indirect one, made by way of discourse practice: properties of sociocultural practice shape texts, but by way of shaping the nature of the discourse practice [...]. Discourse practice straddles the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language and text on the other. (p. 60)

Fairclough's approach, as discussed here, particularly stresses the analysis of discourse practice that is the intermediate between the intricate textual characteristics of the individual news reports, and the profound sociocultural power that can be created. In this argument, it is emphasized that media texts

configure discourse to fit into social culture; and the cultural power shapes micro-textual formation by "shaping the nature of discourse practice". In analyzing this discourse practice, according to Fairclough, the phenomena of textual representation and the much less self-evident power relations underlying and determining the phenomena are systematically dissected and the boundary between them is bridged.

To adapt this analytic framework to this study, narrative analysis is incorporated in the examination of the texts. This is because the specific approach taken to conduct textual analysis should be contextualized to answer the research question of this study. The texts in this study are dissected by examining the narrative construction and how is it constructed by specifically observing features such as the "devices of characterization" (Tomashevsky 1965, p. 80), the narrative actions, narrative functions of the characters, and the story constructing the relations among the characters. Narrative analysis views media texts from the point of view of storytelling according to certain "story grammars" (van Dijk 1988b, p. 50) from which the discursive implications of the text can then be explored. Van Dijk explains the detailed contents of media narratives to be examined include:

> (1) a set of conventional narrative categories; (2) a set of narrative rules that specify the hierarchy and the ordering of the categories into schematic forms; and possibly (3) a set of transformation rules that may change underlying canonical narrative structures into various forms of actual narrative schemata. Such transformations may include, for instance, deletions of categories or permutations that change the canonical order. (p. 50)

As discussed by van Dijk, the analysis of narrative is based on examining textual units forming categories in narratives such as actors, actions, plot and the transformation of storytelling that are constructed through textual units in the media. These textual units are to be differentiated and dissected.

This study adopts the method of cluster criticism to process textual units. It was developed by Kenneth Burke and maintains that "[a]n author contrives his selectivity and his plot's development from-what-to-what, may often be revealed in the associative clusters of his symbolism" (1959, p. 194). He also argues that "by charting clusters, we get our cues as to the important ingredients subsumed in 'symbolic mergers'" (p. 233). The cluster in Burke's sense means the set of textual expressions, such as words and statements, selected for charting narratives (Burke 1959, 1966; Littlefield and Quenette 2007). In applying cluster criticism, a nuanced analysis allows the dissecting of the textual units used in each category in narratives. In mapping the clusters of textual representations, this study will underline the textual units so as to highlight their relevance to the thesis argumentation and in so doing make them easier to be traced by the reader. In sum, the analytical framework developed in this study can be displayed in the following graph:

Media text

Cluster
criticism

Narrative
analysis

Discourse
practice

Sociocultu-
ral practice
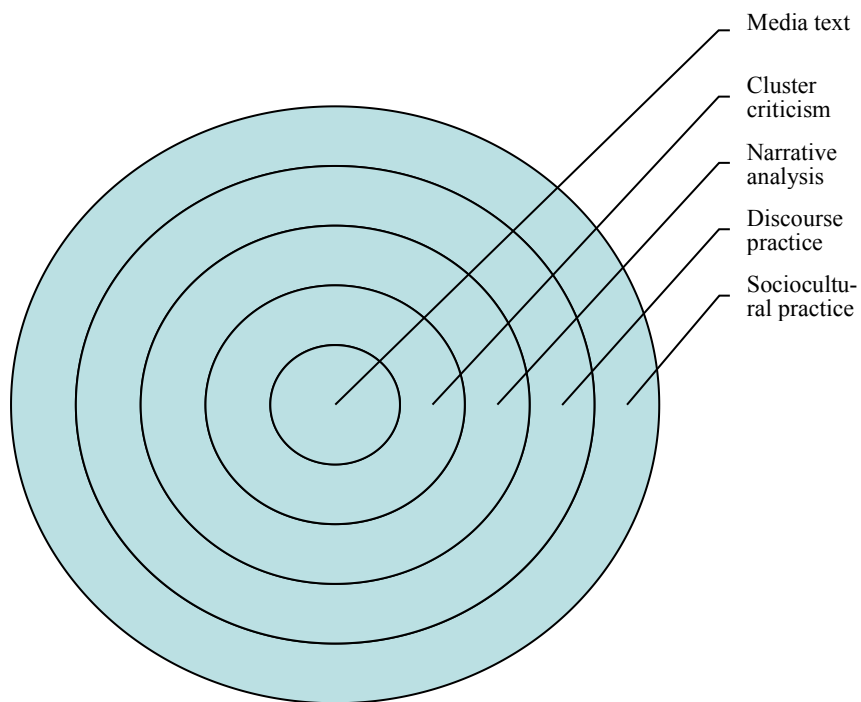
Figure 2

This paradigm is designed by drawing on classic approaches for dissecting

texts as noted above. The sophistication of this paradigm is the product of the

intricate associations among texts, organizing structures, discourse and the

broad socio-cultural context and it therefore should be multi-dimensional and

systematic (van Dijk 2001). The operational approach adopted for analyzing

text and discourse should be determined by the problem to be explored and

there is "no accepted canon of data collection" (Meyer 2001, p. 30). This is

because various questions can be asked about texts and discourse, so the

corresponding approach for addressing them will differ in various aspects and

degrees. Therefore, in order to answer the research question of this study, it is

necessary to formulate a multi-dimensional approach for addressing sub questions closely related to the study.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the theoretical and analytical framework for this study. The theoretical framework draws on theories of representation, discourse and power to explain how the meanings of the textual realities are produced and how and why the legitimated meaning production is controlled by discursive power. Situated within this theoretical context, the study draws on theories of national cultural identity to explain why and how this identity is an outcome of shared meanings that are constructed through a discursive process. In the last section of the theoretical framework, the study draws on arguments in media framing and narrative theory in explaining how meaning production is conducted in media texts and how narrative constructs a potent frame for stories to communicate meaning. The analytical framework formulated in this chapter sets up an operational approach for processing the textual data arising from news reports and commentaries and for applying these theories to address the research question of this study in different dimensions and with progressive depth.

This Chapter establishes a new methodology for approaching natural disaster communication using an epistemological approach that relates to control in a

broader sense and meaning and discourse in a specific context. The analytical framework is rooted in this epistemology and uses a five-dimensional methodological approach to investigate the textual units, texts, discourses and socio-cultural aspects around the issue of discursive control. In the following chapter, a historic overview of natural disaster coverage in Chinese media is conducted from the perspective of power relations in texts and discourse. It presents a focused background to provide a culturally contextualized understanding of the discursive controls used in natural disaster coverage.

Chapter Three

Discursive Control of Natural Disaster Reporting in

Chinese Media: a Historic Overview

Introduction

The previous chapter explicates the nature of discourse and its relations to power. This chapter conducts a historical overview of the way discursive formations have been used in representations of natural disasters in state-owned Chinese media from 1949 to the present. It suggests that a "war discourse" is formulated in these natural disaster representations, although it displays obvious structural changes in the periods before and after the 1980s. Owing to the different social, economic and political backgrounds in the two historical periods the "facts" are constructed differently in the media discourses over these significant years in China's history. Through this historical review, this chapter examines how such media discourses underwent changes because of transformations across China at all levels of society.

This chapter analyzes how disaster facts and disaster rescue actions have been represented in Chinese media throughout these different historical phases. By reviewing literature on this topic, it is found that before the 1980s, detailed accounts of natural disasters were regarded as threats and were either partially

excluded or completely sealed off from public knowledge, so that a "semi-structured war discourse" was formulated for mass mobilization. After the 1980s, both disaster facts and rescue actions have been more fully represented in the Chinese media and a "complete war discourse" constructed.

The construction of this partial war discourse in Chinese media before the 1980s may be attributed to four reasons: the influence of ancient Chinese "*Tiandao*" cosmological views; intellectuals' political participation through their opinions based upon Confucian tradition; the role of media in class struggle theory; and the impact of the Soviet Union's propaganda model. This semi-structured war discourse is particularly displayed in the case of "*ren ding sheng tian*", a rhetoric applied in mass mobilization at that time.

The complete construction of war discourse in the disaster coverage seems to originate in social transformations after the 1980s. Specifically, the formation of this discourse may be attributed to the growth of intellectual freedoms, the rise of empirical scientism and humanitarianism, the retreat of "*Tiandao*" cosmology in the Cultural Revolution, the validation of people's right to access information, journalism professionalism, media commercialization, and the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s and 2000s.

3.1 Existing studies on natural disaster news in Chinese media

Existing studies on natural disaster news in the Chinese media focus on historical divisions and their corresponding characteristics. For instance, Sun (2001) divides it into two periods, claiming that the 1980s is a turning point in natural disaster news: between 1949 and the 1980s media representations centred around the "persons" in disaster rescues, constructing a class-struggle discourse; but from the 1980s the news reports included both details of the disasters and the ensuing rescue works, highlighting access to exhaustive information (Sun 2001, p. 33).

In a different approach, Wang (2008) divides the changes of media discourse into three phases. She argues that from 1949 to 1978 the key themes in the media discourse of natural disasters highlighted revolutionary heroism, the Communist Party, Chairman Mao's charisma and the role of class struggle. From 1978 to 2002 media coverage stressed the audience's right to access information. Then from 2002 to 2008, as exemplified by accounts of the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the media began to gain unprecedented access to disaster information (Wang 2008). These changes are attributed to reforms in government policies, the rise of journalism professionalism and a strong awareness about the public's right to access information (Wang 2008).

In a slightly different view, Dong and Cai (2010) find that three factors dominate in Chinese natural disaster reports: the actions of the Party, the disaster itself and the impact of the disaster on the general public. They argue that from 1949 to 1980 the media discourse of natural disasters featured the politicization and appraising of rescue works, guided by the spirit that "collective human beings can conquer nature". However, the representation of the actual disasters, damage, and victims' sufferings were still papered over to a certain extent (Dong and Cai 2010). Any appearance of so-called "negative facts" was considered to be against media regulations, or blamed and repudiated for its "wrongdoings of objectivism" (Dong and Cai 2010). From 1980 to 2003, the media endeavored to cover the general information of the disaster facts, but still played a very limited role in providing sufficient information about the disaster facts, while from 2003 on wards the media enhanced their performance by providing as much information as possible, supported by government policies and new information technologies (Dong and Cai 2010).

Setting the overview of natural disaster coverage in Chinese media in different historical phases, this chapter argues that media discourses on this topic mainly fall into two categories: disaster facts and human actions. These are the key constituents in these media texts. The unbalanced role of these two aspects in media texts "reminds us that reporting frames can in fact change through time and make different claims on audiences in terms of how they become invited to respond to major disasters" (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012, p. 28).

Even though in different historic periods disaster facts and human actions are constructed differently, one common factor in terms of news making is a consistent appearance of discourses about confrontation. As Lévi-Strauss argues, "the type of event is the same, but not exactly the details" (1977, p. 39). The confrontation shared in different frames is an embodiment of incessant negotiations in communication and power (Castells 2009, p. 50), leading to a structure, called the war narrative in this study, which has undergone manifest changes along with the historical transformation of Chinese society.

3.2 Excluding disaster facts and discursive control

Before the 1980s natural disaster coverage in the Chinese media was characterized by restrictions on the release of information about the damages. The narratives covering natural disasters at this time centred on rescue works and mobilization activities and were placed within a discourse strictly governed by the dominant political opinion. This is exemplified in the media coverage of the Tonghai and Tangshan earthquakes in the 1970s. On January 5, 1970, an earthquake rated at 7.7 degrees on the Richter scale struck Tonghai County in the Yunnan province of China. Its startling severity made it one of the hundred most catastrophic disasters in Chinese history (Yin 2000). Before the end of that year, the seismically damaged areas were acknowledged as expanding to another six counties in the vicinity, the death toll reaching 15,621, with 26,783 injured and 338,456 buildings demolished (Li and Xiong 2009).

In media texts covering this event at the time, the description of the earthquake was indistinct. There was no information about the number of deaths or property losses. The reporting was weighted with ideological teaching, as shown in the following news text extracted from *Yunnan Daily*, the official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party Yunnan Provincial Committee, released several days after the tragedy:

> The foremost solution, among thousands of others, to deal with the contingency is to equip the people in the disaster area with the invincible thoughts of Mao Zedong. After the earthquake happened, the Provincial Committee of Revolution assigned vehicles and cadres to hand out *Quotations of Chairman Mao* and a glittery portrait of him. A number of Maoist propaganda groups were established to facilitate the masses' disaster relief. On seeing the booklets and pictures, people could not help shedding tears.(in Wang 2008, p. 30)

Similar reports appeared from the Xinhua News Agency, the mouthpiece of the central government:

> *Xinhua News Agency*, 1 AM, January 5, 1970. An earthquake rated at 7 degrees occurred in areas south to Kunming, Yunnan Province of our country. Led by revolutionary committees across ranks from the local to Yunnan Provincial governments, and supported by the People's Liberation Army, people in the disaster areas are successfully resisting the earthquake. These actions glorify the spirit of fearing neither bitterness nor death […]. Serious concern coming from Chairman Mao and the Party Center powerfully inspired the Party members, the revolutionary masses of different ethnicities and the soldiers. The masses closely follow proletarian political thoughts, wisely learning and practising Chairman Mao's works. Leaders and the rank and file are mentally unified to overcome temporary difficulties caused by the earthquake in a very confident manner. The mass heroically claim that as long as they are supervised by the Chairman's prescience, they fear nothing. […]. (Yin 2000)

It can be seen that the heroic descriptions of the rescue actions replaced the information about the damage caused by the disaster. In this period the news details were obscured under extreme leftist thoughts as social culture was dominated by Maoist charismatic "truth" (Ding 2010, p. 34). In the face of this earthquake, the government drew on previous instances where it had issued

special directives to guide specific reporting work. For instance, on 2, April 1950, the Bureau of Journalism of the central government directed that the success of rescue work should be highlighted and disaster damage generally omitted (Shen 2002, p. 45). In the same way, in 1954, a list of directives was issued by the southern central branch of the Xinhua News Agency to regulate reporting on a flood of the Yangtze River in that year. It reads:

1. The coverage of the disaster in itself shouldn't exceed agricultural production activities;
2. Stress the success of active combat against natural disasters and the actions of regaining good harvest;
3. The scope of coverage should fix temporarily on areas where the success of rescue can be ensured and where disaster aftermath is less severe and agricultural production can be swiftly restored;
4. No panoramic reporting, no detailed reports of the disaster situation.
(Dai 1983, p. 233, in Wang, 2008, p.30)

According to these directives only positive messages could be reported and disaster facts became a "restricted area" (Wang 2008, p. 30). This restriction is produced within broader social understandings about natural disasters in that historical phase, which limited what can be known about certain social realities and what cannot be known (or what the state wished to suppress) in a society. As Foucault explains:

Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints […]. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth […], the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned […].
(Foucault 1979, p.46, in Mills 2004, p. 16)

As Foucault discusses here, there are "multiple constraints" determining what is knowable and what is anathema to the visions of the state. In the case shown in the exclusion of disaster information in the Chinese media before the 1980s,

the reason for prohibiting disaster facts in the media is closely related to traditional Chinese epistemologies.

3.3 "*Tiandao*" view and Confucian tradition

In traditional Chinese culture a natural disaster was believed to presage ill fortune for the ruling powers. Traditional Chinese thought was characterized by shifts between knowledge and religion, reason and mystery (Wu 2010, p. 239). It is argued that understanding ancient China as a "cultural entity" underpins an insightful comprehension about its social system (Sigley 1996, p. 468). As it is pointed out:

> The point here is that, while there was an extensive code for governing ritual conduct in traditional China, these practices were caught up in a cosmologically based sovereignty that placed the individual within a continuous social hierarchy which was the expression of the universal 'Way of Heaven' and not in terms of a self-reflective state entity.
>
> (Sigley 1996, p. 465)

As Sigley claims, in ancient China the ruling legitimacy of Chinese dynasties was rooted in an assumption that political power was endowed upon the dynasty by "Tian" (heaven), an eternal deity ruling the universe. The anger of heaven was indicated by portents in the form of natural occurrences. It was believed that human beings and nature shared the same driving energy from the cosmos, and social activities could stimulate natural phenomena in other parts of the universe (Bary and Bloom 1999, p. 305). By connecting heaven, nature and the existing social power relations, the *Tiandao* interpretation of natural

disasters appeared. It maintains that a normally peaceful natural order indicates the equilibrium of social orders, while natural disasters are admonitions, questioning the legitimacy of ruling powers (Jin and Liu 2000, p. 30). According to this outlook, any signs of natural unrest would cause anxieties about the social power structure. As it may be explained:

> Like the Greeks and Romans, the early Chinese firmly believed in the portentous significance of unusual or freakish occurrences in the natural world. This belief formed the basis for the Han theory that evil actions or misgovernment in high places incited dislocations in the natural order, causing the appearance of comets, eclipses, drought, and locusts, weird animals, etc. In more primitive ages, and still at times in the Han, such phenomena were interpreted as direct manifestations of the wrath of an anthropomorphic heaven and warnings to mankind to reform. At other times they were explained mechanistically as the result of occurrences in the human world which must inevitably produce effects in the interlocking worlds of heaven and earth.
> (Bary, Chan and Watson 1963, p. 186)

The philosophy that human beings and social systems resonate with the divine heaven exerted a profound influence on traditional Chinese epistemology. Accordingly unrest in the natural world was not just believed to be natural phenomena but also referred to social power relations. Dong Zhongshu, an influential Confucian scholar whose views were canonized as one of the most significant authoritative interpretations of Chinese epistemology in traditional China, argues that "[t]he genesis of all such portents and wonders is a direct result of errors in the state" (Bary, Chan and Watson 1963, p. 187); he also believes that "fair deeds summon all things of fair nature, evil deeds summon all things of an evil nature, as like answers like" (p. 186).

These interpretations constituted a specialized mode of thought and included a method of deduction called "sign-observing methodology" in traditional

Chinese culture (Wu 2010, p. 129). Accordingly, natural catastrophes were regarded as evil signs foreshadowing disruption (Wu 2010, p. 230). The Chinese monarch's position was threatened as soon as drought, floods, military failure or other misfortunes occurred, making it appear questionable whether the dynastic leader stood in the grace of heaven (Weber 1980, p. 10). According to records in *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, the increase in the number of natural omens proportionately caused a deeper and greater dissatisfaction within the bureaucracy about the contemporaneous administration (Bary, Chan and Watson 1963, p. 187).

The "*Tiandao*" interpretation about ruling powers was eventually replaced after dynastic legitimacy collapsed in 1911, but its influence on cultural beliefs did not immediately disappear. The early government of the People's Republic of China had to reconcile official proletarian thought with traditional ideologies. It was critical to ensure social integration and social order and it was seen that "*Tiandao*" notions would be disruptive to the new institutional ways of running the state.

Therefore, accounts of disasters were instantly transformed into messages that required mass mobilization and victorious rescue discourses. In the case of the Tonghai earthquake in 1970, even the exact location of the earthquake was concealed, only vaguely described as happening in areas south of the capital city Kunming; and information about the death toll and property damage was concealed (Ying 2000). The official discourse states that "[p]eople in the

disaster areas are successfully resisting earthquake and undertaking rescue work, glorifying the spirit of fearing neither bitterness nor death" (Yin 2000).

In the period 1949-1978, information control was utilized to avoid threats to social equilibrium and statements inculcating the invincibility of Mao's class-struggle theory were framed to extol the leader's charisma. Charismatic authority seeks its source from grace, heroism, dignity and non-routine qualities and reinforced by evidence of faith and success (Weber 1980, pp. 8-9), therefore, news about mass mobilization and victory in rescue work pumped faith into public sentiments in the face of any disaster. If faith in victory is lost by the masses, or the heroic spirit dissolves, authority will be threatened; and the masses' devotion to authority has to be shored up "by performing miracles and being successful in securing the good life for his followers or subjects" (Weber 1980, p. 9).

In addition to the media-supported devotion to authority in times of crisis, one characteristic of opinion-saturated news may also be attributed back to Confucian influence. Traditional Chinese intellectuals were immensely influenced by the Confucian tradition of the intelligentsia's participation in politics. Early Chinese newspapermen in the middle 1800s carried part of the tradition into their journalistic practices. This was also an era when the traditional Chinese Dynasty was challenged and undermined by Western intrusions. Chinese intellectuals were urged to learn from Western ways of developing a prosperous society; and Chinese media were to "revive the social

vigor by newspaper circulation" (Liang 1987, p. 24). Their nationalist sentiment was accentuated by China's humiliating defeats, which stimulated enlightened intellectuals to save the country by radical political commentaries and debates (Pan and Lu 2003, p. 223). For these Confucian intellectuals the newspaper was essentially a means to influence society with their opinions.

Political editorials were central contents in early Chinese newspapers. Liang Qichao, one of the most influential intellectuals and newspapermen in that era, placed political pursuits foremost in running newspapers, while the newspaper *per se* was merely a tool for engaging the public (Fan 2010, p. 105). Liang argued that newspapers should channel and shape public viewpoints in order to influence political issues, and aimed to rescue the country by shaping public opinions (Liang 1987, pp. 57-58). In an era of national crisis the media became a political mobilizing tool. This is described in the inaugural editorial of *Min Bao* in 1905 by future Nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen:

> There is a group of elites within our society. They can bring in and apply the most constructive ideas in the society and therefore push it to adapt to the world. This is the social responsibility of the enlightened elites. And this is what *Min Bao* is doing. It aims to instill avant-garde theories into the society and try to make new thoughts become common sense. Then the practical implementation of these thoughts will soon follow. (1987, pp. 77-78)

As seen in Sun's view, constructing media discourses in the framework of political activities is a historical choice. Within a distinctive historic period, there is a tendency towards structuring thinking about a subject in a particular way that is regarded as natural and self-evident (Mills 2004, p. 51). In an era of historical change, the central focus in a society was mainly on revolutions. The

saturation of political debate in newspapers was a reflection of this reality and was determined by a prior "total set of relations" (Foucault 1972, p. 191). This tradition in part contributed to the shaping of natural disaster news. Influenced by *Tiandao* epistemology and Confucian tradition, the media texts covering natural disasters in China were characterized by their strong political opinions. From 1949 to the early 1980s Chinese media constructed the expedient theme of *ren ding sheng tian* in natural disaster coverage to seek a balance among *Tiandao* epistemology, Confucian tradition and Maoism.

The central theme in the discursive structure of natural disaster coverage in this period however, concerns struggles with natural disaster, led by ideas of class struggle. That is, the main tendency in this discourse is to construct a class struggle narrative in the text and to try to integrate and unify the public in class terms. In addition to its purpose of eliminating the "*Tiandao*" imagination, this semi-structured war discourse was also organized by Maoist media theory and the influence of the Soviet Union's propaganda model on Chinese media.

3.3.1 Maoist *ren ding sheng tian*: a semi-structured war discourse:

Before the 1980s the semi-structured war discourse was constructed by excluding subversive accounts of disaster damage and by demonstrating examples of "warfare" in terms of class struggle. It is "semi-structured" due to the fact that the disaster facts, as the opposite side of the struggle, are largely excluded in media. For Mao, as part of art production, media is a force in the

cultural frontline (1975). Its strength is embodied in resisting ideological subversion and in bringing together the masses for the revolutionary cause (Mao 1975). The notion of class struggle constructs an imagined war against the "imagined enemy". Details of disaster damage and their corresponding "*Tiandao*" epistemology, as subversive themes, were removed from texts in this semi-structured war discourse, and disaster situations were transformed to victorious mobilizations.

In this period, "*ren ding sheng tian*" (together, mankind can defeat heaven), a rhetoric extolled and applied in media reporting of natural disasters, was also typical of a semi-structured war discourse (see Figure: 3). The four statements - "*ren*" ('people', meaning the victims and rescuers), "*ding*" (determination), "*sheng*" (win the war), and "*tian*" (heaven) prevailed in media stories about natural disasters. For example, on 29 July, 1976, one day after the Tangshan earthquake, Xinhua News Agency released an official news report: "*A Strong Earthquake Happened in Areas around Tangshan, Fengnan of Hebei Province, Led by Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line, People in Earthquake Areas Carry out Rescue Works with the Spirit of 'ren ding sheng tian'*" (Shi and Li 2008, p. 653).

Figure 3

A poster used in the event of Tangshan earthquake
Translation: "*ren ding sheng tian*": [We] don't fear the Heaven rends asunder and the earth cracks.[We] use both of our hands to portray the new world.
(www. Ekoooo.com)

As a counterpoising discourse to the "heavenly omen", "*ren ding sheng tian*", was based on arguments put forward by Xuncius, the renowned Chinese philosopher (313 B.C.-238 B.C.). Although Xuncius' philosophical propositions were not applied as widely as *Tiandao* interpretations, they were still regarded as an influential school of thought in traditional Chinese society. This body of ideas suggested a warfare-like mobilization against disaster based on rationality. The adoption of this tradition is due to a consideration that

people obey what is hallowed by tradition, and that the simple creation of new rules would endanger the organizing legitimacy (Weber 1980, p. 6).

The notion of "*ren ding sheng tian*" served epistemologically to exclude the apocalyptic "*Tiandao*" notion. For Xuncius, heaven and human society have their own separate ways, and human actions, such as customs, rites and norms, are just products of human invention (Nivison 1991, p. 141). This "artificiality" has double connotations (p. 141). On the one hand, what happens to people is not divinely arranged; on the other hand, human actions could surpass nature by "*ding*", meaning collective determination. Severing the mysterious link between social issues and heaven, Xuncius contends that people should focus on the real world, instead of pious actions devoted to a divinity (Zhao 2002, p. 16). This school of thought displaces divine determinism and demands the application of human acumen, encouraging human knowledge, acting against nature to enhance social progress (p. 16).

Drawing on this cultural heritage, "*ren ding sheng tian*" produced a semi-structured war discourse where statements were therefore constituted according to their discursive intentions, targeting the "persistence of themes" (Foucault 1972, p. 35). In this mobilizing discourse, "*ren*", for example, implying "people", refers to the masses in disaster areas, escorted by People's Liberation Army soldiers and guided by local Party members. For instance, in the Tonghai earthquake, the media texts described:

The respective roles and actions taken by these actors in the war discourse construct "*ding*" (collective determination) by extolling the revolutionary spirit, showcasing the leader's care and stressing the invincibility of the collective faith. The cohesion-building spirit, sentiment and belief centred on joint efforts under the guidance of Maoist thought, which laid out an epistemological "support mechanism" in marshalling warlike actions (Mills 2004, p. 45). In this narration, "*sheng*" and "*tian*", stood for "conquer and victory" (*sheng*) over natural threat (*tian*), and manifested strong warfare connotations. If "*ren*" and "*ding*" referred to war preparation, "*sheng*" was the war action in this discourse. The formulation of this war discourse before the 1980s, stressed human victory through collective mobilization and the central importance of the leaders' charisma. However, this discourse excluded "*tian*" (as a threat in this case) because of its association with "*Tiandao*" and the apocalyptic cultural imaginations.

The semi-structured war discourse also allows for information control that results in the exclusion of an "imagined enemy". This narrative omission is created either by sealing off information about the damage caused by disasters, like the Tangshan earthquake in 1976, or by depicting it as a "temporary difficulty" (Yin 2000). It is then closely followed by a victorious war narrative, rather than providing essential information about damage, the death toll or the degree of severity of the earthquake. In these texts, the victory was constructed

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by privileging the war discourse over the disaster facts. It indicates how social reality is constructed by shaping "truth", where the ideologically-driven discourse takes effect (Mills 2004, p. 16). The traditional notions about relations between natural phenomena and human society are textually expelled.

The concept of "*ren ding sheng tian*" was once silenced in the long history of the Chinese imperial dynasties as this truth explanation contradicted the hegemonic dynastic ideology that an emperor's (the son of "*tian*") power is endowed by "*tian*". However, social changes led to restructured power relations after the final dynasty collapsed in 1911. This semi-structured war discourse emerged along with cultural transformations in Chinese society. Arguably, transformations of social culture are also exhibited in the corresponding alterations in discourse practices (Fairclough 1992, p. 7). The struggles between people and the natural disaster and the exclusive coverage of agitated actions as shown in the discourse of "*ren ding sheng tian*" are profoundly associated with the decisive impact of Mao's class struggle theory on Chinese journalism (Tian 2005, p. 78).

3.4 Maoist guidelines and the Soviet propaganda model

Chinese journalism is deeply influenced by Mao's theories on arts production that took shape in the Yan'an period (especially those formulated and delivered in 1942). In this year, the mouthpiece of the CCP, *Jiefang Daily*, was

restructured according to Mao's directives. In Maoist theories on arts production, media is one of the revolutionary frontlines that forms a political battlefield for carrying out class struggles. Mao states that arts production (in which he includes journalistic propaganda), is subject to political imperatives, and should serve as the gears and screws in the machinery or engine of class struggles (Mao 1975, p. 27). In this perspective the media is only a tool to achieve political ends and should be used to unify the masses, shape social opinions and ensure stable progress in social revolution. Mao demands that arts production should comply with a "political standard" and should be constructive in uniting the masses and encouraging their morale; otherwise it will merely be reactionary and wicked (1975, p. 30). He contends that in representing the "brightness" and "darkness" of a social issue, arts production should highlight bright aspects and treat demoralizing points only as a backdrop for "saluting achievements of revolutionary people, heartening their bravery and faith in struggles" (1975, p. 37).

This principle was stipulated to suit revolutionary movements but had a long-lasting impact on Chinese journalistic practices even after the Chinese Communist Party won the war and the government was founded in 1949. Mao's theories were formed during the war against the Japanese invasion, when the literary frontline was a "culture troop" among others (Mao 1975, p. 1). Mao's theory on news work forms a substantive part in guiding Communist Party newspaper work, especially reportage that is manifestly embodied in covering disasters and other "struggles" (Tian 2005, p. 44). In the 1950s Maoist

propaganda theory was even more reinforced by introducing the Soviet Union's propaganda model to Chinese journalistic work.

After 1949 when the PRC was founded, the Chinese government constructed its media system by learning from the Soviet experiences. The media system in the Soviet Union "became a model for structuring Chinese newspapers, news agencies and radios" (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, p. 166). On January 4, 1950, a special column called *Journalism Work* was started in the *People's Daily,* the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. It used most of its pages to translate and introduce Lenin's and Stalin's works on media management. In its inaugural statement it declared that in constructing the Chinese media system, there was a convenient resource; that is, the abundant experiences of the Soviet Union could be widely applied in the Chinese context (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, p. 165). Top officials in the journalistic field, such as Deng Tuo (then the chief editor of the *People's Daily*), Wen Jize (then deputy chief of the Central Broadcasting Bureau), and Zhu Muzhi (then the deputy chief of the Xinhua News Agency) led delegations to the Soviet Union to learn its experiences.

In looking towards the Soviet system, the guidelines of Chinese media work were immensely shaped by the Soviet propaganda model. A translated collection of Bolshevik media theories was supplied as a study book for students in journalism departments of Chinese universities and for journalists across the country. The introduction of Soviet experiences included its

traditions, thoughts, and a series of experiences in editing, interviewing, writing, management and publication (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, p. 166). In this learning process, one argument particularly stressed and reinforced by China's leaders was that media should be devoted to Party, class and people; the media should follow the Party's lead; and each word and sentence should represent the Party's central role (p. 167).

The key theme of Soviet journalism theory is the "Party principle". It demands that media discourse in all news events should focus on the Party's doctrines. Rooted in the Soviet political system (and becoming part of Mao's doctrine) is the view that media have to meet political ends. With this principle the standard of collective good determines what information is collected and how reporting is structured, while the notion of civic rights and access to information is ignored (Remington 1988, p. 134). For Lenin, media is a collective propagandist, agitator and organizer in class struggles, and its function is in mobilizing the masses for revolutionary causes. As Wilbur Schramm argues, all media in the Soviet Union "from the beginning of the proletarian revolution, were conceived of instrumentally" (1956, p. 116).

