

# Research on the Report of Yonhap News Agency's China-related Culture in the Post-epidemic Era

Qi Zhang, Huiqiong Pan

School of Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Anhui 233030, China

## Abstract

After China entered the "post-epidemic era", Yonhap News Agency's news reports on China touched more extensively on all aspects of China's politics, culture, social structure and so on. Among them, cultural news is irreplaceable by other news reports. According to the nearly 300 cultural reports in the early post-epidemic era in China, the frequency of Yonhap News Agency's cultural reports on China varies with events, and the negative reports on China account for more than the positive reports, and "the United States" has been placed between China and South Korea for many times to guide readers to think about China-South Korea relations. Faced with this reality, Chinese media should strengthen the national position and correctly guide public opinion when formulating external communication strategies; Build a discourse system with Chinese characteristics and set discourse issues in advance; Strengthen cultural exchanges between China and South Korea, and promote the sinking of Chinese discourse among the people.

## Keywords

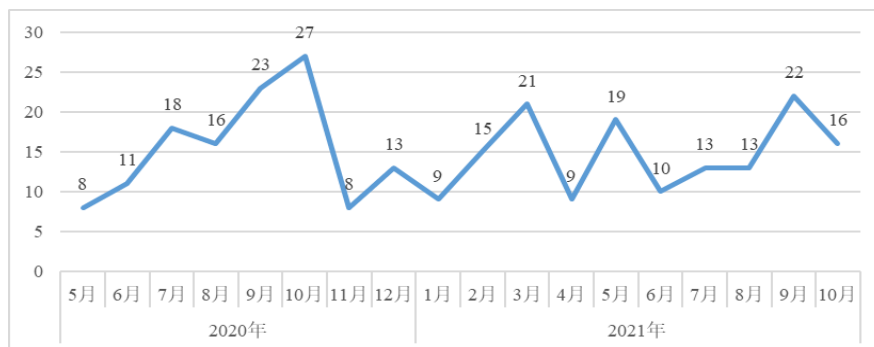
Post-epidemic Era; Yonhap News Agency; Culture Report; External Dissemination.

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out, which had a wide and far-reaching impact on the world and even changed the pattern of international relations to a certain extent. Nowadays, the world has entered the "post-epidemic era" one after another, and the Chinese government's ability to prevent and control the epidemic is relatively stable. The outbreak of the epidemic has focused the world on China, and neighboring South Korea has also paid continuous attention to China under the influence of the epidemic. As the largest news agency in South Korea, Yonhap News Agency's coverage covers all aspects of China's politics, economy and culture. In these reports, the cultural news, with its unique perspective, spread the cultural dynamics of China at various stages of the outbreak to the Korean people. According to the white paper "China's Action against COVID-19 Epidemic" issued by the Information Office of the State Council of China, after April 29th, 2020, the national epidemic prevention and control entered the normalization stage, and Yonhap News Agency's coverage of Chinese culture also changed to some extent.

## 2. Overview of Yonhap News Agency's China-related Cultural News Reports

About one and a half years after China entered the post-epidemic era, that is, from April 29, 2020 to October 31, 2021, the author searched and screened in official website, Yonhap News Agency, South Korea, and obtained 271 news samples with "중국"(China) and "문화"(culture) as the core content. The number and time distribution of reports are shown in Figure 1.



**Fig 1.** Number and time distribution of reports

Judging from the publication time of relevant reports in Yonhap News Agency, there are four months when the number of reports is more than 20. October 2020 is the month with the most concentrated coverage, with a total of 27 reports, followed by 23 reports in September 2020, 22 reports in September 2021 and 21 reports in March 2021. However, there were only 8 articles in May and November of 2020 with the least coverage.

### 3. Yonhap News Agency China-related Cultural Reporting Hotspots

#### 3.1. Cultural Exchanges between China and South Korea under the Epidemic Situation

2021~2022 is the year of cultural exchange between China and South Korea. Whether it is official or non-governmental, the cultural exchange activities between China and South Korea reported by Yonhap News Agency have been very active, involving a wide range. The two countries have close exchanges in tourism, opera, painting and calligraphy, film and television, singing and other fields. Although the epidemic has not completely subsided, various cultural exchange activities, such as the special exhibition of Korean-Chinese ink and wash works, the Chinese-Korean youth video contest "Tell My Story with China" and the Korean Wave knowledge contest "I am a Korean expert", have been carried out, and these activities, whether organized by official leaders or non-governmental organizations, have brought the relationship between Chinese and Korean people closer.

