

# Building Hegemony in Discursive Struggle: An Analysis of Documentary *Super China: The leadership of the CPC*

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**Abstract.** This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis approach to analyze documentary *Super China: The Leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC)*. This study focuses on the representation and image building of CPC and analyses the ideologies behind them. This study argues that the documentary tries to construct a hegemonic, powerful and autocratic CPC in the ‘text’ dimension. In the ‘discursive practice’ dimension, ideologies of South Korea are articulated in CPC’s hegemony. In the ‘social practice’ dimension, the image of the CPC in the documentary reflects South Korea’s cognition of CPC. In conclusion, *Super China: The leadership of the CPC* reconstructs the image and orders of discourse of the CPC and produces new hegemony. That is, the process of discursive struggle is also the process of building hegemony in South Korea.

## 1. Introduction

Super China, a popular documentary in South Korea, was produced by KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) in 2015. It contains 7 episodes introducing China from different perspectives, including culture, politics and the robust Chinese economy. One of the episodes titled *Super China: The leadership of the CPC* focuses on the CPC and its influences. Despite there are numbers of documentaries about China’s national image taken by overseas media, it is rare that the CPC is taken as an independent theme. Therefore, this study sheds light on *Super China: The leadership of the CPC*. To be specific, this study focuses on the representation of the CPC, the construction of the image of CPC and the ideologies demonstrated in the documentary. By applying the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach developed by Norman Fairclough, the study regards the documentary as a discourse and puts emphasis on textual formations, discursive structures, and social practices.

## 2. The ‘Text’ Dimension

CDA explores the role of discursive structures in constituting social inequality[1]. It includes three-dimension: ‘text’ dimension, ‘discursive practice’ dimension, and ‘social practice’ dimension. Any discursive ‘event’ is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice[2]. According to Norman Fairclough, when analyzing a discourse in the ‘text’ dimension, it is necessary to understand the potential meanings and explanatory meanings and determine the multi-directions of meanings. Furthermore, he suggests that textual analysis can be organized in vocabulary, grammar, coherence and textual structure. By applying this theory, this study attempts to observe the ideologies in discursive events through analyzing the vocabularies and textual structures of the documentary.

### 2.1 Expressions of Words: Over-modification.

In the documentary, there are 59 clauses referring to the “communist party”. In the clauses with the “communist party” as the primary subject, there are 7 places present facts, and the rest are evaluative statements. In evaluative statements, the “communist party” is represented as the highest power of

China, also the most confident, flexible and advanced party in China. In clauses with the “communist party” as the primary object, the CPC is represented as the designer of super China, the core of the Chinese nation, and has strong mobilization. Discourse producer is concerned about how to become a member of the CPC and different forms of party organizations in China. Clauses with the “communist party” as an attributive component mainly focus on the leadership of the CPC, political policies, and anti-corruption.

All in all, the “communist party” and the CPC is ‘over-modified’, that is, modified objects related to “leadership” and “power” ‘surround’ the “communist party” and suggest the CPC is the representative of power and leadership. Since ideology enters in the ideological investment of elements which draw upon in producing or interpreting a text, and the way they are articulated together in orders of discourse[3], clauses aforementioned also convey ideologies that the CPC is the only leader of China. ‘Over-modification’ expresses an ‘intense preoccupation’, gives audiences a sense of oppression and even constructs the illusion that “CPC is using high-pressure policies and authority to rule China.”

## 2.2 Grammatical Metaphors: Presupposition and Assertion.

Metaphors generally exist in all kinds of languages and discourses. When we express things through a specific metaphor, we are constructing the reality in a specific way. How a particular domain of experience is metaphorized is one of the stakes in the struggle within and over discourse practices[2].

Text 1

*Does this misfortune only happen to this girl? China is today’s gorgeous pyramid which was built with the sacrifice of tens of thousands of migrant workers and urban people..... Although China’s socialism has prevented a billion people from starving, it is difficult to make sure everyone can have a good life.*

In Text 1, the first clause can be regarded as a grammatical metaphor, for it is transitive, and it seems like an orientated action clause (“the girl” is the actor and “this misfortune” is the target). It can be considered as a metaphorical expression of the following sentence: “This misfortune does not only happen to this girl.” In the metaphorical form, nominalization (“this misfortune”) is the goal and serves as a presupposed entity that deals with what may be controversially expressed as an assertion (like “this misfortune does not only happen to this girl”). Although this assertion is arguable, the presupposition is not. “This misfortune” strengthens the status of the next two clauses, as they are “established information” and themes at the same time. “Established information” is information that is taken for granted.