These principles were seen in the coverage of natural disasters where the discourses initiating collective mobilization and extolling collective invincibility dominated the text (Remington 1988, p.134). Ultimately, the media became an instrument of inculcation, "[j]udging, admonishing, praising, preaching" for the revolutionary cause (Remington 1988, p. 134). Chinese

audiences have long been averse to this because of its "excessive politicization of social life" (Liu 1998, p. 31). News reports in the form of "political documents" stuffed with drab indoctrination is a manifest feature shown in the media texts in this period (p. 40). After the Chinese government carried out reforms from the early 1980s, the way natural disasters were covered underwent conspicuous changes.

3.5 Reform period: seeking facts in natural disaster reporting

Detailed facts about disaster damages were covered in media texts from the early 1980s when China initiated its major social reforms. In this period, a balanced representation of both damages and rescue actions appeared and it began to be recognized that the natural disaster *per se* was an indispensable part of the coverage (Sun 2001, p. 37). The objective coverage of disaster facts, timely reporting and free access to disaster sites for various media organisations (only Xinhua News Agency could get access before this period) brought about a new era in natural disaster reporting (Sun 2001, p. 36). This transformation was shown in the case of severe rainstorms that swamped Sichuan and Guangzhou in the early 1980s, the large-scale floods in 1998, and the extremely devastating Wenchuan earthquake in 2008.

In the reform period, demand for objective coverage of disaster facts began to be officially stipulated in government policies. The *Suggestions for Improving*

News Work, a decree jointly issued by the Party Propaganda Ministry, the Committee for Overseas Propaganda and the Xinhua News Agency, explicitly calls for continuous, timely and publicized coverage of natural disaster facts. Government guidelines require China's media to provide timely releases of disaster information in order to attain an active position to cover the situation. In 1989 the General Office of the State Council and the Party Propaganda Ministry further stressed, in *The Notification of News Work for Improving Emergency Events*, that fatalities should be covered immediately.

In journalistic practice, objectively covering the facts of natural disasters was no longer an anathema. For instance, in 1998 He Yanguang, a journalist with *Beijing Youth Daily*, was honored with an "exceptional award" in yearly state-level news awards, for his instant, detailed and objective coverage of floods on 7 August in Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province of China in that year. In 2009 an editorial on the Wenchuan earthquake gained one of two exceptional awards in the 19th State News Awards. Eight out of 44 news pieces winning first class awards in the field of Chinese media in that year were directly related to earthquakes and meteorological disasters. These demonstrate distinctive policy changes in covering natural disasters once regarded to be sensitive events. In the meantime the role of the media changed from unilateral "political-ideological propaganda tools" to playing more diversified roles in providing information about facts (Huang 2003, p. 448). This shift is attributed to the retreat of the "*Tiandao*" view, social legalization, journalistic professionalism and reforms in media management mechanisms.

3.5.1. Retreat of the "*Tiandao*" view

The influence of traditional *Tiandao* epistemology had begun to wane during the Cultural Revolution. Like other types of traditional thought it was dispelled in the name of purging feudal heritage. The cultural thinking about the relationship between natural phenomena and social practices was reframed by the hegemony of class struggle theory, a drastic change caused by the "revolution" in Chinese culture and the suppression of alternative information sources during the Cultural Revolution. The indoctrination of exclusive class struggle thoughts was accomplished through Mao Zedong mobilizing the Party hierarchy and its propaganda apparatus (Renwick and Cao 2003, p. 72). Class struggle as a "supposed national truth" defined all social relations and caused the "politicisation of social life" (Renwick and Cao 2003, p. 72). It ruled out traditional Chinese thought that produced alternative meanings of life and social practices. In this context the *Tiandao* tradition, with its subversive implications in interpreting natural disasters, could hardly be exempted from "absolute oppression" (Renwick and Cao 2003, p. 72).

The domination of class struggle was embodied in the phrases "*Zhuti Xianxing*" (argument comes first) and "*Cong Luxian Chufa*" (adhere to the political line) in news production, both setting class-struggle theory as the base and goal for explaining social practices (Shi and Li 2008, p. 433). Examples of these could be found in the new discourses of social practices that had to prove the correctness and invincibility of class struggle. Intellectuals had to address

social issues within this framework (Todd 2008, p. 97). The ten years of cultural hegemony repressed the alternative interpretations of news facts and played down the association of natural disaster with ruling legitimacy in the dominant public discourse.

Tiandao thinking was also wound back in a series of anti-tradition movements during the Cultural Revolution where traditional understandings about social practices were labeled as capitalistic or feudalistic dregs, and seen as pernicious at the superstructural level (Benewick 2008, p. 260; Sigley 2010, p. 533). For instance, an anti-Confucian campaign was initiated to dispel Confucian canons and to consolidate the hegemonic status of class-struggle theory. The *Tiandao* view, as an aprioristic cosmology, like the views of Mozi and Wang Yangming that had flourished in ancient China, were repudiated as "old and feudal thoughts" (Shi and Li 2008, p. 337). Another campaign called "Smash the Four Olds" was launched to purge traditional culture, most specifically the "old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits of the exploiting class" (Benewick 2008, p. 288).

The anti-tradition campaign turned out to be effective as a means to "discover and promote the revolutionary consciousness" (Benewick 2008, p. 289). It was maintained that different societies with class relations had correspondingly different cultures. Culture was seen as providing representations of class relationships, so it had to be reformed when class relations changed. Therefore, when a socialist state demolished a feudal empire, a new socialist culture was

required to replace the feudal one under "the slogan of anti-feudalism" (Wang 1998, p. 19). Schools of thought, such as those of Confucius, Mozi, Dong Zhongshu, Wang Yangming and other thinkers in ancient Chinese history were seen as representing reactionary elements of ideology, law and customs and as poisonous weeds that negatively impacted on the construction of a new society (Benewick 2008, pp. 259-259). The exclusion of *Tiandao* cosmology kept the masses from relating natural disasters to social power relations. Any notions connecting natural disasters with divinity were regarded as superstitious, or in Chinese as *mixin* meaning an unjustifiable belief. Thus, *Tiandao* thought appeared to have limited influence on Chinese cultural imaginations; thus the representation of natural disaster facts was made possible. However, a balanced representation of disaster damage and rescue actions still had to be supported by more systemic social transformation and ideological transitions.

3.5.2 Thought emancipation

The Chinese thought emancipation movement started at the end of Mao's era. In 1978 official organs of the CCP released articles on the re-examination of the epistemological foundations for judging the truth. The new challenging argument in these articles signaled a drastic shift from the over-politicized "class struggle" to new orientations for structuring social practices. On 10 May, *Theory Trends*, the most influential internal periodical of the Central Party School, published "*Practice is the sole criterion of truth*" in its sixtieth issue. On the next day this theme was also discussed in *Guangming Daily*, a

broadsheet newspaper with a broad readership among the intelligentsia and Party cadres. The *People's Daily*, as the official media organ of CCP Central Committee, and China News Service also published this article.

The truth criterion debated in these high-ranking official mouthpieces showcased a challenge to the "two whatevers", which maintained that in the new post-Mao era social activities still had to adhere to Mao's revolutionary line. The "two whatevers" claimed to "resolutely defend whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, [and] steadfastly abide by whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave" (Schoenhals 1991, p. 249). Hu Yaobang, then vice president of the Central Party School, called for "emancipating the mentality" and contended that any thoughts neglecting practices restricted their views by "obscurantism, idealism and cultural despotism" (Schoenhals 1991, p. 259). On 2 June, 1978, Deng Xiaoping and Li Xiannian spoke up in support of the truth criterion alteration. The *People's Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency*, *the Liberation Army Daily*, *China Youth Daily* and all the other Party mouthpieces at different levels followed the leaders' remarks on mental emancipation, which "provided sharp mentality weapons" in repudiating the "two whatevers" (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, p. 431).

The new criterion for testing truth hinged on adhering to facts and practices, rather than applying enshrined doctrines to comprehend social realities. Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping urged the Party cadres to accurately and comprehensively interpret Mao's thoughts of class struggle and to "seek the

truth from facts" (Ruan, p. 76, in Schoenhals, 1991, p.253). Not long after, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party succinctly established this criterion as the fundamental way for guiding social practices in the post-Mao era. The Plenum formally strengthened the authority of this principle by "banning the practice of referring to the pronouncements of individual leaders as 'instructions'" (Schoenhals 1991, p. 266).

"Seeking the truth from facts" steered the public away from succumbing to slogans towards pursuing the "scientific spirit" (Wang 1998, p. 19), which created an epistemological foundation on which objective journalistic practice became legitimate. Ten years of Cultural Revolution had inflicted incisive wounds on the nation. Chinese intellectuals began to thoroughly re-examine the way political decisions should be made and social practices positioned. Debates on thought emancipation in a spate of media articles manifested a nearly consensual support to "break with the lingering legacy of the Cultural Revolution" (Schoenhals 1991, p. 265).

Most importantly, the movement of thought emancipation encouraged scientific approaches. A facts-oriented epistemology calls for objective and empirical descriptions of social issues. It stresses perceiving and analyzing phenomena as they are and making statements with strict adherence to the facts, rather than from predetermined doctrines, therefore Chinese society began to be emancipated from the hegemony of class-struggle theories. Empirical and

scientific thinking established a legitimate basis for covering the facts of natural disasters and the demand for objective coverage was stressed. Providing timely information about news events becomes a basic demand for media in this period.

This movement also brought about the prevalence of humanitarianism in the social culture in this period. In the early 1980s Chinese intellectuals launched debates concerning the value of individual persons and social relations, including media and the Party. This began in the literature field where Chinese intellectuals tried to critically reflect on the Cultural Revolution and placate the national spirit. Finally, it was upgraded to the overall theoretic level. The *People's Daily*, in an editorial published on 25th March, 1981, concluded that "society should be highly concerned with the human worth, and the group should respect personal worth" (Xiao 2008, p. 454). Similar discussions on humanitarianism also appeared in the fields of philosophy, arts, economics and law, which led to debates on the ultimate aim of economic development, human rights and citizens' benefits in jurisprudence (p. 454). This liberal discourse had a deep impact on Chinese culture in the reform era. As Huang and Lee point out:

> We do not wish to suggest that liberal thought had a linear or smooth path in China, because official dogma and other forces constantly contested it. But despite this contestation, Western liberalism was obviously gaining the ascendancy in intellectual and media discourses. (2003, p. 44)

Humanitarian attitudes flourished as Chinese people developed a realization that a society is a "human" society and that the value of individual human lives

ought to be respected and legally protected. As Wang maintains, this "New Enlightenment thought" insisted that authentic socialism was humanistic Marxism, which supported individual freedoms and rights (p. 16). Inhuman "alienation", viewing people in terms of political attributes, rather than through individual human worth, was criticized and seen as contradictory to orthodox socialism (p. 16). As Wang claims, in this period the "existential significance of the individual" was placed at the core of social thinking, constituting one of the "hallmarks of the modern attitude" in contemporary China (p. 19).

Like empirical scientism, humanitarianism reshaped media discourses with a focus on disaster news. It led the media to represent victims as human beings possessing rights, worthy of the concern and protection of the whole society, rather than as lifeless political symbols. The people involved in natural disasters were seen as individuals worthy of being represented and therefore needing help. As a result, a major goal of reporting became the representation of realistic accounts of the victims. This posed a sharp contrast to the class-struggle statements in the Maoist era. The structural changes in media discourses on natural disasters were further substantiated in the processes of socially-targeted legislation in Chinese society.

3.5.3 People's right to access information

The appearance of accounts of disaster facts in the Chinese media took place against a background of a raft of new legislations aimed at reforming Chinese

society. After the Third Plenary Session of the CCP's 11th Central Committee in December 1978 the Chinese government initiated the social reform project. Ten years later, a preliminary legal system had been established: approximately 80 pieces of legislation enacted by the National People's Congress and its Standing Committee; 1,000 statues and regulations laid down by the State Council and thousands of provincial laws and regulations promulgated (Yu 1989, p. 27). Over this period, on average 60 pieces of laws and regulations were promulgated annually (p. 28). In the following 20-plus years, the grounding criterion "to construct a legalized society" shaped various areas of society. On 10 March, 2011, Wu Bangguo, director of the standing committee of the National Congress, declared that a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics has been formed (*Xinhua News Agency* 3 October, 2013). This comprehensive legal system started to serve Chinese society more effectively than ever before and to protect citizens' legal rights.

One significant impact of legalization in the journalistic field concerned the securing of people's right to access information. In July, 1987, the Chinese government promulgated "*Some Suggestions on Improving some Issues in News Reporting*". It stipulated that state media should actively broadcast emergency issues and important events before Western media made them an issue. This reporting guideline was released because of the pressures of Western competitors' control of international public discourse. Later in that year the official report of the 13th Conference of the National People's Congress declared national guidelines for validating people's right to know,

whereby the citizen's right to public information was ratified by the highest legislative institution of the nation.

In addition, a series of legal provisions were laid down to give specific directives about information management in natural disaster circumstances. The "*Law on Environmental Protection*" (1989) stipulated that the administrative agencies responsible for environmental protection in the State Council and the provincial governments should release public reports on environmental conditions at regular intervals. "*The Law on Meteorology*" (1999) specified that it was obligatory for state meteorology stations to publicize forecasts of impending weather events. "*The Regulation on Preventing Earthquakes and Reducing Disasters*" (1997), "*Regulation of Managing Earthquake Forecasts*" (1998) and "*Statutes on Floods Prevention*" (1991) all stipulated concrete provisions, demanding that administrative departments release disaster information in a timely fashion. These statutes protected citizens' rights to obtain public information. As Wei adds:

> If it is not banned in the law, the citizens have the freedom to get it. In accordance to this principle, citizens have the freedom and legal right to seek and communicate the information not prescribed as confidential. This clear identification is important for protecting the right to know. (2001, p. 22)

In the middle 1980s of the reform era, the concept of "information" was introduced to mainland China and induced much discussion in the field of Chinese journalism. Not long after, natural disaster coverage began to be seen as providing information, rather than being limited to delivering doctrines for propaganda (Tian 2005, p. 90). This was a manifest change of mentality in

viewing and reporting on disasters, compared with the periods when either "*Tiandao*" epistemology or class-struggle ideology prevailed.

Legally protecting citizens' rights to access information structurally transformed the model of information flow and the role of media that had persisted for about 2,000 years in China. The Chinese model of newspaper circulation could be traced to the 3rd Century when the Han Dynasty ruled China. According to Chinese Journalism historian Ge Gongzhen, then an official newspaper within the emperor's hierarchical system was created to communicate messages about important social issues. All provincial magistrates set up their own agencies in the capital city to collect papers, named "*Di Bao*", issued by the central government (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, p. 31).

This internal communication system within the ruling aristocracy saw its full-blown phase in the Tang Dynasty (618-907A.D.), when a nationwide internal information network called the *Yiyun* system was formed, which included 1,643 official post houses similar to local post offices in the contemporary world (p. 34). The contents of the official newspapers were principally about the emperors' activities, their decrees, appointing and dismissing of the court officials, officials' proposals and other important political or military issues (pp. 42-43). Although it was an internally-restricted form of message transmission natural disasters could not be mentioned because of *Tiandao* beliefs.

Taking the Song Dynasty (960-1279A.D.) as an instance, messages about natural disasters were a particularly sensitive taboo. The emperor feared that the release of such information might be utilized to agitate destabilizing factions (p. 91). To control the contents of *Dibao*, in 999 A.D., the Song Dynasty created the earliest censorship policy in China, named the "*Dingben*" method. *Dingben* is a model of paper that cannot be further edited or modified. The contents were based on stories gathered by officials who collected raw information, and these were strictly examined by relevant institutions or the prime minister (p. 93). This tradition deeply impacted the flow of information in different periods of the Chinese history. Even in the Maoist era the "central and provincial party organs [were] fully integrated into party and government administrative process" (Zhao 2000, p. 9). However, from the reform era the information became critical in areas such as economic cooperation, business, international communications, and even in political participation. This generates a strong demand and a belief in the right for individuals and society at large to access information.

In reform era, the role of a newspaper was changed from an internal administrative tool to a social organ shouldering responsibilities for the public. In the middle 1980s securing public's information rights became a topic of much discussion (Wei, p.21). It was concluded that the degree of information transparency displayed an advance of social democracy (Wei 2001; Zhang 2009). During this period, Hu Yaobang, former CCP general secretary, unprecedentedly advocated the public function of media. As Wei interprets:

[I]t shows that the communication of important information in China has gone from enclosed hierarchical mechanism into a state which principally applies mass media to achieve equitable nation-wide promulgation of information. (p.21)

Underlying these changes are fundamental shifts in attitudes about the legitimacy of social power relations. The communication model created in the Han Dynasty, which persisted for nearly 2,000 years was based on dynastic, highly autocratic power relations. The new communication model, on the contrary, was an embodiment of comparatively citizen-oriented power relations. The difference concerned the transferal of rights to access information. The protection of citizens' rights to access information is targeted at "sufficing a citizen's demand to know, express and participate in the social activities" (Chen 1999a, p. 19). Without information resources, the right to political participation, to free expression and to criticism would be out of the question (Chen 1999b, p. 30). Proposing and securing a citizens' right to access information saw journalists get the freedom for interviewing, broadcasting, and collecting reliable information about facts (Chen 1999b, p. 30). In this context, the coverage of natural disasters in China's media was seen as more professional.

3.5.4 Journalistic professionalism and the coverage of natural disasters

In the reform era, transformations in journalistic practice were accompanied by the revival of journalistic professionalism, professionalized media education and restructured media management. Learning the lessons from the Cultural

Revolution, it became the consensus that Chinese media had to undergo reform to redefine the role of the media as an organ to facilitate socialist construction rather than as a tool for class struggle (Fang, Ning and Chen 1999, pp. 436-437). Also, on establishing a market economy system, media as an industry had to engage with professional approaches to maintain its relevance against foreign news sources and media in general.

Although Chinese journalism is influenced by Confucian canons that suggest that intellectuals should use opinions to participate in politics, the rise of Western journalistic professionalism in the 1980s, with its claims of facticity, objectivity and impartiality, also had a precedent in China. Early Chinese journalism education in the 1920s had also been influenced by Western journalistic professionalism. The then two most influential journalism departments, at Yanjing University and St. Johns University, both structured their courses by introducing pedagogies used in the U.S.A (Hou 2005, p. 124). Early Chinese journalism practitioners were influenced by their experiences in the Western world. Key newspaper editors and journalists such as Shao Piaoping, Huang Yuansheng, Xu Baohuang, Ge Gongzhen, were pioneers of journalism in contemporary China, and not only theoretically insisted on objective reporting and professionalism, but also practised these tenets in their careers (Hou 2005, pp. 123-124).

Chinese journalism education in the 1920s and 1930s and its professional exemplars created a Chinese tradition of journalistic professionalism. For

instance, *Jingbao* and *Dagongbao*, implemented news production in a comparatively autonomous way, insisting on covering news facts and keeping detached from political influence (Hou 2005, pp. 123-124). This legacy was reinvigorated by an unprecedented nation-wide journalistic education scheme. The revived professional heritage endowed journalism education with the spirit of objectivity, autonomy, independence and striving for social justice. The specialized skills and consensually-forged ideals in journalistic professionalism secured its legitimacy as a profession in a society (Tong 2011, pp. 86-88). For instance, the criterion of objectivity distinguishes a professional journalist from a pure propagandist. As Tong argues：

> To be professional is to be objective in a narrative that is fact-based and unbiased. Objectivity is the ethical precondition for determining whether a journalist is professional or not as well as being a condition that reflects the skills of journalists in dealing with facts and opinions. (2011, p. 100)

The journalism education system in China therefore nurtures professional ideals and ethics in this field. Some of the key courses in journalism departments teach both Chinese and global media histories. All this plays a critical role in cultivating students' journalistic professional identity (Pan and Lu 2003).

The revival of Chinese journalistic professionalism also gained strength from the reform in the system of media management. In the Maoist era, Chinese media were all state organs having stable funding from the government, and newspaper circulation was administered through the governmental system. The

government was information producer and circulator. It was a self-contained and comparatively enclosed management model. In this model, the media content was determined by the government itself, and the audiences' influence was weak. This was a typical sender-oriented form of communication in which the contents of propaganda exceeded newsworthy information.

The reform of media management was synchronized with the trend of marketization in China's economy. The press began to be run as a business in 1978 when the *People's Daily* introduced a profit-making accounting system; in 1987 the media industry was defined as a part of the information economy by the State Science and Technology Commission; in 1992 a landmark policy was announced to make the media industry financially independent, except for a few party organs such as *Xinhua News Agency* and *Liberation Daily* (Zhao 2000, p. 6). The former propagandistic news production with a state-subsidized subscription system now had to meet a mass demand for the news facts about those public events that most concerned its audience (Wang 2011, p. 126).

The commercialized media has to produce material that is newsworthy and in demand, therefore, the performances of state-subsidized party papers and commercialized newspapers in the market proved to be conspicuously different. Taking the comparison between *Beijing Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily* as a case, *Beijing Daily*, the official party newspaper in Beijing, saw a 27 percent drop from 523,000 copies to 380,000 copies from 1993 to 2003; while the commercially-run *Beijing Youth Daily* almost tripled its daily print run from

231,000 to 600,000 in the same period (Qian and Bandurski 2011, p. 42). Even the *People's Daily*, the CCP Central Committee mouthpiece, launched a commercial spin-off *Jinghua Times*. It appeared that the Chinese media began to have two masters: "the party and the public" (Qian and Bandurski 2011, p. 43). Therefore, commercialization seemed to propel Chinese media toward strengthening their social function in "setting the agenda for public discourse while striking a balance between political survival and their professional ideals" (Qian and Bandurski 2011, p. 71).

The reform in financial management also resulted in more space for public discourse. Zhao maintains that metro newspapers attained a degree of "organisational autonomy" to the point where the press was more or less liberated from the state (2000, p. 21). This provided space for professionalism in Chinese journalism. For instance, the marketization of media allowed for the existence of "itinerant journalists" (Tong 2011, p. 102), groups of freelance journalists working mainly on investigative reporting about undisclosed stories, forging and sharing ideals of professionalism (pp.102-103). Without the marketization of the media, these activities would hardly be possible.

In a legalized society, rights to access information have to be guaranteed, as defined by laws related to the media's public role and by citizen' needs. Therefore, the professional pursuit of facts in news coverage is grounded on a legal base. It is expected that journalists and media events provide factual and objective information. Without this legal system and its application in

structuring power relations in media practices, journalistic professionalism would be diminished by the subjectivities enabled by media commercialisation. As China's reform goes on, the rising nationalistic culture becomes a broader context for Chinese media practice.

3.6 Nationalizing the event in reform period

Natural disaster reporting in Chinese media in the 1990s and 2000s saw a more balanced coverage of disaster facts and rescue mobilization actions. The emancipation of social communications, legalization in the social system and transformations in the media industry finally created possibilities for representations of catastrophic information. However, the war narrative remained a constituent element in the state media, especially in cases with large-scale social impact such as the catastrophic floods in 1998 in southern China and the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. The tragic damage, once regarded as an apocalyptic sign, was now showcased and constructed as a threat to the nation.

Within this nationalistic culture, struggles between natural intrusions and "our nation" constructed a complete war discourse in this period. This is shown in the *Sichuan Daily*, the official mouthpiece of the CCP in Sichuan Province, days after the Wenchuan earthquake happened in this province, with headlines such as: "*Rescuers are Strenuously Pushing on towards the Towns and Villages*

Damaged by the Disaster"; "*The Earthquake Arouses Chinese Patriotism*";
"*Rear-service Department of the Provincial Military Base: Constructing the
Life Line for Victims*"; "*China in Sorrow but Tenaciously Determined*";
"*Farewell to Compatriots! Come on Sichuan!! Come on China!!!*" (20 May,
2008a). By then, precise information about the earthquake had been publicized,
rather than being sealed off or papered over across media.

However, the basis for the war discourse had changed significantly, as
demonstrated in disaster cases in the reform era. As detailed above, before the
reform the war discourse with elements of threat omitted was organized to
show revolutionary leaders' charisma, the invincibility of class struggle and to
drastically exclude ominous apocalyptic allusions. In the reform era, the
"official nationalism" (Anderson 2006, p. 150) propped up the signification of
a war discourse that now activated the nationalistic collectivism in mobilizing
rescue actions. In relation to events of the same nature, the war discourse was
narrated in a different way, in a society that had been transformed. As Anderson
maintains:

> All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them
> characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical
> circumstances, spring narratives. (p. 204)

Constructing the narrative of nationalism in natural disaster coverage was a
new integrative discursive measure in the Chinese media in the reform era.
Back in the Maoist era the theory of class dominated the cultural space, but
from 1978 to 1990 economic reform brought about pro-Western liberalism

(Huang and Lee 2003). After 1989 patriotism and nationalism constituted the dominating discourses (Huang and Lee 2003)

It has long been understood that nationalistic discourses empower collective identity. For a citizen such discourses generate an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) that secures rights, identity and dignity. This group classification positions individuals in a cohesive collectivism by producing "remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (p. 36). In a society, nationalism is a discourse for cultural identification that defines social rules, which creates and maintains social order. Based on the notion of being a nation, social movements construct cultural systems of signs, images and value judgment, in order to define and unite society (Xu 1998, p. 15). In a modern nation-state the ruling legitimacy is based on its power to integrate various social factions into a nation (p. 66). Given these characteristics, nationalism is essential for social integration and continuity.

Nationalism is a discursive construct that articulates historical legacy, genetic lineage, geographical attachment and common benefits, volition and challenges (Anderson 2006). In addition, it is partly constructed by contrastive counterparts. The modern nation-state is differentiated in relation to parallel nation-states, as Craig Calhoun explains, that the internal unification of the national identity is the "mirror image of the notion of external differences" (p. 7; see also: Niebuhr 1999, p. 317). Nation-building is a classification and separation of humanity through political, cultural and geographical boundaries.

The unifying strength of nationalism can be observed in social mobilization, seen in pursuing common national benefits, or in securing national security in nation-to-nation conflicts (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 36).

Chinese nationalistic sentiment was first stimulated in the 1860s when invasions from Western nations aroused a sense of nationhood among the Chinese. Its inception was germinated in inner cultural commonalities and brought to consciousness by foreign threats (Wang 1998, pp. 10-15; Pan 1999, p. 141). This discourse exhibited enormous power in carrying out the Xinhai Revolution in 1910 and in opposition to Japanese invasions in the 1930s and 1940s (Xu 1998, pp. 139-142). The Chinese nationalism closely relates to China as a nation-state, a political and cultural entity emerging from the modernization process (p. 136). However, after nationalism fulfilled its nation-liberation mission with the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, class struggle theory replaced its role in social mobilization.

Nationalism has become an integral part of Chinese culture since the 1990s. In China, nationalism is often intermingled with patriotism in the public discourse, because of the malleability of their definitions. Patriotism is the devotion to the state and nationalism is the identification with the nation. As a modern nation-state, the state is built upon the common nation; therefore, the identifications with both the state and the nation are generally intertwined. For the general Chinese public, patriotism is nationalism, loving the state is deemed the core of the Chinese socialist value system (*People's Daily* 19 Aug, 2007). Thus, the

recognition of and devotion to the Chinese nation are also fundamental in contemporary Chinese cultural values. This study deploys the concept of nationalism to represent this meaning, which substantially impacts Chinese media. The historic context in which the Wenchuan earthquake is covered is influenced by a "total set of relations" that construct a regular epistemology in a historic period to formulate a new social discourse (Foucault 1972). The nationalist discourse constructed in natural disaster coverage is an embodiment of rising nationalism in Chinese society. There are two critical factors driving nationalism in contemporary China.

Firstly, from the 1990s, China has seen global inter-state communications in politics, commerce, and culture as setting national independence, national benefits and national sovereignty on a social agenda. The nation-to-nation cooperation, negotiation and friction inevitably make the identities of nations clearer and more conscious, for the identity of a nation is formed and becomes more distinctive when it is in a relative contrast with the Other (Sun 1996, in Xu 2012, p, 98). In global communication, different countries are dealing with issues of the respective identity of the independent nation-state, in which China's nationalist esteem and confidence - long suffocated by its often humiliating history - are re-asserted (Sun 1996, in Xu 2012, p, 98).

The notion of the Chinese nation in a global era emphasizes the identity of "Chineseness" in the more than thirty years of "open-door" communications. What makes this point clearer is a contrary example when China's interaction

with the international community was very limited in the era before the "open-door" policy. In that period, the major communication in Chinese society was among the classes, to put it more specifically, class struggles. When there was no vision to the outside to arouse nationalism, the Chinese looked inward and the differences among classes became lines for role identification. The key determinant of this contrast in shaping nationalism lies in that the recognition of identities should be confirmed by a counterpoising Other (Hall 1996b, p. 6; MacKinnon and Heise 2010, p. 104), just as a stark formulation of the national identity is discerned in the Wenchuan earthquake when the earthquake is constructed to be an "invader" or "enemy" to the Chinese nation, which will be examined in the following chapters.

The second reason underlying the robust dynamics of nationalism in Chinese society is its irreplaceable role in securing the recognition of national identity and integrating social mentality. In Mao's era, Chinese society was integrated via the initiation of a series of class struggle movements. It was symbolized by continuous internal conflicts. The drastic changes in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and domestic environment caused a surging construction of Chinese nationalism, which since then played a critical role in Chinese ideology (Xu 2012, p. 96). However, in the recent thirty years of the "open-door" era, the way Chinese society is integrated has been transferred to economic and nationalistic levels. The former is a down-to-earth policy, with economic achievement as the justification for balancing social power, in which the loyalty of social members is, in large part, motivated by the benefits they get

from reform. It is a form of coalescing power basing on catering for individuals' desires.

However, the disadvantage lies in that the common sign of unification in this model is social wealth, and the acquisition of wealth and social resources is inherently competitive, exclusive and potentially divisive, managed through an individual's monetary rewards. Meanwhile, this model shows problems, at least in the case of China, in that the distribution of social wealth is uneven among different social strata and different professions (Lu 2003). In a word, this is principally a common recognition and acceptance of wealth, rather than having its major appeal in an appreciation of the collective identity; therefore it is not the only and the best way to enhance a nation-wide sentiment of "Chineseness".

In this dilemma nationalism as a vibrant cultural discourse is fostered and extolled in social culture, as indispensable social glue in complementing economic means (Xiao 1994). Rather than social or economic wealth, nationalism functions as a soft but more thorough means of securing national identity and produces cultural and political legitimacy in reforms and various social campaigns. In natural disaster situations such as the Wenchuan earthquake, the nationalistic discourse is much more appealing and powerful than economic concerns, for the legitimacy and ultimate drive of mobilization in this event derives from the notion that "we are sisters and brothers as Chinese", rather than directly from monetary reward. The measure of economic

recognition simply cannot affect this situation, for human life is infinitely more precious than money.

Anderson argues that reminders of the crisis of a nation may turn out to be the devices for inspiring the nationalistic genealogies and delineating national identity (2006, p. 201). In this context media agenda-setting in natural disasters tended to construct a nationalistic account and was structured on "the conflict between the positive 'us' and the negative 'them' (Huang and Lee 2003, p. 54). Thus, the war discourse activates the nationalistic sentiments of the public in the face of natural threats. Even though the disaster in itself could stimulate group responses it is the war discourse that makes salient the concept of a nation. As shown in the Xinhai Revolution, the May Fourth Movement and the opposition to Japanese invasions, the war crisis has historically provided a means for integrating the masses through calls for national unity (Xu 1998, p. 155).

