

The disputed islands between china and japan media essay

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Introduction

The disputed islands between China and Japan have recently been a topic of hot debate. The islands, located in the East China Sea are known to China as the " Diaoyu islands" and " Senkaku islands" to Japan. The continuous media coverage concerning the territorial dispute between the two nations have increasingly been made apparent in all types of media. Every day, viewers are bombarded with news media and this becomes integral with everyday culture. (Silverstone, 1999) stated that media presence and representation cannot be evaded. Because of this, people depend on the media to obtain information, whether it is for comfort or security. Exploring how the media influences people's thoughts and ideologies should therefore be examined.

Theoretical issues

Social and political theorist Isaiah Berlin in 1978 coined the phrase, ' general texture of experience' which describes the phenomenon where people take for granted in the way we live and communicate with each other. The media serves as a conduit to bring messages and information to people around the world and such representations are open to interpretation depending on how the events are portrayed. The news coverage on the islands dispute is one case in point. As an international incident, many perspectives are written and expressed on the same event but the way in which the language is used will yield different outcomes. Hence, (Silverstone, 1999, p4) argues that to understand the media ' involves a recognition that the process is fundamentally political or more strictly, politically economic'. The struggle between ownership and control of media institutions will inevitably influence

the final presentation from the authors/journalists. (Herman & Chomsky, 2006) propaganda model consist of the five-filters that can be applied to media representation. The first filter: size and the profit of media ownership along with the second filter of the sources of funding will influence on how the news is portrayed especially if the owner of the media organisation has a political stance. The source of funding for newspapers is generally done through advertisements. In order to attract a target audience, such as the well-educated middle-class reader would curtail suitable content that would be in the interest of the people or businesses that fund these advertisements. The third filter is the sources of information that is obtained by media organisations. The selection of the sources are carefully done and usually taken from authoritative resources such as the White House or from "trusted organisations", however journalists that take information outside of these sources are questioned for its validity and bias. However, sometimes these trusted organisations may have their own political agenda which is not free from bias. The forth filter according to Herman and Chomsky is "flak" which is a negative response that criticises media statement. This can be viewed as a check and balance between media organisations. It is made especially apparent during the elections when one media organisation is right or left wing; republican or democrat. Finally, the fifth filter is 'anti-communism control' which is frequently used to report negativity on issues concerning Chinese domestic issues such as human rights. All these issues concern one side of the coin; however the readers also play a role in the media.

Mediation and four-processes of translation

As people are exposed to the media, we are engaging in the process of mediation. (Silverstone, 1999, p13) explains that mediation ' is the movement of meaning from one text to another; the transformation of meanings (media text) whether large or small circulate in different forms (visual or audio) and the individual, directly or indirectly contribute to their production.' According to (Steiner, 1992), mediation is like translation and involves a four-fold process: 1) trust 2) aggression 3) appropriation 4) restitution. We may build certain amount of trust when reading a text because of the value which it represents. Granted there is an understanding between the writer and reader, we may agree with the representation by experience or by logic. The second process of aggression can be related to the first category. The established value of a text we build confidence to the viewer reading it. Any challenge to its validity will be dealt with aggression as it involves a " claim of ownership." The third process is appropriation where the person " brings the meaning home" because it is suitable for a particular purpose. Finally, restitution involves " giving something back". The original piece of information may have lost its pertained meaning, but replaced, perhaps with a " better" interpretation than the original one. It is unavoidable because there are many different agendas which people go through, whether they are political, restrictions or filtering of truths. (Chan, 2012a)Using (Fairclough, 2001)'s CDA approach analyses the different semiotic resources employed in the construction of meanings and messages. The analysis can be further separated and the use textual analysis is discussed with respect to Robbins below.

Application of text

According to (Robbins, 2006), language, in terms of the use of different vocabulary, grammar and metaphors, can affect the meaning people assign to experience which may also affect one's identity. 3 different sources concerning Senkaku Islands from the media, including the Japanese (Appendix 1- The Japan Times), British (Appendix 2 - The Telegraph) and Chinese (Appendix 3 - Xinhuanet), will be examined using Robbin's framework (2006) to show the inter-relationship among language, identity and politics. Other analysis related to how symbolic action reinforce a particular view of the world, and how people come to believe what they continue to do to hold to their beliefs even if they seem contradictory or ambiguous, will also be looked into. Different choice of vocabulary was employed in the above 3 sources. First of all, a language feature reflecting different identities is shows in the titles. The titles of the above sources all address the issue of ' buying' Senkaku Islands. However, different tones are used. ' Ishihara seeking to buy Senkaku Islands' is used in the Japanese press and ' Japan agrees to buy disputed Senkaku Islands' is used in the British press. These 2 titles are in statement form which gives an objective and firm tone. The phrases ' seeking to buy' and ' agrees to buy' imply that the Japanese government tends to solve the issue in a peaceful way. The word ' agrees' also implies that the Japanese government is taking a passive role with an option provided instead of taking an active role to buy the islands. Oppositely, an interrogative - ' How could Japan " buy" China-owned Diaoyu Islands?' is used in the Chinese one. The phrase ' How could Japan " buy" implies a challenging tone that it is actually not possible for Japan to '

