

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WHEN GLOBAL CONSPIRACY THEORIES
BECOME LOCAL PROPAGANDA: THE
INFLUENCE OF CHINA AND U.S. RIGHT-
WING COVID-19 NARRATIVES ON
TAIWAN

Wei-Ping Li, Doctor of Philosophy, 2023

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Journalism

This dissertation examined how foreign conspiracy theories propagated by authoritarian countries traverse national borders and are transformed into “news” in domestic media systems. Through the lens of strategic narrative and hybrid media theory, it also assessed the impact of these conspiracy theories incorporated into the transnational information campaign as propaganda tools. Using the controversial COVID-19 virus-origin theory as a case study, this dissertation examined how COVID-19 virus-origin conspiracy theories were constructed as propaganda by Chinese state media and how these conspiracy theories influenced the media in Taiwan, which has historically been the main target of China's information influence activities.

Through content analysis, the study found that the Chinese state media constructed its narratives about the origin of the COVID-19 virus by repeating consistent themes, recurrent terms, and assigning distinctive personalities to key protagonists in news events. The Chinese state media portrayed China as a team player that collaborated with the international community by sharing

data openly. However, the United States and other Western countries attempted to contain the rise of China by attacking it with conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus. These Chinese narratives were mostly rejected by mainstream Taiwanese media. Although Taiwanese media mentioned some conspiracy theories promoted by Chinese state media, Taiwanese media were aware of Chinese propaganda and disinformation. They also viewed the disputes between China and the United States regarding the origin of the virus as a struggle for power between the two countries. Even though Taiwanese media and Chinese state media used identical terms to describe the same news events about the origin of the COVID-19 virus and highlighted the same protagonists, Taiwanese media presented narratives that were in stark contrast to Chinese media. The research concluded that Chinese state media had limited influence on Taiwanese media in the case of COVID-19 virus-origin narratives. Nonetheless, this study also uncovered a concerning trend: a number of Taiwanese media articles amplified conspiracy theories disseminated by right-wing American media outlets, such as the War Room, Newsmax, or overseas Chinese media organizations notorious for spreading disinformation. The use of disinformation from foreign media as news sources is one of the vulnerabilities of Taiwanese media in the battle against foreign propaganda and conspiracy theories.

This dissertation adds to the understanding of the influence of conspiracy theories propagated by authoritarian regimes and identifies elements crucial to their success or failure as propaganda tools. It establishes a way of operationalizing strategic narrative through content analysis. Moreover, it sheds light on the strengths and weaknesses of media systems in democratic nations when battling against foreign propaganda. The findings of this study are useful not only to Taiwan but also to democratic and open societies worldwide.

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THE INFLUENCE OF CHINA AND U.S. RIGHT-WING COVID-19
NARRATIVES ON TAIWAN

by

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Dedication

To my dad, Mei-Lin Li (李每林). Without his encouragement, this would not have been possible.

Acknowledgements

My study at Merrill College spanned ten years, from 2013 to 2023. I attended the Ph.D. program for the first time in 2013 but left after the fall semester due to family reasons. Five years later, I returned to the program in 2018 and graduated in 2023. Although not an easy journey, it was full of surprises, love, and support. I am lucky to meet great people who accompanied me on this journey. Looking back, I have many to whom I have been deeply grateful.

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I was in two cohorts during my days at Merrill. I was in the 2013 cohort [known as “a power cohort”!] with Rob Wells, Carole Lee, Pallavi Guha, Amy Wu, and Ngetha (James) Gachau. Although I was with them for only one semester, they still included me in important events, such as Pallavi’s dissertation defense and Amy’s excellent book publishing. I want to express my deep gratitude to Rob, who returned to Merrill and became our Ph.D. program director in 2022. Thank you, Rob, for reading my proposal and dissertation, helping me practice my presentations,

providing helpful suggestions, and cheering for me on many occasions. You told me to be confident in myself, and I will keep your words in mind.

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List of Abbreviations

United States (U.S.)

World Health Organization (WHO)

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Associated Press (AP)

The New York Times (The NYT)

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ)

Eastern Broadcasting Company (EBC)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

When news reporting, films, or research depict disinformation, propaganda, or conspiracy theories, their narratives or plots frequently depict a scenario in which certain actors create content embedded with manipulated information and exert influence on their targets. The communication process appears to be unidirectional, with messages launched like bullets through a medium, such as social media platforms. However, the influence of messages and the relationships between actors, the target, and media systems are more complex than a straightforward one-way scenario. This dissertation will demonstrate the more complex process in which foreign conspiracy theories help disinformation cross national borders, interact with domestic social and political contexts, and are thus transformed by media outlets in the domestic hybrid media system into what some would consider news.

For research on conspiracy theory, a large portion of academic literature available in the English language focuses on its definition, the elements that make a conspiracy theory appealing to audiences, the conditions that facilitate the rise of conspiracy theories, and the path along which the theories are spread. The contexts of these studies and cases are set mostly in Western and democratic countries, where conspiracy theories often arise from the general public. In an age where information traverses borders more easily and authoritarian countries have stepped up their influence on the global stage, another strain of conspiracy theories – the theories that are promoted by authoritarian governments to international audiences – merits greater attention. The COVID-19 conspiracy theories promoted by the Chinese government to reshape the global narratives of the origin of the virus that were transmitted to the relatively democratic media system in Taiwan

thus serve as an ideal case to observe how conspiracy theories are embedded in foreign information influence campaigns.

The theories of the COVID-19 virus origin were among the most prevalent and problematic information during this period (Miller, June 16, 2021). Since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in China, the Chinese government, American right-wing politicians, and other conspiracy theorists have propagated multiple contradictory theories regarding the origins of the virus. Two narrative strains that contradict each other were especially prominent: One contends that the virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China as a bioweapon, while the other contends that the virus was created in laboratories in the United States (Doublethink Lab, 2020; Kinez, February 15, 2021).

Although scientists are still debating the origin of the COVID-19 virus, multiple actors have continued to expand these two claims with fabricated elements (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021; Schafer, 2021). Moreover, the competing narratives have become information weapons deployed by different ideological camps: one is promoted by the Chinese government and its patriots, while the other is bolstered by those who speculate that the Chinese government is hiding secrets from the rest of the world (Kinez, February 15, 2021). Since then, these two conspiracy theories have circulated in the United States and China, been widely disseminated in other parts of the globe, and spawned numerous variants.

These COVID-19 conspiracy theories are not only good examples to study how conspiracy theories became propaganda tools. Moreover, they provided opportunities for researchers to learn the factors why some societies could resist them while others failed. This research employs the theories of hybrid media systems and strategic narratives to identify the elements rendering power to conspiracy theories and how domestic media reshape the narratives. With the help of the theory

tools, the research findings help enhance our understanding of foreign propaganda and help devise strategies to combat problematic information from abroad.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of the COVID-19 conspiracy theories and their influence also contributes to refining theories of strategic narratives and hybrid media systems. To begin, it demonstrates that strategic narrative theory can also be a useful approach to constructing research procedures to dissect conspiracy theories and extract elements for measuring the efficacy of propaganda. Through this case study, this dissertation also finds the essential ingredient that gives conspiracy theories power but may also serve as a strong defense against conspiracy ideas. This study further expands the theory of hybrid media systems by analyzing the flow of information from a media system in one country to another.

This study chose content created by Chinese state media and Taiwanese mainstream media as the research object and examines how Taiwanese media received, adapted, or even rebutted the COVID-origin conspiracy narratives that originated from China. There are multiple reasons to choose Taiwan as the research case. First, Taiwan has long been a victim of foreign disinformation attacks, especially from China, since the Chinese Nationalist Government retreated to Taiwan in 1949 (Wu, 2021; Cook, 2020). For the past decades, China has developed sophisticated disinformation campaigns with traditional and online media to influence Taiwan (Allen-Ebrahimian, May 24, 2021). Nevertheless, Taiwan has endeavored to defend against the information attack and has won international recognition for its successful defense during the 2020 Presidential Election and the pandemic (Kerr & Philipis, November 11, 2020; Blanchette et al., 2021). Taiwan's experience, be it truly a story of success or not, provides a valuable example of the struggle against disinformation and how domestic factors counter foreign propaganda's influence.

Second, the two strains of conspiracy theories (China made the virus versus the U.S. made the virus) analyzed in this research concern both China and the United States. In Taiwan, the relations with these two countries often impact not only national security but domestic public opinion as well. By observing how Taiwanese media used and modified the two strains of conspiracy theories from foreign lands, we can better understand how domestic media use information from abroad to construct their own narratives about important international affairs and try to affect the view of the public about other countries.

The following sections of this chapter will first introduce the COVID-19 virus-origin theories and how they have been used as weapons in information warfare. The second part will discuss this dissertation's central research question: What happened after the Chinese conspiracy theories developed as propaganda reached a specific country (Taiwan)? How was the target country influenced, or how did it resist the propaganda?

1.2 The context of the research -- The mystery of the origin of COVID and the two main strains of theories

1.2.1 The many theories of the origin of the COVID-19 virus

The origin of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, remains a mystery. At the pandemic's beginning, most scientists ruled out the possibility that a Chinese laboratory may have created the virus (Kessler, May 25, 2021). In March 2020, 27 scientists signed a statement published in *Lancet*, claiming that they "overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife" (Calisher et al., 2020). But over the past years, scientists still have not found the virus's origin due to the Chinese government's refusal to be transparent with the data (National Intelligence Council, 2021).

One year after the initial outbreak of the pandemic in China, experts from World Health Organization (WHO) were permitted by the Chinese government in January 2021 to investigate the source of the virus in Wuhan. WHO experts published their report in March 2021, stating that it was “extremely unlikely” that the virus was leaked from an accident in the laboratory. Although transmission from animals to human beings was “possible to likely,” it could not have happened in the market in Wuhan because of the lack of direct evidence. Moreover, the experts pointed out that transmission from the cold chain of frozen food was ‘possible’ (World Health Organization, 2021). Scientists and governments in the West later criticized this WHO report for lacking raw data analysis and an extensive examination (Beaumont, March 31, 2021).

Meanwhile, new evidence has continued to reignite suspicion that the virus may have come from the Wuhan laboratory in China, including the report from *The Wall Street Journal* that several researchers from the Wuhan lab were sick and showed similar symptoms of COVID-19 in November 2019 (Gordon et al., May 23, 2021). Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and agencies in the Biden Administration have also conducted separate investigations and reached diverse conclusions. Some reports argue that the lab-leak theory is most likely, while others have more confidence in the explanation that the virus was transmitted from animals to humans (House Foreign Affairs Committee Minority Staff, 2021; Gordon & Strobel, February 26, 2023). Lately, a group of scientists claimed that new genetic evidence shows the virus could possibly originate from racoon dogs at the Wuhan market (Mueller, March 17, 2023).

Amidst the unceasing doubts and questions, WHO called for more investigation to resolve the mystery of COVID-19 origin. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, concluded that WHO’s first investigation on the COVID-19 origin was not definitive enough to rule out the possibility of a lab leak (Kessler, May 25, 2021). Responding to

the demands from the public and prominent scientists, WHO called for another investigation in June 2021, which was soon rejected by China (The Associated Press, July 22, 2021).

1.2.2 The development of conspiracy theories surrounding the origin of the virus

While the facts are still murky, the ongoing uncertainty and the need for an explanation have fueled the spread of multiple claims about the origin of the virus. These claims contain both sensible and absurd elements. Often, these elements could be true if examined separately but could be misleading if combined. In general, the claims address two fundamental questions: Is the virus natural or genetically modified in the laboratory? Was the virus accidentally released to the world or spread on purpose?

Among the various rumors about the virus's origins, two main claims have received the most attention worldwide. The first is that the virus was created at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Although scientists are still investigating this claim, conspiracy theorists have expanded it to include elements that could be false, such as the virus was created as the Chinese government's bioweapon and was intentionally released by scientists to the outside world (Taiwan FactCheck Center, May 14, 2020; DFRLab, 2021).

It did not take long before conspiracy theorists created and spread this theory about the origin of the virus. The World Health Organization China Office first learned about unknown pneumonia in Wuhan on December 3, 2019. One month later, an English tweet by a Hong-Kong based account emerged, reminding readers of the SARS epidemic that prevailed in Hong Kong in 2003 and claiming that “[t]oday the evil regime [China] strikes again with a new virus” (Kessler, May 25, 2021). Between January and February, tabloids, conspiracy theorists, and politicians spun and boosted the stories. The *Daily Mail* in the United Kingdom. was among the first to suggest that experts had worried about the virus “escaping” from the Wuhan lab (Rahhal, January 24, 2020).

The U.S. conservative newspaper *The Washington Times* reported that an Israeli biological warfare scientist said the virus “may have originated in a laboratory in the city of Wuhan linked to China’s covert biological weapons program” (Gertz, January 26, 2020).

Meanwhile, the far-right financial blog Zero Hedge posted articles claiming that a Chinese scientist was responsible for this pandemic. American lawyer Francis Boyle also claimed the virus was a bioweapon stolen by two Chinese scientists from Canada, who smuggled it to Wuhan. Later this lawyer changed his story and claimed the virus was developed at the University of North Carolina by Chinese scientists and then sold to Wuhan (Adams, 2020; DFRLab, 2021). As for American politicians and public figures, although not explicitly affirming the bioweapon theory and the sinister stories, they kept implicating that the virus could be a bioweapon. For example, former U.S. President Donald Trump, who had been in an ongoing trade war with China, repeatedly said that the virus was from a Chinese laboratory (Rabouin, February 1, 2021; Wise, June 22, 2020). Senator Tom Cotton (Republican from Arkansas) spoke about the “theories” of the origin of the virus in China during a TV interview (Stevenson, February 18, 2020); *Fox News* political commentator Tucker Carlson invited conservative columnist Dr. Gordon Chang to his show, highlighting the issue that China could have had the ability to make bioweapons (DFRLab, 2021). The suspicion that the COVID-19 virus might have been created as a bioweapon in China further propagated anti-Asian sentiment in American society (Zannettou et al., 2020).

Unlike the first strain of COVID-origin theory, whose core issue (the relationship between the virus and the Wuhan Institute of Virology) is still under scientific investigation, the second theory has been proven false by fact-checkers. This second theory asserts that the U.S. government or corporations made the virus, and American soldiers brought it to China (Wong, 2020). The original creator of the claim remains unknown. Still, the Chinese government and other authoritarian

countries such as Russia and Iran have pushed the claim online and through the state media to incite anti-U.S. sentiment inside the countries and in the international community (Nie, 2020; Gilsinan, May 29, 2020).

As early as January 20, 2020, Russian news outlet Zvezda published an article and a video interviewing a “biologist and former weapon inspector,” who suggested that the virus could be a bioweapon and made by either the American government or corporations (DFRLab, 2021; Klepper et al., February 15, 2021). This article did not attract much attention. But a similar allegation that Americans made the virus as a bioweapon targeting China began circulating in China around the same time. At this time, the Chinese government was still trying to censor any rumors about the pandemic. A social media user from Inner Mongolia was detained and fined by the Chinese police for spreading unfounded information in late January 2020 (Kinetz, February 15, 2021).

But the arrest of the Inner Mongolia user did not stop the rumor from evolving and spreading. One expanded version of the rumor claims that American biochemical soldiers took advantage of the Military World Games hosted in Wuhan and brought the bioweapon to China in October 2019 (DoubleThink Lab, 2020). Another version of this rumor used a video clip from Japan’s Asahi T.V. News and reframed the clip as “Japanese Asahi News says COVID-19 had broken out in the U.S. before in China” (Taiwan FactCheck Center, March 3, 2020) to claim that the virus originated in the United States.¹ This version of the claim started circulating around February 22, 2020. The Chinese state media and the Chinese government, who had been mired in the blame for COVID-19’s spread, capitalized on this claim and started a series of propaganda attacks on other countries. The Chinese state media, *People’s Daily* and *CGTV*, first repeated the claim that the virus was

¹ The original clip from the Asahi News pointed out that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had examined the samples from the suspicious flu cases and found some of them might not be caused by the flu. However, disinformation creators exaggerated and misconstrued this information to claim that COVID-19 had spread widely in the U.S. much earlier than in China (Taiwan FactCheck Center, March 3, 2020).

from the U.S. and brought to China by American soldiers. The reports were syndicated to appear in the *Helsinki Times* in Finland and the *New Zealand Herald* (The DFRLab, 2021).

In early March, a self-proclaimed Canadian “consultant” and “professor” named Larry Romanoff published a paper on a Russian propaganda proxy website Global Research affiliated with the “Center for Research on Globalization.”² In this paper, Romanoff picked up the claim that the virus originated in the U.S. and pieced together related but unverified reports from Chinese and Taiwanese websites (Aredy, March 26, 2020). Romanoff’s article only repeated the old story that American soldiers brought the virus to Wuhan. But the title of “professor” and the paper composed of “evidence” distinguished him from previous obscure rumor-spreaders and fragmented claims. Moreover, the name “Center for Research on Globalization” gives an impression of a serious academic institution.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian soon used Romanoff’s paper as proof, tweeting in mid-March 2020 that the virus could be from the U.S.: “It might be the U.S. army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan” (Kinetz, February 15, 2021). Many of Zhao’s tweets were then shared by a bot army and widely retweeted, quoted, and referenced more than 82,000 times by the Chinese state media, Chinese diplomats, and other users in at least 54 languages (DFRLab, 2021). Around the same time, disinformation creators kept adding new ingredients to augment the narrative and hunt for the American labs that possibly made the “bioweapon.” On March 9, a Weibo account stated that Fort Detrick in Maryland, a U.S. Army base where a biological research center is located, could be the birthplace of the virus (Kinetz, February 15, 2021; USAMRDC, 2020). China’s Foreign Spokesperson Hua Chunying then tweeted in May, questioning, “Why not

² The U.S. Department of State has labeled *Global Research* as a proxy website that promotes Russia’s propaganda. See U.S. Department of State. (2020 August). *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf

open up Fort Detrick & other bio-labs for international review? Why not invite #WHO & int'l experts to the U.S. to look into #COVID19 source & response?" (Hua, 2020, May 8). The Chinese media, echoing Hua's tweet, wrote multiple English, Spanish, and Arabic pieces and created a video about Fort Detrick's history to echo Hua's question (Gilsinan, May 29, 2020).

In the following years, the Chinese government kept producing media content to promote the claim that the U.S. is the COVID-19 virus's origin and added new elements to the narrative as possible 'evidence.' In 2020, China Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Zhao Lijan posted two tweets asking, "What is behind the door at the biolab at Fort Detrick?" (Zhao, 2020, July 6). From early 2020 to late 2021, the number of Zhao's tweets mentioning Fort Detrick rose to 24 tweets.³ In these tweets, he indicated that a respiratory disease outbreak in northern Virginia's senior facilities and several EVALI (an illness associated with vaping) cases in Wisconsin in 2019 could be linked to COVID-19. He also aired his suspicions that the virus was produced at the University of North Carolina and compared the virus to the bioweapon spread by the Japanese Army during World War II (Zhao, June 23, 2021; August 18, 2021). In July 2021, he used the *New York Times* former foreign correspondent Stephen Kinzer's interview clip talking about Fort Detrick to suggest that Fort Detrick makes bioweapons. In this clip that was used out of context, Kinzer did not mention any information about COVID-19. But the talk from a former journalist of a reputable Western media and Zhao's tweet, "[a] deep investigation of everything that happened at Fort Detrick would be interesting indeed, but difficult for reasons of secrecy," gave audiences the impression that the theory could be true (Zhao, July 28, 2021). In October 2021, another diplomat Zha Liyou, the Chinese consul general in India, tweeted that the Maine lobsters exported from the U.S. to the

³ The author used Twitter's Advanced Search, placing "Fort Detrick" as the keyword phrase and searched the tweets under Zhao's handle @zlj517. The search results show 26 items from Jan 1, 2020 to Nov 30, 2021. Two tweets were posted in 2020, while 24 were posted in 2021.

seafood market in Wuhan could be the origin of the COVID-19 virus (Solon et al., October 22, 2021).

While the Chinese state media, social media accounts, and diplomats wove stories claiming the virus originated in the U.S., they also pushed another element of their preferred narrative to allege that the U.S. has pressured WHO to make China a scapegoat. The origin of this story could be traced to an online Chinese news site based in Fiji. This website cited a Facebook post by “Swiss biologist Wilson Edwards” written in July 2021. “Dr. Wilson Edwards” claimed that the first investigation result provided by China and WHO had solid evidence that the virus was not leaked from the Chinese laboratory. Edwards went on to criticize the U.S. for trying to threaten the scientific community to overturn the conclusions of the first investigation (Collier, December 2, 2021). The Chinese media and internet users soon circulated Dr. Edwards’ post (Pearson and Culliford, December 1, 2021). But the Embassy of Switzerland in Beijing tweeted in August that there is no registered citizen named Wilson Edwards, nor is any biological research paper written by this scientist (@SwissEmbChina, 2021, August 10). In early December 2021, Facebook removed more than 500 Facebook and Instagram accounts, including the one that belonged to “Dr. Wilson Edwards,” which was proved to be a fake account operated by a Chinese information technology company (Pearson and Culliford, December 1, 2021).⁴

1.2.3 Current studies on the spread of COVID virus conspiracy theories

COVID-19 virus-origin conspiracy theories have been pushed hard by their advocates. But which conspiracy theories have become influential, and how have global audiences responded to the

⁴ Chinese state media quoted the claim by “Wilson Edwards” about how the U.S. politicized WHO investigation. But the state media took down the articles quoting “Wilson Edwards” after the Swiss government verified that “Swiss biologist Wilson Edwards” did not exist. See Davidson, H. (2021, August 11). Chinese media in fake news claims over Swiss scientist critical of US. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/11/chinese-media-fake-news-claims-swiss-scientist-wilson-edwards-critical-of-us>

problematic information? Several studies have traced how the COVID-19 origin theories have changed and investigated who spread the information, by which channels, to whom, and what the narratives were.

Bruns et al.'s study (2021) on another widespread conspiracy theory about the origin of the COVID virus --the 5G signals could transmit the COVID virus -- shows that fringe websites in the U.S. could be this information's original sources. Although the mainstream media first dismissed this information for the information's absurdity, celebrities and online influencers such as Woody Harrelson pushed this theory and attracted the attention of media reporters covering entertainment beats. These show business and lifestyle journalists amplified the false information by reporting celebrities' tweets without caveats or verification. It was not until reporters of other beats or fact-checkers intervened did the mainstream media debunk the 5G theory (Bruns et al., 2021). Nevertheless, many global audiences have circulated the conspiracy theory widely and believed it to be true. Bruns et al. argued that mainstream media had missed the opportunity to intervene early, which could have helped inhibit the spread of the 5G conspiracy theory.

As for how the conspiracy theory about COVID-19's origin travels across national borders, researchers pointed out that language and local communities played an important role in "the fomentation and amplification" of the 5G theory (Bruns et al., 2020, p.177). Bruns et al. found that English communities served as a lingua franca, from which the false information easily disseminated into local and regional language communities formed by religious beliefs, political opinions, common interests, and neighborhood ties.

