Flu Files Interpretation Paper

Guanxi Shen

Article: Blame China for the Flu (Nov 16, 1918, The Globe (Toronto))

The article published by Canadian newspaper in November 1918, employed an eye-catching title: "Blame China for the Flu"; it is inspiring for analyze both in the historical context and contemporary context.

In the article, the author states that the pandemic could be traced not to Spain but Asia; and that China was a breeder of all kinds of contagious diseases which might spread over the earth if they were not checked at their source. Though it may seem like an introduction to a more detailed discussion of the origin of the flu, the author skips the topic and leaves explanations empty in the following paragraphs. Without providing any scientific evidence and even minimum logical rationales, the article turns to discuss politics, making its mention of the flu appears to be for other purposes. The article then discussed that since China will be one of the world's greatest countries, they need to bring China under Christian civilizing influences to prevent them from side with German in the war and become a menace to the world. To understand the author's intention of linking the flu with the political situation, we have to examine the historical international relations. Seven years before 1918, when this newspaper article was published, China revolutionaries outcasted Manchurian rulers and established the Republic of China (Li, 2007). One year before 1918, China had already entered the World War and declared war on Germany (History, 2009). Based on historical facts, China in 1918 was already a republican country and was already in war against Germany, but why is the article still discussing preventing China to side with Germany? Part of the reason maybe because of the strong influences Germany had in Chinese politics. When the Chinese military was reforming back in Qing Dynasty, most of the military personnel and generals were trained by Germans, and China's "new army" adapted the German system and equipment (Schillinger, 2016). The military was in strong favor of Germany in the war. However, the decision-makers wanted to recover territories occupied by Germany, Shandong, as well as to abolish the war indemnity treaty the former government made with Germany (Griswold, 1966). Therefore, the article might offer us a clue of the contradicted feeling between China and Germany that was hidden by history's appearances. Furthermore, in the decoding process, the article has more to reveal. While mentioning the flu but lacked explanatory information, it is reasonable to think the flu is used as a political symbol that the author is concerning: would the pro-German sentiments in China aggravate and negatively impact the world, just like the flu? Moreover, in the article the flu might also be a metaphor of the evil German forces in the war, the author regards the Germany influence was just as contagious and dangerous as the flu, and both the flu and Germany should be checked at their source.

The article also has a strong parallel with the contemporary pandemic, the Covid-19, which was initially started in China, and is more and more used by President Trump as political instruments. One similarity of the two is the tone of "blaming": while putting less effort on taking increasing cases seriously and employing necessary measures, they intentionally transferred the attention to an outside source and turning it political, causing an aggravated situation in reality. For current-day America, China is often perceived as the biggest rival, contagious and dangerous as an epidemic; compared to the real epidemic, the political epidemic has been put on more emphasis, just like Germany in Spanish flu time in 1918.

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