
Articulation in ‘Image Event’: The Media Discourse from the Perspective of Post-Marxism

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Media discourse is the main ideographic system in the world today. Post-Marxist discourse theory, represented by Laclau and Mouffe, argues that media discourse no longer merely conveys information but, more importantly, it has a powerful constructive and representational power over reality. Post-Marxist discourse theory has been gradually applied to social science research, and has also been further developed in the field of communication studies. ‘Articulation’ is a very significant rhetorical practice in the discursive generation mechanism of image events. The basic idea of articulation is to discover and activate the relationship between things and specific discourses. Many of the image events are disseminated through the deliberate appropriation of a series of established discourses, discovering a hidden interface between the topic and the established discourse, which not only enables the production and recreation of a new discourse, but also gives the event a legitimate discursive underpinning. This article aims to provide a post-Marxist analysis of the media discourse interface that exists in the image event in order to broaden theoretical and methodological horizons and create new perspectives for the study of media discourse.

Introduction

A video that was shot in Stockholm in September 2018 turned into a diplomatic issue. It was 1 am on 2 September 2018. A Chinese tourist, Mr Zeng, and his elderly parents arrived at a hotel in Stockholm and tried to check in. After being told that their booking would only take effect after 3 pm, they refused to leave. The hotel called the police, who forcibly removed Mr Zeng and his family onto the street. Mr Zeng’s father, a Chinese tourist, can be seen lying motionless on a pavement

while his mother raises her hands and cries out, in Chinese, ‘Save us, save us!’ Mr Zeng shouts in English, ‘This is killing!’^a Within two weeks, this incident and the accompanying film footage had spread over the world, first from Sweden to China. On the Chinese internet, opinions about the video were sharply split.

The Zeng’s protest strategy, which was grassroots-initiated, spontaneous and improvised, theoretically qualified as an ‘image event’ (Deluca 1999: 2). It was filled with effects, including rolling on the ground, screaming and utilizing one’s body to make a spectacle. It was ‘wild’, indeed, going out of the bounds of civility and rationality, and it spread across the internet like a wildfire, via the ‘public screens’ in everyone’s pocket, igniting the public’s temper in its passing (Li 2019).

We can claim that a practice of articulation in mass communication has emerged when a rhetorical act is targeted towards a certain discourse with defined discursive production outcomes. The media should unquestionably be included as a topic of discourse theory research because it serves as a significant channel for the dissemination of political ideas. It takes a process of conceptual and methodological transformation for media and communication scholars to apply discourse theories with a high level of abstraction and complexity to empirical media discourse analysis.

Media discourse is the main ideographic system in the world today. To get the most persuasive effect in rhetoric, ‘resorting to words’ is a popular rhetorical strategy. In actuality, from the exploration of discourse analysis abroad, the support of pertinent discourse theories is inseparable from the development of discourse analysis methods at each level. According to Jacob Torfing, discourse analysis goes through three stages (Torfing 2004: 6–9). The linguistic theory that served as the foundation for the first generation of discourse analysis defined ‘discourse’ as a textual unit that was larger than a sentence and concentrated on the semantics of spoken or written texts. The term of ‘discourse’ has been enlarged to a broader socio-linguistic activity in the second generation of discourse analysis, which is largely based on Foucault’s theories, especially in critical discourse analysis. The third generation of discourse analysis is emerging and is influenced by post-structuralism discourse theories such as Laclau and Mouffe, which understand discourse as the representation of all social phenomena (including linguistic and non-linguistic social practices), with a focus on the study of ideological conflicts and discourse articulation practices and a particular emphasis on the instability and contingency of meaning structures.

In comparison, the third approach to discourse analysis has not been fully recognized by Chinese communication scholars. Post-Marxist discourse theory, represented by Laclau and Mouffe, has attracted more attention in the field of Marxist philosophy abroad. Laclau and Mouffe argue that media discourse no longer merely conveys information but, more importantly, it has a powerful constructive and representational power over reality.