Researchers also suggested that the social and cultural contexts of local communities may have helped propagate the spread and increase the influence of conspiracy theories in different countries. Bruns et al.'s study (2020) indicated that local communities' long-term fear of 5G

technology and distrust in global elites have made people more susceptible to the 5G theory. Gagliardone et al.'s research (2021) on how Twitter users in Nigeria and South Africa perceived the 5G and Bill Gates conspiracy theories resonated with Bruns's findings. They found that the belief of online users in conspiracy theories tended to be rooted in the particular suspicion of certain ideas or actors in the countries. For example, online users in Nigeria connected the 5G conspiracy theory to the Nigerian president's corruption. While South African users were more resistant to the 5G theory, many of them were still convinced by the Bill Gates conspiracy theory and believed this information validated Western countries' malevolence toward African countries. Similarly, Chen et al.'s research (2020) analyzing COVID-related conspiracy theories popular in China concluded that conspiracy theories narratives are usually loaded with social assumptions and nationalistic sentiment. Especially after the relationship between China and the U.S. deteriorated, the disinformation narratives in China have attributed more responsibility to the U.S. for spreading the virus.

Several studies also focused on lab leak theories. Most of them have approached the issue from the perspective of information warfare and investigated the themes of narratives and "nodes" (such as social media accounts) that spread the information. These studies confirmed the observation that the Chinese government promoted the narrative that the U.S. was the origin of the virus and China was the real victim from the American narratives (Molter and DiResta, 2020; Lim et al., 2021; Chan and Loftus, 2020).

Researchers from DFRLab (2021) traced the narratives of COVID-19's origin theories and pointed out that Russia, Iran, and China have used their state media, fringe websites, major social media accounts, politicians, and conspiracy theory groups to disseminate the theory that the virus was made as a bioweapon originating in American laboratories. The DFRLab researchers found that

although Russian, Iran, and Chinese actors shared this theory widely, they did not coordinate with each other. Moreover, even though the themes of their narratives matched, the details in the narratives often conflicted with each other. Researchers also noted that the theories of COVID-19's origin differ in the U.S. and in Russia, Iran, and China. The theory prevalent in the U.S. claimed the virus was a bioweapon produced in China and leaked to the world. The U.S. politicians also took advantage of this theory to advance their interests in the U.S. elections during 2020 (DFRLab, 2021).

Taiwan and other countries where large populations speak Chinese were also the prime targets of COVID-19 disinformation in Chinese. Hu (2021) pointed out that a large portion of the disinformation during COVID-19 was from foreign countries, written in Simplified Chinese and accompanied by pictures and video clips. Facebook, which 90.8% of internet users in Taiwan regularly visit (TenMax ADTech Lab, March 28, 2022), was the primary platform where COVID-19 false information circulated (Hu, 2021). Taiwanese researchers also found that the Chinese government and its affiliates tried to influence Chinese language communities in Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Myanmar, and the Philippines by spreading false information through WeChat, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. The narratives of the COVID-19 false information during the first three months of 2020 included "COVID-19's symptoms are mild," "COVID-19 has been spread widely in Taiwan," and "other countries faced severe outbreaks while China had effectively controlled the virus's spread" (Doublethink Lab, 2020).

1.3 Research questions

The above studies contribute to the understanding of the nature of COVID-19 conspiracy theories and the actors who spread and amplify them. But some pieces are still missing from the picture.

One is that these studies mostly use data (social media posts, tweets, news articles) limited to the first three months of 2020. As a result, these studies were not able to track how the narratives had changed since then, even when the narratives of the conspiracy theories kept evolving. Another missing piece is how conspiracy theories promoted by foreign states and overseas organizations interacted with local media systems and actors once they entered other linguistic, cultural, and political spheres. Additionally, most studies, particularly the ones analyzing lab conspiracy theories, only turned the spotlight on the spreaders and ignored the agency of information users. Seldom did they examine how local media reacted to problematic information.

Based on the aforementioned research directions and the gap that needs to fill in the existing literature, this dissertation analyzes and compares the narratives regarding the origin of the COVID-19 virus in Chinese state media (information propagator or aggressor) and Taiwanese media (information user or target). It attempts to understand the differences between the narratives in these two distinct media systems and expects to deepen the understanding of how conspiracy theories traverse borders. In the end, this research hopes to contribute to the theorization of the influence of foreign propaganda.

This research addresses three research questions:

1. What are the Chinese state media's narratives of the COVID-19 origins, and how did the narratives change? What is the underlying worldview revealed by the narratives?
2. What are the narratives of Taiwanese media about the COVID-19 virus origin theory? How do the narratives of Taiwanese media overlap – or not -- with the narratives in the Chinese state media?
3. What factors lead to the similarity or differences between the narratives in Taiwanese and Chinese state media?

1.4 Theory and methodology foundations

The key theoretical elements of this dissertation are theories of conspiracy theories and propaganda, the hybrid media system, and strategic narratives. This section will briefly overview the theories and highlight how the theories help orient this study, while Chapter Two will explore the literature in this area in more depth:

Theories and definitions of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and propaganda

This dissertation is mostly concerned with conspiracy theories. However, in academic research or news reporting, this phrase frequently appears along with other related words that refer to problematic information, such as “disinformation,” “propaganda,” and “fake news.” As a starting point for this research, precise definitions and differentiation among these terms are necessary.

A comprehensive literature review and elaboration on the definitions of “conspiracy theories,” “disinformation,” “misinformation and malinformation,” “fake news,” as well as “propaganda” will be provided in Chapter Two. However, in order to facilitate the discussion in this introduction chapter, the researcher would like to give brief definitions of these terms, which are based on the examination and deliberation in Chapter Two.

In this dissertation, the researcher will refer to “propaganda” as a form of communication that aims to influence target audiences. A “conspiracy theory” is a story or explanation that persuades audiences that some unseen but powerful and sinister force acts in secret to cause events to occur for the benefit of the actors. Conspiracy theories can be part of propaganda, which could contain true or false information, including disinformation. The term “disinformation” refers to information that is purposefully designed to be incorrect and harmful. In contrast to disinformation, the creator of misinformation has no intention of causing harm, even if the information is still

wrong. The elements of these types of problematic information and their relationship are listed and illustrated in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.3 in Chapter Two.

In addition to helping define the essential terms, the literature about the types of conspiracy theories and propaganda, the path of their dissemination, and the influence on target audiences also facilitate this research to distinguish between the types of conspiracy theories promoted by different actors.

The hybrid media system

Since this dissertation studies how conspiracy theories originating abroad flow in the domestic hybrid media system and how domestic media interact with or counter the narratives, this research also investigates this issue through the theoretical lens of the hybrid media system. The hybrid media system offers a holistic view to understand the power, interactions, and media logic in political communication. Most importantly, this approach emphasizes the interactions between media and political systems, including traditional media, digital media, news producers, and audiences (Chadwick, 2017). Since this research examines how narratives change in the media ecosystem and the interactions among media, politics, and the public, the hybrid media system theory provides insights into how different elements in the media system shape the stories of conspiracy theories.

Strategic narratives

As the hybrid media system theory helps to conceptualize elements of the media system, “strategic narratives,” the statements that political actors employ to influence others’ behaviors and attitudes (O’Loughlin et al., 2017; Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2021), provide an ideal approach to observe the change of the COVID-origin narratives. According to O’Loughlin et al. (2017), narratives are used to persuade others to act, create consensus, change behaviors, form identities, or even define what

constitutes commonsense ideas. Studies on propaganda have also demonstrated that actors strategically create disinformation or propaganda out of diverse motives to influence audiences. (Guess and Lyons, 2020; Lee, 2020). Likewise, actors intentionally created and spread the COVID-origin theories by framing the information in specific ways, whereas receivers adopted, mentioned, or disseminated the narratives to fulfill their own purposes. The strategic narrative approach provides a path for this research to scrutinize how actors from different social positions echoed, adapted, or challenged propaganda narratives (Khaldarova and Pantti, 2016).

Furthermore, previous studies on strategic narratives provide a useful framework for this study to develop research methods evaluating the influence of foreign propaganda. For example, Wagnsson & Barzanje (2021) crystalized important elements in Russian state media Sputnik news reporting that tried to sway Sweden citizens. Hagström & Gustafsson (2021) identified factors in narratives, such as the description of actors and lessons of events, to compare the effects of statements made by the Chinese and American governments. Colley (2019) suggested a comparison of the content produced by propagandists and the target audiences to assess the influence of strategic narratives. These elements used in previous strategic narrative studies were incorporated into this research as important variables to observe the differences in Taiwanese and Chinese media narratives.

1.5 Research path

To dive into and compare the narratives in Chinese state media and Taiwanese media, the researcher used qualitative content analysis to investigate the media content related to the theories of the COVID-19 virus's origin in Chinese and Taiwanese media. The investigation was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the researcher developed codes based on past strategic narrative studies, coded the Chinese state media content, and looked for themes as well as significant

elements in the Chinese news articles. These notable themes and elements in the Chinese media were then used as codes to examine Taiwanese media content. In this second phase, the researcher made judgments on whether the Taiwanese content could fit into the existing codes developed from the Chinese state media. If not, the researcher created new categories. Through the two phases of data coding, the researcher was able to identify and compare items and discover the differences between the Chinese state media and Taiwanese media. Chapter Four will discuss the theoretical foundation, the process of developing the codes, and the analysis process in more detail.

1.6 Chapter map of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of six additional chapters beyond this chapter as introduction.

Chapter 2 is the literature review, in which the researcher examines the existing knowledge that helps orient this research. The researcher looks into the entangled concepts of fake news, disinformation, misinformation and malinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda, trying to differentiate these related terms and establish a conceptual structure. This chapter also probes the hybrid media system and strategic narrative theories and explains how these theories construct the theoretical and methodological foundations for this research.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the background information on the media system in China and Taiwan. It also introduces studies that examined China's information warfare against Taiwan and how Taiwan defends itself from this influence. Since this research adopts the view that contexts play essential roles in the reception and resistance of conspiracy theories, this chapter delineates the political and media context of this case study (China and Taiwan).

Chapter 4 details the methodology of this research. It discusses the rationale for choosing research methods, the theoretical framework for research design, the development of the coding scheme,

and the steps of research analysis. The researcher will also reflect on the challenges encountered by this research.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings on how the Chinese state media told the stories about the origin of the COVID-19 virus. This chapter will analyze the themes and elements arising from the articles and how the Chinese media used these factors to construct narratives to strengthen the worldview of their audiences.

Chapter 6 then turns the focus to Taiwan and examines the narratives about the origin of the COVID-19 virus in Taiwanese media. It explores whether Taiwanese media tell the same stories and portray the characters in the same way as the Chinese media. The similarities, differences, and use of news sources could be indicators for assessing the influence of Chinese propaganda.

The researcher reflects on the findings and outcomes of this research in the final chapter. This chapter summarizes how well the research addressed the three central research questions of the dissertations and dives into the essence of conspiracy theories and propaganda. It discusses how certain elements of narratives help to construct conspiracy theories and propaganda and how, on the other hand, targets of foreign influence campaigns could use the same elements to defend themselves in information warfare.

1.7 Research findings

Through the examination and comparison of content in the Chinese and Taiwanese media, this research demonstrates that the Chinese state media constructed well-defined conspiracy narratives about theories of COVID-19 origin based on disinformation, contentious historical tales, and a long-standing ideology that portrays itself as a victim of Western countries. On the other hand, Taiwanese media, although some studies indicated that they were vulnerable to Chinese

information influence campaigns, were resilient to the Chinese narratives in the case of the Chinese conspiracy theories of COVID-19 origin.

Nevertheless, this research also suggests that Taiwanese media were influenced by other kinds of foreign narratives, such as conspiracy theories about the origin of COVID-19 promoted by American right-wing media, due to the failed journalism practices of Taiwanese news outlets and a deteriorating media economic environment.

The findings deepen the understanding of conspiracy theories and show how ideology plays a role in making conspiracy theories a weapon for foreign propaganda. Ideology, on the other hand, can serve as a bulwark against information influence. This research demonstrates that strategic narrative theory is a promising approach to studying the effect of foreign propaganda and conspiracy theories with roots in other countries. It also showcases the value of using hybrid media theory as a way to conceptualize how messages, in this case, foreign propaganda that pushes conspiracies, flow through media systems.

Chapter 2: Theoretical lens

This literature review starts with an inquiry into the definitions of fake news, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda. Each of these terms refers to a specific concept but also shares overlapping elements. As a result, users are often confused by these intertwined concepts (Wardle, 2017). When applying to real cases, one would find even more grey areas: governments or individuals could deploy a conspiracy theory as a propaganda tool, which might contain accurate information but is framed to give the audience a wrong impression. In some cases, while the core facts are still unclear, the government has packed the piece of information with other disinformation as propaganda to attack other countries, as we have seen in the COVID-19 virus origin theories. How do we define the problematic information, such as the claim that the COVID-19 virus was from the Fort Detrick laboratory? Should these statements be categorized as conspiracy theories, disinformation, or propaganda against a specific country?

In this chapter, the research examines the literature that provides definitions for the aforementioned terms, analyzes their elements, and establishes a concept structure elucidating their relationship. After applying the COVID-19 virus-origin claims examined in this research to the concept structure, the researcher concludes that the claims propagated by Chinese state media and several American right-wing media fit into the category of conspiracy theories. These conspiracy theories also contain pieces of disinformation. Furthermore, the Chinese state media has deployed conspiracy theories as propaganda to influence communities of Chinese speakers. This chapter thus sheds light on this lesser-explored kind of cross-border conspiracy theory and its relationship to propaganda.

Another important area explored in this literature review is how to evaluate the content and influence of conspiracy theories used as propaganda. In order to answer the question, one needs first to operationalize the variables to dissect and compare the differences in the content created by propagandists and by the media of the target country. The researcher thus builds a research framework based on the theory of strategic narratives and the hybrid media system.

The theory of strategic narratives, which explores how actors use narratives to achieve strategic communication goals, provides a robust foundation for analyzing narratives in Chinese state media (Oates, 2018; Allenby, 2017; Colley, 2020; Miskimmon et al., 2017; Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021).

The hybrid media system theory, which examines the interactions among actors and media, old and new media logic, as well as the power relationships in the information exchanges, provides an important perspective on how information flows in media systems (Chadwick, 2017). Multiple studies have also used the hybrid media system theory to examine how false information is transmitted between traditional and online media and how manipulators use different media logics to amplify distorted messages (Chadwick, 2017; Giglietto et al., 2019; Nayezi et al., 2022; Pyrhönen & Bauvois, 2020). Based on the combination of both strategic narratives and the hybrid media system theories, the researcher further expands the theories to operationalize the concept of “narratives” of COVID-19 virus-origin conspiracy theories in the Chinese state media and Taiwanese media and identifies the influence through observable variables.

This chapter will begin by defining and differentiating terms such as propaganda, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. In the following sections, the researcher will examine strategic narrative theory and hybrid media system theory and how these two theories advanced this research.

2.1 Scholarly definitions of “fake news,” “disinformation,” “propaganda,” and “conspiracy theory”

While working on this project, the researcher encountered a challenge: how to categorize false statements concerning the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Should the researcher refer to them as disinformation, propaganda, or conspiracy theories? It seems that these terms could all be used to label COVID-19 virus origin theories. However, as this review of the literature and the following discussion show, there are crucial differences among these terms. The definition issue is vital not just because the label will be used repeatedly throughout the dissertation but also because it affects the orientation of this research. Moreover, these differences will lead to distinct paths of answering the research questions and finding solutions to counter the challenges to our current information environment.

2.1.1 Definition of Fake news

The first term considered by the researcher is “fake news,” which is often associated with other words referring to deceptive content and is perhaps more widely known to average audiences than other associated terms. As Figure 2.1 of Google Trends shows, the term “fake news” is more searched than other terms such as “disinformation” and “misinformation” from 2004 to 2022. Since the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, commentators have tried to explain how “fake news” led to Donald Trump being elected as the U.S. President (Dewey, 2016; Read, 2016; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). By the same token, there was also concern that Trump paired “fake” with “news” as part of his attack on free media. Because of this, the term is turned into an attack on the media and is inadequate to define problematic information (Freelon and Wells, 2020).

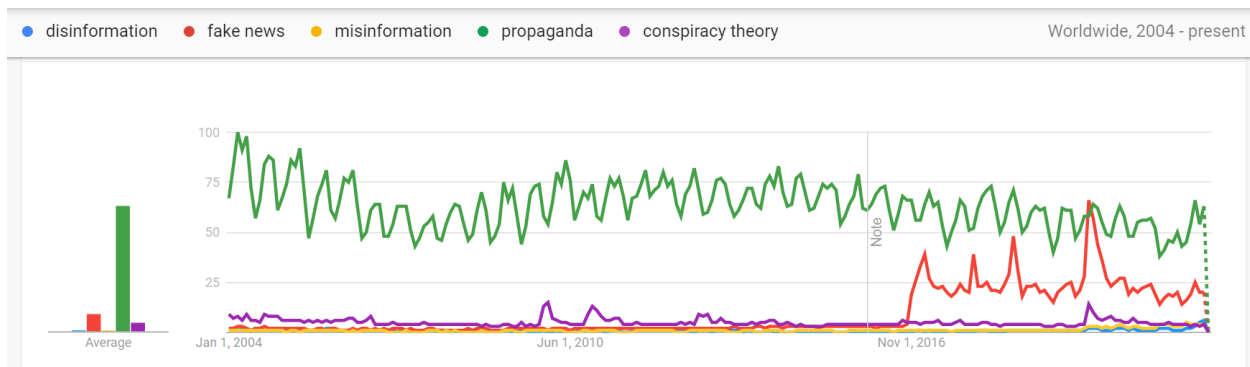


Figure 2.1 The trend and comparison of search interest on Google Trends

Source: Google Trends, Search date: June 3rd, 2022. Time range: 2004 – June 3rd, 2022. Region: Worldwide. The numbers on the y-axis do not represent the real research request numbers. Instead, it represents a scale ranging from 1 to 100 based on a topic's proportion to all searches on all topics. See more explanation of the data on FAQ about Google Trends data: https://support.google.com/trends/answer/4365533?hl=en&ref_topic=6248052

Researchers have combed through the literature and conceptualized the term “fake news.” According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news means “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers” (p.213). Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) further pointed out that fake news is low in factuality, presented in a journalistic format, and intended to deceive the audience. They also urged researchers to refine the definition of fake news. As the problem of incorrect online content has been exacerbated, the focus on “fake news” has expanded from news to include other types of content (Tandoc et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2019; Damstra et al., 2021; Freelon & Wells, 2020). Among earlier efforts to identify the different types of content under the umbrella term of fake news, Tandoc et al.’s study (2017) used two dimensions -- “facticity” and “deception” (authors’ intention to deceive), to differentiate among news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda. In Tandoc et al.’s typology, for example, propaganda’s level of facticity is higher than manipulation; but the creators’ intention to deceive is both high in propaganda and manipulation.

As artificial intelligence (A.I.) has been adopted to be one of the tools to detect problematic online content, scholars have endeavored to operationalize “fake news” by features in the content, such as the diversity of word usage in the content, the length of the information, whether the sources in the content can be verified, and whether the content is emotionally charge, etc. By developing the indicators of fake news, the researchers hoped to build up fake news typologies enabling machines or users to identify more subtle distinctions of content like “citizen journalism,” “persuasive information,” “polarized content,” etc. (Molina et al., 2019; Damstra et al., 2021).

These research efforts to define fake news help crystalize the elements of fake news and analyze the problematic content; the indicators may also facilitate algorithms to automatically detect and take down incorrect and harmful information. However, the definition of fake news still encounters difficulties in identifying diverse forms of content that contain authentic and fabricated elements, such as memes or out-of-context information (Wardle, 2019).

For example, according to the framework of Molina et al. (2021), the criteria for evaluating “fake news” include whether the sources of the content can be verified and whether the content is emotionally charged. But in reality, intentionally deceptive information, such as the false allegation claiming the COVID-19 virus was made in a U.S. laboratory, can also appear in formal news content where the sources are authentic and the tone of the writing is calm. For instance, a news article in a Chinese state media outlet referenced credible American news sources such as *The Boston Globe* and *The Baltimore Sun* and claimed even the American media urged an investigation of whether the American laboratory in Fort Detrick, Maryland, was producing bioweapons. The article has the format of news reporting and was published by a formal media organization. However, this news article used references of American media out of the original context and without providing more information about the referenced article, such as the article’s

name or published date. As a result, this Chinese article distorted the original meaning of the American media sources to falsely support its claim that American laboratories were probably making the COVID-19 virus a bioweapon⁵. This kind of deceptive content can hardly fit into the proposed fake news typology.

Another reason that the term “fake news” is problematic, as the researcher mentioned earlier, is that it has been politically charged over the past years. As Freelon and Wells (2020) pointed out, former president Trump often used “fake news” to discredit news reports with which he disagreed, with the result that the meaning of “fake news” has been conflated with political interests and lost “the analytical value that it may have once held” (p.146). To equip the research with more precise terminology and draw clearer boundaries of different types of incorrect information, scholars now

⁵ This example is the article “Media and Experts from Several Countries Urge An Investigation into the Biolab of Fort Detrick in the U.S.” [多国媒体和专家呼吁——调查美国德特里克堡生物实验室] published on August 6, 2021, by *People’s Daily*, a newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The article claims that “Several days ago *The Baltimore Sun* reported that for many years, the Fort Detrick bio lab has hidden some of the fatalist materials, from the Ebola virus to nerve gas to anthrax. Some people’s fear that these toxic materials could be leaked or intentionally taken away is justifiable.” [美国《巴尔的摩太阳报》日前报道称，多年来，德特里克堡生物实验室藏匿着世界上最致命的一些物质，从埃博拉病毒、神经毒气到炭疽菌。有些人担心，这些有毒物质可能会意外泄漏或被有意带走，这是有道理的”]. (See the original article in Chinese: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0806/c1002-32183330.html>). This article does not identify which news report from *The Baltimore Sun* it refers to. However, a search in the Proquest database by using the keywords “Fort Detrick” and “Covid” and setting the date range from 2020 to 2021 received nine results. One article published on July 25, 2021, a few days before the publication of the *People’s Daily* article, is about how China spread disinformation about Fort Detrick’s bio lab. The article’s title is: “China’s disinformation on COVID-19 reaches Md -- Amid investigations of virus’s origin in Wuhan, Chinese officials seek to cast blame on Fort Detrick. Residents of Frederick call that ‘far-fetched.’” The first few lines of the *Sun* article are: “Over the years, Fort Detrick has housed some of the world’s deadliest substances, from the Ebola virus to nerve gas to anthrax. Some have feared, justifiably, that such toxins might escape accidentally or be spirited away intentionally.” These lines are almost identical in translation to the lines in the *People’s Daily* article, but the *People’s Daily* did not mention other lines in the same paragraph of the *Sun* article: “Now, those scenarios provide a convenient backdrop for an ongoing conspiracy theory: that the coronavirus originated at a laboratory at the U.S. Army post in Frederick and not in Wuhan, China, where it was first identified.” Ironically, the *Sun* article itself was intentionally misused by the Chinese media and became a tool for the Chinese state media to validate the disinformation that the American lab was making bioweapons. The *Sun* article was published on the front page on July 25, 2021. Marbella, J, Mongilio, H, & Campbell, C. (2021, Jul 25). China’s disinformation on COVID-19 reaches Md. *The Baltimore Sun*. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/july-25-2021-page-1/docview/2566135782/se-2?accountid=14696>

mostly use terms such as “disinformation,” “misinformation,” and “malinformation” to replace the vaguer “fake news.”

