

Framing Differences in Reports on Japan's Discharge of Nuclear Wastewater: A Comparative Analysis of The New York Times and China Daily

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Abstract:

Since Chernobyl, nuclear disasters have long overshadowed global environmental concerns. Recently, the discharge of nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan has reignited discussions on such incidents' environmental and geopolitical implications. In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami 2011, the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station was severely damaged, accumulating radioactive-contaminated water used to cool the reactors. In August 2023, Japan began discharging nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean, overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This paper aims to analyze and compare the reports of China Daily and The New York Times on this issue. China Daily is China's state-owned mainstream media dedicated to reporting news to English-speaking countries, while The New York Times is one of the most influential media in the United States. Through framing theory, this paper will use different frameworks to showcase how these two media outlets try to influence people's perception of Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater and the geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Nuclear disasters, International Atomic Energy Agency, China Daily, wastewater

Introduction

Since Chernobyl, nuclear disasters have long cast a shadow over global environmental concerns. Recently, the discharge of nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan has reignited discussions on such incidents' environmental and geopolitical implications. In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami 2011, the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station was severely damaged, accumulating radioactive-contaminated water used to cool the reactors. In August 2023, Japan began discharging nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean, overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This paper aims to analyze and compare the reports of China Daily and The New York Times on this issue. China Daily is China's state-owned mainstream media dedicated to reporting news to English-speaking countries, while The New York Times is one of the most influential media in the United States. Through framing theory, this paper will use different frameworks to showcase how these two media outlets try to influence people's perception of Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater and the geopolitical landscape.

Framing theory examines how the presentation of information in media and communication can shape individuals' perceptions of reality. Growing from the sociological foundation, "Frames in communication"

focus on the "words, images, phrases, and presentation styles" used to construct news stories and the processes that shape this construction (Druckman, 2001, p. 227). According to Scheufele (1999), frames in media content influence the audience's perceptions by highlighting certain aspects of an issue, which are "frames in thoughts" at the individual level. Besides, as a conceptual language from political communication, framing is also used to discuss the effects of media on attitudes about international issues when strategic intent or state interests are not the main focus (Entman, 1991).

New York Time

The New York Times has taken an objective and balanced attitude to the reports on Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater in general. It was difficult for the Japanese government to treat accumulated nuclear wastewater appropriately(The New York Times, 2023). Reports use terms like "treated radioactive wastewater," "ruined Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant," and "powerful filtration system" to suggest Japan has no other option but to treat the wastewater scientifically and discharge it into the ocean(The New York Times, 2023). At the same time, they used the words from Tokyo Electric Power Company(Tepco), the International Atomic Energy Agency, and experts as sources to add credibility to the case. In addition to suggesting Japan and Tepco are in a bind, the New York Times also offers other voices like

government officials, residents, environmental groups, etc. These multifaceted sources provide a comprehensive view of the issue, including environmental, political, and social dimensions, expressing the international community's doubts about Japan's action.

Moreover, The New York Times intricately weaves the geopolitical context into its reporting. The articles highlight the reactions of neighboring countries to Japan's decision, particularly China and South Korea. For example, some reports use expressions like "exaggerating the risks," "coordinated campaign," and "disinformation" to suggest a deliberate effort by China's mainstream media to manipulate public opinion (The New York Times, 2023). Reports also cite sources of Chinese experts working in international organizations to support the idea that China intends to challenge the existing international discourse. At the same time, the report mentions historical issues between China and Japan, such as the "anti-Japanese protests" in China in 2012 (The New York Times, 2023). The New York Times suggests that China's protest against Japan's action is not from the perspective of global environmental and seafood security as China's media claim, but has a historical reason. Other than that, The New York Times provides a framework of Japan-Korea relations, suggesting that Japan's behavior has triggered a backlash in the region and polarization in South Korea. This framing underscores the complex dynamics of East Asian politics and the regional tensions exacerbated by environmental and safety concerns.

China Daily

On the other hand, China Daily consistently adopts a critical tone, underscoring the potential environmental and health risks associated with Japan's actions. With terms like "nuclear-contaminated wastewater" and "crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant," China Daily negatively frames the issue, emphasizing the potential hazards of wastewater (China Daily, 2023). Besides, the use of strong language, such as "irresponsible decision," "nuclear-contaminated wastewater," and "global environmental morality at stake," portrays Japan's actions as not only environmentally hazardous but also ethically questionable (China Daily, 2023). The reports cite opinions and statements from activists, international organizations, and regional bodies. This choice of sources reinforces the framing of a broad-based, international outcry against Japan. In addition, China Daily also provides the framework of neighboring areas. Some articles focus on the condemnation from South Korean activists and politicians, emphasizing regional opposition. It portrays Japan's decision as reckless and violating

international laws, further framing the action negatively. In contrast to the New York Times' criticism of the Chinese media's reporting style, the China Daily also attacked the Western media's reporting focus. The report further criticizes Western media for not focusing enough on this issue's environmental and health hazards. China Daily calls for various actions, including stricter regulation of Japanese food imports and international pressure on Japan to change its decision. The term and presentation style used by China Daily likely influence readers to view Japan's decision as a serious international issue, eliciting strong condemnation and raising concerns about environmental and legal ethics. It could also strengthen perceptions of regional tensions in East Asia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the reports by China Daily and The New York Times on Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant reveals distinct framing approaches reflective of their respective geopolitical contexts and editorial perspectives.

Through their distinct framing approaches, both media outlets inform public opinion. Moreover, they reflect and potentially influence the geopolitical discourse surrounding environmental issues. The New York Times, with its relatively balanced reporting, contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding Japan's decision, including the challenges of nuclear wastewater management and the diplomatic nuances in East Asian politics. On the other hand, China Daily's critical stance amplifies concerns about environmental ethics and regional safety, fostering a sense of urgency and advocating for international action against Japan's decision. Both media outlets also slammed the coverage of this issue made by the other country's media, blaming the other for problems with wording, presentation style, focus, etc.

This comparative analysis demonstrates how media framing can significantly shape public perception and discourse on international issues. It highlights the role of media as not just purveyors of information but as active participants in constructing geopolitical narratives. As global environmental concerns intersect with international politics, reports on such issues by influential media outlets will play an essential role in shaping public perception and the geopolitical landscape.

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