buy' the Islands. The quotation mark used for " buy" shows that an ironic meaning is used which again emphasizes that Japan could not buy the Islands. These different tones from different groups of identities show different attitudes towards the issue of ' buying the islands'. Also, from the title, the British media source tends to use the tone which treats the ' buying' issue neutral. This implies that the British media source may choose to take a neutral political stance on this issue. Another language feature reflecting identities as well as political stance are shown by the different names used referring to the Islands. ' Senkaku' which is a Japanese word is used in the titles of both the Japanese and British sources while ' Diaoyu' which is a Chinese word is used in the Chinese source. This distinctive feature clearly shows the identities of the different groups involved in the issue to show their ownership of the Islands as the Japanese use their own language to name the Islands while the Chinese do the same as well. The British media source, as an outsider of the issue, also uses ' Senkaku' which is a Japanese word, implying the British media source may choose to take the political stance to support Japan rather than China. However, in the text of the British media source, a more neutral political stance is implied by stating ' which China knows as the Diaoyu islands and Taiwan refers to as the Tiaoyutai chain'. According to (Robbins, 2006), a symbolic action reinforces a particular view of the world. In the issue concerning Senkaku Islands, the symbolic action is the act of ' buying' which reinforces whose ownership of the islands is. In the Japanese and British sources, ' buying' the islands seems to be a rational act while that in the Chinese source is clearly an irrational act. Such rationalizing of the ' buying' act in the Japanese and

British sources reinforce Japanese ownership of the Islands while challenging the feasibility of this symbolic action by the Chinese media source shows that the ownership of the islands should belong to China. Again, the British media source tends to take the political stance to support the Japan government as the symbolic action of 'buying' seems is made rational from the British media source. (Robbins, 2006) also points out that interpretive drift, selective perception and suppressing evidence can sustain a belief even though it seems to be contradictory or ambiguous. The act of the Japan government buying the uninhabited Islands from its citizen sounds quite contradictory. However, the media can sustain the belief of Japanese ownership of the Islands by controlling the selective perception of their readers. The Japanese media source tends to shift its readers' focus on the issue to 'protecting' by using the phrases like 'protecting Japanese territory' and 'Tokyo will protect the Senkaku Islands'. The British media source tends to shift the focus to the reaction of Chinese while the Chinese media source focus on the details of the history between China and Japan. The different foci of the sources indirectly control the readers' selective perception and therefore, readers holding a certain belief or political stance on this issue may choose to only read the source which fits their selective perception.

Encoding/Decoding

A 'raw historical event' according to (Hall, 2006, p108) cannot be transmitted directly by the media. Therefore, the event needs to be 'encoded' through discourse and multimodal codes to become a 'story' and then become a 'communicative event' afterwards (Hall, 2006, p108). When encoding these moments of events, media producers might not only choose

from different word choices, but also from different ' visual semiotic choices' in the construction of meanings (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p49). These semiotic resources are important elements to form stories and transmit to readers. The pictures that are chosen to be salient might have a direct impact on the meanings of the focus of the story. ' Saliency is where certain features in compositions are made to stand out, to draw our attention to foreground certain meanings' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p54). ' Potent cultural symbols, size, colour, tone, focus, foregrounding, and overlapping' are the features that can be combined to make saliency (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p55). The following are some examples that describe the way media producers choose to encode the same story with different multimodal resources. In the Chinese protest picture from China daily. com (Appendix 4), the cultural symbol is the Chinese national flags at the background. Flags are a symbol of patriotism and it signifies these protesters are a group of patriots. Size and colour can indicate ' ranking of importance', ' ranging from the largest to the smallest' and ' rich saturated to less saturated colours' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p54). According to these criteria, the most important thing in this picture is the sign stating that ' The Diaoyu Islands belong to China; Japan, get out of China'. It is the largest part of the picture at front with bright red colour, which can catch readers' eyes immediately. As the picture shows, the focus is the man holding the sign. People that are further back fade in the background. The exact number of the people cannot be seen. They serve as the public support in the foreground of this protest. Gaze and pose of the participants are other important elements of signifying meanings. The protesters raise their hands in the picture to take up ' physical space' which

signifies power (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p74). As for the gaze, the front man is looking off frame and upwards, with intensiveness and seriousness. When a person is 'looking off frame, rather than at an object in the image, we are invited to imagine what they are thinking' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p72). Also, when a person is looking upwards, it has positive meanings as the metaphorical association in English words. The camera angle is placed slightly looking up at the man, which give him a sense of power (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p100). The picture has potential meanings to say that these Chinese protesters are united and determined to fight for their sovereignty over the islands. With the same criteria, we move on to the picture in The Australian News (Appendix 5). The most salient part of the picture is the front man with the Japanese national flag, according to the 'size, colour and tone' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p55). The front man raises both of his arms and places his legs apart to take up space which signifies power. The camera angle is looking up the man and the flag empowers them. As the subtitle shows, these Japanese activists are on one of the disputed islands. The 'potential culture symbol' is the flag (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p55). Flags on the land signify sovereignty. The potential symbolic value of this picture is to claim that the Islands belong to Japan in Japanese people's eyes. According to the two different examples, the authors might 'encode' the same 'raw event' in different ways from different standpoints of views (Hall, 2006). In the two texts, it is extremely revealing what the authors' standpoints are by looking closely at the words and the pictures that are chosen to use. In the Australian News, the verbs are 'buy', 'agree', 'pay', 'purchase' which signify that the islands can be purchased. With the picture on top showing

some Japanese men holding their national flags on one of the islands, it might encode pro-Japan attitude in the story. On the other hand, in China daily, the verbs are 'cannot be bought', 'belong', 'purchase (with quotation marks in the text)', 'oppose', 'protest', which signify that the islands are not something that can be bought and it belongs to China; Chinese people will be against those who offend China's sovereignty. The picture on top is the perfect choice of the connotation of the words.

Conclusion

How the media operates require an understanding of the process of mediation and the forces that influence the final output of the representation. Once the news have been published, different semiotic resources are employed to shape the construction of meanings along with the textual representation by the use of vocabulary, grammar and sentence construction in language affects the reader's experience which in turn shape their own ideologies and beliefs.