2.1.2 Definition of disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation

Scholars generally agree that disinformation is incorrect information that spreads with the intent to cause harm. Misinformation is also false information, but the creators or spreaders do not intend harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Freelon & Wells, 2020; Taylor & Jaeger, 2021). Pieces of misinformation could be careless editing errors or a relay of messages without too much reflection or fact-checking. It could also be satire or parody in which the creators aim to use humor to expose the absurdity of politics and society (Wardle, 2019). However, the problem with using “intent” to differentiate between misinformation and disinformation is that it is hard to determine whether the information creators or spreaders have the intent to harm.

As for disinformation, European Commission’s High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Disinformation (2018) gave a concise definition: “Disinformation ... includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (p.3). According to this definition, deliberately manipulated information like rumors and conspiracy theories created with the intent to harm or put the blame on certain groups belongs to the category of disinformation (Wardle, 2019). The COVID-19 virus origin theories that include false claims, such as a Chinese scientist putting the virus sample in front of a vent in the Hunan wet market to spread the disease, can thus be defined as a piece of disinformation.⁶

Claire Wardle and her team in the First Draft further added another type of information, “malinformation,” to refer to the content that could be *true* but is published deliberately or distorted

⁶ This claim has been proved to be incorrect (Taiwan FactCheck Center, May 14, 2020).

to inflict harm. The example given by Wardle is the emails from the Democratic National Committee and the Hillary Clinton campaign leaked by Russian hackers to sabotage Clinton's 2016 Presidential campaign (Wardle, 2019). But the problem with "malinformation" is that it requires that the intent of the author of the information is known, which calls for a study that goes beyond content analysis. In addition, its definition overlaps with the definition of disinformation.

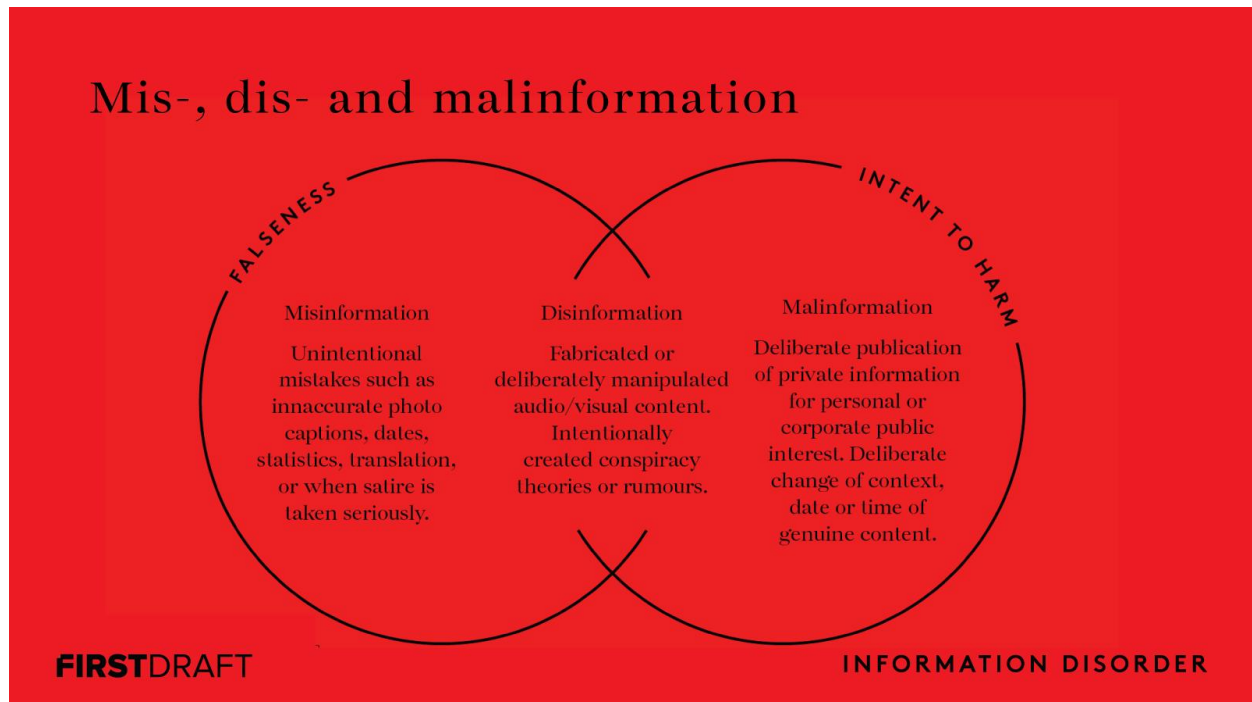


Figure 2.2 The definition of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation by Claire Wardle

Source: Wardle, C. (2019, October 21st). *Information disorder: 'The techniques we saw in 2016 have evolved'*. First Draft. <https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/information-disorder-the-techniques-we-saw-in-2016-have-evolved/>

For example, according to Wardle, disinformation is “fabricated or deliberately manipulated audio/visual content such as intentionally created conspiracy theories or rumors” (Wardle, 2019). But this definition of disinformation also shares similar elements with those in the malinformation elements. According to Wardle, malinformation is “[d]eliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate public interest” and a “[D]eliberate change of context, date or time of genuine content” (Wardle, 2019). Both definitions involve the intentional manipulation of content,

although malinformation specifically refers to the manipulation of “context, date, or time of *genuine* content.” According to this definition, many disinformation pieces could also be categorized as “malinformation.”

Of course, an exhaustive typology is useful when researchers or stakeholders in the information/media field wish to closely examine the content and manipulation techniques of false information. As Wardle (2019) notes, terminology and definition matter when explaining and tackling challenges. Nevertheless, the choice of terminology also depends on the purpose of the research. Research that seeks to identify which kinds of false information are more widely spread will probably find the very detailed typology informative. But others may find the intricate definition does not help to answer their particular research questions. Considering the main purpose of this dissertation, which is to explore how strategic narratives contribute to the evolution of the COVID-19 virus origin problematic information, the researcher chooses to use “disinformation” instead of “malinformation” to include the incorrect information that is created or spread with malicious intent. The researcher will explain the rationale for the choice later in this chapter.

2.1.3 Definition of propaganda

Compared with the definition of disinformation and misinformation, which focuses more on the “information” itself, the definition of propaganda sees its subject matter as more than a piece of information but “a form of communication” that includes more types of information and manipulation techniques” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011).

Jowett and O’Donnell (2011) defined propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2011, p.7). The attempt to influence

others' perceptions and behaviors is the essential element in the definition of propaganda, as we can see the same "attempt to influence" component appears in the definition given by Faris et al. (2017), who stated that propaganda is "the intentional use of communication to influence attitude and behavior in the target population" (p.19, footnote 8).

But propaganda encompasses a wide range of content. The information used in the propaganda could be correct or incorrect, and the sources could be concealed or identifiable. Jowett and O'Donnell (2011) divided propaganda into white propaganda, black propaganda, and grey propaganda. The criteria for the categorization are whether the source of information is identified and whether the message is intended to be true.

In a white propaganda campaign, the source is clearly and accurately identified; the message is also true, although the message is used to promote a purpose such as a nation's interest. For example, some of the news reporting by *Voice of America* during peacetime promoting the democratic value of the United States is a kind of white propaganda. On the other hand, black propaganda conceals the real identity of the message creators or intentionally attributes the information to a wrong source, and the information itself is also a fabrication, lie, or manipulation. An example of black propaganda is the writing of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In the 1900s, the secret police of the Russian Emperor Czar Nicholas created and spread the fake document Protocols of the Elders of Zion, claiming the document was the minutes of a secret council of Jews and provided evidence that the Jewish people were scheming to dominate the world. Through this intentionally fabricated document and information, the Russian propagandist sought to incite anti-Semitism sentiment in Russian society (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2011). As for the propaganda where the source and accuracy are not yet to be sure, Jowett and O'Donnell defined them as "grey propaganda." Since black propaganda contains malicious intent and manipulated information,

some scholars also argue disinformation is a subset of propaganda (Benkler et al., 2018; O'Shaughnessy, 2020).

2.1.4 Definition of conspiracy theory

If propaganda's prominent feature is its being a "form of communication" to influence targets' attitudes and behaviors, conspiracy theories are mostly distinct from disinformation and propaganda for their captivating stories (Byford, 2011). Different from propaganda, with which message creators try to influence others, conspiracy theory believers bond through stories as well as shared worldviews and participate in a meaning-making process by promoting conspiracy theories (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009; Gagliardone et al., 2021; Marwick & Partin, 2022; Starbird, 2017).

Conspiracy theory stories are a distinct genre that shares similar logic, myths, and expressions (Marwick & Partin, 2022; Byford, 2011). As Uscinski (2018) pointed out, common worldviews underlying conspiracy theories include the following ideas: The official version of a story is fake, there are powerful actors as conspirators, and occurrences or circumstances are the results of conspiratorial plots.

One of the most cited definitions of a conspiracy theory is given by Sunstein and Vermeule (2009). They suggested that conspiracy theory is "an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who have also managed to conceal their roles" (Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009, p. 4). Uscinski (2018) gave a similar but more detailed definition. He stated that conspiracy theory is "an explanation of historical, ongoing, or future events that cites as a main causal factor a group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit against the common good" (p.235).

Conspiracy theories usually emerge at times when people face grave crises (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). During crises, anxious human beings look for explanations to account for the reasons behind the events. In addition to the external environment, personal beliefs and identities associated with specific groups encourage people to believe in conspiracy theories (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Conspiracy theories emerge as a result of the interaction of external and personal forces. As Uscinski and Parent pointed out, challenging political conditions often “highlight the vulnerabilities to a group’s position,” allowing conspiracy theories to emerge (Uscinski & Parent, 2014, p.20).

In terms of the content of conspiracy theories, they are often vague and lack solid evidence. However, the vagueness of conspiracy theories also makes them hard to refute (Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2020). The information contained in conspiracy theories could also be true or false. But instead of valuing the fact-checking conclusions made by established institutions, the followers of conspiracy theories have their own rules for evaluating the authenticity of particular messages (Marwick & Partin, 2022).

This is not to say that verification is not important for those who embrace conspiracy theories. Instead, Marwick and Partin’s study (2022) on the QAnon community shows that QAnon believers scrutinize sources and emphasize the importance of evidence. When the community members tried to decode the posts of “Q” (the persona who claimed to have access to sensitive information in the Trump administration), the members cited an array of references that included both conservative and liberal sources and rejected unreliable ones as “disinformation.” Nevertheless, as Marwick and Partin pointed out, instead of following mainstream media’s narratives, the QAnon members conducted their own ‘research’ to collectively and systematically construct their own “alternative facts.” While the QAnon followers felt this to be authentic fact-checking, their selective use of

certain sources and rejection of epistemological thinking meant that they only reinforced the misinformation or disinformation.

Similarly, Gagliardone et al.'s study (2021) on how COVID-19 conspiracy theories were shared among Twitter users in South Africa and Nigeria illuminates the importance of meaning-making and community elements in the reinforcement of conspiracy theories. Their research found that the belief in the COVID-19 conspiracy theories was intertwined with local people's resentment against international corporations and the ruling party in the country. They suggested that conspiracy theories are "less about mis/disinformation, and more about collective identity formation and storytelling" (p.3). Under this circumstance, the dichotomy of "true or false" that is often used for labeling misinformation and disinformation is not that useful when analyzing conspiracy theories, especially when researchers are looking for a countermeasure to address conspiracy theories (Uscinski, 2018; Gagliardone et al., 2021).

2.1.5 Untangle the intertwined relationships between disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theory

The above review of definitions of fake news, disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theory demonstrates how these concepts are intertwined. To summarize the above review of the definitions of disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theory, the researcher breaks down these terms' elements related to their definitions in the following table:⁷

⁷ In the following discussion, the researcher will not include the definition of "fake news." As the researcher pointed out earlier in the "fake news" section, this term has been conflated and cannot precisely pinpoint the information this term represents.

Table 2.1 The elements of misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories

	The facticity of the information	The intent of the creators/spreaders	Possible analysis unit	The main focuses (concerns) of the category
Misinformation	False	No intent to harm	Information	Whether the information is true or false
Disinformation	False	Have the intent to harm	Information	Whether the information is true or false Actors' intent
Malinformation	Manipulated information based on genuine one	Have the intent to harm	Information	Whether the information is true or false Actors' intent
Propaganda	Could be false or true	Have the intent to influence audiences to achieve the propagandists' desired effects	Communication (could include a piece of information or multiple related stories) using one or more communication techniques.	The attempt to influence and manipulate
Conspiracy theory	Could be false or true	The intent is to give an explanation for the historical or ongoing events.	A story/an explanation	The attempt to explain an event. The explanation is based on shared belief and expression.

On many occasions, people use the terms disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories interchangeably. But after dissecting their elements and focused concerns, we can see there are critical differences among these terms. For example, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are all false information, whereas the information in propaganda and conspiracy theories could be true or false. When it comes to intent, although disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories all require the actors to have intent, the actors producing these three categories of content might have different kinds of intent. A creator of disinformation could spin a piece of false information to damage other persons' reputations, but a government could use propaganda to promote the nation's image as a superpower. Moreover, the definitions of disinformation and misinformation are more focused on the "information" itself, while propaganda is referred to as a kind of "communication;" conspiracy theories are treated as "explanations" of events and "stories. It is also noticeable that the definitions of propaganda and conspiracy theories involve more elements of social and political contexts.

Based on the analysis of the definitions, the researcher further suggests defining the relationships among the types of false information created *with intent* -- disinformation, malinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories, by their *scope* of information and visualizing the relationships in the following figure:⁸

⁸ Misinformation is not created or spread with intent. Therefore, it is not included in this figure.

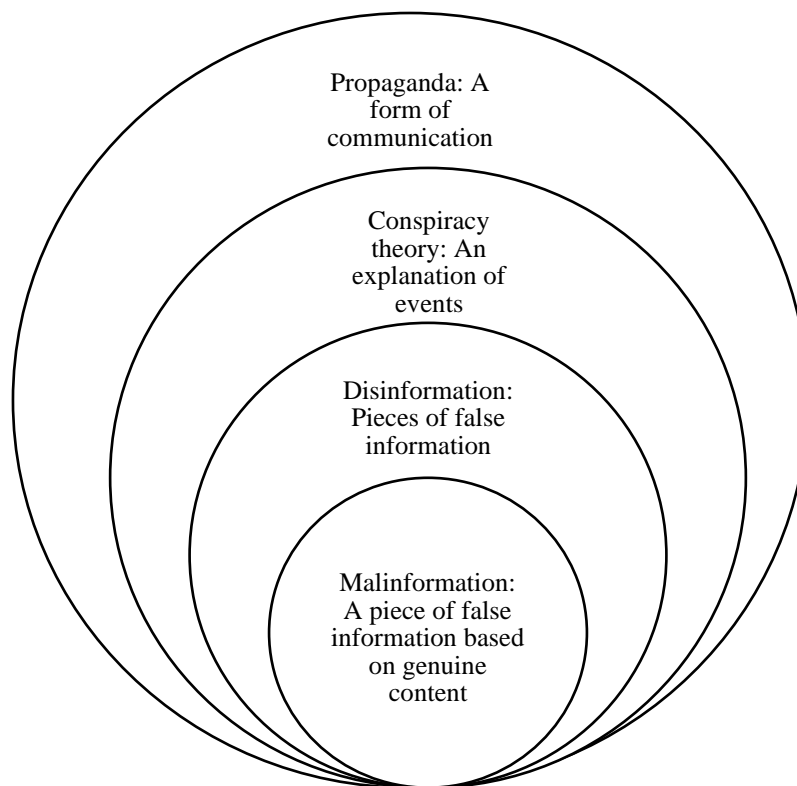


Figure 2.3 The relationships among the definitions of propaganda, conspiracy theories, dis/mal-information

Figure 2.3 shows that the range of propaganda as a type of communication is the widest, which includes conspiracy theories and disinformation/malinformation. For example, a government could spread conspiracy theories containing disinformation as propaganda to blame a certain group for unfortunate events, such as the Nazi German government claiming Jews planned to destroy Germany and had started World War II (Fay, 2019). Since conspiracy theories can contain both true and false information, conspiracy theories have a wider spectrum than disinformation; some conspiracists could also intentionally fabricate information to convince their followers. Malinformation is created with malicious intent, too. However, it is more specifically defined as manipulated information on the basis of a piece of true information. Therefore, it is under the category of disinformation.

The table and the figure above not only help dissect the relationships among propaganda, conspiracy theories, disinformation, and malinformation. They are also useful for clarifying the

nuances in the terms related to false information. Furthermore, researchers and policymakers can thus have a more precise understanding of the issues they are faced with, identify core problems, and choose more effective measures to counter inaccurate and harmful content. For example, fact-checking might be useful to debunk a single piece of disinformation or misinformation since fact-checking efforts mostly address the accuracy of the information itself. However, it would be a difficult task for fact-checkers to fight against “propaganda” since propaganda is a form of communication that may contain multiple pieces of information and communication techniques. Similarly, conspiracy theories can be hard to deflate by a few fact-checking pieces because they are stories that are entangled with community identities and beliefs. Most single fact-checking, after all, can only address a part of the information contained in conspiracy theories but fails to eradicate the deep root of core beliefs and tropes.

2.1.6 How will the dissertation define the COVID-19 virus origin conspiracy theories?

The two competing COVID-19 virus origin theories (the virus is from the Chinese lab versus the virus is from the U.S. labs) discussed in this dissertation match the conspiracy theory definition. To illustrate, the claim that the COVID-19 virus was made in American labs includes stories that the laboratories in Fort Detrick (BBC, August 23, 2021) created the virus. The theory that the COVID-19 virus was a bioweapon from China asserted that individual Chinese scientists released the virus (Taiwan FactCheck Center, May 14, 2020). Both theories sought to provide explanations for the pandemic during the time when people were stricken by fear and worry. The theories also blamed powerful countries, China or the United States, for being responsible for the disaster. Moreover, the theories were positioned in the context where the relationship between China and the U.S. has deteriorated (Ecarma, April 30, 2020).

Meanwhile, the two strains of COVID-19 virus origin theories serve as propaganda tools for the government or individuals to influence audiences' perceptions regarding who should be responsible for the virus. Chinese diplomats and state media have endeavored to portray that the virus originated in the United States. Since 2020, they have constantly promoted the story on different occasions that Fort Detrick might be the birthplace of the virus (Kinetz, 2021). Similarly, politicians in the U.S. also propagated the theory that the virus could be China's bioweapon to muster political support in the 2020 elections (DFRLab, 2021).

There is no doubt that the Chinese media and government's claim that the Americans made and spread the virus is disinformation since multiple fact-checking organizations have debunked the allegations. What requires more deliberation is the statement that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab. As continuing investigations and news coverage have revealed, the virus's origin is still unknown, and the core truth could remain controversial for a long time (Stolberg & Mueller, 2023). Multiple layers of claims attached to the core fact have been proven to be false. For example, fact-checkers have debunked the claim that two Chinese scientists stole the virus bioweapon; they have also dismantled the lie that a Chinese scientist put the virus sample in front of a Hunan wet market's vents to spread the virus (Taiwan FactCheck Center, May 14th, 2020). Still, the virus-origin theories include several elements waiting to be investigated. Defining the virus-origin theories as "disinformation" would limit the scope of the information itself and the direction of this research.

Another factor to consider is the purpose of this dissertation. Instead of establishing the integrity of the core truth, this dissertation centers on the narrative wars taking place in the media system, analyzing how the narratives that originated from other countries were rejected, accepted, or shifted in another country's domestic media ecosystems. Furthermore, this dissertation tries to

identify the dimension of narratives that current anti-disinformation measures have not fully addressed. Based on the purpose of the dissertation, the researcher decides to use “conspiracy theory” as the primary term to define the COVID-19 virus origin theory discussed in this dissertation. The reason is that the main focus of the conspiracy theory definition, which emphasizes aspects of meaning-making and sharing, matches the primary interest of this dissertation and helps inform the research path.

The researcher also recognizes that the COVID-19 virus origin theories discussed in this research could be part of the propaganda that emanates from foreign or domestic sources to influence audiences’ perceptions or attitudes. Indeed, the researcher will demonstrate in the findings of this research that domestic media in Taiwan viewed certain lines of the virus-origin narratives as a part of a propaganda campaign. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that a COVID-19 virus origin conspiracy theory consists of pieces of disinformation such as “Fort Detrick lab created the COVID-19 virus.” These related pieces of disinformation are threads in the broader weave of a conspiracy theory, which is based on a myth or ideology. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this dissertation, it would be less beneficial to distinguish between disinformation and malinformation as this dissertation’s primary concern is on how stories are told, morphed, and shared. The comparison and deeper investigation of the genres of disinformation and malinformation will be an inquiry for other studies.

2.1.7 Focusing on conspiracy theory beyond borders

Based on the previous literature review on conspiracy theory, the researcher summarized in Figure 2.4 the elements of conspiracy theories, including the conditions giving rise to the theories, general ideas that are usually inherent in conspiracy theories, and how conspiracy theories are strengthened through followers’ meaning-sharing and participatory activities.