## 2.3 Proposition Analysis: Conveys Ideologies (In)directly.

There are several direct propositions in the documentary. Give “China is the CPC” as an example. This clause equalizes a country to a political party, conveys the ideology that “the CPC is above the country”. Correspondingly, another clause “the CPC is everywhere” implies that the CPC has penetrated through every corner of China.

Text 2

*President Xi Jinping is pragmatic and concerned about people’s grievances and demands. He always puts interests of Chinese in the first place. In this regard, Chinese kindly call him “Xi Dada.” We cannot see democratic and voting in China. However, Chinese leadership clearly knows what ordinary people hate.*

In this presupposition (Text 2), if the audiences agree with the view that “However, Chinese leadership clearly knows what ordinary people hate” is true, it is likely that they would believe that “We cannot see democratic and voting in China” is true too. As long as they command on the Chinese leadership, they have already unknowingly accepted this pre-determined information that is, accepting the flawed information that “We cannot see democratic and voting in China.”

Therefore, direct proposition conveys ideologies directly while presupposition conveys ideologies indirectly. However, both of them adopt the discursive strategy called ‘false information’ and

transmit information that seems to be unanimously true. Once the audiences accept the direct proposition attached, they would also accept the presupposition.

## 2.4 The 'Architecture' of Texts: 'Foregrounded' and 'Backgrounded' Elements.

Text structure also concerns what kinds of elements or episodes, in what ways and orders, are combined in the 'architecture' of texts [2]. 'Architecture' involves perspectives and attitudes of the text producer which indicate what information within a text is 'foregrounded' or 'emphasized', and what information is 'backgrounded', 'ignored' or even 'eliminated'. In this case, texts can express the ideological bias in a very subtle way.

### Text 3

*The economy is booming and people get richer. You are the winner. What are the reasons for you to oppose the government? China's middle class, especially urban middle class, is the winner. Therefore, if you also are the winner, then you have no reason to oppose the system (government). On the contrary, you will rely more on it.*

In Text 3, the discourse producer regards middle class as the only beneficiary of economic development in China. At this point, the 'foregrounded' message is that the development of Chinese economy has benefited the middle class. However, ordinary workers and peasants, who are also beneficiaries, have been 'backgrounded'. The discourse producer intends to convey an ideology that the CPC appropriates the middle class through economic development (money) and ordinary workers and peasants are losers. In addition, the clause "if you also are the winner, then you have no reason to oppose the system (government)" is based on the assumption that wealth is the criterion to judge people's degree of loyalty to the system and whether to protest the authority (government) or not. This assumption is based on utilitarianism which "demonizes" the CPC and persuades the audiences to believe that the CPC serves exclusively to the middle class.

## 3. The 'Discursive Practice' Dimension

The 'discursive practice' dimension specifies the nature of the processes and interpretations of text production [2]. As an intermediate dimension, it focuses on the process of text production, distribution, and consumption, which relates textual analysis to social practice. All of these processes are social and need to be connected to the special economic, political and institutional backgrounds where they occurred. In the 'discursive practice' dimension, analysis involves coherence, intertextuality, and the construction of speech. This study mainly puts focus on the intertextuality and coherence of the text.

### 3.1 Intertextuality: Discourse Representation and Discursive Struggle.

Intertextuality entails an emphasis upon the heterogeneity of text, and a mode of analysis which highlights the diverse, even contradictory elements and threads. Texts also differ in the extent to which their heterogeneous elements are integrated, and so in the extent to which their heterogeneity is evident on the surface of the text[2]. Discourse representation is one of the essential aspects of intertextuality which reflects ideologies.

### Text 4

*(The CPC intends to) eliminate corruption and control public opinion. Zhong Nanhai represents the highest power of the CPC. In 2013, the CPC issued Document No.9<sup>1</sup> to party officials and warned them to solve problems about human rights and freedom of speech properly. The document was issued by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself.*

<sup>1</sup> Document No.9, more properly the *Briefing on the Current Situation in the Ideological Realm*, is a confidential internal document widely circulated within the CPC in 2013 by the General Office of CPC. The document warns of seven dangerous Western values, allegedly including media freedom and judicial independence.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Document\\_Nine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Document_Nine))