#### 3.2. Historical and Cultural Disputes between China and South Korea

In recent years, disputes between China and South Korea over historical and cultural issues have been incessant, and Yonhap News Agency has also reported a certain amount of historical and cultural disputes between China and South Korea. However, they all happened after October, 2020, which marked the 70th anniversary of the "War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea", and there was an incident that South Korea's BTS's remarks about the Korean War angered Chinese netizens. Therefore, the coverage of Yonhap News Agency's disputes about the "War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea" has greatly increased. In addition, the reports of "Sino-Korean historical and cultural disputes" also involve the issue of Korean clothing, the source of Korean kimchi "Xinqi", the source of "Fan Dance Arirang" and Koguryo, etc., and the number of these reports has also increased compared with that before the epidemic.

#### 3.3. Human Rights of Ethnic Minorities in China

Yonhap News Agency always frequently targets Uyghur and Islam, and a large number of verbs with negative semantics are matched. These verbs have certain offensive meanings, such as 인권탄압 (suppression of human rights), 종교자유를 제한하다 (restriction of religious freedom) and 강제로 구금하다 (compulsory detention). These words with negative emotional color and great picture sense appear frequently, which shapes the Chinese government and the

Communist Party of China (CPC) into an undemocratic image that wantonly tramples on minority human rights, suppresses minority religions and even attempts to obliterate minority cultures. China is a multi-ethnic country, and respects and guarantees the freedom and rights of people of every ethnic group. Compared with China's achievements in promoting national unity, it is obvious that Yonhap News Agency is more willing to focus on the negative presentation of Chinese society through reports.

### **3.4. Prosperous Film Market**

Reporting the current situation of Chinese film and television culture market can help readers know the recovery of Chinese epidemic situation from the side. Under the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, the film industry, as one of the industries with the deepest and largest influence in China, has not been devastated. Especially during the Spring Festival of 2021, the Chinese film market ushered in a good start, surpassing the United States in the box office, setting a record. The Eight Hundred, The Sacrifice, The Battle at Lake Changjin and other patriotic films have been the hot topics in Chinese film market in recent two years, and Yonhap News Agency has also reported and commented on them many times.

### **3.5. Sino-US Relations in the Epidemic Situation**

Sino-US relations have always been the focus of the Yonhap News Agency's China-related reports, as well as in the cultural field. In the Yonhap News Agency's report, the competitive relationship between China and the United States is dominant: in the news industry, the United States imposes additional control on Chinese media, and China suppresses the freedom of American media; In the field of Internet, while actively opening up the other's new media market, both sides are also wary of the infiltration of the domestic market by other countries' capital; In the field of online public opinion, the two countries spread opinions that are beneficial to their own interests through "information warfare".

## **4. Characteristics of Yonhap News Agency's China-related Cultural News Report**

### **4.1. The Frequency of Reporting Changes with Events**

The frequency of China-related cultural reports in Yonhap News Agency has no obvious distribution rule in time, which mainly changes with the frequency of China-related major events. When there are some major cultural events in China or internationally, or cultural events related to China occur in South Korea, Yonhap News Agency's China-related cultural news reports will obviously increase during this period.

On October 7th, 2020, after BTS was awarded the "Van Froit Award", captain Kim Nam Jun said in his speech that "the Korean War explosion is a bitter history experienced by South Korea and the United States", which made many Chinese netizens angry, and the reaction of Chinese netizens also caused heated discussion in South Korea, so Yonhap News Agency also made seven reports on this incident in the cultural section; On October 22nd of the same year, China and the Vatican decided to extend the temporary agreement on the appointment of bishops for two years, and there were eight reports about this incident and related issues in Yonhap News Agency. On March 22nd, 2021, "The Exorcist of Korea" was broadcast on South Korea's SBS TV station. Because Chinese props such as moon cakes and Chinese-style costumes were used many times in the play, which stimulated the anti-China sentiment of Korean audiences, Yonhap News Agency reported six related news items in a row from March 26th to March 31st. On September 2nd, 2021, in response to the frequent chaos in the entertainment field, the Central Propaganda Department issued the Notice on Comprehensive Management in the entertainment field, and the relevant competent departments also adopted a series of measures for the stars and fans who are active in China. In that month, there were as many as seven

reports on this incident and its influence on Korean entertainment industry in Yonhap News Agency.