The rise of post-structuralism paths of discourse analysis does not mean the end of critical discourse analysis, but it does embody new ontological and methodological ideas that deserve attention. The existing media discourse studies in China still limit the understanding of discourse to the textual structure of language and images, thus

making it difficult to cover the analysis of richer and more varied social representations and ideological discourses (Xu and Chen 2020). Articulation is a very significant rhetorical practice in the discursive generation mechanism of image events. The basic idea of articulation is to discover and activate the relationship between things and specific discourses. Many of the image events are disseminated through the deliberate appropriation of a series of established discourses, discovering a hidden interface between the topic and the established discourse, which not only enables the production and recreation of a new discourse, but also gives the event a legitimate discursive underpinning.

The aim of this article is to provide a post-Marxist analysis for the media discursive articulation which exists in the image event, so as to broaden the theoretical and methodological horizons and create new perspectives for the study of media discourse in China.

Media Discourse in a Chinese Context

In the history of human thought, the study of discourse originated from Kant's critical philosophy. Current discourse studies follow the approach of Kant's critical philosophy, which does not aim at debating what discourse actually is, but focuses on the following points:

- (1) What are people's opinions on the appearance of a certain discourse?
- (2) Why do people hold this opinion?
- (3) What are the social and intellectual contexts of the discourse?
- (4) What social practices have been formed around this discourse?
- (5) How these social practices in turn influence people's perceptions of the discourse?

Media discourse is a type of mass discourse in modern society, which essentially relies on the media to understand and transform the world, and reflects the relationship between people and the world through media activities. The digital media have a profound impact on the daily life of the general public in our time. With the advantages of speed and simplicity, it has surpassed the traditional interpersonal communication and become an emerging way of communication. The internet has grown in size and credibility in the China region after more than two decades of development. The internet provides an important platform for Chinese netizens to participate in discussions on public affairs, and online interactions are bringing changes to Chinese society. In the age of digital media, the media space for public participation is expanding, and the participation is ultimately presented through various media discourse practices. Compared with other traditional media, people are more willing to express their opinions and views in this virtual public forum. In terms of opinion expression, the internet has merged dispersed views and discourses into a media discourse that shapes public opinion.

Chinese society has been flooded with public events in recent years. These events, involving major national issues, have attracted the attention of the whole society and

have had a significant social impact. The author has found that, since 2000, the expression of opinions on social public events has become increasingly public, and the internet has become the first place to discuss events. However, with the rise of social media, Weibo and WeChat's 'Moments' have become the genesis of public opinion. It is worth noting that once these public events involve the confrontation between the rich and the poor, public opinion always favours the disadvantaged. The 'drag racing case' in Hangzhou, the Yao Jiaxin case and the Li Gang case are representatives of such incidents. The Hangzhou car racing case refers to an incident that occurred on 7 May 2009, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, in which a person was killed by a modified car driving at excessive speed. Late at night on 20 October 2010, Yao Jiaxin hit a man with his car and then stabbed the injured man eight times, killing him. Li Gang was famous for his son's drunken driving and his son ranting after hitting someone. Through these three cases, it can be seen that the image of some groups is articulated with specific words by media discourse, which in turn creates a stereotype. It is against this background that the discussion in this article is developed.

Basic Principles of Articulation

In rhetorical practice, in order to create a powerful persuasive effect, the rhetorical subject often activates and commandeers certain forms of discourse, making them a generally shared and legitimate social cognition, and then 'in the way of discourse' realizes the purpose of persuasion in consciousness. How is the relationship between things and discourse established in this rhetorical practice of identifying, creating, and contending symbols? How does discourse gain the right to interpret the meaning of things? What are the rhetorical strategies employed by the deeper interpretive system of discourse? These questions undoubtedly point to a more microscopic and specific rhetorical practice: articulation.