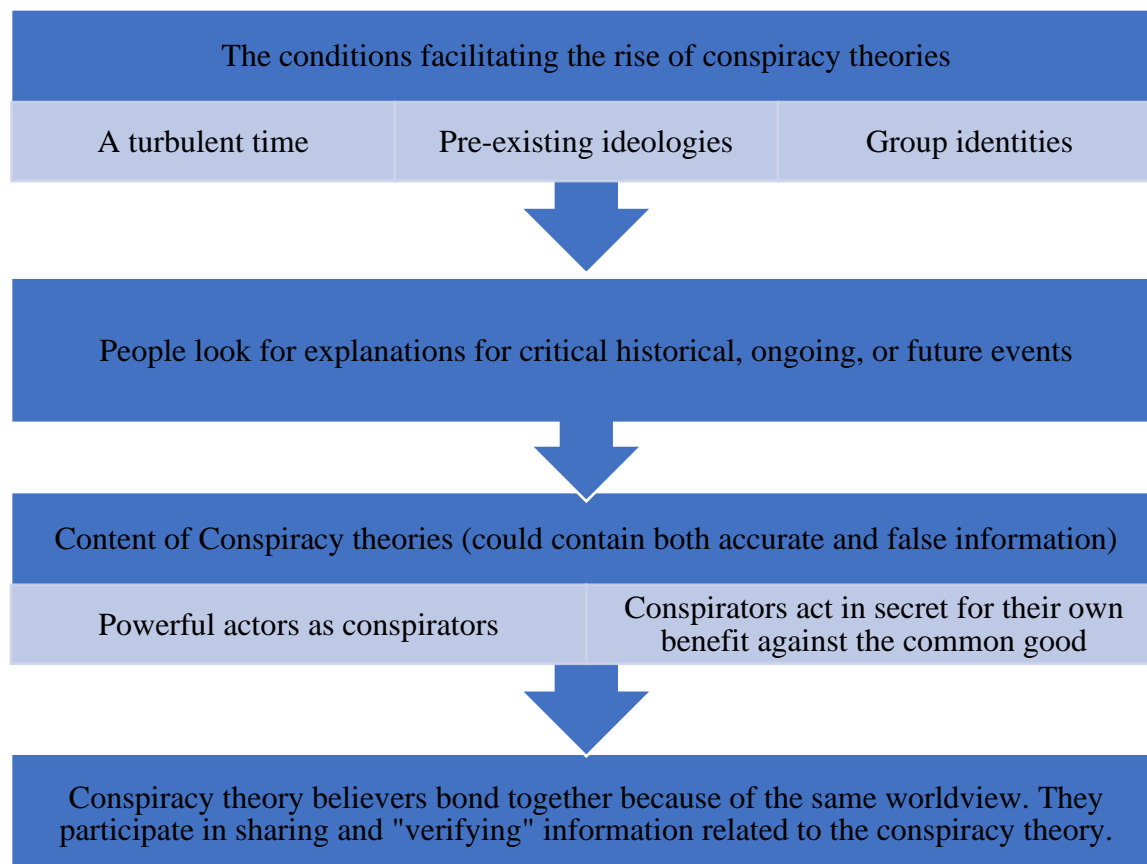


Figure 2.4 The elements of conspiracy theories. Source: Author's research

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a large portion of the literature on conspiracy theories written in English focused on the development or spread of conspiracy theories in individual countries, especially in the context of the United States. For example, Uscinski and Parent (2014) kept track of long-term empirical data to observe the trend of conspiracy theories in the United States. Starbird's study (2017) examined the mass shooting narratives in the alternative media system on Twitter.

However, COVID-19 as a global pandemic brought a new opportunity to observe how conspiracy theories were developed and spread in other countries. Gagliardone et al. (2021) examined the intersection between existing political discourses and prevalent COVID-19 conspiracy theories of 5G technology and microchips vaccination plotted by Bill Gates. Bruns et al. (2020, 2021) traced the global flow of 5G conspiracy theories on Facebook and mainstream media, exploring how

social media users and journalists amplified the theories. Other studies also focus on the rise of COVID-19 virus-origin conspiracy theories in China and how the beliefs in the theories related to nationalism (Chen et al., 2020; Zhang & Xu, 2022).

Scholars have found that the social context and advocates of conspiratorial thinking in authoritarian countries differ from those in democratic societies. Although in some respects, they still share several similarities. For instance, they both assert that powerful actors are behind the conspiracy to advance their own interests at the expense of others. Both types of conspiracy theories are founded on long-term ideology, but their popularity increases during times of crisis. Nonetheless, the promoters and facilitators of conspiracy theories in a democracy are frequently grassroots believers seeking explanations, whereas, in authoritarian regimes, the propagators are oftentimes the government (Radnitz, 2019).

Furthermore, the motives behind these authority-led conspiracy theories are usually not to search for an explanation but to *give* an explanation for events when the government needs to gain control of the situation, maintain legitimacy, or defeat opponents (Radnitz, 2019). For example, Russian leaders blamed the “foreign influence,” usually the United States, for undermining Russia and other former Soviet Union countries (Yablokov, 2019). This strain of conspiracy theories references the old glory of the country and laments itself as a victim of colonialism or Western countries’ plots (Radnitz, 2019). Stories such as espionage events provided vivid details to the theories (Yablokov, 2019). By deploying narratives that evoke patriotism and a sense of crisis and differentiating “us” and “enemies,” the leaders of the authoritarian regimes thus strengthened their legitimacy and power.

Yablokov (2019) also emphasized that leaders of countries where authority-led conspiracy theories prevail usually refrain from promoting conspiracy theories publicly. Instead, conspiracy theories

are usually amplified by public intellectuals, high-ranking government officials, or persons who have access to state media. Cheng et al.'s study (2022) on the Chinese public discourse on Weibo during COVID-19 also found that similar conspiracy narratives were repeated in government-led or pro-government online discourses.

The above studies enriched the understanding of conspiracy theories in broader political and social contexts. This research continues the investigation into conspiracy theories in a non-US environment, focusing primarily on narratives. It begins by examining how conspiracy theories were promoted by news content in state media (rather than grassroots, as in most American cases) and how these types of government-backed conspiracy theories differ from the ones that were developed organically. More importantly, this dissertation explored whether government-backed conspiracy theories, which also played the role of propaganda, shape media narratives in another country or face resistance. Overall, this research aims to shed light on a lesser-explored area of cross-border conspiracy theories and their relationship to propaganda.

2.2 The power of strategic narratives

2.2.1 Definition of narratives and strategic narratives

The research question of this dissertation – how the narratives of COVID-19 virus origin conspiracy theories in the Chinese state media influence Taiwanese media content, resides at the intersection of conspiracy theories and propaganda. The theory of strategic narratives, which examines how political actors use narratives to promote their interests, therefore, provides a useful theoretical lens and research approach to observe how the Chinese and Taiwanese media construct meaning and defining events regarding the origin of the COVID-19 virus.

According to Halverson et al. (2011), a narrative is “a coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories that share a common rhetorical desire to resolve a conflict by establishing audiences’ expectations according to the known trajectories of its literary and rhetorical form” (p.14). In other words, narratives are a collection of stories that center on a particular event, conflict, or idea. These stories could have a coherent theme defining a problem and attributing blames to a certain party (Oates et al., 2018). But they could also be competing narratives that show different accounts and assign responsibilities to others.

Both narratives and frames are ways to tell stories. Their difference lies in that frames are *perspectives* of a single event, while narratives are *a set of related stories* about an event. An event could be framed differently based on a single picture, but narratives, especially in the cases of competing narratives, “the pictures themselves are so different that framing is not the issue. If you move frames around on two different pictures, you will never find the same image” (Oates, 2018, p. 2). For example, there are multiple stories about how the COVID-19 virus leaked or was stolen from a Chinese laboratory. These stories might have different accounts, but their related *narratives* flesh out the idea that the Chinese Wuhan laboratory leaked the virus. But there are other narratives claiming that the virus was from the Fort Detrick laboratory in the U.S. Although they are both about lab leak theories, these two strains of narratives present two competing pictures.

The power of narratives is not limited to the information content itself. What makes narratives powerful is their capability to touch upon people’s identities and evoke the audience’s emotions. Braden Allenby (2017) said narratives are “the core of identity, and construct and validate meaning for the individual” (p.1). In this way, strategic narratives could be deemed as propaganda (Colley, 2019). Since propaganda aims to influence the target audience, strategic narratives also attempt to

reach the same goal with crafted content that hopes to evoke audiences' emotions and identities (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019; Colley, 2019).

One of the ways that narratives bind with audiences and trigger emotions is to make audiences actively involved in the process of meaning-making. Wagnsson and Barzanje (2021) argued that a technique of making the narrative a persuasive propaganda tool is to provide readers with events and let readers fill in the blanks in the direction the narratives imply. This process that readers themselves invest in the story would make readers more difficult to untangle the narrative's elements unless they relinquish the whole narrative (Bacon, 2012; Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021).

Nations have long deployed narratives as a strategic tool to achieve political goals. Miskimmon et al. (2017) defined "strategic narratives" as "tools that political actors employ to promote their interests, values, and aspirations for the international order by managing expectations and altering the discursive environment." To construct a strategic narrative, the creators should include "actors relating to a particular setting that takes action with some type of behavior in pursuit of a goal" (Oates et al., 2018, p. 5). In the COVID-19 lab leak theories, the context was an anxious world looking for answers to explain the origin of the virus. Both theories designate villains in their stories: In the Wuhan lab leak theory, the villains are the Chinese government; in the U.S. lab leak theory, the villains are American scientists and soldiers who brought the virus to China. The actions and schemes in the stories include developing bioweapons, stealing viruses, and unleashing the virus on the public. Through the stories, both creators and spreaders of the two theories put the blame on each other, seeking to shed responsibility and damage the image of targeted countries. Similar to the content of conspiracy theories, strategic narratives do not necessarily contain false information, but false information could become a critical part of a strategic narrative. Allenby defined "weaponized narrative" as the narrative that uses disinformation, social media, and other

communication technology to undermine adversaries' politics or society (Allenby, 2017). This kind of narrative can be a strategy to weaken powerful opponents, such as Russia's disinformation interference with the U.S. and Europe's elections.

Khaldarova and Pantti (2016) analyzed Russian TV station Channel One's news stories on the Ukraine-Russia conflict and contended that Russia's disinformation matches the definition of strategic narrative. They pointed out that Russia's purpose was more than to spread disinformation or to be deemed a more "credible" news source. Instead, Russia's real goal was to appeal to the audience's emotions and form a context where Russia could more easily influence targets with subsequent messages.

Since the power of strategic narratives resides in their capacity to affect audiences by touching on their identities and evoking emotions, fact-checking disinformation in the narratives seems less effective. Scholars suggested that there are probably more effective ways to battle the influence of strategic narratives. Halverson et al. (2011) suggested that when reporting on the same event, avoiding the reinforcement of the original narratives, contesting analogies between the past and current situations, and recasting the actors in the events in alternative roles. In the recent case of COVID-19 narratives, Hagström & Gustafsson (2021) also found that the narratives promoted by China and the U.S. during COVID-19 were not influential if the audiences had their own agenda that was distinctive from the promoted narrative.

2.2.2 Analyze strategic narratives

To examine the influence of strategic narratives, Colley (2019) suggested comparing the content produced by propagandists and their targets. For example, research can examine how the target describes the same events that have been framed by the propagandists and whether there are deviations from the original strategic narratives. Strategic narratives can be analyzed from different

approaches, depending on how scholars position their research. O'Loughlin et al. (2017) proposed four research approaches: rationalism, communicative action, reflexive, and poststructural.

The rationalism approach suggests that the narrative is to compel others into action. This line of research aims to identify the causal relations between variables, such as the content of the narrative and the decisions taken by relevant actors. The communicative action approach emphasizes how actors come to an understanding through interaction and discussion. Scholars interested in this approach examine actors' sequential interactions over time (O'Loughlin et al., 2017). The third and fourth approaches take wider contexts into consideration. The reflexive approach notes actors' identity and emotion and acknowledges media logics play an important role in persuading the audience. Therefore, researchers taking this approach observe how actors use mass and social media to deliver their messages. For example, Roselle (2006) studies how the U.S. and the Soviet Union worked with the media to legitimize their withdrawals from Vietnam and Afghanistan during the Cold War (O'Loughlin et al., 2017).

The poststructural approach employs discourse analysis, arguing that the discourse (of the narrative) is a structured system that has emerged over a long time. Each kind of discourse, such as legal and news discourse, has its own customary rule dictating what to say and how to say. However, agents still have opportunities to change the discourse through languages and practices and "give sense to contemporary events" (O'Loughlin et al., 2017, p.42). This is where strategic narratives can intervene. For instance, NGOs have changed their narratives on humanitarian charity from persuading donors to solidify with suffering people to encouraging the audience to engage with celebrities and identify with the NGO's brand (O'Loughlin et al., 2017). From this perspective, researchers will analyze the narratives' texts and trace how actors who occupied fixed positions in the system use their freedom to reconstruct identities.

Considering this dissertation's purpose, the reflexive and the poststructural approach will benefit the research the most. They remind researchers to consider the variables of actors' positions in the system, the media's logic, how actors take advantage of the logic and news events' temporal opportunities, and how actors employ languages or visual tools in certain contexts to achieve their goals. More importantly, these approaches illuminate the process of crafting the narratives (O'Loughlin et al., 2017).

Wagnsson and Barzanje (2021) provided another useful framework to analyze the content of narratives. Their work on Russia's narratives about Sweden particularly pays attention to the relations among stories and how subplots build up the main narrative. They proposed four areas for researchers to examine: first, how stories relate to each other and become the consistent story; second, what the events' sequence and order are; third, how events are placed in temporal and spatial relation to one another; fourth, how events and details are selected, omitted, or appropriated. Based on the reflexive and poststructural approaches, the researcher will also use the narrative research steps suggested by Wagnsson and Barzanje to analyze the media content of COVID-19 virus origin conspiracy theories. The researcher will revisit these conceptual tools in the methodology chapter.

2.3 The production and dissemination of false information in the hybrid media system

2.3.1 The hybrid media system

Conspiracy theories and propaganda do not appear from the void. They are the products of society and keep changing through interactions with society. The hybrid media system approach, which analyzes interactions among social contexts, the media, and the audience, is an ideal starting point to observe how media and society actors influence each other.

Andrew Chadwick (2017) stated that there are three pillars of the hybrid media system approach: power, system, and media logic. In this context, “power” refers to “the power relations among political actors, media actors, and the public associated with older and newer media” (p.19). Chadwick viewed “power” as relational and evolving from actors’ interactions with each other and the media in the system. Therefore, single static snapshots do not capture the whole picture. Instead, one must consider the contexts, actors’ relations with the media, and their behaviors to understand what is really happening in the media environment. The questions that researchers could ask when examining the system are, as Nick Couldry proposed: *What are people* (individuals, groups, institutions) *doing in relation to media* across a whole range of situations and contexts? How is people’s media-related practice related, in turn, to their wider agency?” (Quoted by Chadwick, 2017, p. 21. Emphasis by Couldry in original text).

Media logic, or norms and media practices, formats, genres, etc., thus provide a good angle for researchers to study how power relations among media actors and media technologies exert influence. As a part of the system, media logic is a product of social contexts and actors. Chadwick (2017) argued that media logic is a force “co-created by media, political actors, and publics” (p.24). This is to say, the media logic is not fixed but keeps changing when the social context is different or when the way actors use media evolves. Likewise, those who seek to influence the public should also adapt to the media logic to make sure they can achieve their goals. The theory’s attention to the interaction between media logic and the audience is also illuminating. In the digital age, audiences are no longer passive audiences; they react, reinterpret, and reproduce media content. Therefore, Chadwick (2017) contended researchers should pay attention to how audiences use and contribute to shaping media logic and content.

2.3.2 Why and how disinformation and conspiracy theories are spread in the hybrid media system

The hybrid media system approach also provides a useful framework to put existing studies on conspiracy theories in a systematic perspective. It also helps enhance the understanding of manipulated information in aspects such as the social contexts that give rise to disinformation, actors who promote the information, and how they use and change the information content.

Several studies have provided evidence that some social environments could have led to the prevalence of disinformation and misinformation. Hemprecht et al. (2020) found that in societies where audiences are more politically polarized and fragmented, people are more susceptible to disinformation and tend to believe reports that align with their views. Bennett and Livingston (2018) and McNair (2017) also are concerned about people's distrust of established institutions. They point out that citizens' loss of faith in politicians, scientists, and journalists contributes to breeding misinformation and disinformation. Especially when politicians relentlessly attack mainstream media as "fake news," audiences who lose trust in traditional media turn to alternative sources, family members, or close friends and encounter information without professional gatekeeping. (McNair, 2017; Giglietto et al., 2019).

The continuing economic crisis in the mainstream media also plays a part in the change in media logic, which facilitates the spread of disinformation. The decline of subscriptions, decreasing ad revenues, and the 24-hour news cycle have left many news media outlets mired in crises for years. When faced with the difficulty of insufficient resources and time pressure, news outlets cannot afford solid verification or a more thorough investigation. Some choose to use shocking but unverified news to increase their reach and audience (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

In the digital age, both existing and emerging media logic in the hybrid media system further accelerates the dissemination of disinformation and conspiracy theories. Nowadays, traditional

media is not the only information senders in the mass communication process. Politicians, members of the public, foreign agents, conspiracy theorists, and trolls are all active actors in the system. They can send messages and reach the audience directly without mainstream media as gatekeepers. For example, politicians such as Trump and alt-right advocates such as Richard Spencer and Andrew Auernheimer are skilled at using online forums or hyper-partisan news websites to muster followers (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

With social media at their disposal, these information actors possess media power but are not bound by traditional media logic and constraints such as verification or balanced reporting. They can reframe news events and spread baseless information through social media platforms directly to the audience. Those who are familiar with social media's logic, such as keywords, hashtags, and search engine optimization, can evoke online communities' emotions and make their messages more prevalent (Giglietto et al., 2019; Bakir & McStay, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Donovan & boyd, 2021).

Although non-media actors do not follow traditional media's basic requirement for verifying information, they know well how to exploit other media tendencies to help disseminate their crafted information. For example, they expose "shocking" events or use sensational language to attract traditional media's attention (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Lukito et al.'s research (2020) exemplifies how Russia's Internet Research Agency benefits from traditional media's hunger for sensational content. By establishing fake Twitter accounts like those belonging to ordinary American citizens and commenting on factual events with sensational language, the IRA made these accounts look like "vox populi" and attracted the U.S. media's attention, further amplifying the polarized messages.

Sometimes, even mainstream media's practices of being fair could be used to propagate false information (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Tsftati et al., 2020; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Benkler et al.'s study (2018) reveals the mainstream media's "balanced reporting" intended to contradict false information turned out to amplify the wrong information. For example, in a *Washington Post* news article refuting the allegation that the Clinton Foundation misused donors' money, the reporting did not mention the correct fact until the 16th paragraph of the article. Benkler et al. argued that the headline and the lead have already impressed readers with a skewed narrative and could have led readers into misperceptions.

Although fact-checking has been seen as an important measure against false information, it might also bring the opposite effect. Marwick and Lewis (2017) worried that debunking might perpetuate the public's attention to disinformation. Through repetition, the disinformation gains even more visibility and becomes part of prominent agenda in the media. The information thus impresses the public as an important issue to know, while the accuracy of the information might be hazy to the audience. As messages move up the media system's chain, the manipulated yet striking ones may dominate and become the prevailing narrative.

But fringe media, partisan media, and politicians also collaborate to push information to achieve common goals. Vargo et al. (2018) found partisan media and emerging online media follow fake news websites' agendas closely. Yang and Bennett (2022) investigated the disinformation spread in the U.S. in the hybrid media system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research shows that *Fox News* and former president Trump co-produced and spread disinformation about COVID-19 in early 2020. Through actors' interactions in multiple media channels, the actors monitored and gathered information, cued and amplified each other's information, as well as addressed and adjusted conflicting narratives.

In some cases, grassroots communities and public relations industries played important roles in promoting conspiracy theories on social media platforms through both planned and unplanned coordination. Starbirds (2019) found that although disinformation was disseminated on social media through an organization such as Internet Research Agency or a semi-orchestrated one by engaging “unwitting puppets” such as journalists to amplify messages, it can be disseminated through organic online communities who “take it on themselves to spread these messages at the grassroots level” (p.18). Besides, paid professional experts and influencers familiar with the rules of online viral marketing could use their expertise to engage in the promotion of conspiracy theories. The employment of online marketing strategies in disinformation campaigns involving traditional media can be even more powerful in setting the public’s agenda and influencing audiences’ perception toward news events (Starbirds, 2019; Ong & Cabañes, 2018).

The hybrid media system approach helps to outline the directions of this research on how lab leak conspiracy theories flowed through the Taiwanese media system. Most importantly, this approach focuses on political, social, and media context that reminds researchers to observe the flow and changes of information from a holistic view. This highlights that it is important not to study just certain types of content – such as news or social media posts – but to consider the nature of the messages that are moving through the entire media system. This switches the focus usefully from message platforms (such as social media sites or news websites) to the content and meaning of the message themselves. It also sheds light on the elements that could influence narratives in different media systems, provides clues to identify variables in the narratives of conspiracy theories, and find the remedies to counter propaganda.

2.3.3 Fact-checking as a countermeasure against conspiracy theories in the hybrid media system?

Scholars, social media companies, and policymakers have hoped fact-checking could be a significant measure to combat disinformation and conspiracy theories. For example, both Google and Meta have provided grants to fact-checking initiatives and added “verified information” by fact-checkers under search results or posts (Meta, June 15, 2021). The European Commission has stated that “[a] dense network of strong and independent fact-checkers is an essential requirement for a healthy digital ecosystem” (Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach, 2018). The Commission also included supporting fact-checking organizations in its action plan against disinformation. However, can fact-checking, a part of the hybrid media system, help target countries resist foreign propaganda and conspiracy theories?

Fact-checking organizations have flourished globally in recent years. According to the Duke Reporters’ Lab, there were forty-four fact-checking centers in 2014. In 2022, the number of active fact-checking initiatives reached 391 (Fact-checking -- Duke Reporters’ Lab, n.d.).

While U.S. fact-checking organizations such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact focus more on verifying politicians’ statements and holding politicians accountable for what they say, initiatives in other countries address specific local demands, such as debunking disinformation in transnational information warfare (Graves & Cherubini, 2016; Amazeen, 2017). For example, in Ukraine, where propaganda attacks from Russia are rampant, the fact-checking group StopFake aims to counter Russia’s propaganda and debunk fabricated information (Haigh, Haigh, and Kozak, 2017). In Taiwan, Taiwan FactCheck Center (TFC) sees itself as more than a fact-checking organization. The founder defines TFC as a “professional advocacy group” that pushes society to invest more in the fight against misinformation and disinformation. In addition to verifying

information circulating in the traditional and online media, they also educate the public on fact-checking by organizing workshops to share knowledge (Hu, 2021, p.122).

However, no matter how varied the missions of fact-checking organizations are, these organizations encounter a similar challenge: winning the trust of audiences (Graves, 2017; Rich et al., 2020; Brandtzaeg, 2018). As scholars have pointed out, one of the reasons contributing to disinformation's rise is audience distrust of the media. Fact-checking organizations, although they were established to improve journalism, still face the trust issue. If audiences question the credibility of fact-checking pieces, how could fact-checkers fulfill their mission of fighting against problematic information?

Some of the critiques of fact-checking also come from scholars who argue facts, especially facts involving politics, are too ambiguous and subjective to be adjudicated as “true or false” (Uscinski & Butler, 2013; Uscinski, 2015).

In the case of fact-checking conspiracy theories, Gagliardone et al. (2021) suggested that fact-checking has a limited impact since conspiracy theory followers are primarily drawn to the ideologies behind the beliefs rather than the integrity of the facts. Moreover, as Marwick and Partin (2022) demonstrated in their study, conspiracy theory enthusiasts such as QAnon members could interpret and “verify” facts in their constructed knowledge system, reinforcing their conviction in conspiracy theories.