In Text 4, Document No.9 is placed in a special context which is illustrated by discourse representations, such as "(The CPC intends to) eliminate corruption and ... Zhong Nanhai represents... The document was issued by...." These discourse representations are specific descriptions of the document. Moreover, the word "warned" reinforces the importance of the described discourse (Document No.9). Instead of choosing words like "say," "indicate," or "notify," the discourse producer uses the word "warned" to indicate the power of illocutionary in the described discourse. The word "warned" constructs a threatening force to the discourse, highlights the coercion of the CPC, and strengthens the following clauses which convey ideologies directly. For instance, "Document No.9 helps to prevent threats against the CPC from western countries", "This shows communist rule is unrest, and even a bit paranoid" and "The CPC does not become confident." Intertextuality embodies the process of discursive struggle. In this case, the discourse producer tries to reconstruct the orders of the discourse of CPC and articulates it into the discursive framework of power politics.

### 3.2 Coherence: Exemplification and Construction.

The documentary connects propositions through functional coherence illustrated by exemplification and construction. By exemplification, the documentary suggests that the number of party members of the CPC is so enormous that the CPC is everywhere. Meanwhile, it also illustrates how the CPC communicates with ordinary people, and what Chinese think of the CPC. By construction, the documentary highlights problems of the CPC, for example, coercion, social inequality, and corruption. In this case, functional coherence highlights problems and conceals contribution of the CPC.

## 4. The 'Social Practice' Dimension

The 'social practice' dimension focuses on issues concerning social analysis, such as the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event, how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice and the constitutive/constructive effects of discourse[2]. In 'discursive practice' dimension, it is considered that the documentary conveys South Korea's political ideologies through the process of reconstructing the image of the CPC. To be specific, the documentary not only produces a "powerful" CPC but also constructs an "awful" CPC illustrated by corruption, diffidence, and coercion. Since social practice shapes the nature of discursive practice, the image of the CPC shown in the documentary actually reflects the cognition of South Korea's citizens towards the CPC. It is argued that most South Korean citizens have the prejudice against the CPC. When it comes to China's politics, South Korean citizens tend to believe "communist system" or the CPC is conservative, dictatorial and exploitative. Such cognition is similar to the image of the CPC projected in the documentary.

Furthermore, differences of the system and the rise of South Korea's nationalism are the causes of South Korean's cognitive bias. South Korea pursues capitalist system. Although South Korean citizens have recognized that the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is different from North Korea's, they still suspect about it [4]. South Korea has become closer to China, mainly for economic reasons [5] rather than political reasons. Since a nation's political system is an important component of its national image, South Korean citizens' negative evaluations of China's political system and the CPC inevitably affect their perceptions towards China.

## 5. Conclusion

By applying Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this study analyses documentary *Super China: The leadership of the CPC*. Firstly, in the 'text' dimension, through over-modification, the CPC is constructed as the highest leadership; through grammatical metaphors and nominalization, the documentary implies that the economic development under the leadership of CPC is based on the sacrifice of workers; through direct proposition and presupposition, the documentary produces the

illusion that “under the leadership of CPC, China has no democracy” and through the “foregrounded” and “backgrounded”, the documentary intends to construct a selfish image of the CPC. Then, in the ‘discursive practice’ dimension, a seemingly “logical” scenario constructed by functional coherence is produced and the documentary instills the South Korean ideologies into the construction of the CPC’s hegemony. While focusing on the CPC, the documentary also suggests its own opinions and standpoints about it. When ideologies are absorbed into various dimensions of discursive practice, the discursive practice also takes part in producing, reproducing, or changing the governing relationship and becomes a part of social practice. Last but not least, in the ‘social practice’ dimension, the image of the CPC shown in the documentary reflects the fact that South Korean citizens have the prejudice against the CPC. Although the CPC has paid great attention to international discursive power since its establishment [6], misunderstanding still happens.

In conclusion, the discourse producer of documentary *Super China: the leadership of the CPC* reshapes dominant orders of the CPC's discourse and produces contradictory and unstable orders of discourse. On the one hand, the discourse producer obeys to dominant orders of the CPC's discourse and constructs a powerful image of the CPC. On the other hand, the documentary questions the dominant orders and attempts to produce a new one. The discursive struggle is ubiquitous and documentaries are without exceptions. In the process of producing/conveying ideologies, discourse production (i.e. documentary) becomes a part of the discursive struggle for hegemony. In this regard, *Super China: the leadership of the CPC* reconstructs the image and orders of the CPC's discourse, and so produces new hegemony. That is, the process of discursive struggle is also the process of building the hegemony of South Korea.

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