Although the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham no longer exists, the word 'articulation' (the concept of which originated there) is still frequently used in several cultural studies texts, becoming a 'theoretical sign of cultural turn'. The Chinese character for articulation is translated as '*jiehe*' (接合). As one of the productive concepts in contemporary cultural studies, its theoretical value and methodological significance have been widely investigated by scholars. In the last decade, articulation theory has become a new area of academic research, probably driven by Stuart Hall. It is best understood as a constructive process related to behaviour and language, rather than a theoretical paradigm developed by scholars such as E. Laclau, C. Mouffe and S. Hall (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

Laclau believes that articulation originated from Plato's 'cave metaphor': prisoners sat in a cave with their shadows projected out of the cave opening, and they thought the shadows were reality, until they saw the puppets in the firelight and realized that those were just shadows before. The relationship between connotative and evocative replaces the internal logical connection, which is based on customs and

opinions. In this metaphor, Plato's original intention was to show the false and incorrect connection of this kind of 'articulation'. Therefore, he tried to break the misleading connection and establish a real 'articulation' from opinions to knowledge. Although Plato regarded the association between human shadow and sound as unreal in his cave metaphor, neither the real connection nor the essential connection can leave the original connection (Bi, 2019).

Marx later included the idea of 'articulation' in his analysis of the mode of production. According to him, the so-called social relations are made up of the production relations taken as a whole. In Marx's view, social formation is connected by 'various factors' according to specific laws, which is what he called the 'articulation' of various specific social forces under special historical conditions. Taking ancient society, feudal society and bourgeois society as examples, Marx believed that in each social form, the sum of each production relationship marked a special stage in the development of human history. Gramsci then used the idea of articulation to explain his concept of 'hegemony', which was influenced by Marx's relevant expositions. Gramsci understood 'hegemony' (or cultural leadership) as the process of ideological struggle. He connected hegemony with ideology, state, civil society, culture and other factors; in particular, he emphasized the cultural hegemony of knowledge and morality. Then the concept of hegemony began to evolve from politics to knowledge and morality.

In the process of competition between, and production of, meanings, Laclau used a 'floating signifier' to reveal the random state and unstable structure between symbols and meaning (Laclau 1993: 435). In *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, published in 1977, Laclau and Mouffe first explained the connotation of articulation (Laclau, 1977). And then, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, they clearly pointed out that 'articulation is any practice of establishing the relationship between elements' (Laclau and Mouffe 2003: 114). Laclau and Mouffe used the concept of 'patching up' in Lacan's psychoanalysis to explain how the meaning can be relatively fixed in different discourse contexts; at the same time, they took Foucault's theory of discourse analysis as the basis for considering the practice of articulation as the connection of different subjects in the discourse system. They thought that Foucault's so-called connection is based on difference, and they realized that connection has the logic of contingency.

So far, the theoretical status of articulation has been initially established, and articulation itself is no longer a kind of association or connection, but is beyond the significance of relevance or connection. The important feature of the theory is the affirmation of uncertainty. Based on this fuzzy core, the logic of post-Marxist theory construction has been formed.

Kevin M. Deluca further pointed out two kinds of discourse behaviours that can occur in the practice of articulation, the first is to Speak Forth Elements and the second is to Link Elements (Deluca 1999: 38). The former emphasizes the selection and definition of the symbol of things and represents the essence along a specific way of discourse. The latter emphasizes changing the referential meaning of things and reconnecting the connection between symbols and meaning; that is, giving new

meaning to things. The relationship between things and their meanings is not innate and fixed, but contingent, uncertain and conventional. Therefore, DeLuca pointed out: 'Before the practice of articulation takes place, things are just "Floating Signifiers" and the function of articulation is to rework the properties of things so that they appear to be re-speaking' (DeLuca 1999: 40). So, articulation is more reflected in the invention, structure and significance of a series of referential concepts.