Accordingly, media texts characterized a natural threat as an "invading force" and "drummed up a sense of national crisis", formulating "we" as a nation and rescue action as a war action (Huang and Lee 2003, p. 56). It is a form of "defensive stratagem" that connects the concept of invasion with the security of a nation (Renwick and Cao 2003, p. 62). This narrative can be summed up in the following way:

> Metaphorical references are, for individuals and masses alike, triggers to formulaic memories and to a particular, constructed, discourse and official 'grand narrative'. The language of this narrative is charged with symbolic signposts: to sacrifice and overcome; to martial terms and a siege mentality and to the 'terrains of power' formed by the conjunction of landscape and memory.(Renwick and Cao 2003, p. 72)

As discussed here, the war as a metaphor extends beyond just revealing facts and highlighting collective actions. The life-threatening and land-devastating accounts urge a social mobilization with the imperative to secure national borders and protect national sovereignty. Nationalism possesses immense spiritual appeal in shaping popular sentiments, as it resorts to the deep feelings of collective loyalty, in the same way that people may pledge allegiance to blood kinship, race and religion (Xu 1998, pp. 41-42). This inner cultural recognition is exclusive and underpins independent nationhood and the sovereign modern nation-state, which is the product of differentiation, negotiation and conflict between distinct nations. The "imagined war" in the media reactivates this nation-building process in which the facts about disasters are reconstructed; the "war" situation arouses nationalistic sentiments producing a nationwide collective integration. Questions in this respect will be discussed in detail in following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter takes an overview of the natural disaster coverage in Chinese media and the construction of war discourse in different historic periods. The structural changes to war discourses in natural disaster news manifest the

country's on-going transformation from a traditional state to a modern nation-state. In this process of modernization, the shift of the dominant discourse concerned with social power structure may be seen. It started from divinity, to leader worship and then to civic rights. This shows a transition of power in communication from centrality to popularity, from mystery to publicity, and from strict control to more transparency. The social reforms after 1978 diversified media roles from being merely "propaganda tools" to becoming "public instruments".

The construction of war discourses indicates the negotiation of power relations in Chinese society across different historic periods. As Foucault argues, the formulation of truth is accompanied by excluding other alternative interpretations (1972). This underlies media construction of the war discourse: the setting up of subversive signs and the validating of positive ones. The more the meaning is undefined, the more debates and negotiations there are. The more important the significance of this meaning, the more obvious the war discourses appear. From "anger of the deity" to "threat to a nation", the semi-structured and complete war discourses are constructed for differentiating the "Other" from "we". Natural disasters in the past were related to the obscurity and hypothetical characteristics of divine power, which shaped the legitimacy of power relations for much of history. Therefore, omens had to be insulated from the public in traditional "*Tiandao*" epistemology when the source of power was regarded as coming from divinity to prevent any diminution in a leader's charisma and power. However, social changes and legalization led to

more realistic accounts of the facts of natural disasters. Situated in the metanarrative of Chinese sociocultural transformation and contextualized in a specific background of contemporary Chinese nationalistic culture, the next chapter will examine how China's media in the 21st Century controls crisis situations caused by natural disasters by conducting a case study of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

Chapter Four

Chinese Media Coverage of the 2008

Wenchuan Earthquake

Introduction

Following the account of media coverage of natural disasters in the Chinese social and historical context in the preceding chapter, Chapter Four will conduct an in-depth analysis of this discourse, drawing from media coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake as an example. The media chosen for analysis in this chapter includes the *Sichuan Daily*, *Southern Weekly* and *People Net*. Some influential news reports and commentaries from other media such as *Guangming Daily* and *Xinhua Net*, are included as complementary evidence for a comprehensive analysis. After examining the special column designs by these media in constructing their accounts, the case study focuses on clusters of representations in news texts.

The case studies are divided into three stages. The first stage explores how "the milieu of war" is constructed as news, specifically how the perception of disruption, uncertainty and anxiety is depicted in the *Sichuan Daily*. The second stage of textual analysis elaborates on the ways in which "war actions" are constructed in media texts. The third stage explains the "Othering" process

of the earthquake. Within each stage of analysis, exemplary media texts are the key object for analysis. In doing this, this chapter aims to analyze the textual strategies used in the war discourse and expound the ways in which they engage with the audience's imagination about the event.

4.1 The event and the sample media texts

The Wenchuan earthquake occurred in the Sichuan Province of China in 2008. It measured 8.0 on the Richter scale. Official figures show that more than 69,197 people were confirmed dead, with 374,176 injured, and 18,222 missing (*Xinhua Net* 20 July, 2008). It was the deadliest natural disaster in Chinese history since the Tangshan earthquake in 1976.

In conducting this study, a series of news reports and commentaries on this event is collected from three main-stream media sources in China: *Sichuan Daily, Southern Weekly* and *People Net*. This corpus is supplemented by several critical news reports and editorials from other media such as the *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily* and *Xinhua Net*. These texts were also widely circulated during the earthquake period. *Sichuan Daily* is the official organ of the CCP Sichuan Committee, so it is a form of mainstream state media at a provincial level. It possessed immediate access to information about the earthquake. This helped in producing more detailed coverage of the event.

People Net and *Southern Weekly* have a nationwide audience in China, so their coverage illustrates how the state media at the national level reported this event. The broad media discourses constituting a news event are the result of the convergence of a large number of media texts from different media organizations, so combining the provincial and national media can present a comprehensive account of the discursive processes. The media organizations from which the cluster of words, sentences and passages are selected are mainstream ones with state backgrounds, which possess institutional legitimacy in releasing authoritative information, especially in the crisis situation caused by the earthquake. As noted in Chapter Two, social institutions hold the status of authority and thus add their discursive process with more trustworthiness (Foucault 1972). For a discourse to be broadly transmitted and accepted, it should have a "truth-claim" (Mills 2004, p. 61) that is claimed to be truthful by social institutions with social legitimacy (Foucault 1972).

In setting up the corpus, 117 copies of news reports and commentaries in these media were collected. The coverage date of these texts started from 12 May to 12 June, 2008, the month when media coverage of the event was intensively focused. Among them 105 articles are from *Sichuan Daily*, 5 from *Southern Weekly*, and 7 from *People Net*. Some texts were originally published in the *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily* or *Xinhua Net*.

4.2 Framing "*Baodao Zhanyi*"

In the field of Chinese journalism, *Baodao Zhanyi*, meaning "the war of coverage", is a rhetorical expression for media framing where highly intensive reports target a single social issue in a limited time period. It is characterized by the intense concentration of reports on one topic from several media and the specifying of aims to be achieved through the joint coverage. Its dense information saturates the public space for a limited period, shaping and steering public opinion through a homogenizing process. The "war of coverage" is an extreme form of agenda-setting, in which an issue dominates the social agenda for a limited period of time, and can be demonstrated by the design of front-page pictures in Chinese media such as the *Sichuan Daily* reporting this earthquake from 12 May to 12 June, 2008. For thirty days its front page picture showcased frontline disaster relief. Only one day's front-page photo was allocated to other news: President Hu Jintao meeting Wu Boxiong, leader of the Taiwan Nationalist Party of China. The coverage of the disaster did not finish until 14 June, when pictures began to address other issues, such as CCP conferences.

This form of framing was further strengthened by presenting special columns for this event. For example, *Sichuan Daily* presented "Special Columns" and a regular (daily) "Special Report" for this event. In total, thirteen days of "Special Columns" and twenty three days of "Special Reports" appeared. Both columns were composed of a series of follow-ups covering this event. In

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addition, a column of "Hero Names" was added for two days and a column of "Attacking Disaster and Rescue Work" for three days. These specially designed columns and features amplified the media attention to the event, targeting the same topic, which was a sharp contrast to the routine reporting styles of this newspaper.

On the day before the earthquake happened, the layout of columns was conspicuously different. On 12 May the columns were all in the usual pattern, including social news, international news, economic news, cultural news and news about the forthcoming Olympic Games. From 13 May the percentage of columns reporting on the earthquake increased, so dramatically that from 18 to 20 May, every page was devoted to this event. The intense accentuation of disaster crisis coverage could also be seen in the temporary shrinkage of other columns. For instance, "Important News" and "Special Reports" occupied all of the space in the paper from 18 to 21 May, both of them wholly concerned with the earthquake situation. A similar allocation of columns also appeared in *Southern Weekly* and *People Net*.

The abrupt changes in the disposition of columns facilitated meaning production in a crisis circumstance. As noted in earlier chapters, media framing of a social event can effectively produce two kinds of impact (McQuail 2005, p. 555). On the one hand, it sets the issue within a frame compatible to its social impact and the expected communication influence; on the other hand, the meaning framed through this structure can create public consensus on mediated

social reality. In *Sichuan Daily, Southern Weekly* and *People Net* the specially-designed columns construct a package around the "war of coverage" which arouses an intense crisis alert in the public consciousness.

The "war of coverage" constructs and spreads the meaning of a pressing crisis situation, so that in the Wenchuan case the earthquake could be quickly and symbolically amplified to a nationwide event. Notions of social constructionism maintain that the mass media define values, ideas and choices and give priority to certain aspects of society. In these ways the media construct a simulated reality for the public (McQuail 2005, p. 101). This construction process is by no means an exhaustive reflection of the facts; it involves selection and salience (Entman 1993). This is due to limited resources for coverage and unavoidable subjectivity in the media. The salience of the earthquake in the media agenda is determined by its strong newsworthiness. Added to this is the influence of the media in mobilizing effective rescue measures.

As described above, this way of organizing news coverage is characterized by an abrupt start and clear conclusion. It is an exclusive frame for an urgent national event. It is an example of a media format that "cut[s] across the conventional content categories of media output" in times of significant or unusual events (McQuail 2005, p. 374). As a media format suitable for crisis situations, Altheide finds that the particularities of a special "format for crisis" include accessible information of the event, visual quality, drama and action,

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relevance to the audience and unity of themes (McQuail 2005, p. 374). This format is also formed in this case, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Before gaining access to the special textual contents that define the significance of the earthquake, the prominence of a social agenda helps the public to engage with the issue. Couldry explains that the structure of the frame in its own right can produce a discursive influence over the public, because it diverges from its routines, so that the frame has the quality of being extraordinary in contrast to producing the everyday news flow (2003, p. 31). The clear boundary confers on the frame a quality for producing particular meanings (Couldry 2003, p. 31). Similarly, Bourdieu also suggests that the critical impact of an action lies in the fact that it arbitrarily crosses the usual line or boundary (McQuail 2005, p. 27). This occurs when concentrated media power is devoted to a single event in a limited period of time. The event attains prominence from this focus.

Within this frame, the "Special Column", "Special Reports", "Hero Names" and "Attacking Disaster and Rescue Work" found in the *Sichuan Daily*, allude to an imagined war situation. *Baodao Zhanyi* may be applied to conduct a comprehensive and profound coverage of any social event that is considered critical in a certain period, however when this highly concentrated information cluster is used in a disaster situation, the military vocabulary, such as "heroes" (*Sichuan Daily* 21 May, 2008), "attacking" or "rescue", construct a discourse of "war against disaster". As Couldry explains, the symbolic naming, ordering,

framing and spacing generate a "symbolic hierarchy of the media frame" that modifies public understanding (2000, p. 178). He argues that the highly concentrated coverage of an issue disrupts the normal "geography" of the everyday column categories, condenses the resources devoted to an issue, and develops a package of convergent reporting (2000, p. 156). The framed categories with prime importance in news production are an example of "institutional arrangements and hierarchies" whereby the structure shapes the content (Couldry 2000, p. 46).

4.3 Constructing the milieu of war

4.3.1 Disruption of peace

The formulation of the war discourse in this event is completed by constructing a milieu of disruption as shown in the following extracts from *Sichuan Daily*:

Selected News Report: "Broad Situation"

阿坝州汶川县发生 7.8 级地震
截至今日零时，地震在全省已造成近万人死亡, 因通讯和交通中断，汶川县极震区的灾情还不明确

　　本报讯 (记者陈宇) 昨（12）日 14 时 28 分，阿坝州汶川县境内（东经 103 度 4 分，北纬 31 度 0 分）发生 7.8 级地震。记者从省地震局获悉，由于通讯和交通中断，汶川县极震区的灾情还不明确。截至今日零时，地震在全省已造成近万人死亡，其中绵阳、成都、德阳、遂宁、广元、甘孜、眉山、内江等地均有不同数量人员伤亡。
　　据初步了解，汶川 7.8 级地震发生后，震区通讯中断，距离震中 92 公里的成都地区被波及，有强烈震感，电力、通讯系统一度中断。由于正在上班时间，人们纷纷从办公楼中逃离，在马路上暂避。
Translation:

A 7.8-degree Earthquake Occurred in Wenchuan County, Aba District

Sichuan Daily (Chen Yu) A 7.8-degree earthquake occurred in Wenchuan County, Aba District (103.4 Eastern Longitude, 31.0 Northern Latitude) at 14:28 yesterday. The correspondent received information from the Provincial Earthquake Bureau that the disaster situation was still unclear in Wenchuan County, an extremely-damaged area in this event, as the communication system were down and transportation was broken down.

Till 12 o'clock this morning, the earthquake has claimed over 10,000 lives. In places including Mianyang, Chendu, Deyang, Suining, Guangyuan, Ganzi, Meishan, Neijiang, etc, various numbers of people have died or were injured.

According to the preliminary information, after this 7.8-degree earthquake, all communication and electricity systems are broken. Chengdu, 92 kilometers from the epicenter, is also seriously affected. As the earthquake happened during business hours, the staff all rushed out of the office buildings and temporally stayed on the streets.

(13 May, 2008a)

Selected News Reports: "Death and Injuries"

17 市州受灾 14463 人死亡

[…]

据不完全统计，阿坝州死亡 161 人、失踪 11 人、受伤 725 人；绵阳市死亡 5430 人，失踪 1396 人，被埋 18486 人，受伤 23235 人；德阳市死亡 6049 人，受伤 21020 余人，被埋 6200 余人，被困 2600 余人；成都市死亡 1215 人，受伤 5735 人；广元市死亡 711 人，失踪 11 人，被埋 1102 人，受伤 9838 人；雅安市死亡 20 人，受伤 421 人；南充市死亡 22 人，受伤 1655 人；遂宁市死亡 25 人，受伤 233 人；资阳市死亡 16 人，受伤 542 人；眉山市死亡 10 人，受伤 549 人 […]。

Translation:

14,463 Died in 17 Cities and Prefectures

[…]

According to incomplete statistics, in Aba Prefecture, 161 died, 11 missing, 725 injured; in Mianyang, 5,430 died, 1,396 missing, 18,486 buried, 23,235 injured; in Deyang City, 6,049 died, over 21,020 injured, over 6,200 buried, 2,600 trapped; in Chengdu City, 1,215 died, 5,735 injured; in Nanchong City, 22 died, 1,655 injured; in Suining City, 25 died, 233 injured; in Ziyang City, 16 died, 542 injured; in Meishan City, 10 died, 549 injured […].

(*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008a)

Selected News Report: "Stories"

[…]

在都江堰市度假游玩的 65 岁退休人员樊光琪在地震发生时，正好在城内风景点南桥的广场打牌，突然伴随着轰鸣声，一阵地动山摇，连他在内的周围 10 个人即使抓住旁边的栏杆，也都站立不稳，灰尘漫天蒙住了眼，耳边全是瓦砾摔落声。等看清东西的时候，周边的三栋四层旅馆顶部已全部垮掉 […]。

一些市民由于房屋倒塌已无家可归。市民宋在华告诉记者："我们 5 楼中间的几个单元垮了。女儿家的商品房也垮了，一家人只能在外面待着。"一个粮油食品批发店的岳姓店主正在清理受损商品，准备打折出售，

记者看到，店铺屋顶上的支架全部垮了，店铺内商品受损严重。与汶川县联系中断。

7.8 级的巨大地震重创了汶川县。

Translation:

[…]

When the earthquake happened, Fan Guangqi, 65 years old and retired, was playing cards in a tourist resort called South Bridge in the City of Dujiangyan. He was then having a holiday. Suddenly, the earthquake trembled the ground and the mountains accompanied by a roaring sound. 10 people including himself were unable to stand stably even though holding onto the banisters. Grey sky obscured their eyesight. He heard the loud cracking noise of breaking tiles. When his vision became clearer, he saw that all three four-story hotels had collapsed […].

Many civilians were made homeless in the event. A man named Song told the correspondent: "All the units in the middle of the fifth floor were torn down. My daughter's commercial flat also collapsed. All families have to wait outside." The boss of a grocery store selling food and oils began clearing the damaged commodities, planning to sell them at a discount. The correspondent could see that all the racks on the ceiling of the shop had crumbled and the commodities in the shop were severely impaired. The communication to Wenchuan was quickly rendered dysfunctional.

The 7.8-degree earthquake inflicted heavily on the Wenchuan County.

(*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008b)

The three exemplary media texts selected here for analysis vividly represent how the usual peaceful social life is broken apart. They were produced in the early period of this disastrous event, and all released within three days after the earthquake. The first two texts construct a panorama of the disaster situations, while the third one exemplifies accounts that try to contextualize the event in terms of concrete civilian lives. However even though they have different genre features, all of them aim to describe how peace in these areas was disrupted and how lives and property were either damaged or severely threatened. As Robertson maintains, it is a typical "map of tragedy" that delivers "maps of meaning" to the public (2010, p. 88).

The complete meaning of the news event depends on the representations of the disruption. In dissecting general narrative regularities, Tsvetan Todorov developed a narrative grammar that may explain how the story flows (Fulton et

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al. 2005, p. 36). He maintains that stories normally begin with a state of conflict between equilibrium and disequilibrium and end with a restoration of a newer equilibrium (p. 36). It is these disruptive situations that produce questions, drive public thinking and have the audience pursue possible factual accounts and causal explanations (Hartley 2002, pp. 154-155). The texts in *Sichuan Daily* exactly portray this scene of disequilibrium, where the earthquake unexpectedly occurs, claims tens of thousands of lives and devastates broad areas. In this process a scene of unrest and disturbance arises.

As most of the audience did not witness the disaster directly, the media constructs a textual reality which formulates a "psychological analogy" in engaging with public imagination of the crisis (Tomashevsky 1965, p. 80). It generates a virtuality that is a "cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns" (Hayles 1999, 69, in Hartley 2002, pp. 232-233). This phenomenon may be seen as an alienation of the audience from the real life event to "experiencing" the event via a mediated sphere. John Hartley suggests that the effect of virtuality is like the "sci-fi fantasies" in which the audience of a sci-fi film are absorbed into the plot and "take on a new body" (2002, p. 233). This effect could appear in this case given that the event in the symbolic sphere is based on an event as heartrending as the Wenchuan earthquake and the news flow is as intensely structured as in the form of *Baodao Zhanyi* (the war of coverage).

Through this effect of virtuality, a socio-psychological mechanism, viewers are engaged with the scenes of the earthquake, symbolically, emotionally, psychologically and imaginatively. They construct a mental representation of the reality which affects the audiences' perception (Baudrillard 2001; Hartley 2002, pp. 232-233). However, this virtuality is only a first step in the symbolic engagement between the media and the public. The discursive power of the media has to be further enhanced by a series of more nuanced textual skills.

Analysis of the Wenchuan texts reveals that drastically contrastive narratives are deployed for constructing the disaster situation. The first two pieces of news establish this contrast by describing the numbers of deaths and widely-affected areas in contrast to the recent state of peace, shaping the broad background of the disturbance; while the third piece portrays the vivid individual experiences of ordinary civilians, making the account more convincing and more pertinent to the audience's specific understanding. This "logic of appearances" (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 99) exerts an "appellative power" by which the journalists address the accounts of misfortunes to an expected audience (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 106). Althusser contends that this is an "interpellation" strategy in which a discourse deploys delicate forms of address to create a tie between the media and the audience who are transformed into subjects involved in the issue (Hartley 2002, p. 146). The link between the methods of engaging an audience and the narrative formats employed may be explained because the:

> [m]ode of address is part of a process of interpellation, where the mass communication 'hails' or interpellates individuals as the subject of its discourse. Media texts invent a fictional image of their preferred audience's characteristics, and address that fictional character.
>
> (O'Sullivan et al. 1994, p. 183)

Using this notion of interpellation it appears that *Sichuan Daily*, by applying the technique of contrast and examples of civilian cases, constructs a scene that suggests to the audience that "our land is in peril and our people are suffering".

The techniques employed in these three news pieces collectively depict a milieu of disruption and attempt to engage the public with the story. This unrest is formed by the comparison of the different states of the same location, before the earthquake and after it. For instance, in text three, a retired gentleman was playing cards in a tourism resort; then the sudden earthquake destroyed the hotel and many civilians had no home to return to. This means of narrating connects the conflict with a specific location and individual actor, creating an audience-engaging discursive tactic. This way of structuring narratives is not unusual in disaster coverage and it builds a "chronotopic universe" in Chouliaraki's word (2006, p. 108). This phrase suggests that drastic conflicts are represented in terms of specific people and locations by presenting elements of contrast.

Generating a "chronotopic universe" appears to be effective in evoking an audience's emotional engagement, as evidenced by research on the Bali bombing tragedy. On 13 October, 2002, a terrorist bombing in Bali killed 218 people. Chouliaraki (2006, pp. 107-108) analyzes the ways in which media

constructed a "living scene of suffering" (p. 108) in this news event and found that the media tend to present "multiple articulations of local space" (p. 108), in which the scenes of suffering in the location are narrated using stark changes from the peace and joy in the past to the suffering of the present, and then indicate an uncertain direction in the future (p. 108). For example, in the Bali tragedy she argues that the elaboration of vivid details constructed a narrative where the former popular tourist resort had turned into a funeral site and that there was no guarantee that the imminent terrorist threats would end (p. 108).

Even though the causes of the Bali bombing were different from the Wenchuan earthquake, the sufferings of civilians are the same, and the ways in which media texts guide the audience's perceptions turn out to be similar as shown in Chouliaraki's analysis. In the case of the Bali tragedy, Chouliaraki proposes that the "chronotopic sphere" aims to ignite concern and empathy from the imagined audience, with the story of "holiday resorts turn into inferno", through which public anger and anxiety is directed at the terrorists' responsibilities (p. 108). In the texts selected in the case of the earthquake, the drastic misfortunes that fell on civilian lives are similar to those in the Bali bombing. The only difference is that the earthquake is the target of the outpouring of anger, anxiety and other negative emotions. Essentially, the narration about a specific location or civilian in the matrix of time is a localized embodiment of the "peace-disruption-anxiety" narrative in the whole event, with more focused techniques and arousing more contextual resonance for the audience.

Complementary to this "time matrix", the media texts selected show that various locations, when juxtaposed, can construct a virtual reality where disaster threatens every corner of civilian lives. The various sites devastated by the earthquake were major points for coverage in the early days after this event happened. At this stage, the overall picture demonstrated the common theme of destruction and despair. As shown by the samples from *Sichuan Daily*, the areas mentioned include broad districts, cities, towns, highways, hotels, civilian dwellings, grocery shops and communication networks. This "space matrix" collectively constructs a disaster situation as a supplement to the "chronotopic universe" (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 108), and the mediated reality "serves to alter time-space relations" (Giddens 1991, p. 24).

The convergence on endangered spaces, moving from abstract geographical names to specific living sites creates a proximal affinity. In this way, the distant disaster areas, as geographical concepts, are connected to human experiences. It is a cognitive transition from a conception of "a disaster happens in that area" to a more sense-making and emotion-arousing "life miseries". In analyzing the Bali tragedy, Chouliaraki finds that this discursive ordering "renders places such as Bali equivalents of other places" (even such faraway places as Kenya) by the shared mentality of the "lack of safety" (p. 108). It is a "virtuality effect" meaning mediated form of information has the potential of affecting audience perceptions of the event (Hartley 2002, pp. 232-233). This mediation may

enable the creation of new identities, shaping new emotions by deploying effective discourses.

4.3.2 Uncertainty and anxiety

The disruption of peaceful order simultaneously causes uncertainty, anxiety and anticipation. In the face of a devastating earthquake, people in the affected areas are in a state of extreme anxiety and vulnerability, while the people in other areas that are not affected by the earthquake also get lost in the intense sentiment of uncertainty (Ren 2008; Xu 2013). These pressing sentiments are seen in media texts that may consist of short words or hinted attitudes, but they may exert a powerful discursive sway on the implications of the news texts as registered by the audience. Taking the selected news reports as instances, the implications of uncertainty and anxiety are represented by words, phrases and short sentences, with tones of hesitation, insecurity, and uncertainty, as shown in the following examples:

Exemplary cluster of statements indicating uncertainty and anxiety
Because the system for communication is broken down, the specific conditions in Wenchuan is still not clear, which is severely devastating
according to preliminary information
People all rush out of the buildings and temporarily stay on the streets
missing
All families have to stay outside
run to the street, looking around and waiting
Telecommunication fails to work. The 7. 8 degree earthquake left Wenchuan seriously dilapidated

Table 2 (*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)

In this cluster of statements, lexicons such as "waiting" and "missing", phrases like "looking around", "not clear", or "[t]elecommunication fails to work" depict a sense of uncertainty and apprehension. The situation in the most severely damaged areas still takes on a mythical status; civilians having no homes, waiting in the streets; buildings are collapsed and a broad district is thrown into chaotic disturbance and needs urgently to be fixed. At this stage, both the concrete conditions and possible solutions are uncertain. In such crisis situations, it is "absolutely impossible to conceive of meaning without order" (Lévi-Strauss 1977, p. 12). This uncertainty leads to anxiety and intense searching for effective forms of remedial action, and creates a psychic resonance with humanitarian appeal (Ettema 2005, p. 134). The "interpellative function" (Althusser, in Hartley 2002, p. 146) of these connotative signs welds together the discourse and the audience's empathy, whereby the influence of the discourse is substantiated and lays down the cognitive foundation for further social mobilization. This interpellation serves an important transitional function in the narrative.

These transitional signals also appear as pivots for producing meaning. Their strength comes from the incompleteness of the story and "a basic need for order in the human mind" (Lévi-Strauss 1977, p. 13), which indicates the need for relief actions. They are more proactive in guiding public perceptions, leaving the public concerned about the situation and "drawn into" the proceedings. Schudson argues that a cultural object operates more by insinuating or informing than by overt directing in specific social relations

where the meaning is enacted (1989, p. 170, 175). Uncertainty, anxiety, trauma and anticipation in this case are activated by the emotional affinities between the victims and the audience (see Figure: 3 and 4).

Figure 4 (Zhou Wenji, *Xinhua Net* 20 May, 2008)   **Figure 5** (Jiang Yi, *Xinhua Net*, 20 May, 2008)

The trauma and uncertainty suggested by these pictures result from the intense contradiction between the unexpectedness of the crisis and the urgent anticipation of disaster relief, by which the media discourses become more powerful than usual. In ordinary times the media inform the audience, while in emergency circumstances the media lead the public. This is especially the case when the issue is of the magnitude of the Wenchuan earthquake and the social

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agenda is closely focused on this event. In exploring the efficacy of culture, Swidler (1986) finds that the validity of a culture is closely related to social situations. He argues that when the social setting is one of "ordinary times" the effect of a cultural object is less obvious than during a dramatically-changing situation (Swidler 1986).

The drastic swaying of public opinions generates a demand for crisis leadership. In a time fraught with uncertainty, the public become desperate to hear an unequivocally clear set of responses which dispel the sense of confusion, and in doing so the meaning creates a lucid orientation of the self within the disaster environment (Pan 2012, p. 15). Schudson also suggests the ways by which meaning is produced at critical times:

> At certain moments when society is in flux, more people are searching the skies for culture leadership and a demand for meaning may become as important as the character of the supply of available significance. If such instances are exceptional, they are nonetheless enormously important. (1989, p. 174)

The tendency to be culturally guided and the corresponding "demand for meaning" as discussed by Schudson are due to the uncertainty and anxiety caused by disorderly information flow in a time of crisis. The meaning demanded in this context is the organized construction of discourse formulated from the information in the disruptive event. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake the crisis and its resultant disruptive impact on information flow lead directly to this request for meaning. This is similar to the analysis suggested by Kitch (2003) who applies van Gennep's theory of threefold division in a crisis: the stages of separation, transition and aggregation in

explaining the regularity of meaning transformation from disruptive situation to the state of equilibrium (Gennep 1960, p. Viii).

It is argued that the "separation" occurs in the tearing apart of the social fabric; the "transition" is the phase of meaning reconstruction through answers, healing and so on; and the "aggregation" is the reunification of values in the community (Kitch 2003). This explanation of a disaster is not only valuable in analyzing a social event, but is also applicable in explaining media discourses about the disaster. As indicated by this argument, the crisis produced by the earthquake should be followed by the processes of "transition" and new "aggregation" if the successful restoration of peace should be decisively attained. In terms of the general news narratives, the disruption of normalities is closely associated with the genre of news production.

News stories often follow the sequence of the beginning of a conflict, dealing with it, and an ending. In the Wenchuan earthquake reporting, the "separation" is the temporary termination of the harmonious relationship between people and nature. The media description of this situation then calls for a "transition" to the "aggregation" whereby the social order can be restored. In this process, the media discourse is powerful in clearing the confusion, reshuffling meaning and reuniting the separated perceptions. In the case of news coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake, the transitions in the news narration are channeled by emphasizing people's resistance to the disaster.

4.4 Constructing a "national war" against the earthquake

4.4.1 The construction of the "invader" and "we"

In representing this earthquake, metaphors portraying death and scourges are deployed in order to construct the disaster as an invading force. The term "invader" used in this thesis is a descriptive account of the image about the earthquake as constructed in the selected media texts. In an editorial published for the National Day of Mourning in the *People's Daily*, titled "*Coalescing Unyielding Strength in Pain*" and widely disseminated in mainstream media across the country, the earthquake is termed "the deity of demise" and the "wicked destructor" (May 20, 2008; see also *Xinhua Net* 16 May, 2008). These metaphors confer meaning on the disaster through which the mobilization and rescue actions attain their significance and they "specify and assume specific relations of power and solidarity between categories of participant, projecting an ideological vision of reality" (Hodge and Kress 1988, p. 46).

In doing this, the media constructs a cause for starting a war discourse. What the public first respond to are the damaging consequences caused by the earthquake. Through blaming the earthquake as a personified invader, public attention begins to focus not only on catastrophic results but also on this "cruel invader". This subtle shift of discourse from an account of factual, observed results to reflecting on the cause of the tragedy forms a space for the production of new meanings. At this turning point, the representation of the

earthquake, as a geological phenomenon, is shaped by a discursive signification. Constructing the earthquake as an invader gives reason to why "we" as individuals and collectively as a community should take action to cope with the crisis. This expediency of meaning transformation shifts "us" from a passive situation and vulnerability. By interpreting this disaster in the frame of "we" and the "invader", these disastrous results suggest that "we" have no choice but to face them. The earthquake recovery then becomes a target of "our" struggle. This frame provides a new epistemology for the event, in which the media have an active position.

Corresponding to the earthquake as an invader, the collective "we" is constructed in military-like statements. The "we" represented in disaster news in the media selected in this study is composed of troops and other rescue groups, the fellow citizens who died or were injured in the earthquake and the heroes who are exemplars in disaster relief. The major rescue groups are soldiers in the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police, so their military identity *per se* enables the news reports to use a series of war-related expressions. However, even though the troops indeed bring military associations into accounts of disaster relief, it is not justifiable that it is because of the troops that war discourses are constructed. As explained earlier in this section, the major reason for this war discourse is to transform perceptions about the event rather than constructing them for tracing troops' actions in this event.