In the COVID-19 virus origin theories, the origin of the virus is still a mystery, but the efforts to explore the truth have been deeply enmeshed in political and ideological arguments (Hart et al., 2020). When fact-checkers changed their previous verdicts on virus-origin explanations, the public's distrust in fact-checking increased even further.

In 2020, *PolitiFact* rated the claim false that the COVID-19 virus was created in a lab (Funke, 2020). But with more scientists calling for reinvestigation of the origin of the virus, *PolitiFact* archived a fact-checking piece on the lab leak theory, noting that they still consider “the claim to be unsupported by evidence” but the assertion “is now more widely disputed” (Funke, 2020). *Fact Checker* of the *Washington Post* also corrected a piece debunking Tom Cotton’s claim of the lab leak theory (O’Brien, 2021). Nevertheless, right-wing media such as *Fox News* took advantage of these correction pieces to attack fact checkers’ credibility (O’Brien, 2021). The correction on COVID-19 origin fact-checking pieces turned out to help the right-wing media damage audiences’ trust in the media and the results of fact-checking. Thus, the very principle that is inherent to both quality journalism and fact-checking – updates and transparency in an attempt to navigate narratives as more information emerges – is used to attack both journalism and fact-checking in general.

The above example epitomizes the limitations of fact-checking on correcting obscure information, especially when the narratives are entangled with scientific information, prior beliefs, and ideologies. When the media try to counter the propaganda, which contains different information elements, what would be an effective strategy to counter the narratives, correct audiences’ perceptions, and even change attitudes? This review of the theories suggests that the answer resides beyond verifying a particular piece of disinformation. Instead, a more complex approach is necessary to address the underlying elements of narratives in conspiracy theories and propaganda. In Chapters Four and Five, the researcher will demonstrate the elements of key narratives and how they exert influence or meet resistance in the case of Chinese and Taiwanese media. But before that, we must first understand the social and political contexts that shape media narratives. Chapter

Three will provide a guide to the media systems in China and Taiwan and the information warfare between them.

Chapter 3: Chinese media, Taiwanese media, and information warfare

A common ground shared by hybrid media theory, strategic narratives, and conspiracy theories is the importance of context. Conspiracy theories usually emerge from pre-existing ideologies in society, attracting people with similar identities who are looking for explanations for events during turbulent times. In addition, hybrid media theory and strategic narratives suggest the production and dissemination of media content related to larger social contexts and media practices. This research follows these approaches to observe and assess how conspiracy theories concerning the origin of the COVID-19 virus affect Taiwanese media narratives. Therefore, it is essential to establish the broader context of media systems in both Taiwan and China, as the neighboring Leviathan is eager to assert control over Taiwan.

This is the key time to study Chinese propaganda that targets Taiwan. Multiple studies have demonstrated that the Chinese government has stepped up its information influence campaign against Taiwan as well as other countries (Kalathil, 2017; DoubleThink Lab, 2020; Freedom House, 2020, 2022; Thibaut, 2022). The propaganda attacks from the Chinese government remained intense during the COVID-19 pandemic, appearing even to offer the Chinese actors an opportunity to reshape international discourse on the image of China and world order (DoubleThink Lab, 2021; DFRLab, 2021; Lim et al., 2021). This chapter discusses the development of Chinese propaganda as contextual information for understanding Chinese narratives on the COVID-19 virus origin and evaluating its influence on Taiwan.

This chapter begins with an introduction of the Chinese media system and recent Chinese information campaigns directed at international audiences. Following that, the chapter examines the media system in Taiwan and Taiwan's efforts to resist the influence of China's propaganda.

3.1 The news media system in China

3.1.1 A system that has always been under the shadow of censorship

In the 2022 World Press Freedom Index compiled by the press freedom watchdog organization Reporters Without Borders, China ranked 175 out of 180 countries, only followed by Myanmar, Turkmenistan, Iran, Eritrea, and North Korea. The report states that since Xi Jinping became the leader of China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, Chinese media have been under “ever-tighter control, while the administration created more and more obstacles for foreign reporters” (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).⁹ With more than 120 journalists under jail terms or detention, the Chinese government has implemented widespread surveillance systems to monitor journalists’ reporting and censored the flow of information online and offline (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

⁹ Scholars and commentators have contended that the word "president" is a misnomer for Xi's political status in China because Xi's official title in Chinese is "state chairman" (guojia zhuxi 國家主席). Except for the fact that they are both leaders of a nation, there is little resemblance between the "state chairman" in China and the "president" in the political system of Western democracy. See Wilhelm, K. (2022, October 19). It's time to stop calling Xi Jinping the 'president' of China. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/10/19/xi-jinping-president-china-general-secretary/>. This research will use “the leader” or “the state chairman” to refer to Xi Jinping.

China's annual scores on RSF World Press Freedom Index

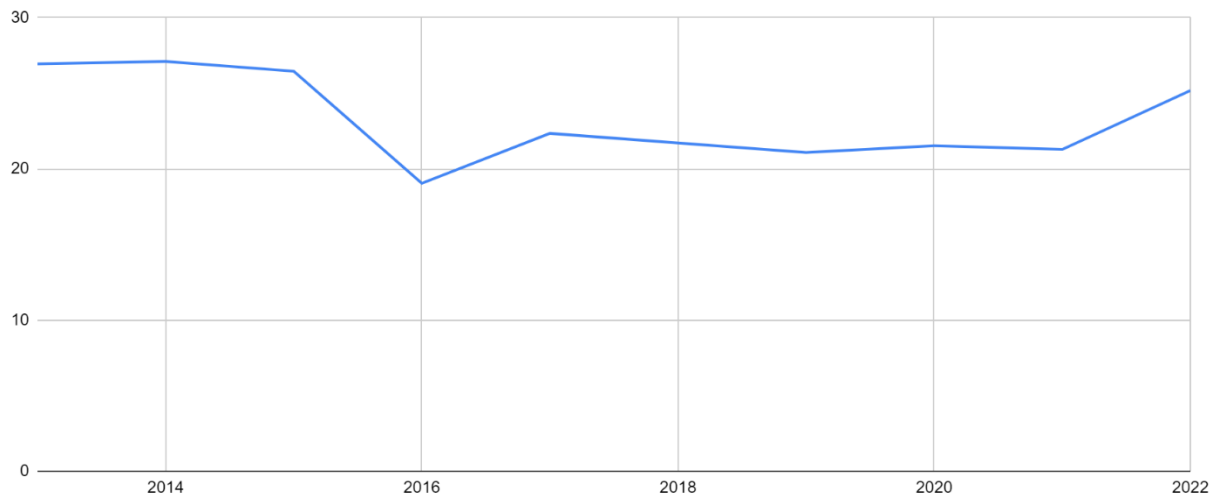


Figure 3.1 China's annual scores on the World Press Freedom Index from 2013-2022. The index was compiled by Reporters Without Borders. The evaluation criteria include political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and safety. The range of points is 0-100. 0-40 means the situation regarding press freedom in the country is very serious, 40-55 is difficult, 55-70 is problematic, 70-85 is satisfactory, and 85-100 is good. For more information on the methodology, see Reporters Without Borders. (2022). The methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index.

Before Xi became the leader of China in 2012, the Chinese news media had enjoyed less restriction on freedom for a brief time, although they were always under the shadow of censorship. As Susan Shirk (2011), the former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of the State Department and an academic specializing in China affairs, pointed out, the Chinese government has always been ambivalent about press freedom. Two important factors shaped the change in the landscape of Chinese news media since the Chinese government opened up the Chinese market to the investment of private capital in the 1980s: economic reform and the internet.

At the beginning of the Chinese economic reform in 1979, China only had 69 newspapers, all of which were branches of the Chinese Communist Party or the government (Shirk, 2011). These newspapers essentially functioned as bulletin boards of official directives or national propaganda. Negative news, such as crimes, could nowhere be found in the publications. Most readers also

deemed the media propagandists of the government. In contrast, intellectuals and government officials learned to “read between the lines” in the news to catch up with changes in policies or upper-ranking positions (Shambough, 2007; Shirk, 2011).

The change in media revenue sources also became a part of the Chinese government’s plan for opening the economy. Since the 1980s, the government has slashed the state subsidies to media outlets but meanwhile let the outlets profit from advertisements (Shirk, 2011). This change in sources of revenue created competition among Chinese media and further encouraged more diverse content and genres of news reporting (Chen, 2021). In 2005, the number of newspapers and magazines published in China reached 2,000 and 9,000, respectively (Shirk, 2011).

In the meantime, online content such as websites provided more entertaining content while enjoying more lax regulation, which challenged the traditional media in the market. Faced with internet services that competed with them for viewers and advertising, news companies needed to discover alternative revenue streams (Jiang, October 18, 2021). Taking on the then-vague regulations on capital restrictions, media outlets sought funding from private companies. The State Council of China even issued guidance in 2010 to “guide and encourage an orderly entrance of non-public capital into the news publication industry to liberate and develop new cultural production.”¹⁰ According to veteran Chinese journalists, the Chinese government intended to establish world-class news and publication conglomerates capable of competing with established international news media (Jiang, October 18, 2021).

¹⁰ The original text in Chinese is: “引导和规范非公有资本有序进入新闻出版产业，解放和发展新兴文化生产力。” Xinwen chubanshu guanyu jinyibu tuidong xinwen chubanshu fazhan de zhidao yijian (新闻出版总署关于进一步推动新闻出版产业发展的指导意见)[General Administration of Press and Publication’s Guiding Opinion on the further promotion development of the publishing industry](promulgated by General Administration of Press and Publication, January 1st, 2010. http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2010/content_1671253.htm)

Nevertheless, it should be noted that even during the time when private companies were allowed to invest in news media, all the media outlets in China were nominally owned by the government. The government still treated all T.V. stations as propaganda outlets and issued licenses to print media for publication. Furthermore, the chiefs of media outlets were appointed by the CCP, and censors were assigned to the organizations to inspect news articles to make sure they toed the official lines (Kaiman, 2017, December 1). Some more “liberal” media, such as *Caijing* (財經), famous for its investigative reporting, was said to rely on the support of more open-minded high-ranking officials (Shirk, 2010; Jiang, October 18, 2021; Osnos, July 20, 2009).

Compared with the situation after 2012, the Chinese media in the 2000s had more freedom to explore uncharted waters once forbidden by strict censorship. Journalists and scholars noticed that the media at that time made “small strides” toward press freedom (Fan, December 28, 2008). Shirk (2011) even pointed out that the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak that happened in China in 2003 was a turning point for the Chinese public and the media to demand more transparency from the government.¹¹ For example, when the Shanghai city government refused to publish its department budget in 2009, it was widely criticized by the media and the public. The media also exposed several shocking scandals that involved private businesses and corrupted government officials, such as the 2008 Chinese milk scandal (Shirk, 2011; Huang, July 20, 2022).¹²

¹¹ SARS was a respiratory illness caused by a type of coronavirus, but it was more fatal than the illness caused by the COVID-19 virus. The disease first originated in Southern China and then spread to 29 countries. See Lam, W. K., Zhong, N. S., & Tan, W. C. (2003). Overview on SARS in Asia and the world. *Respirology* (Carlton, Vic.), 8 Suppl (Suppl 1), S2–S5. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1843.2003.00516.x>

¹² In the 2008 Chinese milk scandal, several companies that produced the milk and local governments failed to take action when they knew the baby formula had been contaminated by melamine. Six babies died and 300,000 babies fell sick from the tainted formula (Huang, July 20, 2022).

With Xi taking over the place of the Chinese state chairman from Hu Jintao, regulations were tightened up again. The same year Xi became the chairman, the government reversed its previous policy and banned private companies from investing in the news industry (BBC News Chinese, October 13, 2021). In the following years, the government issued several orders to impose bans on private capital investing in the news industry and other restrictions on news reporting. For example, the government has required that all websites can only republish news articles from news organizations on the government-approved “whitelist” that strictly follow the party’s ideology, such as *People’s Daily* or *Xinhua News Agency* (Ho, October 21, 2021). The government also urged internet companies, mostly privately owned, to sell assets they possessed in news media (Yang, March 16, 2021).

While the government made sure news media were completely owned by the government and restricted the information flow of news in the system, the government officials have also tightened the control of the ideology of journalists. Since 2013, Chinese journalists should pass exams on Marxism to obtain a press card for news reporting (Wong, February 22, 2016). In a visit to state news organizations in 2016, Xi stressed the role of Chinese news organizations as the CCP’s mouthpiece: “All news media run by the party must work to speak for the party’s will and its propositions and protect the party’s authority and unity” (Wong, February 22, 2016). In December 2022, the National Press and Publication Administration, which regulates the Chinese media, required all journalists to take an exam to test their “political literacy, professional capability, and professional ethics” to ensure journalism works can be aligned with Xi’s thoughts.¹³ In addition, journalists with records of “inappropriate behaviors” are forbidden from taking the exam.¹⁴

¹³ Article 1, 3, Xinwen jizhe zhiye zige kaoshi banfa (新闻记者职业资格考试办法) [Measures for the Professional Qualification Examination of Journalists] (promulgated by National Press and Publication Administration). <https://www.nppa.gov.cn/nppa/contents/279/105894.shtml>

¹⁴ Id., Article 11(4).

In practice, Chinese reporters complain that the government issues more directives that censor ideologically or morally incorrect content. Chinese journalists know well they should steer away from sensitive social and political events or topics that would discredit China (Tong, 2009; King et al., 2014). But in recent years, they have even been instructed to carefully cover soft news or financial news, such as refraining from using strong words to describe the fall of the stock market or avoiding the mention of celebrities who have extramarital relationships (Jiang, September 9, 2018). According to reporters and editors, the ubiquitous but indistinct censorship bottom lines have made news coverage and writing more difficult. Regarding censorship enforcement, the system employs not only government censors and manual checkers but also uses automatic filters based on a “database of sensitive terms” whose scope changes daily. Due to this strict censorship, journalists and editors have learned to exercise self-censorship with higher discretion (Jiang, September 9, 2018).

Similar to news media, Chinese websites are also under stringent censorship. Even though these companies are privately owned, they are still deemed arms of the government and work closely with the government to control the flow of information. Scholars and journalists pointed out that numerous censors worked with automatic systems to implement the government’s orders to hide or take down posts involving sensitive content or revoke accounts that violate rules (Shirk, 2011; Lee et al., 2013; King et al., 2014; Freedom House, 2020).

3.1.2 Chinese media as a propaganda apparatus

Propaganda permeates the Chinese media system and the daily lives of Chinese citizens (Shambough, 2007). According to Shambough (2007), the term “propaganda” has not had a negative connotation in China because it was viewed as *education* for citizens. Before the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square, the Chinese authorities stressed the bravery of the CCP and

condemned the Nationalist Government, which fled to Taiwan in 1949. After 1989, however, the official propaganda refocused on its ruling legitimacy, emphasizing the humiliation imposed on China by the West and Japan (Liao, 2018). Xi's 2012 address on the "China dream" reached a new level, emphasizing China's gaining great power in the international community after more than a century of struggle and perseverance (BBC News, June 5, 2013; Perry, 2017; Liao, 2018).

In domestic propaganda [内宣], government-promoted narratives celebrate nationalism and patriotism, persuading Chinese audiences that China's rejuvenation hinges on people's unity and strong leadership. Chinese domestic propaganda frequently reminds citizens of historical humiliation but asserts that China is growing as a moral and peace-loving global power because it has learned the costs of war and suffering well from its history (Perry, 2017; Liao, 2018). Nevertheless, the narratives of humiliation also cause citizens to dwell on the country's victimhood and stress "preserving national honor" over "peaceful ascension" (Liao, 2018). Hence, nationalism is so ingrained in media and society that any dissenting voices praising former enemies, such as Japan, would be silenced by enraged patriots (Wang & Chew, 2016; Liao, 2018).

Moreover, commercial outlets, as well as state flagship media, promote nationalism. Because stories promoting nationalistic ideology will draw more attention, market-driven publications such as the *Global Times* produce more sensational content employing emotional language to enhance subscriptions and sales. (Wang & Chew, 2016).

On the side of "external propaganda" [大外宣], the Chinese government established organizations in the 1980s devoted to the mission of improving the image of China abroad (Shambough, 2007). In addition to 'sharing China's story,' the initial objectives of media targeting global audiences were fighting hostile foreign propaganda and encouraging Taiwan's unification with China (Shambough, 2007). In the 2000s, the Chinese government began to incorporate state media outlets

into its overseas propaganda strategy (Kalathil, 2017; Insikt Group, 2022). *China Global Television Network (CGTN)*, *CCTV (China Central Television)*, *China's Daily*, *People's Daily*, *China Radio International (CRI)*, *Xinhua News Agency*, and *China News Service* are all part of China's external propaganda apparatus, publishing or broadcasting news in multiple languages including English, Spanish, French, Arabic, German, and Russian, etc. (Freedom House, 2020).

The Chinese government and media outlets also collaborate with local media in other countries, purchase media outlets and infrastructures, and provide training programs for journalists (Kalathil, 2017; Freedom House, 2020, 2022; Lim et al., 2021; Insikt Group, 2022). For example, the Chinese government has bought advertisements in mainstream media in Western countries, including the U.S. The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post* carried *China Watch* supplements sponsored by *China Daily* with their print newspapers or websites (Kalathil, 2017; Freedom House, 2020, 2022).¹⁵ Most of the time, *China Watch* provides neutral content introducing Chinese culture or praising the international economic plans of the Chinese government, such as the Belt and Road initiative. Still, it could be turned into a propaganda tool when the government needs to influence public opinion. In September 2018, when the U.S. and China had conflicts over trade policy, *China Watch* published 4-page articles attacking U.S. policy in *The Des Moines Register* (Kalathil, 2017; Freedom House, 2020).

Eventually, in 2020 the U.S. government designated several Chinese media outlets as foreign agents, including the *China Daily*, the *People's Daily*, and the *Global Times* (U.S. Department of State, 2020, June 22). According to the filing of *China Daily* with the U.S. Department of Justice required by the Foreign Agents Registration Act, from January 2019 to October 2021, this news

¹⁵ The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have ceased publishing the *China Watch* inserts (Freedom House, 2022).

organization had spent at least 7 million U.S. dollars for paid print and online publications in the United States (Freedom House, 2022).

In addition to traditional media, social media platforms play a significant role in campaigns of information influence waged by the Chinese government. Multiple studies have demonstrated China's overt and covert efforts to influence elections in Taiwan, the United States, and Canada, as well as public opinion on the COVID-19 pandemic, Xinjiang internment camps, and Hong Kong protests (Miller et al., 2020; McMillan, June 11, 2020; Freedom House 2020, 2022; Tucker, 2020; Xiao et al., January 5, 2020; DFRLab, January 4, 2022; Scott, September 27, 2022; Impiombato et al., 2022). A typical tactic by Chinese operations is creating many official or fake social media accounts to propagate disinformation (Freedom House, 2020, 2022; Scott, September 27, 2022, McMillan, June 11, 2020). Additionally, research reveals that the Chinese government has recruited public relations firms and influencers to push false narratives about the country's human rights record (Impiombato et al., 2022; Bogle et al., 2021).

Through a variety of online and offline channels, the Chinese government seeks to gain “discourse power” (話語權) to set the agendas of global media platforms and frame events in a manner that is consistent with Chinese perspectives and propaganda goals (Thibaut, 2022). Consistently, “external propaganda” aims to promote positive images of China and change adverse perceptions of the Chinese government. That does not mean the messages are static, as researchers have found changes in the content of Chinese propaganda through the years. For example, prior to the 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese media emphasized the justification of its political systems and territorial integrity, according to Thibaut (2022). Since 2012, however, the influence campaign has championed the Chinese model for non-Western countries as a desirable alternative to Western democracy (Freedom House, 2020; Thibaut, 2022). During the COVID-19 epidemic, Chinese

narratives again emphasized the excellence of the Chinese system in handling the crisis, China's contribution to international medical aid, and denounced the United States for constraining China's rise (DFRLab, 2021; Molter & DiResta, 2020; Hagstrom & Gustafsson, 2021).

3.2 Taiwan's media environment and false information problem

As researchers have found in Chinese domestic and external propaganda studies, Taiwan was both the target and the subject of Chinese propaganda (Shambough, 2007; DoubleThink Lab, 2020, 2021 May 6; Freedom House, 2020, 2022; Thibaut, 2022). On the one hand, Chinese propagandists persistently promote the claim in the international community that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China; on the other hand, it spreads propaganda and disinformation urging the Taiwanese to support the "unification" between China and Taiwan (Shambough, 2007; Thibaut, 2022). Researchers also pointed out that with social media becoming essential in the daily life of the Taiwanese, China has taken advantage of Taiwan's free and open media environment and conducted more aggressive disinformation attacks against the country (Freedom House, 2020, 2022; DoubleThink Lab, 2020, 2021; Shen, 2021). Furthermore, because both Taiwanese and Chinese use Mandarin Chinese as their primary language and their written Chinese characters vary little, the propaganda from China encounters even fewer obstacles when attempting to influence Taiwan. The following section introduces the strength and weaknesses of the media system in Taiwan and how China has targeted Taiwan with disinformation and propaganda in recent years.

3.2.1 The media system in Taiwan – a free but dysfunctional hybrid media system

Taiwan was under strict Martial Law from 1949 to 1987. The Kuomintang Party (KMT, or the Chinese Nationalist Party) imposed bans on press publications and restricted the number of

terrestrial T.V. stations to ensure ideological control over citizens. All the media outlets were directly operated by the government or by tycoons affiliated with the government (Hu, 2017). However, since the 1970s, activists campaigning for democracy have persistently demanded reform. The U.S. government, which the Taiwanese government has relied on for political support, also urged Taiwan to implement democratic reform (Huang, 2019). The Taiwanese government eventually lifted the press and media ban in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hu, 2017).

For the past three decades, Taiwanese citizens and the media have enjoyed press freedom and speech. In 2022, it ranked the 38th (the U.S. is 42nd) on the World Press Freedom Index conducted by Reporters Without Borders and the 5th for internet freedom on the “Freedom on the Net” ranked by Freedom House in 2022 (Reporters Without Borders, 2022; [Quartly](#), February 7, 2023). In 2022, Taiwan’s internet penetration rate was 92% (The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022). LINE, a product of a Japan-Korean company, is the most popular social media in Taiwan, with 95.7 % of internet users aged 16-64 using this application each month, followed by Facebook at a 90.8% use rate. The Chinese social media TikTok ranked 5th on the chart, with 35.2 % of internet users using this application monthly. Another Chinese social media platform, WeChat, has a 29.2% monthly use rate, lagging behind the American social media Twitter by about 1.7% (TenMax ADTech Lab, March 28, 2022).

As for access to news for the Taiwanese audience, according to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s *Digital News Report 2022*, 84% of the Taiwanese surveyed receive news from online websites, including social media, while 59% receive news from television. Only 16% of the interviewed participants use the printed press as their news source. Among the people who use social media as a news source, 49% use LINE, while 45% use Facebook, and 40% use YouTube (The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022).