Stuart Hall noted the discourse theories of Laclau and Mouffe as early as the 1980s and introduced the notion of articulation into media and cultural studies to describe how ideological practices are created under certain circumstances. However, Hall did not fully accept the discourse theory of post-structuralism. Because of this difference in ontological position, although Hall has conducted many studies related to media ideology, he has only introduced the concept of 'articulation' without fully putting into practice the conceptual system of discourse theory.

Image Event and Media Discourse in the Internet Era

In *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*, DeLuca considers the image event as a new rhetorical conception of the new social movement. 'Image event' refers to the staging of confrontational and provocative acts in the televisual sphere to attract public attention and stir debate (Delicath and DeLuca 2003). Civility, rationality and verbal discourse are three traditional norms of rhetoric and the public domain that DeLuca claims image event theory transgresses. Because civility frequently 'serve[s] as masks for the protection of privilege and the silencing of protest', it chooses confrontation over civility (Delicath and DeLuca 2003).

An obvious and important feature of image events is the mass nature of audiences. Image events are not sorts of monologues, which is also of course germane to questions about the power of mass media: audiences can directly contribute to the communication – media audiences listen or view or read.

Compared with words, the main advantage of image communication over words is the ability to construct 'arguments'. Precisely because of the presence of images, the controversy is endowed with great drama, which is perfectly in line with the narrative logic of issue construction in the era of visual culture (Blair, 2004). Specifically, the ideographic system of images has greater uncertainty than that of verbal texts. It is entirely possible for different groups to assign certain meanings to pictorial symbols according to their pre-determined discursive positions, and thus to engage in the practice of contesting legitimacy within the rhetorical systems created by images.

In the context of visual culture, as images and their deeper issues of visibility dominate the cultural logic of the current era, the image event implies an emerging rhetorical practice of underlying resistance. In other words, the image event emphasizes the production of a discourse of resistance in the visual rhetorical

dimension, and thus achieves the discursive purpose of public issue construction by means of 'picturization'. Because of its powerful ability to construct controversy, the image becomes a rhetorical resource that leads to the construction of the public sphere, with the result that it is pushed to the centre of issue generation. In a nutshell, in the context of visual culture, image events are used for the discursive purpose of constructing public issues by means of 'picturization'.

The transition period in China has produced many image events, such as the 'X II Generation' (children of people with prominent social status) and some environmental events. If the iconic symbolic form of these image events is a specific image text, then regarding how to carry out the analysis of the meaningful practice of images, media discourse analysis undoubtedly provides an extremely important analytical paradigm and critical path.

Since it was proposed by Zellig Harris in 1952, 'discourse analysis' has become one of the most important approaches in communication studies, and its academic context and research methods have become increasingly rich. Since the 1990s, discourse analysis, represented by Van Dijk and Norman Fairclough, has been increasingly applied in the field of mass communication. Discourse analysis can explain on what hypothesis our action is based and what kind of impact it will have. Although there are many research results, there are still some problems that cannot be ignored: first, the theoretical perspective of discourse research is relatively limited. Most studies use discourse analysis only as a technical operational tool and lack in-depth discussion of the theoretical meaning behind it; second, the concept of discourse is confused with discourse analysis.

As a basic component of human discourse activity, media discourse is undoubtedly a major object of discourse research and naturally favoured by scholars. As research has progressed, scholars have found that media discourse material is not only easily accessible, but that media use influences and reproduces the uses and attitudes of people in a language community and reflects and influences the composition and expression of cultural, political and social life (Fisher *et al.* 2011). It also reflects and influences the composition and expression of cultural, political and social life. In other words, the study of media discourse not only focuses on the linguistic texts of the media themselves, but also helps us to understand the complex relationship between language, media and society in a wider social context.

'Ideology' is a core concept that cannot be avoided in critical media studies, and it is also the entry point for critical discourse analysis to connect social contexts with textual analysis. Although there have been a number of attempts to ground a would-be critical social theory on premises and methods borrowed from linguistics, it is Norman Fairclough's version of Critical Discourse Analysis which, in Collins and Jones' view, raises most pointedly the issue of the relevance of linguistics to political and ideological critique (Collins and Jones 2006).