In addition, those civil rescue groups and international volunteers who have no military background were also interpreted as joining the war against the earthquake. For instance, *Sichuan Daily* uses the titles "*Thank the Overseas Rescue Groups Who are Fighting in the Disaster Area*" (*Sichuan Daily* 20 May, 2008c) and "*Volunteers, Fighters on the Special Battlefield*" (*Sichuan Daily* 25 May, 2008) to cover voluntary rescue groups. Similarly, the construction of "us" as defenders and fighters in this discourse is strengthened by the recurrent emphasis on heroes and by linking them to the stories (and myths) of real wars in history that are firmly entrenched in China's public memories.

The sacrifices and bravery in fighting disaster threats are core features in defining the "heroes" of this news event. The exemplary heroes manifesting sacrifice for others are seen in the stories such as those about Tan Qianqiu and Liu Ning in *Sichuan Daily* (15 May, 2008b). Tian Qianqiu, a middle school teacher, spread his arms and saved four students from a falling ceiling with the last of his breath (*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008b). Liu Ning, also a teacher in Beichuan, rescued her students at the cost of losing her own daughter (*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008b). Bravery actions are displayed by heroes such as the "60 Warriors in the 'Mine Field'" who spared no effort to provide supplies for victims in mountainous areas (*Sichuan Daily* 24 May, 2013a), and the 800 warriors jumping into the icy water to build a new bridge used for transporting disaster relief materials (*Sichuan Daily* 22 May, 2013). These heroic stories are compared to wars in the history, as shown in the following report:

英雄不远
在弹火纷飞的年代，英雄的壮举是高高举过头顶的炸药包，是奋不顾身扑
向喷火的机枪的胸膛 [...]。 在鲜花盛开的和平时期，英雄更多的是人性
美丽的善举，拳拳关爱的奉献，崇高职责的无畏 [...]。 英雄，不再遥远，
没有轰烈，就在灾难当前，就在我们的身边 [...]。 他们同样伟岸。
Translation:
Heroes Not Afar
In the era when bullets and bombings prevailed, the magnificent feat of the
heroes was holding charges in the hands and rushing into machineguns to stop
the firing with their chests […]. In the peaceful flowery times, heroic actions
are found in more humanitarian deeds, considerate service, and the audacity in
serving the duty […]. Heroes are not from afar and without drama. They are on
our side when disaster befalls […]. They are equally great.   (*Sichuan Daily*
21 May, 2008)

The heroes constructed in this extract represent a group of meanings that tend
to unify individuals' perceptions in this context by extolling attributes of
bravery, resolution and faith, all constructive in strengthening the collective
morale. Through setting up the two sides of this struggle, the premise of a war
against the natural disaster by Chinese people is constructed in the text.

4.4.2 Naming the war and constructing war actions

In the coverage presented by the Chinese media, it explicitly presents the
conception of war against the disaster as a defined image, which may "activate
particular scripts or attitudes" (van Dijk 1988a, p. 16). As mentioned in the last
section, targeting and blaming the disaster delineates the two contradictory
sides. This accommodates the tensions, the unexpectedness and anxieties about
how the situation will develop. At this juncture, articulating the explicit
concept leads the media discourse to a point where it signifies that it is
addressing a solution to the difficulties being experienced by those in the
earthquake zone.

Naming the situation as a war in this circumstance is therefore more about transforming passivity into action as "the cultural producers are able to use the power conferred on them, especially in periods of crisis, by their capacity to put forward a critical definition of the social world" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 64). The call for resisting the earthquake enables the state to achieve a consensus about the crisis in which "there is a general overall agreement about goals and about what should be done" (Xu 2014, p. 93). In this way the media can "explain complex events and ideas to their audiences in relatively simple ways, helping them make sense of events" which "may otherwise be incomprehensible" (Ewart and Dekker 2013, p. 375). It is not just a static simile; rather, the media texts employ a specific vocabulary to formulate a discourse of war and to stimulate vigorous resistance, as shown in the following excerpts from another newspaper, the *Guangming Daily*:

抗震救灾不是一场战争，却胜似一场战争。地震灾害所带来的人员伤亡、财产损失不亚于战争，救援行动的危险性、复杂性不亚于战争，救援行动所要求的协调性、有序性不亚于战争，救援行动所要求的快速反应较之战争也不逊色。

Translation:
The task of resisting the earthquake and carrying out rescue work is not an ordinary war but it is more war-like. The death and injuries it brought about are not less than that in a war; the degree of danger and complexity are no less than in a war; the demand for coordination and order is no less than in a war; and the quick response required for this task is no less than in a real war.

(*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008; *Xinhua Net* 16 June, 2008)

As shown in this extract, the earthquake situation is compared to and defined as a war. Tuchman maintains that media frames material realities "through redefinition, reconsideration, and recounting" in an "ongoing process" (1973, p. 129 see also: Gitlin, 1980, pp. 6-7). In redefining the earthquake, Chinese

media focus on the confrontations and emergencies in the event and highlight its similarity to an imagined war. In framing realities, media make salient part of the reality so as to "promote a particular problem definition" (Entman 1993, p. 52). The constructed definition helps the public read a more organized meaning in a pattern that is easy to understand (Goffman 1986, p. 26).

In this case, the crisis is caused by mystery due to the disrupted flow of information viewed from the perspective of meaning communication around the event. In this angle, it is because of the difficulty in handling the uncertainty of the unpredictable earthquake that produces panic or a perplexing sense of crisis. Therefore, a "simple", "natural" and familiar account helps to "clear up the mystery and restore them [the public] to the range of forces and agents that they are accustomed to" (Goffman 1986, pp. 28-29). Evidently, this procedure is "managed" by information providers (Tuchman 1973, pp. 129-130), that in this case are made up almost exclusively of state-controlled news organizations. The managing and modulating process in this case is textually constructed through pictures and clusters of lexicons, phrases and sentences in which the construction of an imagined war is manifestly articulated:

Exemplary cluster of statements for naming the war of resistance
这是一场艰苦卓绝的持久战。
Translation:
This is an extremely hard war lasting for a long time. (*People Net* 2 June, 2013)
打胜抗震救灾这场硬仗，需要真情更需要实劲。
Translation:
To win this hard war of resisting the earthquake and carry out the rescue work, it needs not only genuine emotions but also substantial strength. (*People Net* 2 June, 2013)
知名理论家、中央党校副校长李君如："在汶川大地震发生以来一个月的日日夜夜，无情的天灾瞬间吞噬了几万条生命，英雄的中国人民立即展开了史无前例的抗震救灾斗争。"
Translation:
Li Junru, a reputable theorist and Vice President of the Party School of the CCP, says, "the

ruthless calamity devoured tens of thousands of lives in a moment, and deaths continued in each of the days and nights after the earthquake. <u>The heroic Chinese people immediately initiated an unprecedented struggle to resist the earthquake and carry out the rescue work.</u>" (*People Net* 15 June, 2008)
水火之急：成都保卫战，抢险战   Translation: The emergency is like fire and flood: <u>the war of protecting Chengdu, the war of carrying out urgent rescue.</u> (*Southern Weekly* 29 May, 2008)
这是新的抗战，这是全民族抗战；面对大自然强加的这场战争   Translation: This is a new war of resistance, <u>a war engaging with the whole nation</u>; in the face of <u>the war imposed by nature</u>. (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013)
灾情就是命令，灾区就是战场。   Translation: All information about the disaster was issued as orders, and <u>the disaster area known as a battlefield</u>. (*Sichuan Daily* 24 May, 2013b)

Table 3

In these extracts it is seen that there is an intentional modulation on the definition of the earthquake, which is managed by introducing the war narrative into the texts. Statements such as a "painstaking long-time war", an "unprecedented struggle of resisting the earthquake", "the war of protecting Chengdu" and "an all nationalistic war", all work to accentuate the imagination of the war of resistance. The media "generate" and "amplify a field of legitimate discourse" through textual measures such as "emphases and tones" (Gitlin 1980, p. 9). The constructed war imaginations in these texts have a "functional significance" in the overall spectacle produced by the discourse of resistance (Eichenbaum 1965, p. 132). That is, the war imaginations are "fundamental components" which provide a setting for articulating resistant actions and community building (Propp 1968, pp. 21-23).

Constructing the imagined war also functions as a context, allowing for the embedding into the texts a series of nationalistic memories of war that are maintained in the national cultural framework, which will be discussed in detail

in Chapter Five. This framed definition in the closest sense indicates an evaluation of the situation and hints at actions to engage with the problem (Entman 1993, p. 52). Arguably, the naming of war suggests the forthcoming narrations of resistant actions in the so far uncompleted media story. As it is proved to be so in the following figures and reporting extracts:

Figure 6   (*Xinhua Net* 25 May, 2008)

Figure 7   (Li Gang, *Xinhua Net* military journalist, 3 June, 2008)

Exemplary cluster of statements for constructing resistance
取得重大阶段性胜利 has achieved major victory of this phase (*People Net* 2 June, 2013)
调动 mobilize (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013)
立体突击 multi-dimensional assault (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013)
吹响冲锋号 blow the bugle (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013)
火速集结 amass swiftly (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013)
生死竞速 life-or-death competition (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013)
突破 breakthrough (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013)
挺近 march (*Sichuan Daily* 24 May, 2013b)

Table 4

As seen in the news pictures and the cluster of statements in coverage, a series of resistant actions is described by verbs such as "assault", "breakthrough" and "march". The decisive use of the low camera angles accentuate the drama of the situation, perhaps reflecting the famous Iwo Jima photographs of Joe Rosenthal that the USA used so effectively in its representations of WWII. The

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Wenchuan photographs construct a division between the two major characters and the manner of their interaction in media story. The situational stimulus and the division make the identities distinctive (Thoits and Virsbup 1997, 116). The war action constructed in these statements clearly differentiates the two narrative characters in the story and regulates the mode of interaction between them as "we actively resist the invader". Identification is formed "across a division" (Hall 1994, p. 123; 1996b, p. 6), which in this case enforces a clear articulation of narrative characters. In doing so, the news reporting is synchronized with the ongoing war of resistance. An overall construction of this war image is therefore produced by the different sections of news articles and editorials that construct the news event where some texts focus on the damage, some on the actions, some on the victories, and some on more general information. Therefore, the complete discursive construction of a "war" may be perceived in one news article or editorial, or through the whole body of reports with its constituting statements.

This construction, transformation and extension of the implications of the news event are commonly applied in news production. It is an intrinsic feature of storytelling in news texts. McQuail argues that normally there are two way of narrating an event as a news story (2005, p. 381). Firstly, the information in an event is organized in a "logical, sequential or causal way"; secondly, the news story tends to adopt a general form of narratives with "principal and minor actors, connected sequences, heroes and villains, a beginning, middle and end" (2005, p. 381). McQuail's propositions explain the overlapping as well as

differentiation between the fact of an event and the interpretation of it in the media. In the case of this earthquake, for example, the initial information is about the geographical situation, the statistics of the damages, and the response of the government, while the following story of a "war" is a mediated construction framed with values.

The hard facts and the opinion-based media construction form two layers in news pieces. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake the news about the hard facts and the construction of a media story are both included in texts. This raises a question of how to understand and maintain facticity in news texts. In answer to this, Morin contends that it demonstrates a coexistence of two modes in a new story: "pure facts" and meaning interpretation (in McQuail 2005, p. 382). As Voloshinov also maintains, "the forms of communication may not be divorced from the material basis", a statement that justifies the facticity and hence credibility of the message (1973, in Hodge and Kress 1994, p. 43). The interpretative construction of an event seems unavoidable as well, especially for an enormous disaster such as this earthquake. The principle of facticity in news production is intrinsically a demand to display the "hard facts" in an objective manner, while the interpretation of the event derives from the media's engagement with the situation and the ways it is framed.

4.4.3 Attribution in framing resistance

Media framing theories maintain that media usually select and emphasize information about an event according to the cultural values of the media. Entman contends that how a news event is defined is the key point in media framing, for it determines the fundamental orientations guiding the whole process (2003, pp. 417-418). In doing this, the framing process in media texts enters into a phase where the cause of an event is attributed to an actor in a media narrative. It is constructed in a virtual image which, in Jean Baudrillard's word, takes the form of a "simulation" (Butler 1999). Baudrillard argues that a symbolic construction of a social reality produces a simulated version of that reality, which is to "realize" or articulate the meaning of the reality (p. 23). In this process, the discourse is dealing with two kinds of phenomenon: a real phenomenon and a hypothetical one (p. 25). The role of simulation is transforming the real phenomenon to a hypothetical version by changing "how things actually are" to "how they could be" (p. 25).

In the media texts of the Wenchuan case, this event is frequently named as a war of resistance, which defines the central relation between communities and the disaster. This definition in the media frame contains two kinds of attribution. The first attributes loss of property and lives to the disaster; the second attributes the cause of the "war" and "resistance" to the devastation brought about by the disaster. How the media both frames and defines a

disastrous event indeed modifies relations among roles in a media story and thus produces different attributive explanations (Entman 2003, pp. 417-418).

Media framing is a process where cultural values are realized in different stages of reporting. Definition and attribution are consecutive phases in the framing. They are coherent in communicating the overall cultural values of the media. The cultural values of media framing in this case are oriented to building a sense of community. These broad values are specifically embodied in the case-specific contexts and represented through a set of judgment and evaluations about the event (Entman 1993, p. 52).

In the frame constructed in the Wenchuan earthquake, the primary concern focuses on people facing the earthquake. The media is especially concerned with communities and their anxieties. In the meantime basic information about the earthquake is delivered to the public to reduce uncertainty. The primary concern apparent in the media frame at the beginning of the event is directed towards the threat and public anxiety. The result of this framing is to attribute the negative sentiments of the public to construct an "invader". This attribution leads to the second judgment produced by the media frame that categorizes the pervasive anxiety and uncertainties in this situation into an imagination of "the Other". This judgment seeks to fix the cause of the anxieties by channeling the destabilizing sentiments to a definite object. It helps the public, trapped in negative feelings, to identify and blame the "Other", so that the public and the "Other", are clearly separated, rather than vaguely intertwined.

This judgment and attribution construct a discourse to comprehend the crisis situation and a line is drawn between people and the crisis, reflecting that "[t]he usual device for grouping and stringing together motifs is the creation of a character who is the living embodiment of a given collection of motifs" (Tomashevsky 1965, pp. 87-88). In doing so, the confused situation is changed to a spectacle of a clearly defined opposition between an imagined character of the "Other" and the people. The basic relation between the people and the disaster is transformed from "the people *in* the disaster" to "the people *and* the disaster".

The framing in media texts of an imagined "Other" naturally leads to an imagined "we", for it is against the "we" in the face of the earthquake that an imagined "Other" is constructed. The concept of "we" in the crisis situation serves to integrate separate and vulnerable individuals into a common identity, to solidify morale and produce confidence in the public imagination of the situation. The creation of this common identity by the media frame displays the form of a humanitarian construction of belonging in the earthquake situation.

These narratives also address the realistic needs to deal with natural disasters. Individuals and families have to seek help from communities and society, therefore the active construction of a common identity by the media helps in mobilizing social support. The constructed dichotomy of the "Other" and "we" produces a prelude to the story of "our" resistance to the "Other". Defining

major actors in media stories and explaining their relation as a form of "resistance" supports community building and as the theory of discourse explains, the process of discursive construction over a real event normally includes three steps: firstly, part of the information is selected to be the focus for elaboration; secondly, the institutions with discursive power, in this case the state media, determine the interpretive framework to be used; and thirdly, a discourse is formulated within this framework (Howarth 2000, p. 53). Evidently, the conceptualization of the "Other", "we" and "resistance" is formulated in this way. In depicting the milieu of the "war", the intense atmosphere and focusing on the confrontational relation between the earthquake and the people as a community, the mainstream media guides the information flow into broader cultural frames.

4.5 Framing earthquake as the "Other"

On analyzing the media texts selected for this study, it is found that Chinese media use four methods for constructing images of the earthquake: implicit allusion; explicit statement; metaphor; and historic analogy. In this event, the earthquake as a constructed character in the media story is a "guiding thread which makes it possible to untangle a conglomeration of motifs and permits them to be classified and arranged" (Tomashevsky 1965, p. 88). In so doing, the earthquake takes on an "identity" of a special being, capable of subjectivity. Its characterization underpins ideological considerations for meaning

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production, which is constitutive of "the category of the subject and its functioning" (Althusser 1992, p. 54). By using textual measures, the media characterizes the earthquake as the "Other" and the negative information is categorized into it by which the media discourse constructs stories and explanations out of the uncertain situation.

At the initial stage of media coverage, implicit allusion is used in constructing images of the earthquake. This method presents an intense, indefinite and unpredictable image. There are two reasons to account for why this method is adopted. Firstly, at the beginning of the event what attracts the media most are the consequences of the earthquake; secondly, an effective way to depict an image of the earthquake is by visually presenting shocking and psychologically turbulent scenes. However, the imagination constructed at the early stage of the earthquake is vague, as the following extract displays:

昨日下午 2 点 28 分———
强震波及成都·亲历
[…]
现场：华兴街
  餐馆下起"瓦片雨"
  "我正在吃面，突然瓦片全掉在我碗里了！"昨日下午 2 点过，成都市民王贺刚正在华兴街吃面，突然觉得地上一阵抖动。刚开始他还以为是外面有卡车经过。随后，头上、桌上掉下了一些瓦渣，王贺刚正准备换个位置吃，只见餐馆里面噼里啪啦开始落下巴掌大的瓦片，餐馆的墙壁和木梁也开始摇晃并发出"吱呀"声。
  冲到街上后他看见，华兴街上一排老瓦房的窗棂、板凳都晃倒了，一些从王府井附近几个高楼里跑出来的人都跑到大街上观望。
Translation:
2: 28 Yesterday Afternoon
On-site experience of the strong earthquake wave
[…]
Site: Huaxing Street
The "rain of tiles" fell onto restaurant.
  "When I was eating noodles, the tiles fell into my bowl!" Shortly after 2 pm yesterday, a civilian in Chengdu City, called Wang Hegang, was eating noodles on Huaxing Road. Suddenly he felt the ground trembling. At the beginning, he thought it was because of a truck passing. Afterwards, some tile pieces fell onto

his head and table. Then he wanted to change a table to continue, but palm-sized tiles kept falling down, as the walls and wooden beams of the restaurant shook and cracking sounds prevailed.

   After he dashed outside, he saw all the window bars and stools in a row of old buildings on Huaxing Street fell. Some people rushed out of skyscrapers near Wangfujing, looking around and waiting on the street.

(*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)

In this extract, statements such as "felt the ground trembling", "palm-sized tiles kept falling down" and "cracking sounds prevailed" depicts fragmented information of the earthquake. The implicit allusion constructs a flat narrative character that is somewhat incoherent, fragmented and opaque (Forster 1927; Chatman 1978; Hochman 1985). The narratives of the earthquake so far are exhibited as constructed in second-hand descriptions fraught with conjectures and hesitations. The principal method used in implicit allusion as shown in this extract is using individuals' snapshot experiences to describe the event (in this instance, the earthquake).

After the disaster situation becomes clearer, explicit statements are adopted to provide basic statistics about the disaster. This method constructs the image of earthquake as a fact by describing its magnitude, the area affected and the number of victims. Through explicit presentation the earthquake stands out as a news fact. In comparison to implicit allusion, explicitly stating data about the earthquake orientates the media texts to describing an objective event. This is shown in the following extract:

截至 14 日 16 时，这次灾害已造成 17 个市州 14463 人死亡、1405 人失踪、25788 人被埋、64746 人受伤、415 万余间房屋损坏、21.6 万余间房屋倒塌。
Translation:
Up until 16:00 on the 14th of this month, 14,463 died in 17 cities and prefectures, 1,405 were missing, 25,788 buried, 64,746 injured, more than

4,150,000 houses damaged, and over 216,000 houses collapsed in the earthquake area. (*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008a)

As in this extract, the hard facts about the earthquake are reported, as evidenced by the location of the event and the latest statistics. From extract one to extract two the image of the earthquake becomes clearer and the uncertain situation is replaced by objective statistics and facts. However, the media texts are limited to releasing information about the facts. As well as reporting the facts the media texts further explain the meaning of the event by producing newer images about it. In this value-adding phase the media use metaphors to construct the earthquake as the "Other".

[…] 汶川大地震 […] 与死神搏斗[…] 狰狞恐怖的自然断裂 […] 是对脆弱生命的无情摧残[…]
Translation:
[…] Wenchuan earthquake […] the deity of demise […] wicked destructor […] is an emotionless scourge on fragile lives […].
(*People's Daily* 20 May 2008; see also *Xinhua Net* 16 May, 2008)

[…] 地震给我带来的恐怖和悲伤超出了我所有的想象。就这一点来说，这个恶魔成功了。
Translation: The terror and sorrow brought about to me by the earthquake exceed all my imaginations. In this sense, this evil deity succeeded.

抢险堰塞湖的官兵最后撤离，在狂暴的自然面前，他们拼尽了全力。他们问心无愧。
Translation:
The troops rushing to deal with the emergencies at the dammed lake finally evacuated. In the face of the raging nature, they have tried their best. They feel no regret for the evacuation.
(Li Gang, *Xinhua Net* military journalist, 3 June, 2008)

In this extract, the earthquake is constructed as an evil actor in the media story. The cluster of expressions used to describe it characterizes it, and links this character to the stereotype of otherness. Using metaphors to depict an earthquake is a way to apply cultural signs as "[t]hese stocked signs already have meanings, circumscribing their later use" (Schwimmer 2009, p. 166).

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They introduce cultural imaginations into news narratives. In doing so, the meaning of the earthquake is easier to communicate for the cultural signs selected to frame the earthquake are routinely used. Cultural signs such as "deity of demise "and "wicked destructor" (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008), signify a meaning of danger, and constitute a cultural code in China's social discourse (Alexander and Jacobs 1998, p. 30). Through this connection between news facts and cultural codes the news reporting outlines a broad and profound map of cultural meanings.

Another technique suggests an analogy between the earthquake and national memories of war. Interpreting the earthquake through a frame of historical memories is specifically made possible by representing the earthquake as noted as an imagined "invader". By applying this historical analogy, the earthquake is juxtaposed with invaders in the history of the Chinese nation, as the following text displays:

在中华民族历史上，国家危亡之时，正是民族精神高涨之际。抗日战争时期，日本帝国主义的入侵给中华民族带来了空前的危机 [...]。在改革开放的新时期，自然灾难发生之时，也正是民族精神激昂之际。1998 年的抗洪救灾、2003 年的抗击非典以及今年年初抗击冰雪灾害 [...]，这次地震灾害，给中华民族的生存和发展带来了危难。

Translation：
In the history of the Chinese nation, when the nation was facing a life-or-death crisis, the national spirit rose to a high degree. Over the period of the war against Japanese imperialists, the enemies invaded the Chinese nation and brought the Chinese nation to a historically unexpected peril […]. In the new era of open-door reform, when a natural disaster happened, a nationalistic spirit sprang up. The big flood in 1998, the SARS in 2003, the blizzard in this year […], and the big earthquake caused a huge crisis in the destiny and development of the Chinese nation.

(*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008)

In this extract the earthquake is juxtaposed against enemies and stereotypical events of the past. The historical analogy shown in this text is one of "the devices of characterization" by which the earthquake is constructed as a narrative actor in the story (Tomashevsky 1965). Constructing characters in the text enables the author to unravel confused information, to classify and to construct a delineated theme out of the disorderly information (Tomashevsky 1965). In this event the earthquake as an "evil enemy" serves to attract, absorb, and contain negative information about the crisis, which seems directionless as it begins. In doing so, the flat actor is constructed as a round actor (Forster 1927). The roundness of the "invader" is filled full with negative information.

Arguably, the construction of images of the earthquake in the media texts shows a gradual process moving from vague descriptions and statistical accounts to engagement with deep cultural codes. In this narration, the narrative characters are constructed by various attributes assigned through textual methods that produce a cumulative "character-effect" (Bal 1997, p. 118). The cluster of words and sentences generates an overall image of characters that assist in the author's assessment and construction of the characters (Chatman 1978, p. 132; Hochman 1985, p. 89). This process can be displayed in the following diagram:

The process of Othering the earthquake				
Constructed Images	Vague image	Facts	Wicked destructor Deity of demise	The invader
Methods	Implicit allusion	Explicit statement	Metaphor	Historic analogy

Table 5

The different images constructing the earthquake form an "Othering" process about the earthquake. Applying different signs, the media incorporate the image of the earthquake into existing cultural imaginations. When this image is embedded in national historic narratives, the cultural identity of the earthquake as an "Other" is finally established. Even though the earthquake is personified in earlier coverage its cultural identity as an "Other" is finally established when it is positioned in a war narrative where the differences between we and the "Other" are highlighted.

The cultural imaginations closely associated with signs such as the "deity of demise" and the "wicked destructor" (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008) are images of evil, horror, threat and Otherness. They derive from conventional representations in a culture, such as images of the enemy in movies, ghosts in stories, evil characters in literature or invaders in historic memories. In sum, the signs used here are symbols of evil threatening "our" lives (Alexander and Jacobs 1998, p. 30). Through reintroducing these imaginations already existing in a social culture the media formulate a map of meaning for understanding the earthquake (Hall 1997, p. 17). Entman argues that it is necessary to incorporate existing cultural frames into texts and thus combine media frames with cultural frames in order to generate resonance in the audience (1993, p. 53).

The interactions between forms of "we" and the "Other" are also constructed by deploying cultural signs that represent a discourse of resistance, as shown in

the phrases used in several publications such as "a new war of resistance and an all nationalistic war" (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013) and "life-or-death competition" (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013). These signs structure the relation between the "Other" and "we" into a discourse of resistance that transforms the media spectacle of the event.

Firstly, the media spectacle produced by the discourse of resistance is different from the one produced by ordinary disaster rescues. The coverage of the disaster rescue is principally focused on facts, while the constructed discourse of resistance uses a series of metaphors to create an imagined war between "we" and the "Other". That is, the discourse of resistance is more about a construction of cultural imagination than a reflection of facts in the event. After all, there is no real war out there on the site. It is only a cultural imagination evoked by the discourse of resistance, which is used to bring the information about the event into a cultural frame. The key concepts of "we" and the "Other" in this frame transform accounts of the event into a process of cultural identity formation. In this process the media combine two layers of spectacle: a layer of information about the facts and a second layer of constructed imagination.

These cultural frames and imaginations are essentially the frames of the mental representations of people living in this environment. Entman argues that media framing cannot be fulfilled until there is a combination of the frame in the text and the frame in the existing culture (1993, p. 53). These abstract frames are

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the parts shared by individuals' cultural thinking (Hall 1997, p. 18). When the signs representing cultural frames are introduced into news narratives audiences are propelled to interpret news events through the cultural frames associated particular signs. In constructing a media spectacle of "war", narratives about battles and fighting evoke a cultural imagination of "war" from the public. Imaginings about "war" are common themes in a social culture, which lay a foundation for the media to evoke them in public discourses. Embedding a cultural frame in the texts facilitates the values held by the media to be communicated to an audience.

Secondly, signs of war and resistance also change the passive position of the communities in the story to an active one. Battles, wars and resistance imply that the threatened communities are taking action to fight the threat. The discourse of resistance pins down the "Other" as a target to resist and fight and in the Wenchuan case, before the discourse of resistance is fully constructed, the differing accounts of the earthquake produce a disorderly flow of information which is to be structured in order so as to relieve the panic. This shift of relations between the two major actors is intrinsically caused by the discourse of the "fight with the earthquake" signified in the media texts. This helps communities to escape the confused mental entanglement of the crisis situation. The communities may begin to separate their position and define it in opposition to the crisis situation. The application of the discourse of resistance makes the identities of both sides clearer.

Thirdly, the tone of news narratives is changed by the discourse of resistance. In the early period of the event the tone of news narratives is filled with terror and intense uncertainty; in the period when the aftermath of the earthquake is intensively covered the tone of reporting is characterized by a rising sense of crisis and the texts display disorder and helpless residents in disaster sites. In this circumstance a series of signs about warfare deploys cultural resources to transform the sense of fragility to the hope for victory in this imagination of communities resisting the "Other". The notion of hope is intermittently pointed out and emphasized by the tone of narration. The subtle change of tone in the media frame also comes from the media's values of humanitarian community building in covering the natural disaster.

The construction of communities and the discourse of resistance both work to incorporate people into a shared sense of belonging. This is constructive in relieving anxiety, for one of the major reasons for this negative psychological state is a lack of support and confidence when people are separated in a crisis situation. In evoking the sense of community and active collective resistance against a "deity of demise" and a "wicked destructor" the media spectacle of crisis is moved to an imagination of solid collective resistance (20 May, 2008). In this narrative, the two contradictory identities are symbolically negotiated, contrasted and defended. Identity is always discursively constructed "across a division, from the place of the Other" (Hall 1996b, p. 6). In other words, the

transforming of tone in news narratives results in a change of relationships between actors in the media story about this event.

In framing this event, the deployment of signs and construction of imaginations is grounded on factual information about the event. Entman claims that the forming of media frames has to be empirically demonstrable (1993, p. 53). The deploying of signs and cultural resources cannot work without the support of information about news facts. The credibility of narratives in the media frame is based on the relevance and similarity between actuality and the media representations. To put it more specifically, the relations constructed among actors in the media story should be similar, in certain perspectives and at certain degrees, to the relations among the participants in actuality.

As noted earlier, Derrida contends that this similarity is a "trace" or "minimal remainder" (Howarth 2000, p. 39) of meaning that links the news event to a media frame. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the main parts of the media frame, such as the actors in the media story and their relations, are constructed in considering the similarities with news facts. In this case, the earthquake is indeed a threatening "invader", and people are indeed involved in a shared sense of crisis. This provides an empirical basis for the media frame to evoke "we" the communities, and the "Other" the earthquake, and to formulate a discourse of active resistance. This resemblance is necessary in using the metaphor of war in this case. For a signification to have an effect, it should

"involve a constructed equivalence between the sign and the reality it represents" (Fiske and Hartley 2003, p. 32). The representation in this case is similar to the way a map or a scale model creates "an equivalent form in whose features we can recognize those of the object itself" (p. 32).

This intermediate resemblance converges news facts with cultural frames. The interpretation of the event is based on the facts but also goes beyond the information about the event to express what it means. In this case, interpretation of the event is shown as a process of adding cultural imaginations to the news facts. The constructed media spectacle produced by images is, at most, similar to the news facts, rather than identical. This is because, if the "simulation" (Bignell 2002, p. 7; Butler 1999, p. 43) of the event was absolutely identical to the event itself, there would be no space for media texts to add interpretations to the event. The media are therefore able to introduce images of communities, the "Other" and of "resistance" into the interpretation of the event. The earthquake is not a "war", and factually there is no "Other". But the earthquake situation generates the potential space to establish communal identity, the "Other" and "resistance" in the cultural imagination.

However, this similarity ensures the credibility of framing, and the ultimate purpose of the frame is to create a simulated reality. Through restructuring imaginations about the reality the media communicate pre-determined cultural

values. The simulated reality is linked to, but different from, "real" scenes of the event, otherwise it would be unnecessary for the media to frame and construct. This artificiality constructs understandings that cannot be completed through releasing only the factual information of the event. In this case, the pursuit of framing is to unite the public imagination in a crisis situation and construct a sense of community in order to relieve social anxiety by uniting the fragmented identifications.

4.6 Framing "communities"

Chinese media's construction of the two opposing actors in narrating the Wenchuan earthquake as explained earlier in this chapter complies with the way symbolic communities are formed. The symbolic engagement and psychological attachment that produce communal belonging also shape mental representations of communities (Anderson 2006). The symbolic statements formed are versatile and malleable in defining sameness and difference to construct symbolic communities, whereby the tensions in a community can be alleviated (Cohen 1985, pp. 92-94). Especially under crisis circumstances, the symbolically formulated community may help to provide meaning and attain consensus among the public, and therefore reconfirm the cohesive strength of a group, community or society (p. 92). Given that a particular community in a society is symbolically and culturally constituted, constructing a community discourse is a prerequisite for providing people with an identity and a sense of

communal membership. What Cohen emphasizes is the integrative function of a constructed community, in a time when the benefits of the community are challenged. However, the specific measures that can be applied in building a symbolic community should be considered.