#### 4.2. The Number of Negative Reports is more than That of Positive Reports

Authenticity and objectivity have always been the goals pursued by news reports, but after all, the main body of news writing is people, so it is inevitable that there will be some subjectivity and tendency. If we want to have a deep understanding of Yonhap News Agency's specific position in the process of news dissemination, we need to analyze the tendentiousness of these news reports.

News texts are divided into positive reports, negative reports and neutral reports. According to statistics, there are 139 neutral reports, accounting for 51% of the total. There are 103 negative reports, accounting for about 38% of all news reports; There are only 29 positive reports, accounting for only 11% of all reports. Obviously, during this period, the number of negative reports is much larger than that of positive reports, and the words used in negative reports are more intense. Example 1 is the title of several negative reports, and example 2 is the title of positive reports. It can be seen that the titles of negative reports have strong likes and dislikes, and clearly show dissatisfaction and criticism of China's views and behaviors, while the titles of positive reports are relatively mild in wording and have no strong emotional color.

Example 1: 부채춤·아리랑이 중국 거라고? 대륙의 뻔뻔한 우기기 [이래도 되나요]

(Translation: Fan Dance Arirang is Chinese? The brazen stubbornness of the mainland [Is this OK])

조경태 의원 “중국의 역사 왜곡 문제 심각...정부 대책 없어”

(Translation: Dr. Zhao Qingtai: "China's distortion of history is very serious ... the government has no countermeasures")

‘김치 中 유래 주장’ 바이두, 윤동주 국적도 ‘중국’으로 왜곡

(Translation: Baidu advocates that "Xin Qi originates from China", and Yin Dongzhu nationality has also been distorted into "China")

Example 2: 중국, 코로나 여파로 할리우드 제쳤다...영화시장 첫 세계 1위

(Translation: China, affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, surpassed Hollywood ... the film market ranked first in the world for the first time.)

국내 중국인 유학생들 “양국 소통 매개체 역할 할 것”

(Translation: Chinese students at home: "will play the role of media communication between the two countries")

중국 코로나 통제 자신감...베이징서 국제영화제 열어

(Translation: China is confident in controlling COVID-19 ... holding international films in Beijing.)

#### 4.3. Building the Associative Relationship of "China-America-Korea"

Yonhap News Agency, as a discourse producer mainly aimed at Korean people, reported the cultural news related to China, except South Korea, its co-occurrence country was "the United States", which appeared 415 times in the corpus ("South Korea" appeared 874 times). Yonhap News Agency will also put China and the United States in the same field or similar activities, and build a certain association relationship based on the similarity between them. The Korean people are the final audience of Yonhap News Agency's reports. In order to let the Korean audience know the present situation of China's cultural development and recognize China's existing strength, one of the simple ways is to compare the "superpower" United States with the "largest developing country" China. Here, "America" is the substitute of "China", and the interaction and directivity between them also make the audience more clearly discover the similarities between the two countries.

Example3:미 정부는 인기 많은 중국 동영상 공유 소셜미디어 '틱톡'과 마찬가지로 위챗이 국가안보에 위협을 제기한다며 이 앱을 미국 앱스토어나 구글스토어에서 금지하고 이 앱을 이용한 거래도 금지하는 행정명령을 내렸다.

(Translation:The U.S. government considers wechat a threat to national security.In the case of TikTok, a popular Chinese video-sharing social media, the app was banned from the U.S. App Store or Google Store, and an administrative order was issued to prohibit transactions using the app. )

As can be seen from Example 3, the U.S. government has not accepted Chinese social software from China with an inclusive attitude, and even wants to ban the use of WeChat and tiktok by issuing administrative orders. For Korean readers, the United States still thinks that these software will pose a threat to national security, not to mention South Korea, where entertainment information is developing rapidly. In the cultural report, Yonhap News Agency regards China and the United States as the target words at the same time, and focuses his discourse on the side of "Sino-US competition", implying the development of China's soft power and its similarity with American power. In the co-occurrence of target words again and again, it seems that the "strength and hegemony" embodied by the United States in the cultural field is also gradually applicable to China, which also strengthens the Korean people's vigilance against Chinese culture and worries about its penetration.

## 5. Enlightenment of Yonhap News Agency's China-related Cultural Report on China's External Communication

Compared with the news in the early stage of the epidemic, the reports on China-related culture in Yonhap News Agency in the early post-epidemic era showed more complicated relations between China and South Korea. Facing this reality, Chinese media should reflect on their foreign communication strategies in time. In the "post-epidemic era" when the epidemic situation is gradually normalized, China should shoulder the responsibility of being a big country, promote the construction of the concept of Community of Shared Future for Mankind, share China's experience with the world and contribute to China's strength and wisdom by improving the external communication strategy.