From Marx's German Ideology to the Frankfurt School's theory of the cultural industry to the Birmingham School's cultural studies led by Hall, all have provided theoretical resources for the ideological analysis of media discourse. Implicit in this

approach is the idea that media and language should not be treated as natural or established phenomena, but rather as social constructions of reality. Yet,

We say this, however, not to dismiss the role of ideology in social processes but to emphasize the need to get things in proportion and see them in their proper place. As an aspect of the relatively peaceable exercise of class rule, ideological domination or hegemony generally relies on the possibility of applying force as a last resort (or as a first resort in the case of ‘rogue’ or excluded communities, or far away peoples or states whose lives and opinions do not matter). (Collins and Jones 2006)

For media and communication scholars, the application of discourse theory, which has a high degree of abstraction and complexity, to empirical media discourse analysis requires a process of conceptual and methodological transformation. What then happens when the image events enter the internet sphere? It is vital to note that the advent of the internet in China coincided with the country’s rapid economic development, which led to an increasingly polarized society. China has experienced growing differences between classes, ethnic groups, and urban and rural areas during the past three decades. According to DeLuca and Brunner, the internet has contributed to the proliferation of protests by echoing, inspiring and enabling them (DeLuca and Brunner 2016). The spectacles of ‘image events’ – so called ‘affective winds’ – spread across the nation as fast as words, images and videos. Digital image events have the capacity to drastically tip the balance of power away from authority and toward the event’s initiator by short-circuiting China’s hierarchical political and legal grievance system (Li 2019). Since 2003, a discussion of image events began to spread across the Chinese internet. It started with the moniker ‘the second generation of rich people’, a term that describes the discontented ordinary people who protest against the crimes of the rich through their (the ordinary people’s) actions. In addition, there was ‘Hospital Ruckus’ (*yinao*), a word used to characterize angry patients acting out, in protest at hospital ‘malpractice’. While others threatened to leap from the hospital building or place dead bodies in front of the hospital door until their demands were satisfied, some brutally attacked hospital staff, stabbing doctors or beating up nurses (Beam 2014).

According to the ‘image event’ theory, these situations appear to be progressive cases: underdogs use social media to make their voices heard and leverage public opinion against the establishment, to their benefit.

In the name of ‘defending rights’ (*weiquan*), many of the protests began with marches, sit-ins, banners and speeches over loudspeakers, and sometimes escalated into collective violence. Stories and videos of such incidents arrived in one’s WeChat inbox or Weibo feed in fragmented fashion; many videos were accompanied by the wrong captions – some were taken years ago in a different city for a different cause, but were used to advertise a fresh new protest. With an abundance of protest footage circulating online, distinguishing the real from the fake can be difficult. The de-contextualized communication is reminiscent of the ‘guerilla warfare’ that DeLuca describes of radical environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Earth First!;

however, in an unstable and fragmented information environment such as the internet, what used to be glorified for disrupting mainstream ideologies tends to generate feelings of disorientation instead (Li 2019).

Therefore, 'image events' in online communication can easily form a fixed media discourse. For example, in the reports on the 'Rich II Generation' ('*X* II Generation' where *X* can be any group) incident, the media texts often portray the 'Rich II Generation' as a privileged class with bad qualities and the opposite party as a disadvantaged group that is weak and deserves public sympathy, giving a positive or negative impression to a certain group of people through a sharp contrast.