As in other democratic countries, Taiwanese media have faced tremendous challenges from fierce market competition. Scholars have pointed out that this competition has severely damaged information quality and created abundant opportunities for political manipulation, including interference from China (Hu, 2017; Huang, 2019; Cole, July 29, 2020; Rauchfleisch & Chi, 2020). Since the lifting of Martial Law and the end of the ban on newspaper publication, Taiwan once had more than 50 newspapers in the market. But due to the competition and the decline in readership and ad revenue, four newspapers have come to dominate the Taiwanese media market: *The United Daily News*, *the China Times*, *Liberty Times*, and the *Apple Daily* (Hu, 2017).¹⁶

The number of T.V. channels, including terrestrial, cable, and satellite, has grown exponentially. For this island of 13,976 square miles² and a population of 23.57 million,¹⁷ there are 22 channels owned by five terrestrial T.V. stations and 140 channels owned by 72 domestic satellite stations. Among these channels, there are seven 24-hour news channels. These news channels produce talk shows that invite guest speakers to comment on current events. Scholars found that due to intense market competition, these talk shows tend to provide sensational and politically polarized content to attract the audience's attention (Hu, 2017). Taiwanese can also watch channels from overseas satellite stations (National Communication Council, 2021).

To survive in the market where the audience share is dwindling and advertisement revenue is declining, some Taiwanese media owners have turned to China as a land of opportunities. The growing desire of Taiwanese media to venture into the Chinese market thus provided the Chinese government leverage to increase its influence through the Taiwanese media (Huang, 2019). China's intention to extend its influence through the Taiwanese media has become evident since

¹⁶ The Apple Daily, which was owned by the Hong Kong tycoon and dissident Jimmy Lai, terminated its operation in Taiwan in 2022 (Hioe, September 15, 2022).

¹⁷ For comparison: Maryland is 12,407 square miles with a population of 6.046 million.

2008. In that year, the pro-China media group Want Want Holdings, which has made a tremendous profit from China's food manufacturing market, purchased an influential newspaper, the *China Times*, and several other T.V. stations (Huang, 2019). After Want Want Group owned these outlets, the newsroom, under the group's owner's instruction, persistently promoted China's "positive" news and downplayed reporting on Tibet, Xingjian, and Tiananmen Square massacre. Those who disobeyed the rules could only leave the company or be demoted (Liu & Li, December 24, 2012; Wu, 2016; Huang, 2019; Cole, July 29, 2020; Lin, 2022a).

The media organizations under the Want Want group are not the only outlets bowing to the Chinese government. Another mainstream newspaper, The *United Daily News*, also received subscription subsidies from the Chinese government (Huang, 2019). Both the *China Times* and *United Daily News* also carried paid advertorials for China as a new way to increase revenue without labeling the Chinese government as the sponsor of the content (Huang, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). In addition, the two media groups co-organized the annual "Cross-Strait Media Summit" with Chinese state media groups for years, in which Taiwanese media representatives meet with their counterparts from the Chinese state media (Huang, 2019). During the meetings, Taiwanese and Chinese representatives signed several statements to promote mutual interests and vowed to contribute to goals such as "the preservation of the common interests of the Chinese nation and the benefits of the people across the strait" (Huang, 2019).

To look for business opportunities in China, even anti-unification T.V. news stations such as *SET News* (Sanlih Entertainment Television, SET) suspended a T.V. talk show hosted by a celebrity famous for his anti-China stance. Moreover, the station issued a guideline to downplay news about the Tiananmen Square massacre and Falun Gong in exchange for selling entertainment programs produced by the same media group to China (Huang, 2019). After suffering losses in the Chinese

market as a result of the Chinese government's tighter restriction of media material, SET moved its focus back to the Taiwanese market in 2015 and revived the suspended talk program for the anti-China host (Huang, 2022).

In parallel with the bleak media market, journalistic standards in Taiwan have been weakening. Michael Cole, a Canadian scholar who formerly worked for Taiwan's media, described the difficulties Taiwanese reporters face: "poor corroboration and fact-checking practices, a highly competitive media environment in Taiwan, overworked beat journalists, vertical chain of command in media with older editors lording it over young reporters, and lack of incentives for investigative journalism...." (Cole, July 29, 2020).

Other researchers have discovered that the performance of journalists in Taiwanese news organizations is not measured by the quality of news content but by the number of real-time news (or breaking news) articles a journalist can generate each day and the click-through rate of their online articles (Liu, 2018; Chiang, 2022). As such, journalists must produce a huge quantity of news articles in a short amount of time without undergoing vetting procedures. Moreover, in order to attract readers' clicks, journalists frequently seek out sensational items with little news value. These working conditions lead to the result that reporters look for news sources from dubious online websites or even include online user comments in their news coverage (Chiang, 2022; Lin, 2022a). Even worse, these pieces of unproven hearsay that are usually intertwined with opinions would be seen as "news" by the general public as a result of the mainstream media's coverage and then spread across society (Lin, 2022a).

Under these kinds of circumstances, Taiwanese reporters have been criticized for being lazy in investigating news sources and incapable of verifying information. Moreover, the news has become a tool for owners to advocate for their political slants and economic interests (Cole, July

29, 2020; Rauchfleisch & Chi, 2020). According to the observation by Rauchfleisch et al. (2022), the bias of Taiwanese media mostly reflects “the general divide in politics,” including media outlets’ attitudes toward China (p.6). For example, the *Liberty Times* is deemed as a “pan-green” outlet, meaning anti-unification with China and friendly to the currently ruling Democratic Progress Party, whereas the *China Times* is a “pan-blue” organization that is close to anti-independence political parties such as the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party).

In addition to using media with similar political beliefs to advocate for political interest, Taiwanese political parties also deploy astroturfing cyber armies to influence public opinion, sometimes by generating or amplifying fake information (Rauchfleisch & Chi, 2020). Rauchfleisch and Chi (2020) noted that Taiwan’s media system is what Chadwick characterized as a “dysfunctional hybridity,” a media system comprised of traditional and online media that harms a democratic society (Rauchfleisch & Chi, 2020; Russell & Chadwick, 2020).

3.2.2 The Chinese propaganda problem in Taiwan

Over the past decades, propaganda has long been a part of China’s strategies to “unify” Taiwan. Nevertheless, prior to the 2000s, Chinese propaganda toward Taiwan was viewed as “fruitless” to China’s “lack of understanding of the target audience” (Lai, 2007, p. 55). In contrast to China’s monotonous propaganda, Taiwanese media have offered a variety of genres, content, and political viewpoints since the government relaxed media controls and privatized the market in the late 1990s (Huang, 2019). But as the media environment has worsened and social media have become prevalent, the Taiwanese media system has faced grave challenges from Chinese propaganda and disinformation.

One instance occurred in 2018 when Taiwan held local elections for mayors in major cities. In the spring of 2018, multiple Taiwanese mainstream media outlets published news that China was

conducting a “large-scale military practice” in the Taiwan Strait. This kind of news was specifically sensitive to the year when elections were held and could sway election results. However, the media’s coverage was based only on news articles published on China’s state media website. Later, it was discovered that the information had been exaggerated propaganda from the Chinese government and that the drill had only been at a standard scale (Lin, 2022a).

Another event that also happened in 2018, the “Kansai Airport incident,” further exemplifies the problematic media system in Taiwan. This incident began with a Weibo post by an account based in China. The post stated that when a typhoon wrecked the Kansai Airport in Osaka, Japan, Taiwanese tourists identifying themselves as Chinese could be transported from the airport to other safer places with the Chinese embassy’s help. This information touched on the most sensitive national identity issue of the Taiwanese. Soon a Chinese-funded online media Guancha.cn (觀察者網) then forwarded this message on its website, which was also soon reposted to the message board of a popular Taiwanese Bulletin Board System (BBS). Taiwanese mainstream media rushed to cover the “news,” citing the online posts without vetting the facts. T.V. talk show hosts also picked up the topic, commented on the event, and attacked Taiwanese diplomats they thought should take responsibility. Moreover, even Chinese state media outlets further cited the Taiwanese media articles to attack the Taiwanese government (Lin, 2022a; Harnett & Su, 2021).

Soon after, online trolls and Taiwanese political influencers initiated political astroturfing and criticized Taiwanese diplomats in Osaka, Japan, for failing to assist stranded Taiwanese citizens at the airport. These unrelenting attacks ultimately led to the tragic suicide of a Taiwanese diplomat. It was eventually confirmed that the information concerning China assisting Taiwanese citizens with airport excavation was fabricated (Rauchfleisch & Chi, 2020; Shen, 2021; Lin, 2020). Rauchfleisch and Chi (2020) argued that the incident at Kansai International Airport highlights

two problems in Taiwan's dysfunctional hybrid media system. First, news organizations stress speed over quality and accuracy; second, the media have become a weapon for political interests. The Kansai Airport incident, the Taiwanese local election in 2018, and the Taiwanese presidential election in 2020 have provided opportunities to observe how propaganda pieces, especially those from China, circulated in Taiwan. Cole (July 29, 2020) argued that the media channels that China has employed to spread information to Taiwan include: Chinese state media, such as *People's Daily*, traditional Taiwanese media, social media, content farms (many of them based in Malaysia and operated by Chinese-speaking Malaysians), and Taiwanese influencers.

Based on the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential election observation, Shen (2021) established four modes to summarize how disinformation from China spread in Taiwan through these "information nodes." According to Shen, in the "propaganda" mode, the information is initiated by the Chinese central government, which shapes the tone of the propaganda and dictates that the state media must publish the information. The Taiwanese pro-China outlets will then quote the Chinese state media's articles in their own reports and broadcast the news.

The second mode is the "pink mode," in which Chinese local governments or individuals disseminate information on Weibo, Facebook, WeChat, YouTube, or live streaming platforms. What happened in the Kansai airport incident was an example of the "pink mode." In the third mode – the "content farm mode," the information could be delivered by Chinese companies who sign outsourcing contracts with the Chinese government, the overseas companies operating the Chinese content farm websites, or individual Taiwanese influencers who make videos for revenues. These companies or influencers do not really coordinate with each other. They are more like individual contractors working for the clients (who might be the Chinese local governments).

But a few of them still carry out political missions and use content-farm websites as well as social media to spread information (Shen, 2021).

The last one, the “collaboration mode,” is conducted as a part of the Chinese United Front operations (Shen, 2021). The Chinese United Front Work Department has recruited Taiwanese citizens through local groups or professional organizations. Different from the other three modes where the information can be more easily tracked or observed, the information in the last mode is mainly disseminated through private chat groups. In addition, agents in this mode could also use the information produced or circulated from the above three modes (Shen, 2021).

Shen (2021) pointed out that the difference between Russian and Chinese information warfare is that China uses a wide range of diverse units to spread information. These units are not necessarily officially affiliated; the patterns of information distribution are also incoherent. What makes it more difficult to detect China’s information attack is that some of the propaganda is produced by Taiwanese locals instead of foreign actors. Many of the disinformation pieces also bolster each other with their narratives and try to affect Taiwanese “cognitive frames” (Shen, 2021). Although clarifications from the Taiwanese government or timely verification by fact-checkers may stop some disinformation, others, such as conspiracy theories about COVID-19, could have possibly exerted long-term influence and divided society (Shen, 2021).

Besides the disinformation from China and its affiliated operations, Taiwan needs to tackle the false information created by domestic actors who are not linked to Chinese operations. For example, Taiwanese political parties or supporters have used similar routes to spread disinformation to serve their purposes. They could generate eye-catching false information on social media platforms and attract mainstream media’s attention. The media would then push the false information up the chain and amplify it. In the politically polarized (pro-China v. pro-

Independence) society, the opposition party would also attack the government's clarification press releases as "fake news" or fact-checking initiatives' verification as "untrustworthy" (Lin, 2019).

3.2.3 How does Taiwan combat China's propaganda and disinformation?

The issue faced by Taiwanese media highlights the dilemma for democratic countries: authoritarian governments have stifled dissident voices domestically and established a full-fledged propaganda machine online and offline, ambitiously expanding their global influence into democratic states. At the same time, democratic countries have witnessed a decline in media resilience and freedom as a result of extreme market competition and an abundance of online resources. Authoritarian propaganda organizations also exploit the openness of the internet, which is valued in democratic nations, to disseminate their messages and weaken public confidence in established institutions.

Having faced intense propaganda attacks from China and been ranked as "the world's biggest target for foreign information" for nine consecutive years by the V-DEM institute based in Sweden, Taiwan has developed tactics to fight against the information influence campaigns from China (Wang, 2022, August 26; Yang & Chin, March 19, 2022). These measures entail not only efforts from the government but also collaboration from civil society (Blanchette et al., 2021; Kuo, 2021; Huang, August 10, 2020; Wang, August 26, 2022; Hamacher, December 31, 2019).

For government policy and legislation, the Taiwanese government established a disinformation coordination team consisting of cyber security and law officials from several sectors (Kuo, 2021). In addition, the Legislative Yuan (Taiwan's legislative body) modified a number of laws to increase the penalties for spreading disinformation via traditional or social media during elections

and the COVID-19 pandemic (Blanchette et al., 2021).¹⁸ The recently enacted anti-infiltration law imposes a maximum jail term of five years on individuals who illegally accept funding from an “external hostile force” and engage in political campaigns or lobbying.¹⁹ Yet, these rules have also been criticized for limiting freedom of expression (Jansen, January 3, 2020).

During elections and the pandemic, the Taiwanese government also frequently held news conferences and issued statements to dispel false information and rumors. Sometimes they even created memes in the hopes that the clarification messages would become viral and reach more citizens (Lin, 2022).

Observers noted the role of Taiwanese civil society in the fight against Chinese propaganda and information, particularly the rise of fact-checking initiatives (Blanchette et al., 2021; Lin, 2022; Wang, August 26, 2022; Su & Li, 2023). The earliest Taiwanese fact-checking initiative, MyGoPen (麥擱騙), was established by a computer programmer in 2015 with the intention of assisting the elderly in countering online falsehoods. Another crowd-sourcing fact-checking platform Cofacts (真的假的) was founded in 2017. Online users could submit questions about suspicious information and request help from other users for verification. Taiwan FactCheck Center (台灣事實查核中心, TFC), launched in July 2018, was founded by former journalists who utilized journalistic practices to investigate and report fact-checking results. In addition, these three initiatives also collaborated with media watchdogs and social media companies such as LINE,

¹⁸ These amended laws are: Civil Servants Election and Recall Act(公職人員選舉罷免法), Presidential and Vice-Presidential Election and Recall Act(總統副總統選舉罷免法), Social Order Maintenance Act (社會秩序維護法), Special Act for Prevention, Relief and Revitalization Measures for Severe Pneumonia with Novel Pathogens (嚴重特殊傳染性肺炎防治及紓困振興特別條例) (Blanchette et al., 2021).

¹⁹ 台灣反滲透法 [Anti-Infiltration Act of Taiwan]. (2019). (台灣 [Taiwan]) Presidential Office.

Google, and Facebook to promote media literacy courses in schools and communities (Su & Li, 2023).

Did the above measures effectively help Taiwan fight against Chinese propaganda during elections and the COVID-19 pandemic? In the Freedom House 2022 Report *Beijing's Global Media Influence*, Taiwan was ranked first in both categories, “Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts” and “Local Resilience and Response” among the surveyed 30 countries. This indicates that Taiwan is the country that has suffered from the most severe influence campaigns from China but also the one that has the most robust defense. The report lists the measures that the Taiwanese government and civil society have taken to defend against the influence of China. It also points out that the Taiwanese were more aware of Chinese propaganda in recent years (Freedom House, 2022). In addition to the Freedom House report, Taiwan’s fight against Chinese disinformation also drew the attention of major Western news organizations, which highlighted Taiwan’s experiences and urged Western countries to learn from Taiwan (Huang, August 10, 2020; Wang, August 26, 2022; Sass, August 29, 2022).²⁰

Questions then emerge from this praise for Taiwan’s resistance to the Chinese information influence campaign: How did the organizations reach the conclusion that Taiwan was resilient to the influence of China? How did they conclude that Taiwan was able to resist China’s propaganda because of the laws and the collaborations among non-governmental organizations? It is hard to find clues in these news articles about how the effectiveness was assessed or how the causation was established. The *Washington Post* op-ed uses examples to showcase that some pro-China Taiwanese media organizations relocated to China or had their satellite T.V. license revoked

²⁰ For example, the op-ed piece published by the Washington Post uses the title: “Chinese disinformation is ascendant. Taiwan shows how we can defeat it” (Huang, August 10, 2020); An article on Foreign Policy is titled “Taiwan Is Beating Political Disinformation. The West Can Too” (Kerr & Phillips, November 11, 2020).

(Huang, August 10, 2020). Yet, these examples merely demonstrate that the Taiwanese government has taken actions; but they still fall short of showing the extent of China's influence. The Freedom House report *Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022* details the variables in the survey of influence and investigates whether the Chinese propaganda narratives have been shown in local media and affect audiences (Freedom House, 2022). Nevertheless, this report does not approach the issue by comparing content and narratives.²¹

Academic research on Chinese information influence on Taiwan, such as Shen's analysis (2021) of the four modes of China's disinformation dissemination in Taiwan, has offered an essential understanding of the flow of disinformation. But a comparison of media narratives is still missing from the picture. This missing element could be one of the most direct indicators of Chinese influence on Taiwanese media. This research attempts to solve the question of China's influence on Taiwanese media through qualitative content analysis and examines the influence of Chinese media on Taiwanese narratives on the origin of the COVID-19 virus as a case study. The next chapter will detail the methods and process of this research.

²¹ For the methodology adopted by the Freedom House *Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022* report, See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/beijing-global-media-influence/2022/authoritarian-expansion-power-democratic-resilience/methodology>

Chapter 4: Methodology

This research included a two-phase study to examine the influence of Chinese propaganda on Taiwanese media and answer the research questions of this dissertation. First, what are the Chinese state media's narratives of the COVID-19 origins, and how did the narratives change? What is the underlying worldview revealed by the narratives? Second, what are the narratives of Taiwanese media about the COVID-19 virus origin theory? How do the narratives of Taiwanese media overlap – or not -- with the narratives in the Chinese state media? Lastly, if there are similarities or differences, what are the factors leading to the similarities or differences between the narratives in Taiwanese and Chinese state media?

Based on these questions and the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review chapter, the researcher chose qualitative content analysis to investigate the narratives of COVID-19 virus origin theories presented in Chinese state media and Taiwanese media. This chapter will describe the rationale behind the methodology selection, research design, and challenges encountered in the research process.

4.1. Rationale for choosing qualitative content analysis

Krippendorff (2014) defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p.18). It is a research method to identify not only the manifest meaning of texts but also latent meanings or omitted elements. Moreover, content analysis can further reveal the relationships of the text to wider contexts (Puppis, 2019).

In the study of propaganda and disinformation, content analysis has been a primary research method (Lilleker and Surowiec, 2020). This method is especially useful in identifying propaganda strategies, information circulation patterns between old and new media, as well as political actors' communication techniques (Lilleker and Surowiec, 2020). For example, Seo (2014) explored the propaganda images of the Israel Defense Force and on Twitter during the 2012 Israeli–Hamas Conflict and compared the themes and frames of the two sides. King et al. (2017) analyzed online posts by Chinese internet commentators and revealed the strategies deployed by the Chinese government to distract attention from criticisms of the government. Research conducted by Faris et al. (2017) explored the news coverage during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. In this research, Faris et al. examined the online sources referenced and the themes of the content to demonstrate different journalistic practices used by supporters of Trump and Clinton both in mainstream and social media.

Content analysis as a communication research method has been juxtaposed with other related research methods, such as textual analysis. Scholars have also debated whether content analysis should be divided into quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Frey et al. (2000) included content analysis under the umbrella research method “textual analysis” with other research approaches that researchers use to describe and interpret the characteristics of the content. They further made distinctions between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. While quantitative content analysis selects, codes, and categorizes texts, as well as analyzes data to test the hypothesis, qualitative content analysis is even more interested in the *latent meaning* associated with the times that the variable occurs (Frey et al., 2000).

Schreier (2012) pointed out that at the early stage of the development of content analysis, the quantitative approach defines this research method. As Bernard Berelson (1952) stated in the

classic textbook *Content Analysis in Communication Research*: “Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and *quantitative* description of the manifest content of communication” (p.18, *Italic emphasis added by the researcher*). But other scholars challenged the notion and contended that a qualitative approach would generate more insights into research, such as propaganda analysis that examines how certain phrases are strategically deployed in some contexts (Schreier, 2012).

Other scholars also point out that although quantitative content analysis can excavate useful information with the help of statistical tools, it is merely able to show surface meaning and could neglect important contexts beyond the texts (Puppis, 2019; Lilleker and Surowiec, 2020). Krippendorff (2004) also cautioned researchers who look for specific political information that the quantitative indicators could be “extremely insensitive and shallow” and suggested, “[q]ualitative analyses can be systematic, reliable, and valid as well” (p.10). For research that aims to understand texts from the prospects of contexts and make inferences beyond the text, scholars recommended that qualitative content analysis would be an ideal path (Puppis, 2019).

However, with the development of content analysis research methods, scholars also agree that many content analyses employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches. After all, both approaches involve the process of systematically assigning codes to the artifacts examined, such as texts, pictures, or videos, analyzing patterns and relationships, or identifying meanings in the artifacts (Riffe et al., 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). As a result, some researchers contend that the line between quantitative and qualitative content analysis is “artificial” and vague (Schreier, 2012, p.14).

But Schreier (2012) argued that there are still differences between qualitative and quantitative content analysis. In addition to the often-mentioned difference that the qualitative approach

focuses more on latent meaning, the qualitative content analysis also needs more contexts and references when doing analysis and is more data-driven when developing coding frames. Other researchers, such as Hsieh and Shannon (2005), also developed more detailed analysis approaches within the qualitative content analysis of how to examine and interpret text data.

The general steps for a qualitative content analysis start with a systematic reading of texts and noting the themes and patterns in the content. Next, the researchers decide on codes that could be labeled to the data and start assigning the codes to research units, which could be whole articles, paragraphs, or just sentences. In the last step, the researchers organize the patterns and themes, making interpretations based on the researchers' knowledge of scholarship (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; McKinnon, 2013; Puppis, 2019). It might seem that the research process of being familiar with the research data, creating and assigning codes, and systematically assembling the codes is a linear path, but Puppis (2019) pointed out that the journey of qualitative content analysis could be circuitous. For example, at the stage of creating code books, researchers could find new patterns and go back to revise codes and previous coding results.

In fact, there are different approaches to creating codes, and the choice of approach is related to what researchers want to discover from the study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) listed three types of approaches. In the inductive approach, researchers immerse themselves in the data, pay attention to notable words in the text, observe the emergence of codes, and see how the codes link to each other. This approach is useful when researchers aim to develop new concepts. The second approach is more directed, in which the codes have been established by previous studies or can be developed by theoretical frameworks. This approach would be helpful in studies whose goal is to enrich or find supporting evidence for existing theories. Nevertheless, the established codes could possibly limit the direction and findings of the research.