### 5.1. Strengthen the National Position, Correctly Guide Public Opinion

The media should treat the negative reports about China in foreign media rationally. In the face of false reports of innuendo, we should carefully consider the purpose and influence of foreign media reports on this incident, find out the truth, and resolutely resist and counter these smear remarks and malicious attacks. When reporting controversial events in the world, we should stand on the same front with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, play the role of the mouthpiece of the party and the people, and speak for China together. At the same time, we should also face up to our own shortcomings and actively fulfill the obligations of the media to promote the solution of problems.

With the development of the Internet, the global village phenomenon is becoming more and more obvious. Many Chinese netizens will also be curious about how other countries evaluate China and report China-related events. Foreign media reports and comments sometimes have an impact on domestic netizens, and even extreme phenomena that they only believe in foreign voices. Therefore, Chinese media should play a more public opinion-oriented role to enhance their influence and credibility. On the Internet, we should also pay attention to the leading role of today's online opinion leaders, encourage the media, experts and public figures to make rational and socially responsible remarks, help people clarify their understanding, establish and enhance national cultural self-confidence, and let some misleading remarks and false news collapse of itself.



## 5.2. The Construction of Discourse System, Set Discourse Issues

In the field of international public opinion, China has always been in a passive situation. Western countries led by the United States firmly control the right to speak in the international community, and it is difficult for China's voice to effectively spread to all parts of the world and be heard by people from all over the world. Under such circumstances, China urgently needs to improve its media's international communication ability, grasp the initiative of discourse, and build a discourse system with Chinese characteristics. This means that we can't simply apply the western discourse system, and the emphasis is on Chinese characteristics. The establishment of discourse system can not be separated from the promotion of comprehensive national strength, nor can it be separated from the Chinese nation's cultural confidence in its own country. Rooted in a long cultural history and based on China's contemporary style, China's values can be better promoted, and the world can see the cultural heritage accumulated by China and learn about the development and progress of New China. Only in this cultural discourse system can China's voice be loud enough to be more influential.

The epidemic situation in COVID-19 has hindered the development of global cultural ecology, and the international communication of culture on this basis is even more difficult. It is precisely because of this that the tendency of politicization, labeling and stigmatization is becoming more and more obvious in news reports and public opinion fields of traditional media and new media in various countries. First of all, China got a better recovery from the epidemic. Compared with other countries, China has a better chance to set up discourse issues in the post-epidemic era in advance, and actively launch issues with cultural value that can resonate with the whole world, helping the international audience to build confidence in restoring normal life, and at the same time, promoting the construction of foreign discourse system with Chinese characteristics.

## 5.3. Strengthen Cultural Exchanges and Promote Discourse Sinking

Academically, both sides should make joint efforts to strengthen exchanges and cooperation on the principle of "opposing politicization of academic issues and realisation of historical issues", and jointly discuss the similarities and differences between the cultures of the two countries by holding academic exchange activities, etc., so as to help both sides have a more thorough and clear understanding of the culture and history of the other country, and let the two peoples keep due respect and understanding of the cultures of other countries. China and South Korea's media should also strengthen communication and cooperation. Yonhap News Agency's negative reports mostly come from journalists who have settled in South Korea, and their news sources mainly come from the media of western countries such as the United States, while the reports of special correspondents in China are more objective and neutral. It can be seen that journalists' ignorance of China and the influence of western demonization of China will also lead to negative comments on China. Therefore, appropriately relaxing the interview restrictions of foreign correspondents in China, actively inviting Korean journalists to come to China, allowing them to get in touch with a real China, accepting them with a more inclusive attitude, and conveying the Chinese voice with a more frank and open attitude will also help cultural exchanges and eliminate hostility.

In addition, in the post-epidemic era, in the process of external communication, China's media should also sink its perspective to the people and attach importance to the role of ordinary people as the main body of cultural exchanges between China and South Korea. Chinese people's understanding of South Korea started from the "Korean Wave" culture, which represents fashion. Korean stars, songs and dances, movies and TV plays and so on are very popular among the younger generation, which attracts them to know other parts of Korea. When we communicate with South Korea, we should also sink some political discourses that ordinary people are not familiar with into life language that can make them easier to

understand and accept. On the basis of fully understanding the local culture and habits, we should choose more friendly expressions, show a positive and friendly image of China in a subtle way, break the cultural gap between the two countries, and draw closer the relationship between Chinese and Korean people.

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