Reinvention and Repetition: Articulation of Media Discourse in an Image Event

Because visual and multimedia communication is predicted to have a stronger impact in the age of media fragmentation and distraction, image events dethrone linear, word-based communication in favour of visual and multimedia communication (Li 2019). The idea of the 'image event', which was developed in the Western liberal democratic movements of the twentieth century, evokes acts of heroism and historical instances of civil disobedience, such as the American 'civil rights struggle and the anti-war protests of the 1960s and 1970s' (Deluca 1999: 127). However, something about the Stockholm event, mentioned earlier, felt different from the public protests that have characterized the 'image event' – the Western liberal model. In a sense, Zeng's case exposed the global media to a Chinese grassroots strategy for garnering attention when confronting perceived injustice.

In the process of image event communication, the properties of the symbolic code and the context of the meaning are often unified by the media discourse. A review of some types of image events in China in recent years reveals a common phenomenon: no matter whether the guilty party is the '*X* II Generation' or not, the media will guide the audience to point the finger at the '*X* II Generation'. This tendency ensures the event is not analysed calmly and objectively at the early stage of development, and the event will further intensify into a conflict between the privileged class and the ordinary class. The purpose of articulating the '*X* II Generation' with negative images is to frame the meaning of this 'special' group in a new way by means of a powerful discourse. Thus, it seems that articulation of media discourse presents such a path of meaning production in the communication of image events: a specific discourse is used to make an articulation between a representative event and a specific meaning, thus achieving a deep social consciousness of identity and persuasion.

Primarily, mediated discursive articulation manifests itself in the reinvention and application of new ideographs and the accompanying struggle for meaning that arises in their application. Ideographs refer to symbolic terms that are specifically 'selected' by a particular media discourse. Commonly used ideograms in image events are fire, blood, wristwatch, torch, flag, umbrella, government building, ruined

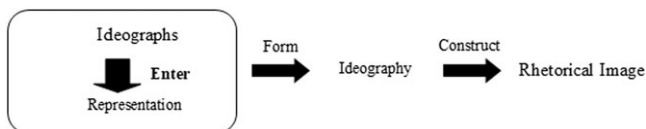


Figure 1. Visual persuasion.

wall, and emoticons (smiling, angry, wooden, etc.). The meaning shaped by these ideograms has to be linked to the Chinese tradition and the current specific cultural context.

Visual rhetoric research indicates that images have a ‘visual persuasion’ function, and its mechanism of action is as shown in Figure 1.

In other words, the image creates a persuasive ‘Rhetorical Image’ in an invisible way, so that the audience can have an emotional identification reaction. But in the face of image stimulation, the first reaction of the audience is only a temporary emotion. The truly effective ‘visual persuasion’ strategy needs to be transformed and smeared through specific rhetorical strategies (metonymy, symbol, metaphor, intertextuality, etc.) to produce a continuous discourse articulation. This means using ideographs as mediators; images stimulate audiences to make the leap from emotion to reason, from perception to thought. The key to the leap is repetition.

Second, social culture is generated by the accumulation of large-scale symbolic activities. Symbols are generated when the repetition of ideographs changes from quantitative to qualitative, increasing the motivation of the image. The constant repetition of ideographs allows the articulation of image events and media discourse to be established, which in turn creates stereotypes of certain types of image events in communication.

As mentioned earlier, repetition implies that the articulation of discourse and elements tends to stabilize, which means the fixation of the relationship between discourse form and content. The ‘Rich II Generation’ and ‘outstanding young people’ in the ‘drag racing case’ in Hangzhou, the ‘crazy second generation of the army’ and ‘migrant women’ in the ‘Yao Jiabin case’, the ‘son of the domineering police chief’ and the ‘freshman student with excellent character and learning’ in the ‘Li Gang case’, and so on, the texts of the events reported by the media put the relationship between the two sides in a state of direct opposition, emphasizing the gap between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, and using this exaggerated modification technique to achieve social construction in the process of repeating objective events.

Image events achieve social construction through media discourse, which is consistent with post-Marxist discourse theory. Post-Marxist discourse theory upholds the view that there is no society outside of discourse and reduces society to discourse, replacing ontology with constructivism. Laclau and Mouffe are the representatives who hold this view. For communication studies, post-Marxist discourse theory will undoubtedly inspire new ideas in discourse analysis.