The third approach, the summative content analysis, hopes to analyze the latent meaning of the content and understand “the contextual use of the words and content” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1283). This research approach starts with counting the frequency of words, phrases, or patterns, but it goes further to examine how these words and phrases are used and whether the usage differs by variables. In the last step, researchers associate the frequencies of words, patterns, and usages with broader contexts to identify latent meaning. For research that aims to connect texts with actors’ backgrounds and broader social-political contexts, the summative approach enables researchers to identify the outside elements that shape the content.

For this study, the researcher planned to investigate the worldviews behind the COVID-19 origin theory narratives in the Chinese and Taiwanese media by identifying the latent meaning in the media content. In addition, the researcher also intended to connect the texts with broader contexts, such as the background information of news outlets, to understand how the media content was influenced. The qualitative content analysis method and the approaches suggested by Hsieh and Shannon that takes note of the meaning and contexts of the studied objects are thus valuable for the inquiry of this research.

Here, the author also wants to briefly explain the approach for the development of codes assigned to the data in this research. As the researcher showed in the previous discussion, the choice of approach will rely on research questions and purposes. The researcher already had research questions in mind. Several studies have also explored Chinese COVID-19 narratives and can serve as part of the foundation knowledge on this topic.²² Therefore, instead of immersing oneself in the

²² Before the researcher started conducting this research, there had been multiple studies on the Chinese COVID-19 narratives, for example, DFRLab. (2021). *Weaponized: How rumors about COVID-19’s origins led to a narrative arms race*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Weaponized-How-rumors-about-COVID-19s-origins-led-to-a-narrative-arms-race.pdf>; Hagström, L., & Gustafsson, K. (2021). The limitations of strategic narratives: The Sino-American struggle over the meaning of COVID-19. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 42(4), 415–449. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1984725>; Doublethink Lab. (2021, May 6).

texts and observing the emergence of codes, the researcher would first use existing categories or codes as a guide to examine the content. Yet, the researcher was also aware of the caution in Hsieh and Shannon's study (2005) that adopting preexisting codes could possibly constrain new research findings. Therefore, the researcher decided to use an approach that includes "deductive (theory-driven)" and "inductive (data-driven) steps to develop codes (Puppis, 2019).

For the deductive (theory-driven) step, Puppis (2019) recommended that researchers first identify the codes of interest and then employ their research questions and theoretical frameworks as a guide for developing codes. As for the inductive (data-driven) step, researchers turn to focus on elements in texts that could answer the research questions. Throughout the process, researchers would undergo a trial phase where the initial codes would be modified when researchers identify additional new categories. Thus, the process would be circuitous.

The approach suggested by Puppis provides a flexible qualitative content analysis method. On the one hand, the deductive step based on the fruit of previous research could continue the existing lineage of knowledge by employing codes derived from prior discoveries. On the other hand, the inductive phase would prevent previous codes from limiting the breadth of inquiry and may facilitate the discovery of new patterns or themes, thereby further enhancing the understanding of the studied topic.

The researcher thus decided to use the theoretical framework and codes that previous studies on strategic narratives have generated. The reason is that the existing literature in this field has offered a valuable framework for analyzing how narratives exert influence and assessing how countries respond to information influence from abroad (Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021; Hagström &

The Chinese Infodemic in Taiwan. Medium. <https://medium.com/doublethinklab/the-chinese-infodemic-in-taiwan-25e9ac3d941e>

Gustafsson, 2019, 2021). Meanwhile, the researcher also closely examined the text data and identified new elements. The researcher will detail the code development process in the next section.

4.2 The theoretical framework for research design and the development of the coding scheme

The theory of strategic narratives is one of the theoretical lenses that this research used to examine and compare content in Chinese and Taiwanese media. As the researcher discussed in the literature review chapter, scholars studying strategic narratives examined content to identify “master narratives” in stories told by nations. These stories share similar plots, describe individuals or entities in the news stories as heroes or villains, and deliver lessons to audiences. Countries also use strategic narratives to shape audiences’ understanding of events through the repetition of identical storylines (Halverson et al., 2011; Allenby, 2017; Colley, 2019).

Studies analyzing strategic narratives produced by Russian and Chinese media provide useful frameworks for this research. For instance, Wagnsson and Barzanje (2021) observed how Russian media *Sputnik* covered events related to Sweden from 2014 to 2018 and how the stories related to each other. The elements in the media content coded by Wagnsson and Barzanje include the events when the stories emerge, the actors presented in the news stories, as well as roles (such as victims, heroes, and villains) assigned to actors. Moreover, they looked into how the problem was defined and suggested solutions. In Hagström & Gustafsson’s analysis (2021) of the COVID-19 pandemic strategic narratives promoted by China and the United States, the authors focused on four areas: who the main protagonists in the content were, how the protagonists were portrayed, the sequence or the causality of events, and the lessons learned from events.

Overall, the content can be coded and analyzed from the following aspects: the *temporal* (time elements) relation of the stories or narratives, the *protagonists* in the narratives, the *frames* of events, and the *lessons* the narrators want to deliver to the audience. The four aspects will become the principal categories of codes of this research. In addition to the four aspects, the research also adds another aspect – *the individuals or media outlets referenced* in the articles to examine the possible sources of influence. In addition, the researcher kept records of the dates and news outlets that published the articles.

Based on the qualitative content analysis approach recommended by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Puppis (2019), as well as the strategic narratives framework developed by Halverson et al. (2011), Wagnsson and Barzanje (2021), and Hagström and Gustafsson (2021), the researcher decided to conduct two phases of research:

1. Phase 1: Analysis of Chinese state media

The researcher analyzed the COVID-19 virus origin narratives in the media content of Chinese state media.

In this phase, the researcher used the principal coding categories (time, important elements, frames, lessons, referenced individuals, and media outlets) that had been developed by previous research on strategic narratives. These “principal categories of codes” include:

- A. Time – Publication dates of articles in the corpus. The researcher also noted significant events that occurred around the time when the articles were published. For example, the time when the WHO published their investigation results of COVID-19 origin or when Biden proposed a second round of investigation in China.
- B. Media outlets that published the articles.

C. Important Elements – these categories of the codes were developed based on the above-mentioned strategic narrative studies. However, the items under the categories also were inducted after close readings of the content. For example, “protagonists” is a category code that Hagström and Gustafsson (2021) used in their study to identify Chinese and American narratives. This current research adopted this category code “protagonists.” After reading texts from Chinese media articles on the COVID-19 virus origin, the researcher found Dr. Anthony Fauci was a recurrent character in the articles. The researcher thus established a code “Fauci” under the category “protagonists.”

There are three category codes of important elements in this research:

- a. Sources: individuals and media quoted by the articles
- b. Protagonists: people or entities repeatedly mentioned in the articles or were assigned specific roles in the articles
- c. Distinctive words: notable words or concepts constantly appear in the articles

D. Frames – The main points that the author presented in each paragraph of the articles. The codes under this principal category code were identified after close readings of paragraphs in articles. For example, one of the most common paragraph frames in Chinese state media articles is “The U.S. could be the place where the virus originated.”

E. Lessons – The most important things that the authors of the articles wanted to convey to the readers. The codes of lessons were identified by close readings of articles. For example, one of the most common lessons in Chinese state media articles is also “the U.S. could be the place where the virus originated.”

Figure 4.1 shows the hierarchy of codes, while Table 4.1 illustrates how the codes were developed. When the researcher developed the codes of frames and lessons, she ensured that each code was distinct and would not overlap.

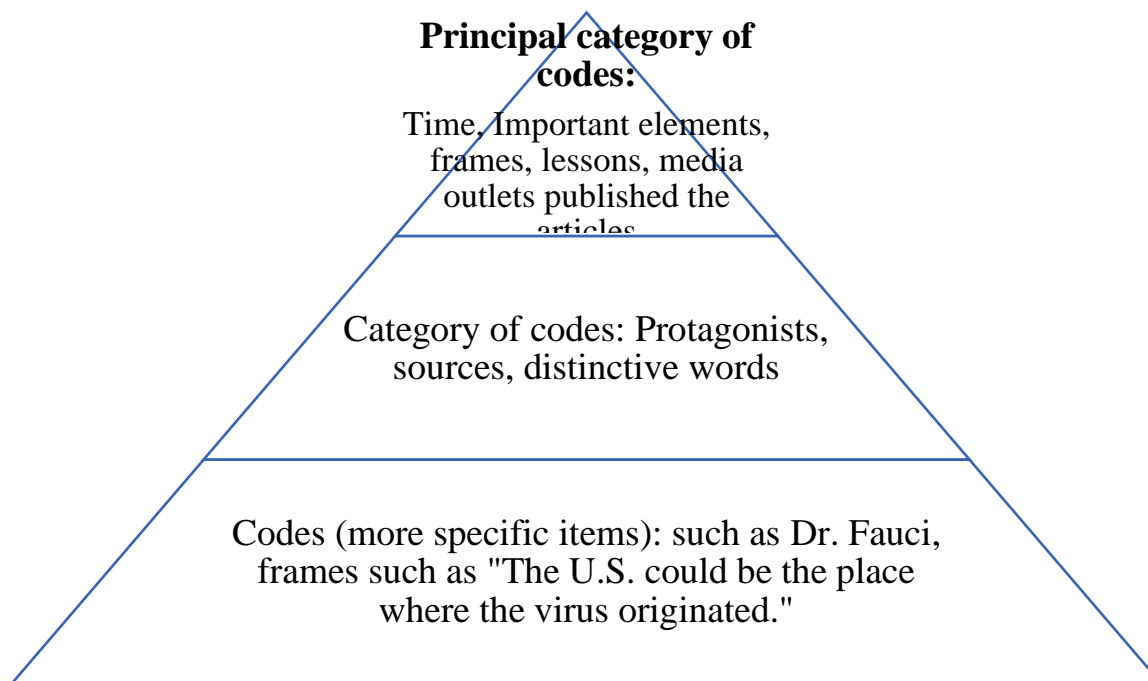


Figure 4.1 Hierarchy of codes

Table 4.1 How the codes used in analyzing Chinese state media articles were developed

Hierarchy of codes	Examples of codes	How the codes were developed
Principal category of codes	Important elements	Based on theoretical frameworks developed by previous studies on strategic narratives
Category of codes	Sources, protagonists, distinctive words	Based on theoretical frameworks developed by previous studies on strategic narratives
Individual codes	Dr. Anthony Fauci	Developed by the researcher's reading of data (texts of articles)

2. The second phase – the analysis of Taiwanese media

The researcher used the coding scheme that was established from the investigation of the COVID-19 virus origin theory narratives in the Chinese state media. The first-phase investigation has identified important elements, frames, and lessons from the Chinese state media articles. In the second phase, which examined the narratives about the COVID-19 virus origin in the Taiwanese media, the researcher adopted the elements, frames, and themes identified in the Chinese content as the basic codes. When the researcher read paragraphs from the Taiwanese media articles, she first made a judgment about whether the elements and frames fit into the existing codes. If the researcher could not find corresponding codes, she created new codes. As a result, the principal category of codes (time, media outlets, important elements, frames, and lessons) and category of codes (sources, protagonists, and distinct words) in the Taiwanese media coding scheme are the same as the ones in the Chinese media coding scheme. But the lowest-level codes would vary since they were created after close readings of the Taiwanese media articles.

With this coding scheme combining the codes generated from the first-phase research and newly-created codes created after reading the Taiwanese articles (see Figure 4.2), the researcher could identify the narratives in the Taiwanese media that echo the ones in the Chinese state media and the narratives that are unique to the Taiwanese media. By comparing the similarities and differences in the narratives and the sources quoted in the media content, the researcher could further assess whether and how the Taiwanese media content was influenced by information originating from other countries.

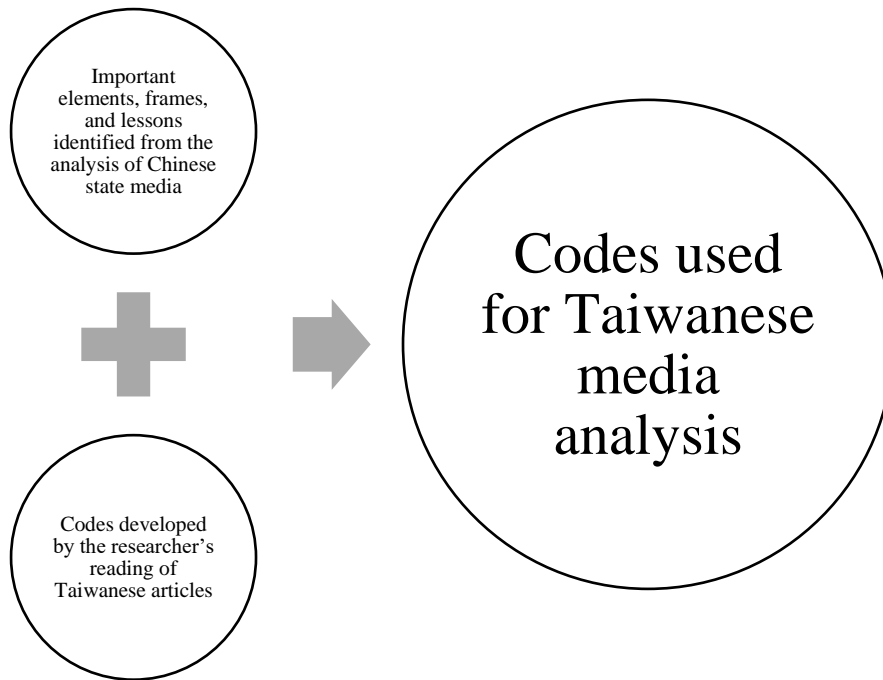


Figure 4.2 How codes were developed for the Taiwanese media analysis

For the coding books of Chinese and Taiwanese media analysis, see Appendices 1 and 2.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Data collection for the Chinese state media articles

The selection of the Chinese media is based on the following criteria: 1) the media outlet represents the mainstream media discourses of the COVID-19 virus origin theory; and 2) the media outlet targets overseas audiences who consume media content in the Chinese language.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the Chinese media system, particularly under Chinese leader Xi Jinping's rule, has been more restrictive than before (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). Chinese media outlets are now required to adhere more strictly to the directives of the Chinese Communist Party. State-run publications, such as the *People's Daily* and the *Global Times*, thus set the tone

of news reporting for other national and local media to follow. The researcher chose to analyze articles from:

People's Daily Overseas Edition: *People's Daily* is “the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party” (Qian, 2020) and sets the tone of news narratives that the Party demands the official media follow. To serve “Chinese living overseas, in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, students and workers who live in foreign countries, and those who care about China,” the paper has issued overseas editions since 1985 (A Brief Introduction to People's Daily, n.d.). The “About” page on its website states that the overseas edition is “a window for people residing abroad to understand China, and China to understand the world” (A Brief Introduction to People's Daily, n.d.).

Global Times: *Global Times* is a branch of the *People's Daily* and claims itself to be “the most authoritative international news reporting in China” (About Huanqiu.com, n.d) and brands its website as “the primary information-sharing platform chosen by the Chinese to learn about the world events, and one of the Chinese media outlets mostly cited by the overseas media” (About Huanqui.com, n.d.). Although the *Global Times* has amassed a wide readership in China, media scholars have described the reporting of the *Global Times* as “sensational nationalist” (Wang and Chew, 2016).

The researcher used the *WiseNews* database ((慧科中文報紙數據庫) to search for articles published during the time frame of this research (January 1, 2020, through June 30, 2022) by employing the following keywords: “新冠肺炎” (COVID-19) and “起源” (origin) and “病毒” (virus). After receiving the search results, the researcher manually filtered out the articles that were not relevant to the COVID-19 origin theory, for example, the ones that discussed medical treatments. The researcher chose to keep the articles that mentioned the origin place of the virus.

The rationale is that conspiracy theories could be sporadically dispersed into disparate accounts instead of being systematically told in single-focus articles. In addition, the researcher could observe the development of the narratives over time. The researcher ultimately selected 94 articles from *People's Daily* (19 pieces) and *Global Times* (75 pieces).

4.3.2 Data collection for Taiwanese media articles

The selection of the Taiwanese media sources for this analysis is based on the following criteria: 1) the media content should represent the narratives of COVID-19 virus origin theories in Taiwanese media outlets; and 2) the media should have a wide reach and influence on Taiwanese audiences. In other words, the media content should be able to reflect what average Taiwanese audiences receive in their daily media environment.

The researcher consulted the *Digital News Report 2022* published by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to decide the media types to include in the research. Since 2012, the Reuters Institute has conducted investigations on how audiences in different countries receive news. This report has included Taiwan since 2017 and provided information on the ranking of the audience's major sources (online, TV, social media, or print) of news and the weekly reach of news brands (The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2017).

According to the *Digital News Report 2022*, the internet has become the most important news source for Taiwanese audiences, followed by TV, social media platforms, and print media (See Figure 4.3). Notably, all the traditional TV news channels and newspapers in Taiwan, such as *TVBS News*, *United Daily News*, and *Apple Daily*, have also published their reporting online both on their own websites and on news aggregators such as *Yahoo! News*. As a result, traditional TV and print media have wide weekly reach to audiences through their websites and online news aggregators (See Figure 4.4).

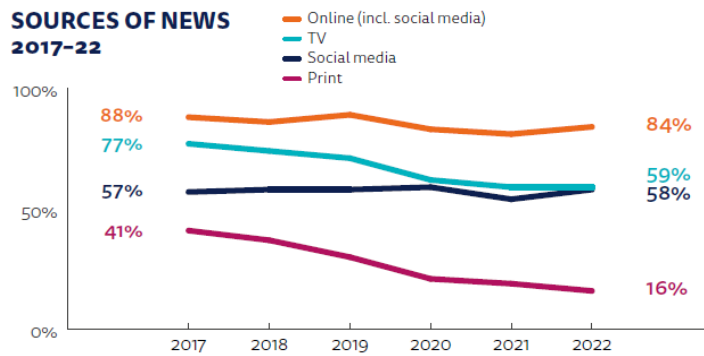


Figure 4.3: Major news sources for people living in Taiwan (Source: Digital News Report 2022)

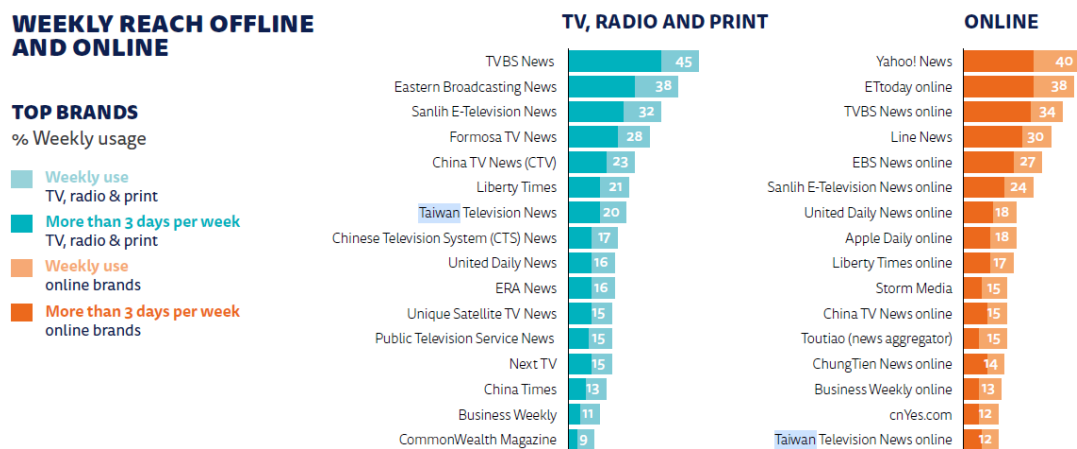


Figure 4.4: Major News Brands in Taiwan (Source: Digital News Report 2022)

When considering news outlets for data sources, the researcher chose outlets based on factors of the Taiwanese media environment. The factors include the ranking of the weekly reach to audiences, the history and political backgrounds of the outlets (especially the outlets' attitudes toward political tension between China and Taiwan),²³ and the availability of news articles. As a

²³ Media bias in Taiwanese media is a broad reflection of the media owners' national identities and political ideology (Rauchfleisch, A., & Chi, 2020). *United Daily News* (and its *World Journal*, the UDN's branch published in North America), *TVBS News*, and the outlets under the WantWant conglomerate (*China Times*, *China TV News*, *ChungTien (CTi TV) News*) are "pan-blue," meaning the owners and the content of the news outlets are more Beijing friendly. *Liberty Times*, *Formosa TV News*, and *Sanli E-TV News* (SETN) are considered "pan-green," meaning the owners and the content of the news outlets oppose unification with China (Chang and Chen, 2015; Rauchfleisch, A., & Chi, 2020). In addition to the organizations mentioned above with a covert political bent, other media are not

result, the researcher decided to collect data from the following traditional TV and print news outlets: *United Daily News/World Journal*, *Liberty Times*, *China Times*, *TVBS News*, and *Apple Daily* (Taiwan).²⁴ It is also worth noting that *Apple Daily* (Taiwan), which was once one of the most popular news media in Taiwan, was shut down in August 2022 due to the arrest of its founder Jimmy Lai by the Chinese government for advocating for democracy in Hong Kong (Hioe, 2022).²⁵

In addition to the above print and T.V. outlets, this research also included online news media such as *Ettoday online*, *Storm Media*, and *CnYes.com*, which are included on the top brand list in the Digital News Report.

As the *Digital News Report 2022* demonstrates, *Yahoo! News* is Taiwan's top online media outlet. *Yahoo! News* differs from other online news websites because, in addition to its news team, *Yahoo! News* also serves as an aggregator collecting news articles from a wide range of other media outlets through content-sharing agreements. As a result, articles from lesser-known news websites could still reach a vast audience through *Yahoo! News*. Therefore, the researcher decided to include news articles not only from the above-mentioned major news outlets but on *Yahoo! News* platforms as well.

As for Taiwanese TV talk shows, the researcher chose talk shows broadcast during primetime (8-10 pm from Monday to Friday) from the TV stations ranked as the top TV stations in the weekly

classified as either pan-green or pan-blue. To the researcher's knowledge, academic studies on a clear classification of the pan-green and pan-blue media in Taiwan have been scarce. The above categorization is based on news and academic articles discussing news reporting and the media system in Taiwan, as well as the researcher's personal knowledge as a citizen who grew up and worked as a journalist in Taiwan.

²⁴ The parent company of *Apple Daily*, Next Media Limited, owned several publications in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Among the publications are *Apple Daily* (Hong Kong) and *Apple Daily* (Taiwan). The two *Apple Daily* belonged to separate subsidiaries and were operated by different editorial teams (Wang, 2021).