The efficacy of building up a symbolic community that possesses both cultural resonance and practical relevance is associated with emotional responses, the nature of an event and the concept coding tactics. As opposed to communities that are mostly created by blood lineage and geographical closeness, Delanty argues that postmodern communities are "nomadic, highly mobile, emotional and communicative" (2010, p. 104) and emphasizes that people experiencing a loss or trauma may manifest a greater sense of belonging to a community (p. 107).

The traumatic nature of an event such as the Wenchuan earthquake produces longing for community as a socio-psychological mechanism that derives from the need for support from society. Even though emotions of loss and trauma are psychological outcomes in individual people, the ultimate source of this emotion is the event that people experience. The underlying reasons for the trauma are the factors that cause the death, injuries, and tragedies and it is these "malignant" factors that ultimately give rise to emotional reactions and feelings of community membership.

These factors are also often constructed as antagonistic actors in locating the boundary of "our" community and the alien threat. As in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the uncertainty, anxiety and feeling of loss in negotiating the crisis situation are transformed through a catharsis of emotions attained by naming the disaster as the initiator of these "evil" deeds. Kenneth Burke argues that the ritual construction of the "symbolic utility" is accompanied by "creating differences" as well as "identifying similarities" (in Haes, Hüsken and Velde 2011, p. 189). The coherence and unity of our community is seen as "sacred", which sets up a binary contrast with the unity of "profane" nature (Haes, Hüsken and Velde 2011, pp. 189-190). The boundary delineating and labelling in this creates a "ritualized discourse" (p. 190) that becomes the "dominant cultural code" (p. 190). For a further exploration of the communities generated in the coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake it is necessary to clarify what a community is, how it is created and to what extent discursive methods may enhance its formation.

The term "community" is defined by its essential characteristics. Borrowing the definition given by Hillery, three features are indispensable in forming a community: shared location, ties, and interaction among members (1955, in Bernard 1973, p.3). The shared location denotes the geographical togetherness of a group of people; however, in a world saturated with hi-tech communication facilities, it inevitably includes the closeness or sameness in terms of psychological attachment in the space created by media. The ties in the community may consist of the interests, values or moral pursuits shared by

a group of people. They are constituted and sustained through communications among people in a group. This shared commonality in members' minds creates a cohesive power that transcends the physical differences and distance among community members. It generates a "high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time" (Nisbet 1967, in Bernard 1973, p. 4).

The cohesion of a community may be generated by building "us" and "the invader" in this case because of the transferability of community locale through symbolic measures, dependable symbolic interaction and the articulation of values prevailing media coverage. As Amit argues, even though contemporary societies are mobile and communities like *Gemeinschaft* only existed in history when social interactions were of a face-to-face style, a community that is symbolically connected may possess similar strengths (Amit 2002, p. 17). Morley and Robins also claim that there are "aspirations directed beyond the locality" (1999, p. 349) to re-imagine inclusiveness in a "hyperspace" (p. 347) or any "new forum for public discourse" (p. 350). However, this does not mean that the sense of community is wholly ideational (Amit 2002, p. 17). It also has to be reliant on actual social relations (p. 18). Arguably, if there are no actual social links among people, it is challenging to create an imagined common identity among them.

This dialectic of actual associations and the symbolic construction of a community are shown in Amit's criticism of over-confidence in the efficacy of

human constructions. Following Anderson's concept of the imagined community (2006), it is suggested that the power of a constructed community is often overestimated in its role of generating collective perceptions, communal cohesion and even in initiating collective actions (Amit and Rapport 2002, p. 18). The point Amit does not make clear is what produces these actual links, or actual social relations. In fact, shared values are important in creating and maintaining actual social interactions and these may be values of blood kinship, economic, political, ethical or moral beliefs. They serve as roots in cultivating communal identity and consciousness (Mansfield 2000, p. 3).

In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the community building is based on both the imagined forms as discussed in this chapter and the actual associations among the people involved in this event. Firstly, the people whose lives are threatened by the earthquake are widely and "actually" connected with people all over the country (such as relatives, friends, associates across different provinces); secondly, the values of "our" country, of our "sisters" and "brothers" of the same "mother" country are important parts of Chinese nationalism; thirdly, the community constructed in this discourse are substantially supported by organized mobilizations from different parts of the country in this period, such as fund-raising, public mourning and voluntary rescue participation. These activities provide a setting for the media to crystallize the shared pursuit of community building. As Amit explains:

> Community arises out of an interaction between the imagination of solidarity
> and its realisation through social relations and is invested both with powerful
> affect as well as contingency.   (2002, p. 18)

Another factor needing to be mentioned in enhancing community building is what Warner explains as "the integrative nature of conflict with an outside enemy" (Bernard 1973, p. 63). In the light of what Warner see as "non-structural factors" for upholding a community, the war discourse in natural disaster news appears to be justifiable (Bernard 1973, p. 63), as is the role of enemy, or constructed "invader" in this case, to enhance communal cohesion, Warner claims that:

> [e]xtraordinarily powerful common symbols were necessary to counteract the
> disintegrative effect of the collective representations of conflicting groups.
>   (Warner and Associates 1949, in Bernard 1973, p.64)

Viewed from Warner's perspective, the declaration of a "war" against the natural disaster is one of the "extraordinarily powerful common symbols" to impact public sentiment trapped in the sense of crisis. It is a mobilizing slogan by which a "conceptual haven" is offered to "safely circumscribe potentially infinite webs of connection" (Amit and Rapport 2002, p. 17). By formulating this discourse the media stimulate active responses following the unexpected intrusion of an event. In Warner's words, the disruption and integration of order has to be "bridged" (Amit and Rapport 2002, p. 64).The narration of a conflict in this situation serves as an intermediate route for constructing an integrative discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that producing meaning and constructing a unified sense of belonging for people involved in a natural disaster situation plays an important role in disaster relief. The cohesive feeling of belonging and the sense that there is support available for the emotional and physical rebuilding of the dilapidated area are all critical for a comprehensive and systematic crisis control. Evidently, without a meaning structure to relieve the uncertainty and trauma of people, and to help them positively face the challenge through the backing up from a communal identity, it is difficult to show that the crisis is being controlled.

This chapter examined the construction of community by describing and briefly analyzing the design of media reports, and the framing of a war of resistance in the 2008 Chinese media constructions of the Wenchuan earthquake. Through analyzing the framing process in the period when the earthquake was intensively covered a frame of war is seen to have been constructed. In doing so, the Chinese media have produced a constructed imagination in media stories, and thus formulated a structure of meaning in the vacuum caused by the abrupt disruption to regular activities following the earthquake. This Chapter described the textual process of the characterization of key narrative actors. It is argued that the media tried to facilitate the crisis control through framing stories and thus relieved the uncertainty and anxiety

caused by disorderly information flows and the lack of meaning in this crisis situation.

This chapter also maintained that the characterization of the earthquake was set to help construct a cohesive identification for the people affected by the trauma and terror. Through differentiating the disorderly information and categorizing the negative imagination into the imagined "invader", a dichotomized structure of meaning is formulated that relieves uncertainty and unifies dispersed people with a cohesive feeling of belonging to a community. Within this frame, how can a cluster of shared meaning be signified to form a coherent sense of belonging is critical; otherwise the foregoing process will lead to a deterioration and further terrorization of the crisis rather than facilitating control. That is, the ultimate intention of this discursive process lies in helping people by constructing a perceived "togetherness". The core for achieving it is dependent on effectively signifying a cluster of potential meanings for creating a cohesive feeling of belonging. The next chapter will address this question and investigate how a cohesive sense of belonging towards a national, Chinese, cultural identity was textually signified, contextualized and engaged with contemporary Chinese nationalism in media coverage of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

Chapter Five

Articulating Chinese National Identity in the 2008

Wenchuan Earthquake Coverage

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the community building and the Othering process in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, this chapter goes on to dissect how a collective Chinese national identity is constructed. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, the central question of this study is to investigate how media is potentially used to control a natural disaster crisis by creating meanings. This chapter looks at how a sense of belonging is constructed by the Chinese media to cope with the confusion and uncertainty in the information flows in the coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake. The community building and the consolidation that arise from the sense of belonging affect the confidence and will of the people in the earthquake, so this chapter explores how this process is achieved in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake. In addressing these questions, this chapter specifically looks at the association of the war narrative with China's national consciousness and its national memories. In addition, the analysis in this chapter dissects how the war

narrative serves as both a news making approach and a cultural code for nation building and meaning production.

5.1 Constructing national identity in the coverage

In covering the Wenchuan earthquake, Chinese media emphatically constructed a sense of "we". The cluster of textual elements in the media in this case "hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser 1992, p. 55). Multiple approaches were used to achieve this. In a synthetic review of the media texts covering this event, three constructed images can be identified. The images constructed for people involved in the first approach are those of anxiety and the perceived threat of the earthquake. Under this approach, victims involved are recognized as frightened, passive and directionless, or as helpless witnesses. Therefore the images reported in the media showed a situation where victims' behaviors were unstable and unpredictable, as the following cluster of statements shows:

Exemplary cluster of statements in portraying confused individuals in the crisis
一些从王府井附近几个高楼里跑出来的人都到大街上观望。 Translation: Some civilians coming out of the buildings near Wang Fu Jing Street run to the street, <u>anxiously looking around and waiting</u>. (*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)
"我从 13 楼跑下来，透过玻璃看到地面上已经聚集了很多人。" 等小郑跑到距离大楼较远的地方时，发现大街上到处都是跑出来的人，他才确信自己经历了场地震。 Translation: When I ran downstairs from the 13th floor, I saw through glass <u>lots of people who had gathered outside</u>. (*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)

在整个大楼剧烈摇晃的过程中，这个男生对着镜头记录下地震发生的时间 "2008 年 5 月 12 日，成都真的发生地震了，大楼还在摇晃！"[...] 只见学生们纷纷往楼下疏散。 Translation: While the huge building was shaking violently, this man noted down the time when the earthquake happened in front of the camera. "On 12 May, 2008 the earthquake occurred in Chengdu. The building is still shaking at the moment." […]. <u>Students are evacuating one after another</u>. (*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)
记者抬头看见天花板上的吊灯在剧烈摇晃，似乎要马上掉下来。随着震感越来越强烈不少人都开始往门口涌。 Translation: The journalist sees the chandelier on the ceiling is shaking violently. It is about to fall down. As the degree of quaking increases, <u>many people rush to the gate</u>. (*Sichuan Daily* 13 May, 2008)
[...] 严重的灾情、巨大的救灾难度超出人们的想象 [...] 安县茶坪乡、高川乡 1.5 万余人无法联系，情况不明 [...]。 Translation: […] The circumstance in the earthquake is serious. It is beyond our imagination how difficult it is to conduct disaster rescue […] in the rural area of Chaping and Gaoshan in An County, there are <u>15,000 people lost</u>. Their conditions are not clear […]. (*Sichuan Daily* 14 May, 2014)

Table 6

In the cluster of expressions in these extracts, a passive image of the people involved in the earthquake is constructed. Lexicons selected to construct narrative characters produce a cumulative image of them in storytelling (Hochman 1985). In the extractions above, expressions such as "anxiously looking around and waiting", "many people rush to the gate", and "15,000 people lost" construct an image of scattered, disorganized and helpless people in the texts. This is the initial textual technique used in depicting the victims as a distinct narrative character.

In the second approach the role of the rescuers was highlighted by constructing them through their strong collective action. This posed a contrast to the image of passive victims in the first approach. In the media texts, the rescuers were drawn from different sectors of society, such as troops and medical workers. This redirection of narrative character construction changed the general media image of the whole event. Firstly, the role of "we" in the whole picture became

clearer when the vague image was made specific by emphasizing active rescuers. Secondly, this shift changed people's response to the earthquake from a passive position of suffering to an active fighting state. Thirdly, a specific image of "we" was constructed through describing collective actions, as shown in the following report:

灾情就是命令，时间就是生命。灾情发生后，省委、省政府作出反应，要求灾区紧急动员，组织机关干部、民兵和群众就地开展救灾自救。立即成立了省"5.12"抗震救灾指挥部，启动应急预案，紧急部署抗震救灾工作，特别是对救援、物资、医疗、救济等作出具体安排。省委、省政府领导干部在第一时间赶到灾区，组织开展抗震救灾工作。各级领导干部迅速行动，深入一线，靠前指挥，组织各种力量，充分发动群众，全力以赴抗震救灾。

Translation:

The disaster is like a command for urgent actions. In such an occasion, the time to carry out rescue work is as precious as human lives. After the earthquake, the CCP Sichuan Committee and Sichuan Provincial Government urged the cadres, the military and the masses to initiate a form of self-rescue. A "5.12" headquarters has been set up to launch measures for dealing with the emergency. The headquarters stipulates concrete strategies for conducting rescue actions such as the ability to maintain living necessities and medical services. The officials from the CCP Sichuan Committee and Sichuan Provincial Government arrived at the disaster area to organize rescues immediately after the earthquake. Leading cadres at different levels took urgent actions. They went to the Frontline to organize and unite the people to spare no pains in carrying out disaster relief. (*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008c)

As shown in this extract, the "people" in the media texts are constructed to be highly organized groups who are mobilized and take rapid action to start disaster relief. Statements such as "the CCP Sichuan Committee and Sichuan Provincial Government", "[c]adres of different levels take actions rapidly" and "[t]hey organize different groups to sufficiently unify people" exhibit an authoritative and empowered "character effect" in the text (Bal 1997, p. 118). Compared with the previous incoherent, fragmented and opaque image, the "people" in this extract are constructed with "coherence", "wholeness" and "dynamism" (Hochman 1985, p. 89). This transition is due to the fact that the media select the groups of people who enhance a positive representation in

order to mobilize disaster relief. It is acknowledged that the tragic scenes of the victims do appear in the text covering the overall situation, but in constructing the war narrative in the mediated space the mobilized people are especially highlighted. This is because constructing the war narrative requires the image of the people to be dynamic and ready to engage in the resistance.

However, these changes in depicting people are limited to the disaster event itself; that is, it did not draw on cultural signs in constructing an image of "we". The difference between directionless people and the active, organized rescuers reported was shaped by a technical modulation in reporting perspectives, along with the facts of the situation, and they did not transcend the scope of "real" scenes in the disaster area. The image of a collective "we" was formed mainly by a socio-psychological reflex that led to urgent actions in the face of the earthquake. The media discourse played only a peripheral role in the formation of the collective incentives. However, the collective "we" sets up a positive image enhancing the construction of a cohesive cultural identity of "we" to be drawn upon in later periods.

The construction of "our" Chinese cultural identity in this event started when "we" were named as a nation and situated in a cultural frame of nationalism. This transition is conducted in the media formulation of national consciousness, which is a sense of belonging to an imagined nation (Hall 1996a, pp. 611-615); national memories, which include "founding myths and myths of origin, mythical figures, political success, times of prosperity and stability, defeats and

crises" (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 31); and then leading to a final representation of national cultural identity. As displayed in the following extracts:

Exemplary cluster of statements used to represent nationalist consciousness
惨烈的天灾 [...] 震醒了中国人思想深处的高尚情怀和共同信念——过去很长一段时间里，人们一度认为它被现代化的激烈竞争、市场化的锱铢必较遮盖掩埋。 Translation: The horrifying natural disaster […] awakens <u>the honorable sentiments and the shared belief hidden in the depth of Chinese minds</u> - people have been for a long time deeming that this sentiment and belief are concealed by the competition in the process of modernization and repressed by the parsimony in the market system. (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008)
一个迈上复兴之路的国家，一个历经劫难的民族，在严峻考验下顽强前行。 Translation: <u>A state</u> on a way to rejuvenation, <u>a nation</u> with a long history of scourges, strenuously progresses under stern challenges. (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008)

Table 7

Exemplary cluster of statements used to represent national memories
中华民族在五千年长河中也曾经历太多苦难，但文明血脉一直未绝，民族历史一直绵延，正是在与每一次灾难的碰撞中，我们的民族不断激发出新的精神资源。 Translation: <u>The Chinese nation has experienced overwhelming tribulations, but its lineage of civilization</u> has never ceased and its <u>national history persists</u>. It is in the clashes with disasters that <u>continuous spiritual assets spring out within our nation</u>. (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008)
国家危亡之时，正是民族精神高涨之际。 Translation: Whenever the nation faces a crisis, the national spirit rises up. (*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008)
日本帝国主义入侵 [...] 改革开放时期 [...] 1998 年抗洪救灾、2003 年的抗击非典、今年年初抗击冰雪灾害，全民族万众一心、众志成城、迎难而上、敢于胜利，民族精神得到了锤炼和升华。 Translation: The invasion of the Japanese imperialists […] the era of the open-door reform […] resisting the big flood in 1998, combating SARS in 2003 and the snowstorm early this year, in these situations <u>the whole nation is of one mind</u> and the cohesive faith; therefore the difficulties can be overcome. In these events, the <u>national spirits</u> are shaped and sublimated. (*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008)
《多难何以兴邦》 Translation: How could the multiple disasters make a nation thrive? (*Southern Weekly* 5 June, 2008b)
《汶川震痛，痛出一个新中国》 Throes in Wenchuan Produce a New China (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013)
尊重生命，铭记苦难，将使一个国家在挫折中奋起，将让一个民族在磨难中前行。 Treasuring lives and <u>keeping the scourges in mind</u> enable a state to stand up from the setbacks, and have the nation advance even though there are hardships. (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008)

Table 8

Exemplary cluster of statements in constructing national identity
他们是父亲、母亲、儿女、兄妹，是我们血肉相连的骨肉同胞，是共和国无法割舍的挚爱。这份痛楚，将由 13 亿中国人共同承受；这份哀伤，将由中华民族一起分担。 Translation: They are <u>fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters</u>. They are <u>compatriots</u>

connected to us with blood and flesh, the beloved that cannot be separated from the Republic. The pain will be shouldered together by 1.3 billion Chinese. This sorrow will be shared by the whole Chinese nation. (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008)
任何困难都难不倒英雄的中国人民！ Translation: No difficulties could defeat the heroic Chinese. (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008)
同胞走好！四川雄起！！中国加油！！！ 2008 年 5 月 19 日 14 点 28 分：四川、成都、天府广场，热泪交织呐喊 […] 昨天是全国哀悼日的第一天。一大早，广场上就拉起"深切哀悼四川汶川大地震遇难同胞"的横幅，聚集起了无数前来哀悼的人们。志愿者们发放小白花，广场旗杆前排满了花圈和鲜花。有人在花前合十祈祷，有人在花圈前深深地鞠躬，还有人跪在地上痛哭不已[…]。 下午 2 点 28 分，防空警报拉响，所有人手牵手高举过头顶，埋头为遇难者默哀。一条黑色横幅"同胞，走好"拉开。"同胞们，走好！四川，雄起！"人群中突然传出了一声呐喊。瞬间，所有人沸腾了，"雄起，雄起！"声此起彼伏。"中国万岁，中国万岁!"拳头一次次高举，呐喊声一声声响起。 "起来，不愿做奴隶的人们 […]"。人群中有人唱起了国歌。有人高高挥舞起五星红旗，大家用自己最响亮的声音齐声相和 […] 烈日当空，分不清人们的脸上到底是汗水还是泪水。 Translation: Farewell to Compatriots! Come on Sichuan! Come on China! 28", 14', 19, May, 2008: Sichuan, Chengdu, Tianfu Square, Moving Expressions and Tears. […] Yesterday was the first day for national mourning. Early in the morning, a banner written with "Deeply mourning for the compatriots killed in the earthquake" was placed on the square. Innumerable people stood around it. Volunteers gave out little white flowers. In front of the flag pole were full arrays of wreaths and flowers. Some were praying in front of the flowers. Some were deeply bowing towards the wreaths. Some were kneeling down crying […]. At 2:28 pm, the siren rang. All the mourners joined hands and raised them overhead. They lowered their heads, silently mourning for the dead. Then, a black banner was spread out, writing "Farewell, compatriots." "Country fellows, farewell! Come on Sichuan!" a shouting voice sprang out from the crowd. Suddenly, the crowd began to yell. "Rise up, rise up!". The shouting fell and rose incessantly. "Long life China, long life China!" Fists and shouting went up and down again and again. "Rise up, people who don't want to be slaves […]." Someone began to sing the national anthem. Some waved the national flags high above their head. All of them echoed the anthem with their sonorous voices […]. Under the scorching sun, it was hard to differentiate whether the drops on the face were tears or sweat. (*Sichuan Daily* 20, May, 2008b)

Table 9

As shown in these extracts the "Chinese nation" as a narrative character is unequivocally articulated in the media story. The signs such as "compatriots", "brothers and sisters", and "heroic Chinese" signify the meaning of an anthropomorphic Chinese nation having "blood and flesh". These clusters of lexicons and sentences in the text exhibit the author's intentionality to achieve a "character-effect" (Bal 1997, p. 118) concerning Chinese cultural identity.

They serve to attain the goal of the narration: the formulation of a media story producing a structure of meaning in this highly uncertain situation. As Eichenbaum contends, the signs clustering around a narrative character are oriented towards representing the dominant idea of the author (1965, p. 138). The nationalistic articulations in these clusters represent a centralized meaning.

This meaning is summarized in the text as the Chinese national spirit, which generates "straightforward identification" of community belonging for the people facing the crisis (Hall 1996b, p. 6; During 2005, p. 57). In sharing this crystallized meaning the people involved in the crisis identify with an identity as members of the Chinese nation. Characterizing the earthquake as an "invader" and the dispersed people affected as a nation enables the interactions between them to be framed in resistance mobilized and unified by the shared meaning of the Chinese national spirit. As shown in the cluster of statements in the extracts above, the "Chinese nation" as the central character in the discourse of resistance derives its function of crystallizing the meaning in this crisis contingency from the cultural resources of Chinese nationalistic consciousness, nationalistic memories and self-identification as Chinese.

The construction of nationhood is started by the invoking of national consciousness as a set of meanings signified by the sign of the "nation" in national culture. It is a cultural sign for social identification stating that "we" are a nation (Anderson 2006). This is one of central themes in the mainstream social discourse of the modern nation-states. The shared meanings contained in

it are a critical integrative discourse for consolidating national identity (Smith 1995; Hall 1996a; Habermas 1999; Mock 2012;). Therefore, the meaning of being a nation is repeated, circulated and enhanced in social discourse (Hall 1996a, p. 613). National consciousness is a regular analytic angle for interpreting the meanings of social activities and events, so using symbols of it to explain events such as the Wenchuan earthquake is intrinsically a process for conferring meaning to the events through nationalistic discourse.

Representing and invoking the notion of nation in the extracts such as "[i]t is in the clashes with disasters that continuous spiritual assets spring out within our nation" (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008) and "[n]o hardship can defeat heroic Chinese" (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008) cited in the table above enabled news communication to enter into a broader cultural space. This transition updated news coverage to a field of cultural communication. In this cultural frame, a more nuanced code is found in national memory, which plays a critical part in constructing national identity in this event (Pan 2008, p. 12). It is a narrative about the nation at a deep level of cultural imagination that draws upon historic appeal and a belief in strong power for social identification (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 31). As a discourse for establishing the historical legitimacy, it roots itself deeply in the cultural system of modern nation-states (Hall 1996a). National memories therefore, have a "cultural sensibility" (Schlesinger 1991, p. 167) for building a national identity, because they are integral constitutive parts of the collective memory of a nation's citizens (Schlesinger 1991, p. 174; Halbwachs 1992).

National memory reappears in solemn national festivals or in times for national commemoration; however, as a structure of meaning about birth, suffering, victory and the honor of a national identity, the national memory is deposited in social knowledge through social learning and enculturation (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 28). This can be seen in such expressions as: "its lineage of civilization has never ceased and its national history persists" cited in the table above (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008). This is because the national history is the original source of meaning in consolidating national identity. It lies at the root of a national culture that is "contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it" (Hall 1996a, p. 613).

The key nature of national cultural identity is the sharing of national consciousness and communal sentiment about national memories. Both national consciousness and national memories are aspects of cultural heritage that are constructed in existing social discourses (Mock 2012, p. 4). They are seen as signs for national cultural identity, when introduced into the confrontation between "Other" and "we". This leads to overt representations of the national cultural imagination in news and commentaries. In a crisis situation such as a large-scale earthquake, the media representation of national memories leads to a highly integrative national identity (Niebuhr 1999, p. 317). This is shown in extracts such as "[w]henever the nation is in a crisis, the national spirit rises up" which indicates a phenomenon where a sense of national community is identified when a threat approaches a nation or its

members (*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008; as also seen in Figure 8) The intensification of national spirit and a sense of nationhood at this moment are indispensable in mobilizing society to carry out difficult rescue works.

深埋的北川中学只有国旗迎风不倒

Translation: Only national flag stands up around the dilapidated Beichuan Middle School

Figure 8 (Li Gang, *Xinhua Net* military journalist, 3 June, 2008)

The process of evoking nationalistic sentiments through the iconic image of bright red flag against the devastated background of the rubble is therefore clearly enabled through the media. As the medium for signification, news reports, photos and commentaries in this case play two roles in constructing national community. Firstly, the media texts construct an imagined "Other"

which formulates a discursive structure for creating a perceived national identity (Hall 1996b, p. 6; MacKinnon and Heise 2010, p. 104). Secondly, it is through media reporting that national memories are overtly re-presented to construct national identity in the media space. Both the process of creating the "Other" frame for constructing the role of the earthquake, and the process of nation building are conducted through interaction, negotiation and modulation of meaning in the media texts. The image of the "Other" is formed in contrast to the image of "we". Without either of the roles, the media story cannot be completed. The notions about "Other" and "we" have to mutually rely on each other in delineating boundaries between them and in producing a media story out of the blurred and confusing situation following the earthquake. This contrastive relation is formulated in a continuous news reporting process, which presents an on-going war narrative in the media spectacle.

5.2 War narrative and the construction of national identity

The war narrative constructed in the Wenchuan earthquake coverage is a genre of reporting which is intrinsically a discursive measure for meaning production. It is also a narrative displaying the relation between the two roles of "we" and the "Other" after they are constructed. When the binary and conflicting relation between "Other" and the nation is presented in a continuously moving style in media reporting, a media story of war between the two is formed. In this war narrative, there are two major plots: firstly, this "Other" threatens or destroys

the property and security of the national community; secondly the national community resists the "Other". The narrative characters of "Other" and "the Chinese nation" serve respective narrative functions in the constructed media story created by the war narrative in a time of crisis. As Fairclough argues:

> [T]exts set up positions for interpreting subjects that are 'capable' of making sense of them, and 'capable' of making the connections and inferences, in accordance with relevant interpretative principles, necessary to generate coherent readings. These connections and inferences may rest upon assumptions of an ideological sort. (1992, p. 84)

According to Fairclough's thesis, the "interpretive principles" in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake coverage are controlling the crisis by constructing a cohesive sense of belonging for the imagined Chinese nation. The "position for interpreting" is the frame of resistance in this case which enables China's media to produce meanings of national belonging through narrativised storytelling. In this way, the major constituents in the communication take on the coloring of war of resistance. "We" becomes a national community threatened by an invader; the interaction between "we" and the "invader" becomes the fighting action. Defining this spectacle as a war constructs the symbolic interaction and meaning formation in a grand war narration. This type of metaphorical description is not accidentally formed, but a deliberate factor in the media representation of the Wenchuan earthquake.

Firstly, the earthquake situation produces confrontational scenes in itself. The conflicts between on-going disaster and people's rescue actions include facing the earthquake and then "conquering" it. These tangible actions are the material foundation for constructing the war narrative. If there is no such premise of

conflict in the real world, there would be no consistent formulation of the war narrative, and it could not be incorporated into the actual development of the event as it unfolds. Even though the media construction of the cultural imagination is to present a virtual reality, it still requires a semblance of connection between the real event and its symbolic reality (Barker 1998, pp. 17-18), as shown in the metaphors based on the semblance of war and the Wenchuan earthquake in this case: the earthquake is a "war imposed by the nature" (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013), "the disaster area is a battle field" (*Sichuan Daily* 24 May, 2013b) and in the report that states, "the ruthless calamity devoured tens of thousands of lives […], [t]he heroic Chinese immediately started an unprecedented struggle of resisting the earthquake" (*People Net* 15 June, 2008). Evidently as in these clusters of statements, the textual construction is based on both the event and its symbolic reality.

Secondly, the formation of a war narrative is also related to the fact that troops are major rescue forces that attract intense coverage by the media. After a large-scale natural disaster occurs, the disaster relief is dependent on coordinated endeavors. In this situation, only by deploying state power can effective rescue work reach broad districts. Troops and other trained personnel become a major force in dealing with the disaster. Along with troops participating in the event, a militarized discourse is presented in the media. However, the militarized signs accompanying troops are not the main reason for the formation of war narratives. They are only supplementary information

constructing the war narrative between the "Other" and the nation. This is because the construction of war narratives is primarily concerned with building national cultural identity, rather than being limited in depicting the actions of troops, as noted in Chapter Four of this thesis. However, it is acknowledged that the statements associated with the unique genre for depicting troops add a sense of warfare to the mediated event, even though this genre is not the decisive reason for it.

Thirdly, the formation of a war narrative is also caused by the media's pursuit of stimulating news. Seeking a stimulating account of a news event to attract readers is one of the key features of media reporting. In covering the Wenchuan earthquake, the conflicts and "battle" scenes are one of the targets for media coverage. Constructing an anxious atmosphere and presenting strenuous fighting scenes are particularly newsworthy as shown in headlines such as "[f]ire and flood emergencies: the war of protecting Chengdu" (*Southern Weekly* 29 May, 2008) which is more striking to the reader than a prosaic description such as "disaster relief is conducted in the city of Chengdu". In doing so, an image of warfare is vividly shaped in the media space.

These three aspects could explain the objective causes underlying the formation of the war narrative, but viewed from the perspective of national identity formation and the focus of this construction, the main purpose of the war narrative is to form a narrative by which "Other" and "our nation" are imagined. As cultural theorists argue, the formation of national cultural identity

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is formed in contrast to an "Other" (Hall 1996b, p. 6; During 2005, p. 151; Wodak et al. 2009, p. 33; Barker 2012, p. 220). In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the contrast is embodied in the discourse of resistance such as "life-or-death competition" (*Sichuan Daily* 17 May, 2013) and "Chinese people […] resisting the earthquake". In this constructed media story, the shared meanings crystallize around national identity through the formulation of the Chinese people's resistance and victories over the imagined invader.

In the Wenchuan earthquake, the constructed national community and its resistance to the threat from the "Other", invokes national faith. In reporting the ritualized national mourning over the deaths, the national communal meaning was crystallized as these signs for national cultural identity converged. The war narrative created a differential mechanism between national identity and the "Other"; however, its role in transforming public imagination about the event is not limited to this level as can be further analyzed by examining it in a broader national cultural framework of contemporary China.

The essence of the war narrative and the ensuing discourse of resistance are meaning production through signification. According to Hall, there is no meaning inherent in the material object, and it is the set of concepts and mental representation that constitute meaning (1997). The individual material object is given a concept and the meaning of this concept is interpreted through "organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying" conceptual maps (Hall

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1997). The meanings about the Wenchuan earthquake are conferred by the state-owned and regulated media where news facts in their own right only provide basic information as to what has happened. But when it comes to the question of what the event *means*, the media must construct texts to represent its meanings.