The Critical Media Discourse in the Context of Post-Marxism

Among scholars of media discourse, van Dijk is unanimously recognized as a leading figure. He is concerned with the particular structure of news and the role of this structure in the mass media. He uses the research framework of CDA to think about the propositions of social function, cognitive structure, discourse expression and discourse regeneration. His *News as Discourse* and *News Analysis* are considered to be pioneering works in media discourse research, and they have laid the theoretical foundation for media discourse research. Instead, this article would like to talk about Critical Media Discourse in a post-Marxist perspective.

Laclau and Mouffe co-authored the book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*; they are both regarded as pioneers of 'post-Marxism'. The book is considered a classic text of post-Marxist thought, a work that reconstructs the Marxist theory of radical democracy along a post-structuralist approach, using the discursive construction of hegemony as an ontological foundation.

With their materialist conception of history, Marx and Engels ignited a revolution which was to shake the foundations of human endeavour across the board (Jones 2018).

If we analyze Marx's and Engels's statements about language, then we observe that in many cases their concern is not specifically linguistic issues; they touch upon questions of language as a way of better elucidating positions on the social sciences with which the classics of Marxism were primarily concerned: philosophy, political economy, history. (Alpatov 2000: 174)

The academic positions of Laclau and Mouffe were formed under the direct influence of the 'European Communist Movement' and its theorists, who regarded the 'Marxist crisis' as the origin of post Marxism. In their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Laclau and Mouffe seek to create a specific discourse to deconstruct traditional Marxism and focus this intention on three turns: the turn to micro-politics, the politics of identity, and the politics of confrontation. It is also from these three turns that Laclau and Mouffe develop a post-Marxist theory of discourse, characterized by a view of discourse as a purely socially constructed representation. The basic principles they followed in terms of discourse are clear:

- (1) Discourse exists in the structure of object meaning, and the task of discourse analysis is to explore the deep grammar behind the act of meaning.
- (2) Discourse is a relational system in which language and action are unified and embodied.
- (3) The idea of practice can be used in place of discourse, and in a way, discourse and practice are almost equivalent.
- (4) In relation to being, discourse determines the existence of objects.

Laclau and Mouffe replaced people with discourse as the sum of social relations and argued that all relations are constructed in this relation. It is by virtue of this logical transformation that post-Marxism dissolves both the economic base and the superstructure in Marxism into 'discursive constitution'.

Media discourse is an implicit culture, ideology and values have been of increasing interest to the social sciences in the last two to three decades. In the study of media discourse, there have always been two main orientations: one is the critical and political approach; the other is the practical and daily approach. The former research orientation we see more often in critical discourse analysis (CDA). So-called CDA, in other words, was just a novel way of expressing particular political opinions (Collins and Jones 2006). Jones' conclusion was that 'the CDA approach to language involves a mystification of the role of discourse in society. CDA itself, therefore, constitutes an ideological formation' (Jones 2004). Bennett elaborated as follows:

This is not to deny that there exists a real world external to the signifying mantle which language casts on it. But it is to maintain that our knowledge or appropriation of that world is always mediated through and influenced by the organizing structure which language inevitably places between it and ourselves. (Bennett 2003: 5)

Language is the essence of communication, and media discourse is the linguistic ideographic form of media communication. Media discourse is a discourse constructed according to purpose and need, and the purpose is to provide a subjective interpretation for the world. Media discourse is influenced and shaped by a variety of political, economic, cultural and ideological factors in the process of forming representations.

To a certain extent, the world today is presented to us through the communication media, and it is through the communication media that we perceive the world. Media discourse is a system of discourse that is transmitted by developed media communication technologies, and discourse is produced as a reality in consciousness. Media technology simulates reality and even creates it. In terms of speed, breadth and depth, its dissemination and penetration quietly participate in the shaping of the world and social relations. Media technology introduces a new scale to society and creates a whole new environment. The technological properties of media discourse make it intervene in human life from the form of communication to its content.