According to Hall signs are embedded in media texts, from which the maps of meaning of the audience are evoked or stimulated. Because the media texts give an intermediate form of reality, the meaning signified through the texts become the public's interpretation of the real event. To put it in another way the meaning of an event is not inherent in the event, nor in the texts, but is rather produced inside the mind of the reader, viewer or listener (Hall 1997).

In the Wenchuan case, there are two kinds of maps of meaning. In the face of the huge earthquake, the simultaneous map of meaning reacting to the situation includes images of destruction, danger, and horror. The meaning represented by these images is disruptive and adds to the sense of crisis. As the news narrative continues, the media framing introduces another map of meaning which highlights national identity and resistance. The codes for signifying meaning in this map are found in the existing beliefs of contemporary Chinese national culture. Hall argues that the codes connecting signs and concepts are "fixed socially" and "fixed in culture" (Hall 1997, p.22). In the mediation and signification practice in Chinese media reporting of the Wenchuan earthquake,

the linguistic forms used, such as the "invader", "the war of resistance" and "the Chinese nation", are those conventionally associated with notions of the national memories and the communal identification of "Chineseness". This association is socially produced for the Chinese who grew up, and were educated and cultivated in contemporary Chinese national culture.

However, if the close association between signs and concepts is a customary way of connection in a culture, then a question can be asked as to how this convention is formed and how and why a concept such as a "nation" features in the map of meaning for the members of that culture. If there are no such concepts in the audiences' maps of meaning, there would be no foundation to conduct signification in the discourse of resistance. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how and why the concepts of national cultural identities are incorporated into the cultural imagination and function as cultural resources for meaning production as shown in the discourse of resistance. For this question, Wodak et al. point out:

> The question of how this imaginary community reaches the minds of those who are convinced of it is easy to answer: it is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is thus the product of discourse (2009, p. 22).

In this explanation, the culturally conventionalized link between a sign and a notion, or a cluster of signs and a group of meanings, is created specifically within narratives and more broadly within social discourses. The signs in linguistic forms are constructed, the meanings they signify are constructed, and

this link used for signification is also arranged by discourse. Through this discursive formation, the signs and their meanings are paired.

In the case of the media coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake, the "nation" is drawn upon as a fundamental concept in the public discourse and a constitutive part of social cultural imaginations of Chinese nationalism. In contemporary Chinese culture, notions and concepts associated with Chinese nationalism such as national wars, nationalistic humiliation, and nationalistic rejuvenation are incorporated into the social discourses that circulate in conventional cultural thinking (Wang 2012). The learning and maintenance of these concepts exist in the knowledge of history and common sense as created by mass culture. They are also contained in communal cultural practices such as ceremonies and national holidays, in cognition about common geographical locations and communal national pursuits. These social discursive practices construct and tighten the link between the "nation" and "the national war of resistance" to Chinese nationalism. It creates the potential for the Chinese media to use the war narrative to signify the meanings of nationalism. The national community can be articulated in the contingency of an imagined national war constructed from the images and reports arising from the earthquake crisis. As Hall explains:

> [T]here is the narrative of the nation, as it is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historic events, national symbols, and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. (p. 613)

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In Hall's argument about national culture, the specific ways for constructing this culture are discussed. From his analysis of narratives used for constructing national culture, it could be argued that there is a continuum of discursive processes in creating the signifying practices concerning national culture: from specific narratives such as those found in "a set of stories" or "scenarios", to a broad nationalist discourse, and then finally a map or system of meaning about nationalism. These narratives accumulate to constitute the discourse and national cultural system within which conventionally addressed concepts such as the "war of national resistance", collective memories and "Chineseness" serve as signs representing the overall map of meaning about nationalism. These narratives are constructed and communicated around the central theme of the "nation" indicating a cultural frame and a form of ideology which constitutes an episteme as discussed by Foucault (Mills 2004). In the case of contemporary Chinese culture, the national memories and national identity also function as signs in which a shared cultural perception of national identity is deeply rooted.

Also as Foucault states, in this way, individual persons are given identities and a cultural cognition about self-identification and social relations (Mills 2004). This social discourse is broadly circulated and repeated as a social truth (Mills 2004) where the cultural resources or cultural codes are non-trivial notions, concepts and frameworks that form epistemological frames. These frames are essential for interpreting meaning in a social culture and are "instrumental to the constitution of subjectivity" (Cavallaro 2001, p. 95).

For instance, the meaning contained in the identity of the "Chinese nation" is shared by national members and, as noted, the sharing of meaning for identification in a community generates a sense of belonging for individuals (Rutherford 1990). As identity theory maintains, an individual acquires his or her identity by belonging to a community and sharing its central meaning; in doing so, a sense of attachment in terms of cultural psyche is generated. "[We] cannot be ourselves unless we are also members in whom there is a community of attitudes which control the attitudes of all" (Mead 2003, p. 40). If such identities are not constructed in the public discourse to create communal meanings among social members, it would be hard to form consensus, which could not then lay down a foundation of cultural identification and cultural legitimacy for social management. Further, if there is no identification system in a society, the values for social inclusion are more difficult to formulate and share, and thus obstruct social communication.

As a modern nation-state, China formulates a social identification system centering on the identity of the Chinese nation, based upon social integration. The identity of membership in the Chinese nation is a critical concept in the maps of meaning about cultural identities. Viewed through Hall's theory of representation, the cultural industries, including the media, construct mental representations of cultural identities, and the signs, such as linguistic lexicons and images that represent them in the public discourse. As Chan (see also: Kellner 1995, p. 60) explains:

> [The] linkages between ideology and discourse are not direct, but are instead
> mediated by *mental models*. These are cognitive representations of personal and
> subjective experiences of individuals that help them make sense of the
> environment. (2012, p. 367)

This argument is similar to Hall's discussion of the representation of meaning and Foucault's discussion of discourse, which examine how discursive power is practiced focusing on subjects or people's thinking. Their ideology is ultimately a cluster of meanings carried by linguistic forms that help to formulate the discourse. When people use, think and interact through this discourse and within this discourse, their thinking is framed by the ideology. This framed thinking is a mental representation about constructed identities that normally enhance social cohesion, while in crisis situations provides a sense of belonging. Without the identification with a community, people are unable to get the "personal coherence and intelligibility" (Rutherford 1990, p. 24) and the necessary "sense of belonging" (Rutherford 1990, p. 25) when threatened by a crisis.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the shared meaning of national cultural identity has become a discursive resource for social integration (During 2005). As Simon During states there are "[t]raditions clustered around such identities to be empowering and an aid in the construction of strong and vibrant communities and futures" (2005, p. 152). The signifying process in identity formation is intrinsically a discursive formation (Barker 2012, p. 229). This discursive formation is driven by power relations which, in Foucault's arguments on discourse and power, are "means of both producing and

organizing meaning" (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, p. 96). As a form of discourse the cultural identities are constructed by social institutions (such as the media) possessing cultural power to formulate maps of meaning about social identification and its association to signs.

The domination of nationalism in the Wenchuan Earthquake coverage, as represented by the media selected in this study, is not an accidental linguistic ordering in the media texts. It is a result made possible by the nature of the state media and the specificities of the Chinese audience, China's historical background as well as its socio-cultural context. The disaster crisis tends to "intensify state-society interactions, [and] dramatize otherwise less visible structures in state-society relations" (Xu 2014, p. 92), resulting in the war narratives formulating a nationalistic discourse that also resonates with Chinese memories of its national wars.

5.3 War narrative as a cultural code in national memories

Associating the tragedies and battle scenes in the earthquake event with historic memories forms a substantial part in constructing national identity in these news reports. Writing intensely about such memories can be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, past memories of national events exhibit the strengths and victories of the nation, which enhance the morale within the broader discourse of a national war. The selective use of historical analogies of the nation's

victorious stories increases the positive expectations and creates an imagination looking towards victory in the disaster relief. Secondly, this analogous representation produces shared meanings in constructing national identity. The collective memories and communal narratives in a social culture can produce "straightforward identification of community belonging" (During 2005, p. 57) where these shared meanings are culturally defined (Hall 1996a, p. 613). In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the collective memories represented in media texts construct a shared meaning of belonging to the Chinese nation "with a long history of scourges […] progressing forwards under stern challenges" (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008). It is essentially an articulation of nationalism in the contingency of resistance between people and the earthquake threat, reinforcing Otto Bauer's claim that "[t]he nation is the totality of men bound together through a common destiny into a community of character" (1999, p. 183). In resisting the earthquake, the consciousness of national identity is evoked by a nationalistic description of victims and rescue actions.

National collective memories are mostly dormant but erupt when the concept of nationhood is addressed or challenged, reigniting national memories (Halbwachs 1992). Smith contends that every nation has its own "archetypal myths" (1995, p. 22) that entails the collective memory, values and honour of the nation, which is a cultural tie that connects people in a communal mental space (1995). It is in the Wenchuan case that "the honourable sentiments and shared belief hidden in the depth of Chinese minds" are brought to the

forefront by the media (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008). It is the root of this identity conception that transcends historic periods and sustains long-time social changes (Smith 1995, p. 34). The narratives of victory in a historical event seek to "crystallise and express" (p. 22) the unifying charisma of the nation, and highlight "the enduring power and hold of ethnic ties" (p. 34).

In a circumstance such as the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake, the media's role in maintaining and articulating nationalism is essential. Because nationalism is both ethnically derived and culturally maintained, the media operates as an ideological apparatus for perpetuating national perceptions and consolidating national identity in the public discourse. Smith claims that the nationalistic conception is related to citizens' subjective identification through symbols, myths, stories and memories, to objective "authentication, cultivation, selection, designation, preservation and inculcation" (1995, p. 90). The media plays an important role in these signifying practices as a national cultural cultivator and the "hammer and anvil of social solidarity" (Lasswell 1971, p. 221). Media discourses "co-ordinate and unify" (p. 222) the atomized society which can be better unified and mobilised "by illusion than by coercion" (p. 222). This can be seen in the Wenchuan case, where the media's construction of Chinese national identitiy generates a cohesive sense of togetherness for the people physically dispersed. However, for the media to unify the public by constructing a nationalist discourse there is still a requirement for a situation "stimulus" that has the potential to make this identity salient (Thoits and Virsbup 1997, p. 116).

As noted, nationalism can be made conscious and further reinforced when it is situated in an oppositional imagination (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 36), and it is this opposition that acts as a stimulus. Different from smaller scale communities that can be maintained by face-to-face communication, the persistence of a large national community has to face the challenges of distances across the nation or even worldwide. This makes it more dependent on being imagined and usually implying a submerged contrastive approach. As Niebuhr points out:

> Nations do not really arrive at full self-consciousness until they stand in vivid, usually bellicose, juxtaposition to other nations. The social reality, comprehended in the existence of a nation, is too large to make a vivid impression upon the imagination of the citizen. (1999, p. 317)

Niebuhr continues to argue that the nationalism is a "particular fervour of devotion" and this powerful sentiment "the unique product of the time of crisis" (p.317). An alternative view is that the crisis is an intermediate factor that produces a release for nationalistic sentiments. It is a situational condition for arousing nationalism, rather than the major cause.

The key factor in nationalism at the time of a crisis is the media's intentional construction through the clusters of textual statements. However severe the situation may be, without a clear articulation of intended meaning, the eruption of nationalism in this case will not be taken for granted. For instance, the crisis situation of a natural disaster was also reported in a class-struggle way in Mao's era, or in a purely descriptive way without strong nationalistic

representations such as the coverage witnessed following the Haiti earthquake in 2009 (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012, p. 148). As Hall contends:

> We can only use language to produce meanings by positioning oursleves within the rules of language and the systems of meaning of our culture. (1994, p. 122)

In this case, nationalism is a central theme formulated in war narratives, and the war narrative constructs the two oppositional sides, further nationalising "our" community in a time of crisis. Thus, constructing nationalism around a crisis situation is not completed in a straightforward approach as historic memories, the crisis situation and national cultural cultivation are all necessary and inalienable factors needed in framing a nationalistic response. For the media to maximise the impact of these cultural elements in a specific event, more synthetic tactics are required. Without the spectacle and meta-narratives of national war, the "full self-consciousness" (Niebuhr 1999, pp. 317, see also Wilson, 1966) of nationhood may not be "sharply outlined" (Niebuhr 1999, p. 317) in media representation.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as mentioned in previous sections, the intrinsic relations between the earthquake and human lives are conflicting, the actions violent, and the results devastating and tragic. This complies with how war unfolds and is perceived by those following events through the media. This resemblance based on the realities of the event sets the ground for news coverage to stimulate a war imagination in the public. Secondly, the necessity of the war narrative to incorporate nationalism and set it into motion is also

related to the prototypes of nationalistic discourse (Hogan 2009, p. 17). The way in which nationalism is addressed in the culture reflects common principles of the nation.

Walzer and Hobbes argue that citizens' nationalism originally derives from their inner fear of "conquest and oppression", especially when there is no sovereign national governance (Walzer 1999, p. 329). Perceived through an anthropological lens, nationalistic sentiments by nature contain conflicts and offer a sense of protection, with the aim of acquiring security from antagonistic threats; these are primitive but also critical reasons to form a community. This inherent nature of being protective and collective produces conflicting genres of nationalism in a culture and in Hogan's summary of the principal genres in nationalistic narratives, indicates that all of the three major nationalistic prototypes entail conflict (2009). They are the heroic prototype, the sacrificial prototype and the romantic prototype (p. 17), which are framed in a threat-defence sequence (p. 213). These shared prototypes comply with the reason for nationhood as necessary: human nature pursues security; the heroes' sacrifices and the romanticised feelings add to the cohesive strength of a community.

Through constructing a war narrative in China's case, the media spectacle of resisting the earthquake is deeply incorporated into deep cultural thinking. It is through this commonality between the war narrative in the earthquake event and wars in the national historic memory the media is able to insert the event within the deep level of national consciousness. This combination expands the

space for meaning production and starts to draw on cultural resources in national historic memories of "resisting […], battling with […], overcoming" the challenges (*Guangming Daily*, 3 June, 2008). It is the broader "metanarrative of the Chinese nation" consisting of mnemonic memes such as the "struggle for independence and the reinstatement of lost dignity" that constitute a frame in the map of meaning concerned with Chinese modernization (Song and Sigley 2000, p. 47). The specific cluster of meanings signified by the war narrative in the national memory confers national cultural significance on the earthquake event, and as Entman stresses, the way media exerts its discursive power is "heavily supported by the text and is congruent with the most common audience schemata" (1993, p. 56). Intrinsically, the transformation in the interpretation of the event is completed through situating it into the frame of national memories. That is, the image of national resistance activates the cultural imaginations that therefore confer meaning on the event (Entman 2003, p. 417).

The national memory signified by this war narrative also confers historic significance on the event of the Wenchuan earthquake. The interactions between "Other" and "we" become a replay of national war memories in the text:

百年来争取民族独立、自由、解放的血火锻造，30 年改革开放时代大潮的荡涤洗礼，丰富着民族精神的时代内涵。迈入新世纪新阶段，以抗击非典到迎战冰雪，都是一次民族精神的体现。
Translation:
The epoch making connotations of the national spirit are enriched by the blood-fire struggles for national independence, freedom and liberation in the latest one hundred years. This spirit is also extended by the baptism of open-door reform

in last 30 years. In recent stages of the new century, the national spirit is embodied in the resistance to SARS and the struggle with blizzards and other disasters.

<div align="right">(People's Daily 4 July, 2008)</div>

As shown in this extract, the news event surrounding the Wenchuan earthquake draws from a grand nationalistic narrative from about a hundred years ago and relates it to the contemporary situation, in a similar way as media did in covering the 2003 SARS outbreak and the snow storm occurring earlier in the spring of the 2008 in China as indicated in this extract (see also: Pugsley 2006). This commentary tries to explain the significance of the earthquake event by comparing it to the past challenges the nation faced, which situate the Wenchuan earthquake into a profound map of meaning of Chinese nationalism with immense historic depth. These statements indicating historicity of national identity represent and activate the meanings recognisable to the audience.

In media texts, the war narrative also constructs the way participating roles interact in stories. At the level where news facts are presented, it creates a spectacle of standoff between the "destroyer" and collective "we"; as noted at the level where the more general nationalistic consciousness is represented, the earthquake is constructed as "Other" and "we" as a nation; and finally at the level where the war narratives in deep national memories merge with the current warlike actions, stories about national wars in the historic narratives are replayed in the media space.

In these multi-faceted media spectacles, media used different frameworks and discursive resources for constructing an imagined "Other". In this process, it is the war narrative that serves as an intermediate mechanism, a recognizable structure, leading to the flow of the media story. And the reason why the three levels of imagination appearing in the media spectacle can converge and transform from one to another is that they share this narrative as a binding code. The different levels of images as constructed in the media texts can be displayed in the following table:

The media spectacles	Plot	Cultural identity
covering news facts	stand off	we
national consciousness	fighting earthquake	nation (collectiveness)
deep national memories	fighting the Other	nation (as a historic truth)

Table 10

The cultural imaginations signified by the war narrative change in different media spectacles constructed over the duration of the event. The underlying cause for constructing progressive levels of imagined spectacles is the media's intentionality to build new stories and identities. It can be shown in the following table:

Steps	Constructed imagination	Mechanism for identification
	The destruction of the earthquake	Providing information
	Rescue	News coverage
	"We" fight the earthquake	Socio-psychological collectivism
	Nation fights the enemy	General national identity construction
	The war in historic memories	War narrative as a cultural code
	Strong belief in winning the war	Crystallizing nationalistic meaning

Table 11

This table shows how nationalistic meaning is represented through the progressive discursive formation as observed in the media texts. Viewed from the perspective of cultural identification, the war narrative is constructed to facilitate the representation of the shared meaning about the Chinese nation. This way of constructing national cultural identity has proven to be effective in mobilizing social resources in dealing with a large-scale earthquake.

In addition to the factor of the media's state background in bringing about nationalism in this event, the clearly-stated directives from the CCP Propaganda Ministry and the demands of senior Party officials also play a direct role in applying nationalism in natural disaster coverage. Aiming to stress the critical significance of covering natural disasters, the mainstream media in China often treats the task of conducting serialized reporting as a serious battle, or, to express it in Chinese, *BaodaoZhanyi* meaning "the war of coverage", as mentioned in Chapter Four. The discretion in conducting natural disaster reporting is substantially determined by the clearly-stated directives from the upper managerial level. This is clearly exhibited in the demands presented in the *Sichuan Daily* coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake, as demonstrated in the following passage titled "*Provides Powerful Spiritual Driving Force, Thought Guarantee and Public Opinion Support to Seize Victory in the Struggle against the Earthquake*" (*Sichuan Daily* 18 May, 2008):

Li Changchun[2] emphasized that so far the task of resisting the earthquake and carrying out rescue work has come to a critical phase. The work is very challenging. The frontline of propaganda should communicate to audiences with depth in the broad area to have them understand the critical decisions and plans put forward by the Party center and the National Congress. The media should comprehensively and efficiently cover new advancement in rescue work, report the concrete instances of all-out rescue measures adopted by the Party committees and the governments at different levels, cover the moving stories of the soldiers from the People's Liberation Army, armed police, and policemen about their continuous and brave fighting against the disaster. The media should also broadcast the masses' spirit of mutual help, self-sacrifice, and the real deeds of all fronts of the society in different parts of the country. Thereby the media should solidly draw on the great spiritual strength of the Chinese nation to enforce this highly collective struggles against the disaster, extolling the keynote of national cohesion, victory, and resilience all across the country.

As shown in the guiding principles for covering the Wenchuan earthquake, one of the primary foci is to urge media to stimulate the cohesive spirit of nationalism and integrate public opinion in the time of crisis. This guideline for coverage was also stressed by Liu Yunshan, the minister of the CCP Propaganda Ministry at the time the earthquake occurred (*Sichuan Daily* 15 May, 2008). In the aftermath of the earthquake, the following survey covering twenty six provinces and includes 523 respondents conducted by media survey lab in Tsinghua University concludes that the Chinese media effectively shapes a strong sense of belonging to Chinese nation. As shown in the following statistics:

The degree of recognition about the coverage	Percentage (N= 523)
Active reporting, giving people hope	98.1%
Encourage social mobilization and disaster relief	98.3%
Information attract ordinary people to participate	94.36
Represented collective disaster relief by government, troops, all fronts in the society and civic strengths	98.8%
Represented "fish and water" relation between people and army; enhance unison between army and people	98.79%

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2 Mr Li Changchun was then a member of the Standing Committee of the CCP Political Bureau.

Effectively <u>increased the self-confidence of the Chinese nation</u>	98.4%
<u>Increased social cohesion; strengthened soft power</u>	98.72%
Displayed the government's powerful competence to carry out crisis relief	97.85%
Demonstrated the competence of the media to mobilize society	97.82%
Displayed the Party and government's emphasis on human rights	97.04%
Showcased the power of new media like internet and mobile phones	97.03%
Reflected the facts and effectively guided public opinion	96.23%
<u>Represented an open and civilized image of our country</u>	95.46%
<u>Indicated the strong comprehensive national strength</u>	94.43%
Displayed more transparency in releasing information	92.28%

Table 12   (1 June, 2008)

This survey indicates that themes such as the "self-confidence of the Chinese nation", "social cohesion", "soft power" and "national strength" resonate profoundly with respondents. It is also seen in this case that synthesizing textual features with cultural implications links words and images with conceptual maps in people's cultural imagination (Entman 1993, p. 53). In this case, the cultural frame of national identity is linked to audiences' understanding of the event. This effect is jointly enacted by the signs of war and national culture. As indicated, the clusters of words and sentences in the war narrative "activate the vast range of meanings which are already embedded in our language and cultural systems" (Hall 1994, p. 122).

5.4 War narrative as an archetype for meaning making

Narrating a social issue in the frame of war can confer historic significance to it, for war tends to make history in cultural memory. This implication adds more

social significance to news events; therefore, the war narrative can be seen as a way of news making. From this perspective, the frame of war is an archetype in the social meaning system, which enables a humanized interpretation of the disaster as well as activates the social values associated with the public's understanding of the historical significance of wars.

The archetype of war is a shared conceptual map. The public perception of the present is based on the premise of their recalling of historic memory. As Heer and Wodak state, this is a form of "historical consciousness" which "generates 'subject matter' for the construction of meaning associated with the present" (2008, p. 2). This "subject matter" is an archetype for communicating meanings; even though the contents of a text differ between past and present stories, the shared form of understanding is similar. This leads to a series of internalized "cognitive schemata and event models" (Heer and Wodak 2008, p. 4) which enable people to decode meaning and understand the significance of new information via existing modes. As explained in the following way:

> In order for events to have 'meaning', or to be capable of acquiring meaning,
> they must already have acquired 'form' in human perception.
> (Heer and Wodak 2008, p. 3)

The archetype of war is therefore a code embedded in the web of social knowledge, circulated in the social culture (Heer and Wodak 2008, p. 2). Its formulation is both unconsciously informed in individual people and consciously practiced, thus the remembrance of war filters into public cognition. The genealogies of social histories are often narrated in a recurrent

repetition of confrontations, revolutions, wars, victories and the pursuit of peace. And as war becomes a sign for heartrending social significance, it enters into the social consciousness.

The conscious construction of the war narrative is seen in the cultural practices perpetuated in the form of collective remembrance of wars such as World War I and World War II, or in China's case the Communist Revolution and the Nationalist losses against Japanese forces, and all further reified in photography, poetry, literature, plays, war memorials, and media representations (Winter 2006, p. 2). The public representation of war remembrance resonates with familiar and familial stories of the past wars, by which this discourse enters every corner of life (p. 6). War remembrance is not a recall of conflicts as much as it is a "discursive engagement" which generates a historical consciousness in a society (p. 2). It is a nation-building code that confers nationality on a nation, perpetuating an identity of being a national member for its citizens.

Nation-building as one of the constant missions of socio-cultural practices, ensures that the archetype of war is incessantly circulated around the society and becomes a carrier of meaning production. This can be through deifying or mythologizing battles or individuals, such as China's use of revolutionary heroes such as Wang Wei, or Australia's return to the ANZAC "legends" of WWI. (Wang Wei died a heroic death in the 2001 "Spy-Plane Incident" in which a US spy-plane was brought down over China's Hainan Island by two

Chinese fighter planes. Wang Wei was the pilot of one of the Chinese fighter planes that subsequently disappeared, presumed crashed. Wang Wei was presented as a martyr in the Chinese media). Through the perpetuation of schemata concerned with national cohesion the citizens are culturally associated with the nation. As Finney maintains, contemporary representation of these war stories can redefine these experiences to be "moral, social and political capital" (2002, p. 7), because the sameness of remembrance and imagined experiences confers a collective identity for members in this nation (2002, p. 5). Therefore, the value of the war narrative in social integration enables the archetype to be embedded within the net of existing social meanings consistently maintained and enhanced by regular rituals of nation building as well as the remembrance of national wars.

The war narrative as an archetype for meaning production is an iconic path for achieving social inclusion. The key attribute determining if it is appropriate to address a social issue by resorting to the war narrative lies in whether there is a form of conflict or confrontation and whether it is socially significant. It is through "dichotomization" (Herman and Chomsky 1988, p. 35) that this archetype constructs the identity of "we" against the "Other"; and it is the magnitude of this contrast that is commensurate with being conceptualized to be a war. According to Derrida's argument, this shared attribute, as the base for signification, is a "minimal remainder of meaning" (in Howarth 2000, p. 39) which "exhibits a minimal sameness in the different contexts in which they

appear, yet are still modified in the new contexts in which they appear" (in Howarth 2000, p. 41).

The archetype of war thus becomes an epistemological apparatus because of its value in social impact in each new context. Signs with no substantial efficacy in meaning production and social repercussion will never be sustained for long. The reason the archetype of war functions as one of the threads of historic knowledge production, lies in its commemorative significance for nation building. Therefore, the emergence of this discourse is not accidental, and its prevalence in social culture is profoundly grounded.

As explained, the widely circulated and perpetuated war stories produce a structural form of perception for understanding conflict in the social episteme. For the meaning producers, saturated in this episteme, this confrontational issue is perceived by resorting to the archetype of war to understand it and interpret it. They encapsulate the event with this narrative to disseminate it, or even sell it, because this archetype is a viable mechanism of meaning reception in the audience, whose decoding manner is also shaped by this archetype.

For the event with a core plot of conflict such as an earthquake, its being formulated within the archetype of war provides a localized outburst of the nationalist ideology. John Frow (2003) contends that the form that is deployed in interpreting a fact, an event, or an issue is typical of the way a society comes to address it. Frow created the concept "*casus*" (p. 15) to explain the logic

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where the "constructedness" of a discourse becomes "a nodal point of historical significance" (p. 18), a phenomenon that the influence of the meaning structure upon human mentality outweighs human activeness in constructing the event in a pre-planned manner. This phenomenon in meaning formation is seen in concrete examples such as in Cultural Revolution when the meanings of even trivial aspects of social life such as the conception of the relationships among families were constructed through the fixed standard of revolutionary class differentiation. It is also exhibited in the formulaic image of China as a sign of Communism in Marxist sense, with insufficient examination of diversified specificities across the broad territory and in different historical contexts. This is a form of alienation in human communication where the constructed meaning reversely controls human epistemology in an unconscious way. As John Frow claims, the result of this alienation is evident in the "archetypical liquidation of meaning" (p. 17) and "implosion of meaning" (p. 17), by which an outer event ignites, activates or causally induces "a frame of causation" discursively cultivated in public conception or collective memory. This mechanism is also justified by Halbwachs in his analysis of the social perception of facts. As pointed out:

> [T]o discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle. It means to perceive in what happens to us a particular application of facts concerning which social thoughts remind us at every moment of the meaning and impact these facts have for it.
>
> (1992, p. 53).

In Halbwach's explanation, the discursive formulation over an object is in parallel to the "circles" and "systems" of the existing dominant map of

meaning. Given that the archetype of the war is a sign for manifesting the importance of an event, the media tends to frame socially significant conflict within this frame. On the one hand, the media, situated in the nationalist culture where the war archetype is one of its constituents, tends to think of the conflict between disaster and the human lives as a type of war; on the other hand, the archetype of war has become a cultural source or capital in social discourse to invoke causal repercussions. Therefore, this archetype is a medium between the media and the audience. In a word, this is a process of selling cultural capital as well as consuming it. And this expediency in communication by no means terminates at this stage.

In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the nationalism constructed in this frame also significantly serves to achieve social integration. The dramatization of the battle between the Chinese people and an imagined "invader" is commensurate with the schemata of national war. The notion of collective identity is iterated repeatedly in this process, and culturally resonates with the war archetype as a form of collective memory (During 2005, p. 57). This mediated version of war combines the historical memory with actions of resistance in facing the event, further strengthens the cultural value of the war narrative in producing meaning, and enhances cultural integration in an imagined cultural experience.

5.5 Nationalism as an experience in the war narrative

The nationalistic identity is created through discursive construction and its meaning is enhanced through people's experiences of this construction. In a process of reading and experiencing, the nationalistic meanings are interpreted, understood and possibly accepted. The experience is not limited to physical forms but is also carried out by the means of mentally or imaginatively experiencing the communal feeling of being in a nation or being Chinese in this case. This is due to the recognition of national values that come from "the nationality of the individual" (Bauer 1999, p. 185). Individuals alone have the subjective and independent acuity to differentiate the legitimacy of such nationalist claims. In the media's dramatization of nationalistic stories, the abstract construct of the nation is contextualized as it "dissolves the nation into a process" (p. 185). That is, the citizens of the nation realise the meaning of the nation in experiencing it. In a word, nationalism is maintained by formulating discourse as well as by being realised in individual experience.

One of the key roles of state-owned media is to generate possibilities for nationalism to be experienced as a process. The media not only create a symbolic spectacle as a nationalised simulation of reality, but also invite and engage social participation via mediation. In this context, the term "experience" should be redefined or extended as it includes not only physical participation, but also the imaginative engagement in a virtual space. The central rationale of

this imaginative and symbolic experience is a "reflexive appropriation" of nationalism as "a form of collective consciousness" that proves to be effective in individuals' national identification (Habermas 1999, p. 334). Nationalism can be structured in a process whereby it is acquired rather than given, for instance in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the people involved acquired the meaning of nationalistic identity by mentally going through concrete stories of resisting the "Other". This "acquired nationalism" (p. 335) is from within the people who are guided by the discursive power. As an ideology in modern nation-states, nationalism is "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1992, p. 52). This relationship is made relevant through interpretations that integrate reality and virtuality, as Althusser explains:

> [T]hey constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make illusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of the world […]. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live. (1992, p. 52)

In Althusser's argument, the articulation of a discourse formulates a virtual form of social relations by which individuals receive clues as to how the actual social relations should be structured. The progressive war narrative formulated in the Wenchuan earthquake coverage coincides with this process in which the nationalistic ideology is interpreted and strengthened when the audience mentally experience and become involved in the grand narrative of nationalistic resistance to the threat. It makes possible the symbolic

engagement in virtuality and in experiencing the mobilization people identify the collective cultural identity. The creation of this process in this case can be attributed to three reasons.

Firstly, following earthquake, most of the audience had no physical access to the disaster scene, so they could only experience the event through virtuality. The conception of the reality and virtual reality cannot be differentiated in this case, for the audience has no alternatives from a distance to clearly differentiate what is real and what is the "hyper reality" (Baudrillard 2001). The real experience and the experience in the virtuality are merged. Therefore, the only "real" experience of the audience is completed virtually. That is, the audience has to merge into the virtual sphere to experience the real event, and the real social understanding is completed in the symbolic world (Baudrillard 2001).

Secondly, in this merged space, the narration of war is a progressive discourse; therefore it activates symbolic actions and progressive activities. In this case, nationalistic values are dispersed in imagined experiences of resistance. During the phases of the unfolding event, from experiencing the disruption of peace, the anxiety and uncertainty, to facing the "invader", organising "our" community, then to sacrificing and heroic struggles, and finally to victory through unified rescue and re-construction, the "mental" experience parallels and overlaps with the real practices. At this point, the reality and virtuality converge.