In this era of media discourse representation of the world, people's most direct real reflections and fixed habits of thought are often those that have been reported by the recognized authoritative media, and their authenticity is not in doubt. Through the dissemination of media discourse, the meaning of the event seems to be defined in a fixed way. Media discourse often indicates a rhetorical power, a divine charm, a persuasive logic, a germination of love and hate, a hypnotic hallucinatory effect, and so on, that rushes people's hearts and minds, agitates the power of the group, directs their passions and makes them explode with energy. Therefore, the production and dissemination of media discourse does not only complete the dissemination of information and reflect reality, but sometimes it also has a strong dominant power to

influence or change events. This dominant power arises when the subjectivity of the audience is suppressed or even decreased by the communication of media discourse, and is eventually led and dominated by media discourse. In this process, the dominance of media discourse in defining the world is further consolidated and strengthened, continuing to shape the world we inhabit in various ways and causing people to develop a strong psychological dependence on and belief in media discourse.

In the book *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*, Lincoln Dalhberg and Sean Phelan proposed the development of a 'critical media politics' using post-Marxist discourse theory (Dalhberg and Phelan 2011). Critical media politics should be a combination of multiple disciplines and fields of study, and discourse theory is an essential entry point. Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* is highly complex, and it is only decades after its publication that discourse theory has attracted the attention of communication researchers. This process goes through a systematic examination of philosophy (post-structuralism social ontology), theory (political identity theory and radical democracy theory), and methodology (discursive analysis strategies). Consequently, Critical Media Discourse provides a new analytical approach, which emphasizes the study of political ideology and also shows the complex possibilities contained in the field of daily life.

Conclusion

For Chinese media and communication research, post-Marxist discourse theory and its inspired ideas of discourse theory analysis will undoubtedly enrich our theoretical and methodological horizons. This article applies the study of media discourse from a post-Marxist perspective to explain the articulation in image events, and develops a more detailed examination of the interaction of news discourse, audience discourse, and political discourse in the Chinese media field. This helps to expand the theoretical and methodological horizons of domestic media discourse research in China, which in turn widens new ideas for communication research in China.

From the perspective of academic development history, discourse studies have originally filled in and challenged the traditional linguistic theories since Saussure, so linguists have mostly equated discourse with text, except that the former is focused on the spoken form, while the latter refers to the written form.

Unlike the general act of assigning meaning to things, the practice of articulation has a clear persuasive tendency and rhetorical purpose, and therefore places more emphasis on a persuasive way of generating meaning. Discourse theory in a post-Marxian perspective rejects the grand narratives of traditional political theory and believes in pluralistic new social movements, such as the image event, as micro-political struggles that revolve around discourse. In the case of image events, on the one hand, the key to the practice of articulation is to give a discursive framework to the act of interpreting things, and in this way to establish a collusive relationship

between things and particular discourses. On the other hand, when a thing enters the interpretative system of the established discourse, it breaks away from its original field of meaning and undergoes an alternative process of meaning assignment, which results in the construction of a new 'discursive field'. This process is often accompanied by the production of a new discourse, which gives a new discursive basis to the corresponding social behaviour.

The importance of the media in today's world cannot be questioned. The media play an important role in the production, maintenance and confrontation of ideological leadership and the media must maintain a diverse discursive ecology. Since discourse plays a crucial role in the construction of reality, the power and influence of media discourse is self-evident. Critical Media Discourse focuses on the impact of discourse on social identity, social relations, and knowledge and belief systems. Applying it to the study of image events has far-reaching practical significance for the construction of society and provides a new perspective for the study of social opinion environment, policy advocacy, public mobilization and public communication.

Note

- a. 'Chinese Tourists Playing Up Pengci Antics in Sweden: Lost Much Face for China!' Sohu.com, 4 December 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/279541378_100071240.

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