Thirdly, in the final part of the war narrative, nationalistic statements become more explicit. "We" are together, defending our community and mourning the deaths. The discourse further crystallises the fact that this community is part of the nation, a national community, with spirits that make the nation cohesive and mighty in defeating the disruptive disaster within national territories. At this stage, both the virtual experience of being in the nation and the explicit discourse formulation jointly take effect. The nationalism in this context is a result of experience, a cause of actions, as well as a process. In addition, the war narrative formulated in this case is also due to technical requirements for news making.

5.6 War narrative as a choice for news making

The prevalence of the war discourse in Chinese media partly results from the storytelling nature of news making. Even though there is factually no real war in the disaster areas, the genre of news writing requires the telling of stories out of news facts. And the storytelling must resort to actors, plot, and sequences. Not only is the news created as a story, it should also be appealing and sound significant for the audience. Therefore, the mechanism of dramatization is used to make a news story out of disaster facts. This structure of news inevitably constructs the facts of the disaster within a plot of conflict and dramatizes this conflict to be part of a socially significant war (McQuail 2005).

In formulating the war narrative, the Chinese media created a broader space for news making. The plot of human beings fighting the "invader" for a final victory is a transformation of the initial plot, which sees the "invader" devastating human lives. Both of the stories possess news values and their combination depicts a complete spectacle of the media event. But the story of human actions towards the disaster holds more weight in the whole narration of the war discourse. This changes the protagonist of the stories from the "invader" in the initial stage to the thousands or tens of thousands of people inside or close to the event. More protagonists create more specific stories in news production, because different people inside the event have individual situations and vivid plots. Otherwise, the plot would be repetitive, drab and limited to providing information, which will restrict the media's potential to dig out the potential for news production of the event.

The conflict is also a starting point for news production, for it is the disruption of normality that attracts the attention of audiences. The continuous battling with the earthquake for example makes the news production a progressive storyline, instead of a static information provision. It transcends the facts of the natural disaster as an already existing phenomenon, to compose elements of human emotions, actions and revelations into the stories. Individuals tend to interpret the event by relying on the conceptual maps that are familiar to his or her imagination (Hall 1997, p. 18); thus the news producers in the media organizations structure the coverage by also referring to the coding system in the meaning structure rooted in the audience's minds (Entman 1993; 2003).

Therefore, the Chinese media aims to structure or restructure this attribute into news production that can resonate with the audience, for effective news communication between message senders and receivers is bridged through resonance of this meaning interaction.

This interactive relation is principally a process mediated through an issue or a question, shaped in the kiln of humanization, for the meaning analyzed here is that of human beings. Arguably, humanization is an unavoidable feature in interpreting or composing messages that can be displayed in two aspects. Firstly, it is about whether or not an issue will be relevant to his or her concern and what will be linked to his or her concern. Secondly, humanization is embodied in the dissection of messages in the lens of human perceptions and for human understanding, in order to communicate and be communicated. Following this same line, then, the rhetoric of war, as a humanized storytelling of a material natural disaster, is a representational tactic. Showing changes, eruptions, slogans, thrills and struggles enhances the humanized coding of the information.

War narrative in this case, when examined from a more nuanced perspective, sees the functioning of war and confrontation in natural disaster news as partly attributed to the limitation of signs in depicting different phenomena in correspondingly distinctive ways. This is because the human sign systems are limited in words, phrases and sense-making lexical combinations, but there are limitless movements, changes, events and a magnitude of possible phenomena

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in the real world. In other words, the capacity of a sign system to represent the world is limited. This is shown in polysemy and the circumstances in which people use metaphors to denote a scene or idea that lacks an exact sign to adequately express.

It seems that the tactics of polysemy, metonymy, or other communicative expediencies transmit senders' meanings to an audience, but this also brings in a string of associated connotations or imaginations. As Hall maintains, "[s]igns stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads" (1997, p. 18). Once a sign is used to explain a new scene, its connotations are simultaneously transferred to the new phenomenon the sender wishes to depict. For instance, in war discourse, the signifier "war" is usually used to signify actual wars such as World War II; therefore, the image of the actual war will be summoned to understand the earthquake.

The human confrontations with the natural disaster are made comprehensible within existing war frameworks. This is shown by a series of signs, such as the naming of fighters, heroes, or the deity of death, which represent the meaning of roles in news stories. The limitation of the human sign systems and the expansiveness of the existing signs are the reasons why the sign of "war" is being used to be associated with a natural disaster situation and further articulate Chinese nationalism.

5.7 Nation-building and the archetype of war

Creating publicity is one of the key features of media in managing mass communication, which demands that media utilise public discourses that is communicated to plural audiences and follow legal requirements around public responsibility. These demands are determined by, in China's case, the state, but are also impacted upon by the audiences of mass media and the ethics of media practice.

One of the grounding principles guiding the Chinese state media is its responsibility to push for social integration in a situation where the equilibrium is disrupted (*Sichuan Daily* 18 May, 2008). Even for media with different background of ownership, one base line for the covering practice is their public responsibility for the society as stipulated by regulations and codes that deal with media ethics (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956). This demand is even more conspicuous during crisis situations. The question for the media is not to make a choice as to whether or not to construct the sense of community, but rather what kind of community would befit the contingency of the circumstances. To put it specifically in the case of large-scale natural disaster situations, the constructive consideration for the media is to determine what kind of discursive orderings would be the best option for community building.

The discursive measure that was finally adopted in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake was nationalism. The aim of the discursive construction is clear;

that is, to exert influence on public perceptions of the disaster, where the social psyche is guided toward positive integration and the public is mobilized for disaster relief. In this discursive design, there are arguably four reasons to explain why nationalism is observed as the central community-building discourse in the war narrative.

Firstly, a large-scale natural disaster determines that a nation seen as a community is an adequate construction in this situation. There are a variety of communities, such as those formed by blocks, neighbourhoods, districts, or provinces. But in dealing with natural disasters, such as a huge earthquake, the inclusiveness of community should be nationwide in either physical or ideational forms. And it is the collective faith of a nation that is the mightiest power and a counterpart to the "deity of demise" or the "wicked destructor" which is so devastating (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008).

Secondly, the Chinese media supervised by the state in this study are prone to choosing the nation as a community discourse in this circumstance. For *Southern Weekly* and *People Net*, the nationalistic perspective provides a routine angle for interpreting social events. When one part of the nation is in a crisis, nationalism will be even stronger and a sense of national brotherhood and sisterhood is more probable in their news coverage. For state media at the provincial level such as the *Sichuan Daily*, the building of national community is also indispensable, because this is determined by the audience affected by

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the disaster. For them, a community formed from a nation means strong nationwide solidarity.

Thirdly, nationalism is a meaning structure deeply rooted in social culture and is a regular theme in the audience's social identification. It is a cultural gene rooted in the knowledge of national history that circulates across the social conscience in a variety of forms such as nationality, identity and international discourses. In doing so, identifying with Chinese national identity becomes "a form of self-conscious conduct (*zijue xingwei*)" among Chinese people (Sigley 2004, p. 559). It is always ready to be presented to the public when there is a need to attain national consensus. The meaning structures deployed for this end are the war narrative and the ensuing rhetoric of nationalism.

The intricate crossover between these two existing meaning structures is the fourth reason that nationalism appears in the war discourse. The articulation of a "war" in this situation, as analyzed, is a result of the public's strong will to act with collective strength. In the contingency of the Wenchuan earthquake, the community discourse that is thematically coherent with the confrontation is nationalism. The meaning structures of nationalism and the war archetype are intricately entangled. The knowledge, social culture and historical accounts of the nation-state are closely intersected with public memories of confrontation in various forms between different nation-states (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 36). It is the exclusiveness of nationalism in its sovereignty that creates the boundaries

among different nationalities. Nationalism is associated with confrontation and resistance; and the war narrative is usually linked with national identification.

In analyzing the war narrative and Chinese nationalism, it is also instructive to examine whether the confrontations and battles represented in natural disaster coverage are essentially constituted in the "virtual reality" constructed by the media, or are formed as a burst of social meaning via the media. In other words, does the sense of war derive from the media's construction or is it a reflection of the influence of broad social discourse upon media? The next section will address this question.

5.8 Reporting or projecting? Situating nationalism

The correlation between nationalism, the archetype of war and their representations in Chinese media poses challenges to the principle of objectivity in media practice. In the textual analysis in this study, it is found that the objective account of "hard facts" of the disaster situation and disaster relief only constitute part of the information in the whole story. Practically, it is the interpretative texts that glue hard facts together and construct a comprehensive story of the event. In this case it is the integrative frames that guide the meaning production. In this process, the information in the hard facts plays a limited role.

It is because the media has to perform its social responsibility to relieve public despair and discursively integrate the disruption. The media, in this situation, has not only to cover the event by releasing disaster news, but also to explain what it means to the "people" who are either physically involved or mentally engaged with the event. Once it comes to "to mean", the social culture will automatically come into play, since the meanings will be decoded within the audience's cultural frames. Goffman maintains that people immersed in a culture explain the meaning of a new phenomenon (such as an emergent event) according to the frames they are familiar with at the time (1986, 24-29). His argument indicates a meaning making mechanism in which people carry the frames in their mental representation to conceptualise the material world.

The meaning production in this case is not limited to summarising and presenting battle scenes in the media spectacle as a more in-depth investigation indicates a reversed act in which the force of social meaning structure is ignited and introduced into the media spectacle. This invoked meaning is projected onto the event. Compared with the media's interpretation of the event, the real mechanism is different from it. Even though social culture seems to be a static existence of meaning maps or ideology, it would actively project itself onto a social setting when triggered by situational factors. The intermediate agent of this act is public mentality, through which this projection takes place (see Figure 9).

Figure 9   China Do Not Cry (Szonline 2008)

As seen in this figure, the meaning of the nationalist culture is resonated in the public and projected over the event of the Wenchuan earthquake. This projection of cultural force is localised in individual thinking about an event in a way that is prescribed by the cultural archetypes. In a social setting, individuals exhibit considerable resistance to changing their framework of frameworks" (Goffman 1986, 29), therefore the cultural archetype allows the individual to obtain meaning in a certain way framed in the culture, whereby the cultural archetypes project themselves over the reality.

There may also be a query as to whether the speed of independent judgement is slower or quicker than the simultaneous projective force of social archetype, as

it is hard to measure the simultaneous thinking process of individual reporters or editors-in-chief in the media. They could have a selective process for explaining the situation, but this is out of the scope of this study. However, it is certain that the projective force of social archetypes enacted on a public scale generates an intense power that pushes for a consensual anticipation of meaning structured through these archetypes. As already introduced in Chapter Two of this thesis, Tuchman maintains that this is a social tendency of typification in interpreting events (1973 pp. 129-130). It explains the process where people pursue meaning in typical patterns, for typical interpretations produce a coherent subjectivity. Such are the cases with the Wenchuan earthquake, where the cultural archetypes of confrontation, fighting, community-building and nationalism indeed possessed a projective force in themselves. It can be assumed, therefore that the projective force of social culture, through the agency of the public, is cultivated in public mentality and enforced by public anticipation, stimulated by the adverse conditions.

The usual question asked about news reporting, disaster coverage and other media phenomena is how the reality is constructed according to media's intentionality; however, a further question can also be asked: how the media's intentionality is constructed and why a certain notion becomes media's intentionality. It would be more informed to claim that the symbolic representation is more about a projection of stereotypical cognition than a construction of reality, for the action of construction is undertaken by people who cast the structure of meaning making onto the reality. In other words, the

central participant in this process is the media with constructed structure of meaning, rather than the reality which is to be weaved into existing cultural frames to be understood.

This reflexive examination tries to dissect the origin of the dynamics in media representation of reality, or more specifically, the crisis situation in natural disasters. In order to explain what is represented or constructed for the reality, it is necessary to trace the way media frames news production. For instance, in the Wenchuan earthquake, confrontation and community building are what the Chinese media constructs of the disastrous reality, by which the media aims to modulate the social sentiment. However, there is a premise before media decides to formulate the whole process. This premise is the force of social culture, which projects itself through media onto the reality under this circumstance.

In the case of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, this force is found in Chinese nationalism, which is constructed in social mentality, activated in this contingency of crisis and projecting the structure onto the complex disaster situation through mediation. Once the devastating situation and disaster relief requires nationwide mobilization, nationalism is projected into the reality of the situation.

In a word, the Chinese nationalism in this study is a culturally cultivated discourse, circulating around the society, and embedded in social knowledge. It

is a tacit knowledge, a set of criteria and truthful thoughts that are perpetuated in contemporary Chinese culture (Xu 1998). It is generated, maintained and renewed by state institutions set for knowledge production and information dissemination. This net of meaning creates a cohesive and imagined nation upon which the running of all the social institutions and the practice of public affairs derives meaning and legitimacy. This cultural force binding the communities together and serving as a criteria for judging public value in regulating social practices will however, show its outburst in contingencies of the imagined war of resistance.

Conclusion

As a cultural code for constructing national identity, the war narrative is intrinsically a discursive resource underlying the national consciousness and its memories. It is maintained in the broad social discourse. In modern nation-states, this identity is a sign for integrating national sovereignty, so it is always one of the codes enhanced in mainstream media. Therefore, the episteme of the war narrative is repeated at moments when the nation is threatened. In this sense, the identity constructed in the Wenchuan earthquake coverage is an articulation of the nationalist discourse mediated through the war narrative.

In this Chapter, the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in China was adopted as a case to elaborate on the process where war narrative is constructed in the media

outlets selected in this study. In this mediated event (Dayan and Katz 1992), Chinese nationalism is inserted into the media portrayal of the resistance from the Chinese nation to the catastrophic earthquake. This Chapter explores the relation between the war narrative and nationalism and shows that the Chinese nationalism that underlines the war narrative possesses an intricate correlation with the social and historical context of contemporary China. The next chapter discusses the more nuanced way in which China's national cultural identity is represented in the systemic structure of the culture.

Chapter Six

"The War of Resistance" and the Differential Cultural System

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the representation of nationalism in the Chinese media in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and explained the power relations by which the nationalism is constructed as a frame for meaning production in contemporary Chinese culture. This chapter aims to explain the more nuanced approach where the meaning of cultural identity is negotiated in the formulation of media texts. In doing this, this chapter will firstly discuss the interactive dichotomies found in forming the meaning of cultural identities. Then it will discuss the differential and classificatory attributes of the cultural system and their impact on the formation of cultural identities. In examining these two mechanisms this chapter maintains that the construction of the national cultural identity is not limited to perpetuate it as a cultural frame as discussed in Chapter Five, but also has to fit into the differential attributes through which the cultural system is created. It is also argued that only through constructing the national cultural identity according to the rule of differentiation and classification of the cultural system can it be engaged with in this symbolic system.

6.1 Cultural features of identity and the textual realization

In the media texts relating to the Wenchuan earthquake, communities are constructed centered upon the concept of common identities. The constructed national community is completed through step-by-step narratives. The imagination of the communities can be effectively triggered by texts because the essence of communities is cultural, symbolic and imaginative. According to Hall, cultural identities are intrinsically formed through the shared meanings (Hall 1996b). In analyzing the traits of cultural identities and the way they are formulated in the media framing, it is possible to dissect the mechanisms of meaning production about the Chinese national cultural identity in the media representation of this event. In examining the construction of communities in the Wenchuan texts, it is found that the process is indeed conducted through the application of specific signs that conform to the basic requirements of identity formation and feature four key aspects.

Firstly, the media uses signs to construct identities and this complies with the attribute of cultural identity as being symbolic. Barker argues that cultural identity is constructed through signification, and that signs are the physical prerequisites for identity formation (Barker 2012). The media texts provide linguistic tools in this case to initiate this signification process. For example, signs of identity such as the "Chinese nation" (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008) the "heroic Chinese people" (*People Net* 15 June, 2008) and "the Birth of a

New China" (*Southern Weekly* 22 May, 2013) are used in the Wenchuan media texts for representing the meanings of the Chinese national identity.

Secondly, in the media texts covering this event, groups of people and their situations are discussed separately from the facts of the earthquake, which provides a feature of the collectiveness necessary in the identity formation. Identity theory maintains that the formation of an identity relies not only on signs, but must also be a concept about community; that is, cultural identity is a concept based on groups (Mead 2003). To put it in another way, the identity of an individual person is acquired through the belonging to a group. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, identity formation is not individuated in a straightforward manner to confer an identity on each person; rather it is through the construction and imagination of the communities. Accordingly, the Wenchuan media texts construct a national community, and individual persons imagining themselves as belonging to the community of a nation, obtain or reinforce their cultural identities. That is, individuals' identities are conferred by the communal identities.

Thirdly, the signs used in media framing in the Wenchuan reporting come from the concepts about identities in Chinese culture, a key feature of the identity formation. This association assumes that the identity of an individual person comes from incorporating his or her sense of belonging to a concept of collective identity, and the reason individuals have this sense of belonging is their identification and recognition of this concept. This identification and

recognition is influenced by the specific situation and the public imagination of cultural identities. If the linguistic form and meaning of an identity concept exists in a broad social culture, it can be identified by the public; and if this concept is articulated on a suitable occasion such as in a threat or disaster situation, it is more likely to produce a sense of belonging (Barker 2012). Such concepts have become labels for the public to identify themselves.

Fourthly, the construction of identities in media texts resonates with the public's psyche in a crisis situation. The outcome of identity formation is to produce a sense of togetherness as a vital cultural value to which the media adheres in this event. The construction of a recognizable cultural identity is accomplished through sharing the meaning that unites individuals in a common bond of togetherness (Hall 1996b). Forming identities means to sustain certain demands from the public, or this signification process will be of no intrinsic significance in the overall picture of the event and will not persist in the ongoing media discourses. In the face of an earthquake for example seeking a sense of belonging and unison is a marked pursuit of the public. Only through establishing a communal identity can the social psyche take heart and therefore relieve the uncertainties.

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that signs, group(s) of people, shared meanings and suitable contexts are indispensable components in the identity formation. If there is no sign, the public's maps of meaning about identities cannot be deployed; if the event lacks a situation where a

consciousness of collectivism becomes manifest, then there is no context for an articulation of the cultural identity; if there is no shared meaning of a concept of identity, it is difficult to resonate in the public's imagination; if there is no pursuit of belonging in social psyche, then identity formation will lose its realistic basis. In this case, all these components are situated in the dichotomy of the "we" and the "Other" as can be seen as formulated in the Wenchuan texts.

Viewed from the perspective of the cultural identity formation, the formulating of the war of resistance in Wenchuan texts is a bridge to deploy the dichotomized conceptual paradigms in the identity formation in an overall picture of the earthquake event. An event must undergo a process of signification to be incorporated into the frame of cultural identity formation, and as Barker states the focus of cultural identity is "constituted through language as a series of discourses" (2012, p. 229). What results is the construction of the war of resistance that is intrinsically a structure to bring the interpretation of the event into the we/the Other dichotomy.

6.2 Differentiation and the cultural identity

Considering the object of this research is media discourse and the identity formation, this section will examine why and how a group of meanings can serve as the shared meanings for identification, and is premised on the theory

of the cultural identity. That is, the study considers whether the media texts meet the requirements of identity formation claimed in the theory of cultural identity discussed in Chapter Two. Based on this theory it is argued that these media texts construct cultural identities through producing shared meanings; however, in doing this in the Wenchuan case, the media constructs a war narrative to ensure the process of identity formation can come about.

As noted, shared meaning is produced in contrastive relations where shared counterparts, aims, and pursuits are the foundations for producing shared meaning and the guaranteeing factors ensuring that the shared meaning is factually accepted among the individuals. The shared aims and pursuits generate an interior cohesion when they are in an oppositional relation to other groups with different identities (Barker 2012). In this case, the construction of "nation", as a cultural identity, is based on shared aims in a crisis situation and the earthquake, as one part in the dichotomized structure, defines the shared goal of the people: to resist disaster.

In the Wenchuan texts, the dichotomized structure is also completed through formulating the discourse of resistance. The continuous descriptions that construct the disaster event as a type of battle create dichotomized sides for identity construction. The metaphor of battle generates resistant interactions for interpreting the relation between collective identities of "we" and the constructed "Other". For the state-run media in China, articulating the overall situation in an active "battle" manner, rather than simply presenting

information about the aftermath is essential for constructing a group identity in a time of crisis. Hall claims that the construction of identity is carried out through "specific enunciative strategies" (1996b, p. 4), that can be seen as discursive formations set as a background of differentiated imagination in constructing shared meanings and identities (Hall 1996b). The discursive formation indicated here is the specifically formulated war of resistance in the media texts seen in the Wenchuan earthquake case.

This discursive strategy is to clear away the meanings that cannot be included and endured in "our" community, by transferring them to a constructed "Other". As Hall explains, identities are "more the product of marking difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity" (Hall 1996b). This differentiation is indispensable, for if a shared meaning of an identity is to be acquired, the discourse should at the same time allot a space to place the meanings that cannot be shared. In this sense, the "Other" is constructed to be an object to be blamed and a place for catharsis. In this way, the meanings shared to construct "our" identity can be purified and kept away from subversive memes. That is, it is through drawing a clear line towards what is different that makes the same meanings crystallize.

In the Wenchuan case, the state-controlled media had to make clear the opposite side of "our" communities and use a sign to have it stand out in the media space. If the image of the opposite side is blurred, "our" pursuit would be not clearly targeted and "our" shared meaning could not be purified. This is

because in this case the opposite side contrasting with the "we" (the state and the citizens of China) determine the direction of "our" actions and the reasons why "we" should take such actions in a crisis. Therefore, the construction of identities such as "we the Chinese" is on the one hand rooted in the cultural resource; but on the other hand, the condensation and articulation of this identity have to be in a context where it is appropriate for it to stand out. So, it is necessary for the media to formulate an intermediate discourse to create such a context.

This context is created in the Wenchuan case by utilizing the media's voice to establish the common pursuit of the groups of people in the face of the threat from the earthquake. The pursuit is the strong wish for security, for living through the disaster and for "defeating" the disaster. These shared expectations are the base for articulating the shared meanings in community building and identity formation. It is the disaster that creates these shared expectations, while it is this challenge posed by the earthquake that generates strong determination among the groups of people.

The embedding of identity formation discourse into the media texts of this event is also influenced by the gravity of the natural disaster. For instance, if the scale of the earthquake was small and easily contained, there would be no strong consciousness of collective identity and no explicit collective pursuit with which to condense the shared meanings for the identification. Even though a small-scale natural disaster can also become a news event, it is

generally unsuitable to be addressed as a type of war. Arguably, the construction of identity requires a situation stimulus (Thoits and Virsbup 1997, p. 116) for activating and maintaining the collective consciousness.

The potentiality for producing this stimulus is determined by whether stark similarities and differences can be found among participants in an event. As stressed by Jenkins, "similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identification" (Jenkins 2004). So for a natural disaster such as the Wenchuan earthquake which is intensely covered by the state media, it has to be dealt with by resorting to communal supports not only from the state interventions but also from the wider community. In this case, the similarities and differences are manifest: the shared similarity is the public's common attitude towards the earthquake threat; the difference comes from the opposing status between the people and the earthquake. The structure of similarity-difference lays a cognitive foundation for the media to construct and apply the discourse of resistance to structure news narratives and form recognizable cultural identities.

In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the key themes in the central meanings around the Chinese national identity are the "heroic Chinese" (*People's Daily* 20 May, 2008), "the honorary sentiments" (*People's Daily* 4 July, 2008), and "one heart, cohesive faith, overcoming the difficulties" (*Guangming Daily* 3 June, 2008). These themes can fix the anxieties in the social psyche and gather strength for resistance in a crisis; therefore, they have a strong unifying power to produce consensus among the individuals. However,

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in order to incorporate these themes into a central meaning to form a "we" as a cultural identity, the disruptive elements entangled inside them, such as uncertainties, anxieties and fear, should be dispelled so as to consolidate the core value of the "our" identity. This step is necessary, as explained earlier, so that the constructed identity should be a complete one, with a clear title and definite denotations. It is these disruptive elements that illuminate what is lacking in "our" community or identity, which implies "what it needs in order to define fully and confirm its identity" (Rutherford 1990).

What Rutherford notes about the images of a "we" projected out into the "Other" are intrinsically parts of imagination that are deserted in constructing the "we" with purified themes. The identity construction is a symbolic process, in which the role of the "Other" is not limited to constitute a dichotomy of the identity formation; it is also a support from which the identity of the "we" is modulated, reinvigorated and maintained. In this case, it is necessary for the media to reshape the image of collective identity by using the act of attribution in its framing and holding an active discursive position to build up faith within the "we". Even though the earthquake was the initiator of the event, it instantly became a silent "Other" when the media formulated an expedient discourse of resistance.

In other words, a disaster can initiate the event, but it has no discursive competence to make a media story in the text. The signs representing the disaster are chosen by the media and framed within a position of being "Other";

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its central meaning has to be summed up by the media; its relation to the public is redefined; and it is constructed partly to be a supporting actor to construct "our" identity. Therefore both transferal of meaning and construction of the dichotomy of identity formation are conducted in the running discourse about the war in the text. Saussure maintains that meaning is produced through differentiation and this dichotomy for identity formation is not static but a dialogic process (Hall 1997) between a pair of identities in an oppositional relation. It produces and confirms the meanings for each of them. In the Wenchuan texts, the central meaning of the earthquake is "threat and destruction", against which and in interaction with which "our" meaning of "solidarity, resolution and victory" is confirmed and consolidated.

The selection of principal subjects in the Wenchuan case was determined by the cultural values of the media in covering this event. As the analysis of media frames has shown in Chapter Four, building a national belonging is the central cultural value in the coverage. When the war narrative is formulated in the coverage, the status of the major roles in the event is inverted. In the narrative of "earthquake besieged people", the narration favors the factual, objective side of the earthquake; in the story of "we resist the earthquake", the angle of narration is from the "we" which now holds an active position. This change in news narration replaces statements represented by the theme of "siege and crisis" with that guided by "the war of resistance". As meaning is seen as the result of negotiation (Hall 1997), the change in the way of narrating the event changes the way meaning is negotiated.

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In this discursive modulation, the constructed war fixes the overall meaning of the event. As the uncertainties and anxieties in a natural disaster situation are partly due to the immense unexpected shock, they can be heightened by uncertainties in the information produced during the crisis. In routine times, the information flow in the society is regular and in accordance with the public's ordinary expectations. This regularity of information flow and reliable expectation in routine social life keeps the social psyche and social order in a certain and stable state. Viewed from the perspective of information communication, the crisis in the Wenchuan case is ultimately attributed to a lack of definite information or the unstable flows of detailed information in regard to the disaster, its aftermath and disaster relief. This leads people to have various conjectures about the event. In this circumstance, the social responsibility assumed by the media demands that media on the one hand provides sufficient information; and on the other hand, shapes public opinion to avoid panic. In doing so, the influence of the natural disaster is restricted to the event itself; rather than being amplified. In the face of these demands for crisis relief, the media discourse plays a critical role (Shao 2009, p. 237). In the Wenchuan case, the media construction of the war of resistance not only clearly fixes the key entities in the event, but also presents clear information as to the major story of the event. In addition, it also provides information as to how the problem should be approached to provide the best outcome.

Specifically speaking, the construction of resistance clarifies understanding of the situation through sorting out irregular flows of disaster information and the

negative information is incorporated into the concept of "Other" in the interaction. It is within this interaction that "we" and "Other" are defined and therefore a new interpretation of the event is produced (Hall 1997). The resistance is a measure to ensure that the task of creating meaning be fulfilled in the context of natural disaster news. In other words, this discourse is an act of signification that links the media space with the cultural space. At this point, a further question can be asked about the relation of this media discourse with the differential mechanism of the cultural system.

6.3 The war narrative fitting into the cultural structure

In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the ultimate aim of textual formulation of cultural identities was to effectively communicate national values to the audience. How this was achieved can be addressed by using cultural theories to examine whether the media's discursive strategies were compatible with the essential traits of the social cultural system. According to cultural theories, individuals' conception is formed within a cultural system (van Dijk 2009, p. 7) that constructs "a state or habit of the mind" of individuals (Williams 1987, p. xviii). For different individuals, there are variances as to their cultural thinking, but there are also commonalities within them. Williams maintains that society and culture are mutually dependent, that is, there is no organized society without a cultural system (1987). This argument is further explained in Lévi-Strauss's findings on the "symbolic

origin of society" in which he sees the society "as the order of culture" and the social activities as symbolically structured (Hénaff 2009, p. 186). The common structure in cultural thinking is that shared by members in a society. Therefore, examining media texts by making reference to cultural structure can assist in checking the potential intelligibility of the meaning constructed in those texts.

When the media texts about the earthquake are coded in accordance with the cultural structure, the information and values of the media can be decoded by the audience. Specifically, the traits of cultural structure influences the way information about the event is sorted out. The close association between media text and cultural structure is determined by the fact that the social culture is the setting in which the construction, communication and comprehension of media texts is practiced. The signifying practices of media have to adhere to the facts of a news event to ensure authenticity, objectivity and neutrality; and also have to conform to the attributes of the cultural structure. The former is more determined by the event in itself, while the latter is more associated with the attributes of cultural system. That is, the structure of social culture lays down rules for constructing the media discourse in fulfilling the identity formation in media texts.

In human communication within a cultural system, a communicator and the respondent have to possess "capacities for making +/- distinctions, for treating the binary pairs thus formed as related couples, and for manipulating these 'relations' as in a matrix algebra" (Leach 1973, p. 52). Therefore when the

media formulates texts in accord with the attributes of the culture, it is more likely to be decoded in this cultural structure. As Hall emphasizes, in understanding objects, they have to be placed in a differential classificatory system to acquire a cultural meaning or identity (1997). He argues that social culture is constituted by classificatory systems (1997), in which a cluster of objects is arranged into an order of things according to their differences and similarities viewed from certain perspectives.

So in the Wenchuan case, the dichotomy of identity formation formulated by the war narrative is intrinsically a process in which the overall information about the event is put into classifications by the media that are in a dialectic relation. As Lévi-Strauss maintains, the attribute of classification in cultural structure refers to a practice, in which the "chaotic data provided by nature" is divided into different parts which are further broken up into more nuanced classifications (Doniger 2009, p. 198). This procedure is essentially a process of differentiation, and "the marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture" (Hall 1997). As contended by Lévi-Strauss, "this attempt inevitably traps the human imagination in a web of dualisms" (Doniger 2009, p. 198), because as the process of differentiation of an object proceeds, the information about the object becomes more and more nuanced and definite. In the Wenchuan case, the overall crisis situation is an object to be covered by the media. The cluster of information within the situation is then differentiated and classified into three parts: "we", "Other" and "resistance". In so doing, the symbolic ordering of each of them are formulated

in the text. And therefore, the confusion of the event is clarified when the meaning system concerned with the crisis is created. In this sense, formulating the war imagination is a symbolic act to culturize the material realities of the Wenchuan event to the audience.

In addition, the systemic attribute of cultural structure means the differentiation of an object is conducted to create nuanced meanings in a classificatory manner (Hall 1997, p. 236; Woodward 1997, p. 30). As the human communicative system is characterized by and constructed through the "category-forming capacity" (Leach 1973, p. 39), differences should be intelligible in cultural system rather than processed in a random way. The premise for differentiation should include a feature shared by all components in a category. It is only when certain components possess commonalities that they can be classified and thus differentiated from others. As noted earlier, in this case, the reason why the identities of "we" and "Other" and "resistance" as a dynamic relationship can be differentiated in the event is the commonalities of information these notions contain. The commonality of "we" comes from the common threat from earthquake and its aftermath; the commonality in classifying the "Other" is the destructive impact on people; and the commonality of "resistance" derives from the rescue actions that are similar to an image of fighting back.

This systemic attribute of cultural structure also implies that the orders of things classified through differentiation should be associative rather than irrelevant. In this way, these linked orders produce a web of concepts. In the

Wenchuan texts, the reason that "we" and "Other" can produce meanings is that they are associated by the category of "resistance". If there is no such association, the classifications would be irrelevant to the storytelling and meaning making. Therefore, the interrelated conceptual paradigm of "we–resistance–Other" is formulated in the media spectacle which reflects and embodies the structure of the foundational cultural system.

Conclusion

The construction of the war of resistance in the media texts from China's news outlets creates a dichotomized structure for forming cultural identities in which the meaning of cultural identities is produced. The efficacy of this mechanism is attributed to the fact that the meaning system in a culture as seen in China is formulated through differentiation. Therefore, the war of resistance in this case is by no means simply a metaphor; rather it is rooted in the mechanisms of cultural identification and the universal regularities of the cultural system recognizable to the Chinese audience. The next chapter explores and contextualizes the global implication of such discourses through an analysis of the 2013 bushfire crisis in Tasmania, Australia.

Chapter Seven

Discourse of Resistance and Global Implication

Introduction

Following the previous chapters on examining the discourse of resistance set in the case of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in the Chinese state media, this chapter conducts a minor case study of the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire. In examining the community building process in media coverage of this event, two privately-owned Australian media are selected: *The Australian* and *The Mercury*. This minor case study examines how the discourse of resistance is also constructed in different cultural contexts such as in Australia, and provides an overview of the discursive process which produces it. In analyzing the texts selected for this section of the study, cluster criticism is also applied to trace the words, phrases, and sentences chosen in the text in the meaning production. Based on these clusters of expressions, the study investigates what narrative characters are framed and what meanings are signified. Finally, this section analyzes the concept and meanings used for constructing the cultural identity in this event. While this analysis does not delve deeply into Australian cultural framework, it aims to indicate the global implications of this discourse. In doing this, this minor case illustrates that the constructed "war of resistance" is

a contextualized and a mediated cultural phenomenon that underpins cultural identification in a crisis situation.

7.1 The event and the corpus of data

A catastrophic series of bushfires occurred in Tasmania from late November 2012 to April 2013. The peak time of this natural disaster was in early January, during which hundreds of houses were burned out and residents' lives threatened in southern areas of the state. This devastating bushfire raged mainly on the south-eastern coast of Tasmania. The event was covered by the Australian media, and it became one of the major focuses on the public agenda in the period. The way media reported this disastrous event was unlike the Chinese media coverage of the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake; however, similarities are visible in the use of a constructed "war of resistance" as a frame for transforming the disruptiveness brought about by the catastrophe and for integrating the public conception of the crisis. Nevertheless, the more specific statement orderings and prevailing themes within this discourse display culturally diversified characteristics.

In analyzing the commonalities as well as distinctive traits of the war narrative as constructed in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire, news articles from *The Australian* and *The Mercury* in the period of the Tasmanian bushfire were selected, to conduct a textual analysis of the

media frame and its culturally-specific representation. The corpus of primary data comprises 67 news reports and pictures from *The Mercury* and 15 from *The Australian*, both from Murdoch's News Limited, Australia's largest commercial network. *The Mercury*, a local media outlet, depicted in detail the stories of the disaster, and exhibited a nuanced narrative in dealing with the crisis situation. *The Australian*, as a national media, reports news events from a nationwide perspective.

The combination of both can provide a research angle that includes both macro and micro spectacles; thus enabling a comprehensive study of the media coverage of this event. Through examining news articles in these commercial media, it is found that the war narrative also performed an integrative role in their coverage of the bushfire. The broad picture of the war narrative in this event is a result of continuous as well as progressive formulation of its key constituents and relations among them. This is necessary, for with no essential construct of the indispensable elements, stages and atmosphere that are decisive in narrating the story about the war of resistance, the complete media story cannot be produced. Specifically, these include the constituent parts discussed in the following sections.

7.2 Mapping the crisis

As noted, the initial state of war narration is formulated by textually generating an atmosphere that indicates imminent danger, crisis, loss and disaster. It is a prelude for the progressive ordering of the statements and creates a cause for preparing for a battle. Specifically, this move consists of narrations that foreshadow the incoming intrusive threat and destruction of lives, property and peace. As shown in a news article titled "*First bushfire offers taste of things to come*" in *The Australian* (4 January, 2013), the texts indicate a "taste" of "things" that are linked with the stereotypical image of a malicious intrusion into the harmony.

Combined with insinuation of the intense situation, a straightforward approach is applied to send a clear warning to the audience. At the stage of terrorization, signals for keeping residents alert to a coming destruction prevailed. For example, *The Mercury* released a news article titled "[*s*]*ummer of fire danger looming, authorities warn*" (Wednesday, 2 January, 2013). This direct warning message was supplemented by a picture depicting two firefighters, with anxious facial expressions and equipped with fighting gear, which seemed to be preparing for highly possible fire-fighting actions (see Figure 10). The implicit foreshadowing and the more confirmative warning set in motion a terrorization of the situation in tracking this event.

NEWSFRONT |

Summer of fire danger looming, authorities warn

Rising perils of dry winds

WELLINGTON 3-1

WELLINGTON FIRE STATION

ACTION STATION: Volunteer firefighters Sean Riseley, 35, left, and Brendan Sargeant, 25, are on call and ready to go as the Wellington brigade at Viesta Drive, Glenorchy, gears up for predicted hot and windy weather.
Picture: LEIGH WINBURN

Figure 10   (*The Mercury*, Wednesday, 2 January, 2013).

The representation of the incoming perils and terror creates a warlike depiction of mobilization in this media discourse. On 4 January, immediately before the major bushfire broke out, *The Australian* reported:

> Mr. Ryan said agencies were in an "advanced state of readiness", with 8000 personnel, including 6000 Country Fire Authority members, ready to mobilize.
> (Friday, 4 January, 2013)

Later, it continued to write that "the risk is real and potentially deadly" and called for bracing for the catastrophe (*The Australian* Tuesday, 8 January, 2013). At this stage, the probability of a catastrophe that was foreshadowed appeared to be confirmed and the representation of active preparation of the

state institutions appeared to break through the terror. After the bushfire broke out, the target of the mobilization was constructed in the media.

7.3 Characterizing the bushfire

The bushfire is continuously named as an "evil demon" which makes the object of fighting vivid, focused and in accord to the rhetoric of struggles. The bushfire itself is a natural phenomenon, but once it is identified as a demon, it is set on the opposite side of the sacred. By the specific denomination through naming, the connotation of the bushfire is extended from a natural happening to a social event fraught with complex relations. The demonized naming of the bushfire elevates it to an antagonistic attitude, a perpetrator of ruin, death, despair and an ultimate aim to fight for, as it is portrayed in the following texts:

Exemplary cluster of statements used for demonization
fiery hell (*The Mercury* Sunday, 6 January, 2013)
nature's worst (*The Australian* Wednesday, 9 January, 2013)
summer hellfire (*The Mercury* Saturday, 12 January, 2013a)
raging inferno (*The Mercury* Sunday, 13 January, 2013)
the beast (*The Mercury* Saturday, 12 January, 2013b)

Table 13

Such expressions use existing images of destruction and evil spirits to name the bushfire. In addition to the lexicon, the media applies pictures showing violent rages of the fire, with fire fighters using water pumps to defend the as yet unscathed land. The configuration of the lexicons and pictures on the one hand delineate the bushfire from "we" as a community. It is placed in a separated

position indicating wickedness in this news story. On the other hand, it is a transition leading to a progressive storytelling, in which the elements of the event are separated, dissected and incorporated into a narrative of an imagined war of resistance.

Through demonizing the bushfire, the two actors are constructed in the war narrative. The disaster results, the threat and the stories during the bushfire period are addressed within binary relations between the "hellfire" (*The Mercury* Saturday, 12 January, 2013a) and the "we" as a community that has not been clearly emphasized at this stage. Put in detail, the ruins can be interpreted as the evil act of the bushfire; the threat is interpreted as one part of the hellfire, which the "we" is battling against. In sum, demonizing and characterizing the bushfire in the media narratives sets up an interpretive framework for this event, which tends to transform the disaster into a story about human battles with the evil catastrophe. This transformation is further strengthened in the ensuing constructions of the war actions.

7.4 Constructing a war of resistance

War actions in this case are characterized by the ongoing confrontations, in which the defenders in the media story are constructed. In *The Australian* and *The Mercury*, corresponding to the narrative character of "evil inferno" (*The*

Mercury Sunday, 13 January, 2013), the narrative actions of resistance are textually shaped:

Cluster of statements for constructing actions of resistance	
The fire service was last night battling 22 blazes across the state, using 63 fire trucks (*The Mercury* Friday, 4 January, 2013b)	
nine helicopters and one plane	(*The Mercury* Friday, 4 January, 2013b)
People's army on march	(*The Mercury* Thursday, 10 January, 2013b)
Homes lost as state battles blazes.	(*The Australian* 5-6 January, 2013)
The Tasmania Fire Service called for residents of Forcett, near Sorell, and the Lake Repulse area in the Upper Derwent Valley to take urgent action. Firefighters were last night battling 22 blazes across the state […]. (*The Mercury* Friday, 4 January, 2013a)	
Finally, some respite but the battle goes on. (*The Mercury* Thursday, 10 January, 2013a)	

Table 14

In this cluster of statements constructing resistance to the bushfire, the lexicons such as "march", "battle" and "take action" delineate the people involved in the crisis and the cause of the crisis. By framing the action of resistance using these statements, the identities of the two narrative characters in media story about this event are constructed. In doing so, the plot of "Tasmanians are being threatened by the inferno" is transformed to "Tasmanians resist the inferno". The active connotation of resistance constructed by the rhetoric of war creates a positive representation of the situations that counteract and relieve the negativity at the early stage of the event (see Figure 11).

Holding the line: states withstand nature's worst

Firefighters try to hold back flames at Deans Gap near Nowra in NSW, and, below, crews from Ararat in Victoria chase a blaze about 200km west of Melbourne

PICTURES DAN HIMBRECHTS, CRAIG WILSON/PYRENEES ADVOCATE

Figure 11   (*The Australian*, Wednesday 9 January, 2013)

As the photo indicates, "the line" is now held between the people and the "nature's worst". In doing so, the two narrative characters in the media story are identified. The wholeness or coherence of communal meaning is produced on the "threshold between interior and exterior, between self and Other" (Rutherford 1990, p. 24). And the cultural identity is not fixed but is "continually being produced within the vectors of similarity and difference" (Barker 2012, p. 233). Here, the people facing the similar threat are discursively categorized in a group; while the incidents in the bushfire are conceptualized as an imagined invader. Evidently, the line drawn between the bushfire and the people involved embodies the mechanism of differentiation in the role identification.

More obviously, the sense of resistance was bluntly expressed on the front page of *The Mercury* on Thursday, 10 January, where the defending groups in this war discourse are named as the "People's Army". This large-print statement was followed by a passage titled "People's army on march" on page 5 of the day. Arguably, the concept of the "People's Army" accurately contains all the participants in disaster relief, including state fire services, residents and volunteers, but it also importantly conjures up images of China's mass "People's Army", rather than the sparse collection of volunteers (given Tasmania's low population) that are fighting the fire. The participants on the different fronts are seen to take common fire-fighting actions, and are on the same fighting side in this war discourse, with the same goal of defeating the invader.

The shared mission and similar acts construct an image of the People's army, which makes the war discourse more manifest and also reasonably introduces militarized representations. Within the register of this broad war narrative, the interactions between the "inferno" (*The Mercury* Sunday, 13 January, 2013) and the "people's army" (*The Mercury* Thursday, 10 January, 2013b) are constructed within a notion of threat and resistance consisting of fighting, defending, approaching, marching and defeating. These "war actions" express the confrontation between the people's army and the demonized bushfire which makes the war discourse extend beyond a static nominal interpretation of the two sides and displays the news story in an on-going fluctuation of scenarios. It is stories rather than drab information that produce news events. The

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continuous confrontations within the war narrative separate the whole picture into a series of temporal stories about conflicts. By this means, the media creates more opportunities for the news production, because the information about the bushfire is limited but the stories of conflicts are plenty.

This more nuanced narrative also helps the media to consistently engage the audience with the event. The specific stories about the battles of this sort are applied to specific cases of individual persons, families and communities. Again just as the way the sense of belonging is constructed in the case of the representation of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake by the Chinese state media, the depiction of terror and the construction of two the contrastive narrative characters (literally, good and evil) and their interactions contribute to a narrative function. This function forms the context for community building.

7.5 Communal identification of "the Tasmanians"

The constructed unification in this case is essentially a discursive process in which communities are built up through representing a series of shared meanings. The dramatized discursive formations in the Tasmanian bushfires are produced not simply for adding news value and engaging audiences with thrilling stories, as they also construct the communities that back up the disaster relief and create a sense of belonging for the people in areas threatened by the bushfires. A discourse can articulate a meaning shared by individuals

who, through this meaning, identify themselves with an identity (Hall 1996b, p. 6). In constructing a sense of community or a shared identity, media texts in this case used two methods: construct shared meanings and articulate these meanings with concepts of communal identity such as the "the Tasmanians" and "the nation". In this event, the cultural identity of "the Tasmanians" is especially shaped around a series of meanings such as the shared trauma, the heroism, the bravery, the generosity, the mate ship, the compassion, love, revival and triumph:

Exemplary cluster of statements representing a shared meaning for community building
Ordinary heroes ensure a miracle   (*The Australian* 12-13 January, 2013)
Heartbreak and heroism as fires burn   (*The Mercury* Sunday, 6 January, 2013)
These are the scenes that have gripped the nation since January 4. All-engulfing flames that devastated communities and took a huge public and personal toll. But they are also the scenes that ignited an amazing and proud Tasmanian spirit of generosity, bravery and compassion. These are the scenes that united the state. (*The Mercury* Saturday, 12 January, 2013c)
Standing in front of the rubble that was their house awaiting an insurance assessor yesterday. The couple said the family's strong Christian faith and love for each other would see them embrace the challenges ahead […]. Mrs. Holmes was always confident it would turn out well. 'We never lost faith. People are asking us how you can still be smiling but there's more to life than material possessions,' she said.   (*The Mercury* Friday, 11 January, 2013)
Town Spirit rises from the ashes.   (*The Mercury* Saturday, 19 January, 2013)

Table 15

In these extracts, a group of meanings is signified by signs such as the "heroism", the "generosity, bravery and compassion", the "faith' and the "town spirit", which are articulated as shared meanings to construct a collective identity of being "the Tasmanians". That is, it is through recognizing the cultural themes represented by these signs that people trapped in uncertainty and anxiety identify with an imagined community. Cultural identities are "constituted through language as a series of discourses" (Barker 2012, p. 229; see also: Hall 1996b, pp. 5-6), therefore without the articulation of these shared

values the cultural imagination in the bushfire situation would be occupied by trauma and the negative sentiments.

The disorderly information flow and the stressful situation experienced by the people in the crisis objectively generate a potential pursuit for a structure of meaning. The meaning represented by the cultural identity of "the Tasmanians" helps to dispel the turmoil within the disruption and therefore creates "personal coherence and intelligibility" and "a sense of belonging" (Rutherford 1990, pp. 24-25). The cultural themes signified in the texts above in the bushfire situation suggest a communal narrative fitting into the communal needs that are essential for constructing the sense of belonging to a cultural identity (Mansfield 2000, p. 3; During 2005, p. 57). In this event, meanings concerned with the communal belonging are articulated through the cultural identification with "the Tasmanians". As the front-page in *The Mercury* displays:
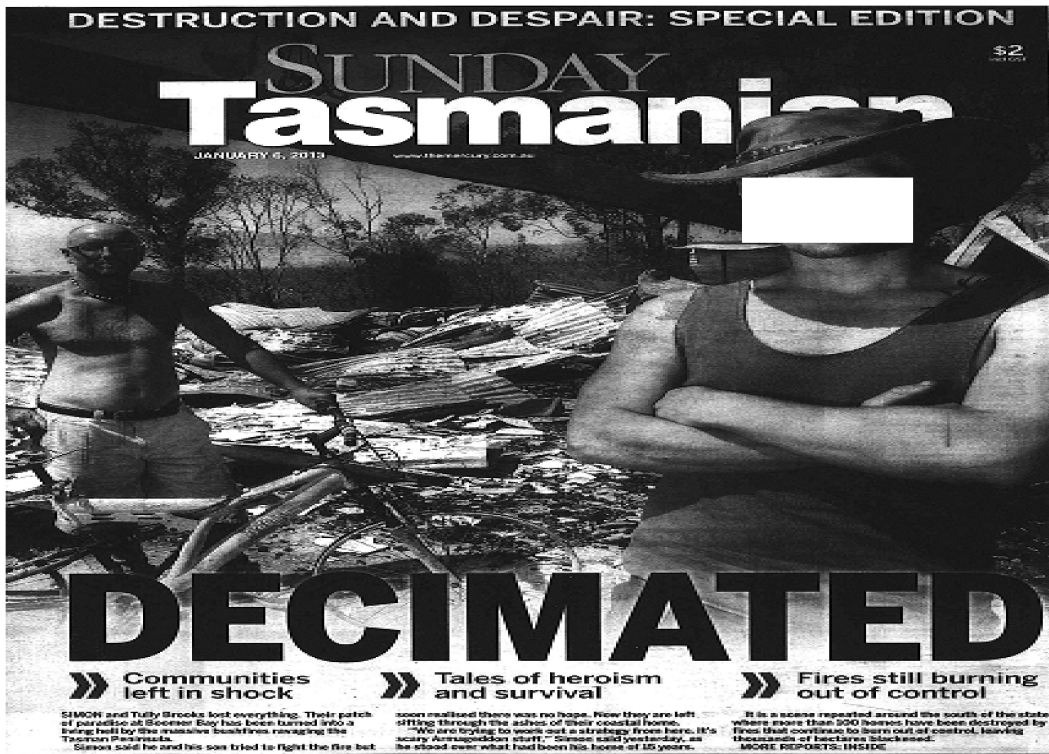
Figure 12   (*The Mercury,* Sunday, 6 January, 2013)

Figure 13   (*The Mercury* Saturday, 12 January, 2013c)

In these two front page pictures, the communal identity of "the Tasmanians" is lucidly articulated for community identification. As demonstrated in the cluster of statements comprising the words "decimated", "communities left in shock", "tales of heroism and survival" and "fires still burning out of control", the media narrative of this event is framed in a story of "the united Tasmanians" engaging in a war of resistance with the "inferno". The manifest articulation of the concept "the Tasmanians" holds together the cultural themes of the "Tasmanian spirit of generosity, bravery and compassion" which constructs a sense of unison for the reader in the face of the crisis (*The Mercury* Saturday, January, 12, 2013c). The communal identification of the Tasmanians in this situation is constructed to lead the meaning production toward a theme of victory, which then indicates the consummation of the media story, reinforced with the hope and resolution for a final triumph.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the four constituent parts in constructing the war of resistance in the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire by *The Australian* and *The Mercury*. In this case, the national cultural identity is far less constructed than that of "the Tasmanians". This may be due to the event being a localized one and has by far less influence than that of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. However, it is argued in this chapter that in media texts the bushfire is characterized in an imagined war of resistance; and in doing so, a series of meanings are signified

through which an imagined community-"the Tasmanians" are constructed. This cultural identification entails shared meanings such as faith, the mate ship, the bravery, the unison and victory in the face of the invasion of the bushfire as an inferno. As with the experiences of the Wenchuan earthquake, this chapter also maintains that the crisis situation caused by the bushfire produces a contingency in which a common pursuit of meaning is required to relieve the uncertainty and anxiety. The pursuit of belonging to a community in this case is fulfilled through shared values symbolized by the cultural identity of "the Tasmanians". This discursive process fits into the people's common experience of the crisis in the physicality and therefore is a contingent articulation of the shared identity. In doing so, this media discourse contributes to the crisis control by representing the meanings for its readers based on their cultural understandings.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This thesis draws upon Chinese culture and society as a context and the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake as a case study to analyze how a discourse of resistance is formulated in order to control a crisis caused by a natural disaster. Such crises require systematic responses including the coordination of the disaster relief, the rescuing of victims, and the mobilizing of emergency and social infrastructure resources. How the media represents and interprets the disaster also plays an important role. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider every aspect contained in disaster relief, instead it examines the information flows and production of meanings in a disaster situation, and specifically examines how a select media discourse was constructed in the Chinese media to enhance the representation of disaster relief in the Wenchuan earthquake. This thesis argues that the natural disaster is the ultimate cause of the crisis situation; however, the most disturbing aspects of the crisis are not limited to death and the devastation of properties.

Such was the case in the Wenchuan earthquake. The crisis situation caused by the earthquake included multiple aspects and levels. It included challenges in deploying resources, personnel and equipment, the dispersing funds, challenges to the social psyche and pressure on the government for response. For instance,

there were specific and urgent demands for assistance such as mass public hygiene support. These were among the most urgent material needs. There was also an urgent need for information and the information management as victims and onlookers sought meaning.

After an earthquake on such a scale the pressing sense of crisis needed to be resolved into ordered, decipherable and confusion-relieving understanding of the situation. In terms of information flow and creating meaning out of chaos, the crisis situation in the earthquake was not only about death and loss, but also closely related to the emergency that brought about the disruption of ordinary information flows. In such a climate of confusion, questions were asked by the general public: What is the specific information of the earthquake? How are the people in earthquake areas faring? How can we respond? How can we help? How can the anxiety and uncertainty be relieved? How can victims be provided with humanitarian consolation? All these questions resulting from the disaster situation lead to a demand for information from the public. Only through providing sufficient responses to these questions can the level of emergency be reduced. Therefore, the release of information from the media plays a critical role in this situation, for the information from the media, especially the mainstream media, is a primary information source. This research explores this important function of the media and examines what type of information is released and what meaning it constructs from the disaster and integrates into particular discourse for the public in response to the disaster relief. This is based on the proposition that the media's role in responding to disaster or crisis

is not to be taken at face value. It in fact contains more nuanced discursive regularities that are worthy of being summarized, theoretically questioned and empirically categorized in order to properly understand their value and purposes.

This thesis addresses this question through an integrated examination of social culture, discursive power and media texts, and by displaying how a discourse of resistance can be constructed through interactions among these factors. As explained in the theory of media framing, in order to attain resonance and impact from the audience, the media's coverage should be modified to relate to the audience's cultural context. This is based on the view that when individuals receive information, the meaning of it is interpreted within a cultural frame. Therefore, the provision of information about an earthquake is in the service of producing meaning, and the factual, descriptive information is only the raw material for acquiring meaning.

In the media texts selected in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, one element of the information released is structured around the model of "resistance" which aims to generate resonance. In this model, the earthquake is constructed to be an opponent, the rescue actions are constructed under the concept of resistance, and the people are united in the spirit of collective national identity. Setting disaster information as its base and using a signifying practice as its means, this discourse intends to define the meaning of the earthquake situation in a nationalistic way. This signification practice in media

texts functions to interpret the people's relation to the earthquake and creates a shared meaning by using these discursive measures in a time of uncertainty. The kind of meaning that should be created by this discourse is determined by the purposes and desired interests of the media, as either a state or commercial institution.

These purposes represent both the realistic pursuits in the disaster situation and the aim to control the situation by the cultural power behind the media. The discourse of resistance constructed guides the information flow and creates a strong sense of belonging in a time of crisis. In the reality of the earthquake situation, victims and those who are anxious are in an intense need of definite solutions and desperately aspire to a sense of belonging. Human needs in a crisis are for physical assistance, and also for the psychological support simultaneously erupting when communities are fractured. In the face of a large natural disaster, individuals need to feel included in a community in order to attain a sense of belonging.

Behind the media, the intentionality of the cultural power is displayed in its control of the earthquake situation. The media examined in this thesis includes mainstream news outlet with state backgrounds. In China, although the *Southern Weekly* takes a more independent stance in its reporting, it is also managed under the system of the Party media conglomerate. The state power behind the media in the Wenchuan case affects its coverage of the crisis, the attributes of the public character and the sense of nationhood it projects. The

nationalistic orientation in the Wenchuan case is embodied in the media's emphasis on national cultural identity in its discourse. The shared meaning produced by the discourse of resistance meets the real demand for mobilizing social resources to carry out disaster relief and at the same time applies a signifying practice to construct people's self-identification with "our" national frontline. In this way, the demand for a sense of belonging is met.

The attribute of nationhood as a cultural power for formulating this discourse is also showcased in the articulation, emphasis and intensification of national cultural identity in the media texts. There is no doubt that the construction of a national cultural identity is by no means the only choice for constructing a sense of belonging in a disaster situation. For instance, when traditional *Tiandao* epistemology occupied the dominant position for explaining the meaning of the natural disasters, the collective cultural identity was constructed around the charisma of divine leaders; in the period of the Cultural Revolution, media texts constructed the imagined togetherness in emphasizing the concept of class struggle. In the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the strengthening of national cultural identity in the media coverage reflects the power of the nation (including its government, military and its citizens). Just as in traditional Chinese culture and in the context of the Cultural Revolution, the current media discourse is also deeply impacted by the national culture in contemporary Chinese society.

Although operating in alternative cultural contexts, state power still uses the media to construct and manage different cultural identities in natural disaster circumstances. The ultimate goal is the same, which is to facilitate the crisis control, where the purpose of cultural power is to contain the emergency. It is therefore the cultural climate that impacts what cultural identities should be constructed and the ways they are constructed to produce a group of shared, evocative and belonging-making meanings, reflecting Hall's idea that it is a contingent articulation produced in a suitable context. In contemporary China, the national identity is the most evocative concept for integrating the collective identity. As Xu (1998) argues, in the modern nation-state, there is no other discourse that has more cohesive strength than nationalism. The notion of nationhood can unify the people in a country with a shared cultural imagination of the common identity (Xu 1998). The integrative power of the national cultural identity derives from the fact that individuals' cultural thinking and behavior are soaked within the national culture. National memories, national heroes, the genealogy of the national history and the distress, glory and aspirations of a nation form important parts in the knowledge structure and the consciousness of the people in a nation. Within this cultural context, when there is an urgent demand for the community building, such as in the Wenchuan earthquake, the notion of national cultural identity is ready to emerge.

In the meantime, the role of media texts lies not only in articulating the national cultural identity, but also in constructing the discourse of resistance in

order to incorporate the earthquake coverage into a nationalist discourse. As discussed in Chapter Five, media embeds nationalistic signs such as national memories and national values in the texts, which make the frame of nationalism one of the fundamental bases for releasing information and interpreting the meaning of the situation. In this "media event" (Dayan and Katz 1992), the nationalistic interpretation is achieved through fusing together cultural identities, cultural values and collective memories. Viewed through the lens of Foucault's theory of discourse and power and Hall's theory of representation, the construction of national cultural identity in the Wenchuan earthquake is completed through latent premise and manifest representation.

In the latent sense, cultural power forms signs and meanings about national cultural identity, including events in national cultural memories, national heroes, national flags, and even national anthems. The cultural meanings signified are those shared imaginations closely associated with China's histories, values and identities. This is latent because it is a process independent of a single event (such as the Wenchuan earthquake), which is conventionally constructed in social culture and is a consistent and regular practice of cultural integration. Before and after the Wenchuan earthquake, the nationalist discourse had been circulating and would continue in the cultural space of Chinese society as a conventionalized cultural practice, which accumulates to a cultural heritage or resource of meaning production concerned with the Chinese nationalism.

The manifest display of power in media coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake is clearly seen in its intensive and explicit representation of nationalistic signs in media texts and its organized formulation of nationalistic discourses. This is a case in which the nationalistic discourse is articulated in a concentrated form, and activated via the signifying practice of media texts that are driven by the cultural power. Its power lies in incorporating the uncertainty and the "vacuum of meaning" caused by the earthquake into the existing system of nationalist meaning and in so doing, creating a clearly-articulated meaning structure to fill the vacuum.

The media's meaning production throughout the Wenchuan earthquake event is therefore a process in which an existing meaning frame is applied. The fundamental facts of the earthquake include the disaster, people and rescue, so in this situation, a group of meanings should be produced to contribute to the understanding about them and their relations. This group of meanings impact on how a sense of belonging is created to unify the people, and affects what attitudes should be adopted in viewing the earthquake that relate to the approach for organizing disaster relief.

Information about the earthquake, the people and the rescue actions can be guided into the nationalistic cultural imaginations according to the way nationalism is conventionally addressed. The reason an intermediate discourse is necessary in the framing is that, (according to the theory of national cultural identity as explained in Chapter Two), the concept of nation is formed in a

contrastive cultural imagination in relation to other nations. Therefore, if the relation between the people and the natural disaster should be framed into a nationalist discourse, there arises a question about re-constructing the imagination through mediation, a process completed by utilizing a discourse of resistance. As dissected in this study, this discourse consists of three episodes: "Othering" the earthquake, nationalizing the people and constructing the rescue action in the rhetoric of war. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, when the earthquake is constructed as an imagined invader, the discourse of nationalism is spontaneously introduced in media texts. That is, "Othering" the earthquake is a necessary step for constructing national cultural identity.

Based on existing discussions of natural disasters and media communication, this thesis proposes and analyzes the war narrative and the ensuing discourse of resistance. It argues that the war narrative is an essential factor in the discourse of resistance, and a crucial entry point for examining the relations between media, culture, discourse and power. This thesis also indicates the significance for understanding the way the discourse of resistance is constructed and why it is applied when attempting to relieve and control a crisis caused by a big natural disaster. The questions addressed by this discourse not only provide a new interpretation of media coverage in the circumstances of big natural disasters, but also help to extend the spectrum of vision for organizing media coverage in natural disaster situations, and for implementing disaster relief.

However, the perspective stressed in the discourse of resistance is just one part among other "angles" and approaches in the panorama of the media coverage of natural disasters. It is limited in the scope that it creates only one discursive measure for constructing national cultural identity in a time of crisis. It is acknowledged that there are potentially other alternative discursive measures. However, in dissecting the discursive process, signs, meaning and cultural power behind the discourse of resistance, this thesis argues that the media's meaning production in natural disaster situations is closely associated with cultural power produced through the discursive practices. Cultural power determines the ultimate end of this process of communication, which is to integrate the meaning and control the crisis. To this end, the state media creates increasingly nuanced ways of structuring media texts that produce suitable meanings for the society at any particular time.

In gaining control of the situation, the media discourse constructed to cover natural disasters, the people involved and the rescue actions, has an intricate association with the theories about meanings and significations, cultural identities, discourses and cultural heritage, discursive measures and ideological restraints. Each step in completing this process is determined by the principles organizing them together with the aim to conduct control. In other words, the analysis in this thesis examines the integration of power and culture, and perhaps most importantly, emphasizes the discursive measures shaped in contemporary China's media texts to enhance disaster control. From the Wenchuan earthquake case, the discourse of resistance is shown to be a

discursive structure that binds together the practical needs in responding to the earthquake with the aims of cultural integration.

This study is principally limited to the Chinese context, but acknowledges that in interpreting these media texts, there are some subjective evaluations due to the methodologies used. However, the central contribution of this thesis is a new understanding of the communication methods that are called upon in the aftermath of natural disasters. As illustrated in Chapter Seven, the war narrative and the discourse of resistance were similarly constructed in the Australian media coverage of the 2013 Tasmanian bushfire, indicating that this discourse carries its implications across nations and cultures. This wider implication indicates that the discourse of resistance and the use of war narratives in news reports are a reflection of commonly understood rules about signs, meaning, cultural identities, discourse and power. These discursive structures therefore allow the media to clearly articulate cultural identities in their coverage of natural disasters to maintain a heightened sense of belonging in a time of crisis.

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