²⁵ It would be difficult to label the political bent of *Apple Daily* (Taiwan) by the "pan-green" or "pan-blue" classification since the organization's owner Jimmy Lai positioned *Apple Daily* (Taiwan) as a market-oriented tabloid. However, Lai and *Apple Daily* are famous for their stand opposing the Chinese Communist Party government (Chang and Chen, 2015).

reach list of the *Digital News Report 2022*. Considering the popularity and the availability of the data, four T.V. talk shows were chosen:

Situation Room (少康戰情室) produced by TVBS

Ariel on Show (這不是新聞) produced by EBC

Taiwan Frontline (台灣最前線) produced by Formosa TV News (FTV)

Taiwan! Go for It! (台灣向前行) produced by Formosa TV News (FTV)

To make the research results of Taiwanese media content comparable to the Chinese state media, the researcher searched the database with the same search keywords used when collecting articles from the Chinese state media. These keywords are “新冠肺炎” (COVID-19) and “起源” (origin), and “病毒” (virus). The data’s timeframe (January 1, 2020 -June 30, 2022) is also identical to the data timeframe of the Chinese state media data.²⁶ The *WiseNews* database ((慧科中文報紙數據庫), which is also the database source for the previous investigation of the Chinese state media articles, contains articles from the Taiwanese media outlets that the researcher has identified above, except for *Apple Daily*.

When the researcher collected data for this research, *Apple Daily* kept most of its news articles online and made them searchable and accessible. The researcher was able to secure 20 *Apple Daily* articles relevant to the virus origin theory of COVID-19. However, the arrest of the owner Jimmy Lai by the Chinese government has led to the demise of *Apple Daily* both in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The news articles are no longer available through web searches since September 2022 after the shutdown of the *Apple Daily* website.

²⁶ The researcher used these terms in Traditional Chinese to search the database. Actually, the written characters of these terms were identical in Traditional and Simplified Chinese.

The *WiseNews* database does not collect Taiwanese TV talk shows, either. However, these shows have uploaded episodes to YouTube and can be searched on YouTube. The researcher obtained four episodes and transcribed the conversations between the host and guests. While the Chinese study did not include talk shows, this study was concerned with establishing the propaganda goals of the Chinese media. As such, using the smaller range of media sources in China, which has a much more controlled media environment than Taiwan, was a reasonable approach.

After having gathered the search results from the *WiseNews* database, *Apple Daily* website, and YouTube, the researcher manually filtered out articles that were not relevant to the COVID-19 origin theory, such as medical advice. Following the same rationale the researcher used when selecting Chinese state media articles, the researcher decided to keep content that mentioned the possible origin places of the virus because conspiracy theories could be sporadically dispersed into disparate accounts instead of being systematically told through a limited set of focused articles. In addition, the articles will help observe the development of the narratives over time.

This research ultimately examined 690 articles and four talk show conversations. The number of articles and transcriptions²⁷ by each media outlet is shown in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.5.

²⁷ The number of talk shows transcription is combined with the number of articles produced by the same production company. For example, the Situation Room talk show transcription is counted as the content produced by TVBS.

Table 4.2 Number of articles of each media outlet in this research

Media outlets	Number of matching cases
Liberty Times(自由時報)	214
Agence France-Presse(法新社)	2
Apple Daily(蘋果日報)	20
BBC 中文	5
Business Today(今周刊)	1
China Times (Including CtWant)	54
CNA(中央社)	51
CNYes	1
CTS(華視)	4
EBC(東森新聞)	8
Deutsche Welle(德國之聲)	8
Ettoday.com	50
Fount Media(放言)	1
FTV(民視)	7
GVM(遠見雜誌)	1
Newtalk(新頭殼)	104
NowNews	4
Radio France Internationale (RFI)	3
Radio Taiwan International (RTI)	5
SETN(三立新聞網)	35
Shin/CMmedia(信傳媒)	11
Storm(風傳媒)	13
Think Tank(思想坦克)	1
TVBS	21
Yahoo! News(奇摩新聞)	9
UpMedia (上報)	16
UDN (World Journal (世界日報))	26
Kanzhongguo (看中國)	1
People Media(民報)	2
Mirror(鏡傳媒)	14
BCC(中廣新聞網)	1
WatChinese(看雜誌)	1

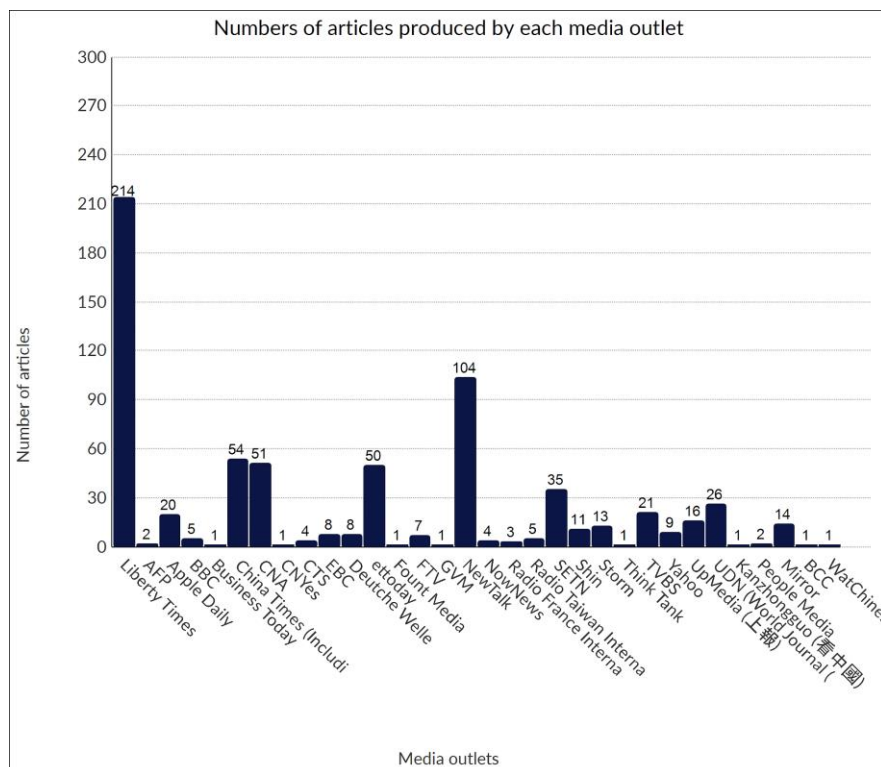


Figure 4.5 Numbers of articles produced by each Taiwanese media outlet

4.4 Data Analysis

All the articles collected from the database were uploaded to NVivo for analysis. The researcher coded articles according to the coding scheme: important elements (sources, protagonists, Distinct words), the dates the articles were published, the media outlets that published the articles, the frames of each paragraph (main points that the author presented in each paragraph), and lessons of each article. A paragraph may contain multiple frames and lesson codes. For example, a paragraph may contain a frame “the virus originated from the U.S.” and the lesson “Western countries blemished China.”

The researcher conducted two rounds of reading articles. In the first round, the researcher skimmed the articles and labeled publication dates and news outlets that published the articles. In the second round, the researcher examined each piece carefully, recognized important elements, and assigned codes of frames to each paragraph and lessons to the entire article. The articles examined in this research were published in Traditional Chinese (used in Taiwan) or Simplified Chinese (used in China). The analysis process also required the researcher to apply knowledge of history, the social-political situations, and the media environment in Taiwan and China for coding judgment. As a former journalist who was raised, educated, and worked in Taiwan, the researcher was capable of using her expertise in Taiwanese media and society as well as her knowledge of relations among Taiwan, China, and the U.S. to conduct the research.

The second round of the reading and coding process was conducted by the researcher and the other coder. The other coder is also a native Mandarin speaker, grew up in Taiwan, and is familiar with the political situation between Taiwan and China. The coder followed the instructions from the researcher and coded 60 articles with the coding scheme prepared by the researcher. The percentage of the intercoder agreement is 96%.

After finishing assigning codes to texts, the researcher began the analysis process. The researcher followed the “secondary-cycle coding” steps recommended by Sarah J. Tracy (2013, p.194). In this research stage, the researcher conducted an analytical examination of the codes. According to Tracy, this is a process in which a researcher “beings to organize, synthesize, and categorize them [the codes] into interpretive concepts” (p.194). During the process, the researcher systematically grouped related codes together “under a hierarchical ‘umbrella’ category that makes conceptual sense” (p.195) and observed emerging patterns.

4.4.1 The process of analyzing articles from Chinese state media

In the stage of analyzing articles from Chinese state media, several codes under the category of codes (protagonists, sources, distinct words) were identified. For example, the code “protagonists” category includes famous individuals, former U.S. President Donald Trump and former U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. There are also roles, such as victims and malicious actors, assigned in the articles. Another category of code, “distinctive words” (words or concepts that constantly appear in the articles), became codes such as “politicization” [政治化] and “conspiracy theory” [陰謀論]. Figure 4.6 shows the notable protagonists and words identified from the Chinese state media articles.

Protagonists	Distinctive words
Donald Trump Michael Pompeo Dr. Anthony Fauci Malicious persons US followers Victims Good persons	Conspiracy theories Politicize Throw the pot Defamation (and other similar words such as "blemish") Lies and rumors Immoral Shameless Villains Great power

Figure 4.6 Codes identified under the categories of code “Protagonists” and “Distinct words”

Regarding the frames, a hierarchy of frames emerged after the researcher grouped related frames under “umbrella categories,” as suggested by Tracy (2013). First, the codes of frames were adjusted as “subframes.” Then the researcher repeated the grouping process and assembled “subframes” under a higher category “main frames.” The “main frames” could then be aggregated

into three “themes.” To sum up, the hierarchy of the themes and frames is as follows: Themes → main frames → subframes.

The codes of lessons were analyzed following the same steps as frames.

Figure 4.7 is an example that illustrates the relationship among subframes, main frames, and themes.

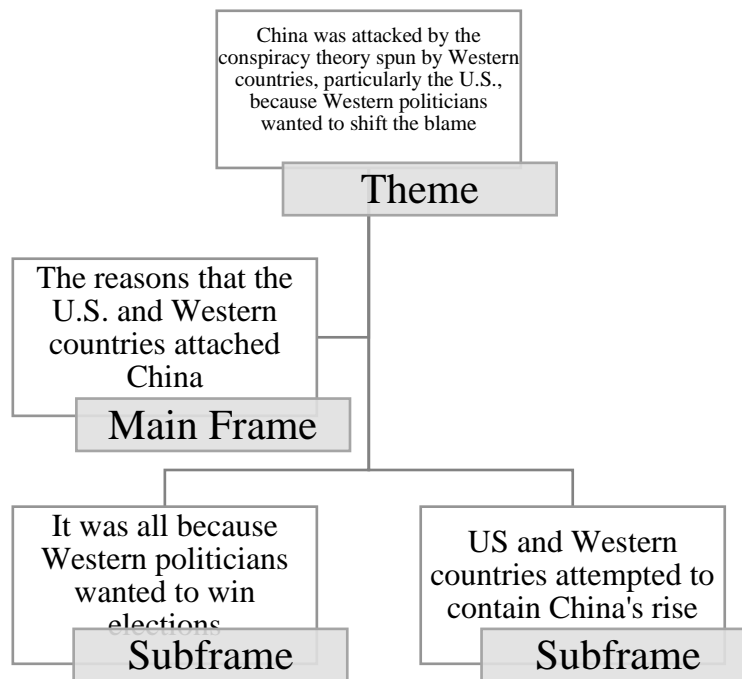


Figure4.7 An example of the relationship among Themes, Main frames, and Subframes

4.4.2 The process of analyzing articles from Taiwanese media

When analyzing articles from Taiwanese media, the researcher repeated the steps employed in analyzing Chinese state media. After finishing the coding process, the researcher examined the codes, grouped subframes, and aggregated main frames into themes.

As the researcher mentioned previously, this study aims to investigate the narratives in the Taiwanese media that echo the Chinese state media as well as discover ones that are unique to the Taiwanese media. Therefore, when analyzing Taiwanese media articles, the researchers also categorized the frames and lessons into two main groups: “narratives echoing the Chinese state media” and “narratives unique in the Taiwanese state media.”

The codes and hierarchy of the themes and frames in the group “narratives echoing the Chinese state media” follow the same framework in the Chinese state media investigation: **Themes** (for example, “the virus came from the U.S. or Europe. The bio labs in the Fort Detrick army base in the U.S. was the prime suspect”) → **main frames** (for example, “The origin of the virus”) → **subframes** (“The virus might originate from the U.S. and Europe”).

The hierarchy of the themes and frames in the “narratives unique in the Taiwanese media” is similar, although the codes are different from the codes in the analysis of the Chinese state media: **Themes** (for example, “the origin of the virus”) → **main frames** (for example, “the virus might originate from China”) → **subframes** (for example, “The virus might be from the Wuhan lab”).

The codes of lessons were analyzed following the same steps as frames. The researcher will discuss how the themes, frames, and important elements shape the narratives of the COVID-19 virus origin in the Chinese state media in the next chapter and then examine the similarities and differences between Chinese state media and Taiwanese media in Chapter Six.

4.5 Research challenges and reflection

The researcher encountered several challenges during the research process and needed to make decisions. This section reflects on these challenges and explains the rationales behind the decisions.

The first issue that the researcher faced was the loss of data, specifically the lack of a full archive of the articles from *Apple Daily*. The internet has increased the accessibility of articles. Nevertheless, many items can be eliminated in the blink of an eye. The *Apple Daily* (Taiwan) was previously one of the largest and most popular newspapers in Taiwan but halted publication in 2022 when the Chinese government imprisoned its owner, Jimmy Lai (Chang, 2022). Thus, the *Apple Daily* servers were shut down and all previously accessible articles are no longer available online. In addition, although *Apple Daily* played a significant part in the history of Taiwanese and Hong Kong journalism, its articles were not included in the major Taiwanese and Chinese news publication databases. The loss of all the past *Apple Daily* articles is a significant loss for journalism researchers in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Although some volunteers claimed to have saved the *Apple Daily* articles, researchers must first learn that an *Apple Daily* database *exists* and then take considerable effort to *retrieve* it. Moreover, who knows how long the database maintained by individual volunteers can last?

Fortunately, the researcher was able to secure the *Apple Daily* articles before the servers were shut down. However, the shutdown and disappearance of the historical content of a key media outlet highlight the dilemma faced by those who study media of authoritarian or high-risk political environments.

The second issue was whether the researcher should have employed network analysis to examine how the Taiwanese media referenced international news sources, including the Chinese media. At

first, the researcher believed network analysis could illuminate the influence of the Chinese state media on Taiwanese media by showing the flow of information. However, the researcher found that the visualization features in NVivo could illustrate how news sources were used in the narratives. The researcher, therefore, decided to use NVivo instead of network analysis.

Chapter 5: How to brew conspiracy theories: Findings and analysis of Chinese state media narratives on the origin of the COVID-19 virus

This chapter presents the findings from the first phase of this study: the content of the *People's Daily* and the *Global Times* regarding the theory of the origin of the COVID-19 virus. The goal is to answer the following questions: What are the Chinese state media's narratives on the origin of COVID-19, and how did these narratives evolve from January 2020 to June 2022? What worldview do the narratives reveal?

Through an investigation of the content from the two Chinese state news outlets, patterns of Chinese narratives around the origin of the COVID-19 virus are revealed. Moreover, the research findings demonstrate how the Chinese government and state media bolstered and propagated conspiracy theories. In contrast to cases in the United States, where most conspiracy theories developed organically, the creation of authoritarian-led conspiracy theories involves a state-supported campaign, coordination among various participants in the hybrid media system, and the repetition of coined terms and simplified, but distinctive protagonists. In this chapter, the researcher will show how the Chinese government used the narratives in conspiracy theory as part of its propaganda to define the global event and shape the COVID-origin discourse on the international stage.

5.1 Studies of the Chinese narratives of COVID-19 virus origin theories

Since the late 2019 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, a number of studies have examined the narratives produced by Chinese media and internet users (DFRLab, 2021; Molter and DiResta, 2020; Hagstrom and Gustafsson, 2021; The Secret Labs conspiracy, 2020;

DoubleThink Lab, 2021). These studies concentrate on narratives before the beginning of 2021 and largely stop at broad categories without investigating more complex elements, such as how individual narratives have accumulated to form a larger picture of COVID-19 origin conspiracy theories. Nonetheless, the extant observations provide an excellent starting point for analyzing the evolution of the narratives.

As prior studies have pointed out, in the first few weeks of 2020, a significant proportion of Chinese media and social media posts praised the performance of the Chinese government in preventing the spread of the virus. This series of articles lauded China as a global hero for shipping medical supplies to other nations or that China fought the COVID battle to earn the time for other countries to prepare for the disease (DFRLab, 2021; Molter and DiResta, 2020; Hagstrom and Gustafsson, 2021). The articles published at this time discussed the origin of the virus and did not shy away from acknowledging that the virus may have originated from the Hunan Seafood market in Wuhan (DFRLab, 2021). But shortly after American politicians, media, and political commentators blamed China as the source of the COVID-19 virus, the Chinese media adopted a different tone (DFRLab, 2021). The tweets from Chinese diplomats Zhao Lijiang and Hua Chunying in March 2020 are examples. After Jesse Watters, an American television commentator, demanded an apology from China for the pandemic, Zhao refuted the claim that the virus originated in China. A few days later, Hua and Zhao tweeted that the COVID-19 virus was identified in the cases that were earlier diagnosed as flu in 2019 in the United States, implying that the virus may have originated in the United States (Hua, 2020 March 12; Zhao, 2020 March 12). A EUvsDisinfo study further found that the social media accounts of the Chinese media, such as China Global Television Network (CGTN), repeated the disinformation spread by Russia, claiming the United States established 200 laboratories producing bioweapons worldwide and

implying that the virus could have originated from American labs (The Secret Labs conspiracy, 2020).

Continuing the thread of investigation on the narratives of COVID-19 virus origin, this research examined 94 articles from *Global Times* and *People's Daily* published from January 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022. In the next sections, the researcher will explain the themes that emerged from the Chinese media content and the tools they used to augment the narratives in the COVID-19 origin conspiracy theory.

5.2 The story told by the Chinese state media –the themes of the content about the COVID-19 virus origin

After conducting a qualitative content analysis, identifying and aggregating the frames, three themes emerged from the 94 *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles. The first theme disputed the allegation that the virus originated in China and claimed the virus could actually have come from Europe and the U.S. The second theme attacked Western politicians, particularly American politicians, for diverting attention from their inability to control the pandemic in their own nations by placing blame on China. Finally, the articles criticized the United States. for impeding global cooperation during the pandemic, citing instances in which other nations or even Americans disagreed with the U.S. government. Table 5.1 shows the main frames included in each of the three themes.

Table 5.1 Chinese state media themes and main frames

The Chinese state media themes and main frames
<p>The virus came from the U.S. or Europe. The lab in the Fort Detrick army base in the U.S. was the prime suspect of the birthplace of the COVID-19 virus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The virus may originate from the U.S. or Europe and was not leaked from the Wuhan lab. • The origin of the virus is a scientific question. • The U.S. should be investigated thoroughly. • For Detrick was the prime suspect. • The U.S. had a nefarious scheme and a history of lying
<p>China was attacked by the conspiracy theory spun by Western countries, particularly the U.S. because Western politicians wanted to shift the blame to China.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are lies and conspiracies against China. • The American and other Western media blemished and politicized China. • The U.S. and Western politicians attacked, criticized or treated China unfairly. • The reasons that the U.S. and Western countries attacked China. • The U.S. lost its battle against the pandemic.
<p>China was a team player by helping other countries and being transparent, while the U.S. was a troublemaker.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China behaved well and was transparent during the pandemic. • The U.S. was the one who caused trouble in the investigation and disrupted international collaboration. • Those who supported China were attacked or persecuted by American politicians or the media.

5.2.1 Theme 1- the virus came from the U.S. or Europe. The labs in the Fort Detrick army base in the U.S. was the prime suspect of the birthplace of the COVID-19 virus.

One of the conspicuous main frames in the 94 articles was where the virus originated. With the keywords used for collecting the data and the purpose of this research, it is not surprising that narratives of the origin of the virus were prominent. What is worth observing is how the story of the virus's origin was told in the Chinese media.

The main frames “The virus may originate from the U.S. or Europe and was not leaked from the Wuhan lab,” “The origin of the virus is a scientific question,” and “The U.S. should be investigated” reveal how *Global Times* and *People's Daily* delivered the story of the COVID-19 virus origin to their audiences. Figure 5.1 through 5.3, which show the number of articles containing the main frames published each month, indicate that *People's Daily* and *Global Times* began to dispute the virus's origin in the Wuhan lab as early as February 2020, claiming that additional scientific research was required. In addition, the hypothesis that the virus may have come from the U.S. and been transported to Wuhan during the Military World Games in October 2019 was first advanced on social media by Chinese diplomats such as Zhao Lijian (See Image 1) in March 2020. Although the Chinese state media did not *actively* promote the theory until May 2020 (See Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3), they had indirectly supplemented information related to the theories proposed by the diplomats' tweets.

According to WHO's record, the first outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was reported in China in December 2019 (*Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 response*, n.d.). Zhao Lijian tweeted on March 12, 2020, that the director of the U.S. Center for Disease Control Robert Redfield admitted in a Congressional hearing that “some [U.S.] flu patients actually died of COVID-19 in late 2019” (Zhao, 2020, March 12). The Chinese state media *Global Times* and *People's Daily* later published articles to support Chinese diplomats' tweets. For instance, the article “About the U.S.'s lies about

COVID-19 that involved China and the real truth [美国关于新冠肺炎疫情的涉华谎言与事实真相]” published by *People’s Daily* in May 2020 asserted that Michael Melham, the mayor of the city of Belleville in New Jersey, claimed that he might have had COVID-19 in November 2019. According to the article, Melham’s doctor tested him and confirmed that the mayor had already had COVID-19 antibodies. This *People’s Daily* article concluded that “this case occurred two months earlier than the first case reported in the U.S. on January 20, 2020” and was proof that the virus had appeared in the U.S. earlier than in Wuhan (*People’s Daily*, 2020).²⁸

It should be noted that Mayor Meham’s case had never attracted attention from national media in the United States. New Jersey local media outlets nj.com and northjersey.com first broke the story on April 30 and May 1, 2020.²⁹ But nj.com also cast doubt on Melham’s assertion, calling it “startling yet uncorroborated” (Jennings, 2020). A search in the *Factiva* database did not find any major English newspapers following the nj.com news report except for the English edition of *Xinhua News Agency* and *People’s Daily*.³⁰ The Chinese media, however, has repeatedly quoted Mayor Meham’s account in different news reports to support the claim that the virus first appeared in the U.S. before it appeared in Wuhan.³¹

²⁸ The original text in Chinese is “美国新泽西州贝尔维尔市市长迈克尔·梅尔哈姆表示，自己在2019年11月就已感染新冠病毒，检测结果也显示他已拥有新冠病毒抗体，比美国1月20日报道首例新冠病毒确诊病例早2个多月。” This article was also published in other major state media, such as Xinhua News Agency. This article is no longer available from the *People’s Daily* website but is still accessible from Xinhua News Agency. *People’s Daily*. (2020, May 10). About the US’s lies about COVID-19 that involved China and the real truth [美国关于新冠肺炎疫情的涉华谎言与事实真相]. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-05/09/c_1125963436.htm

²⁹ See Jennings, R. (2020, May 1). N.J. mayor makes unfounded claim that he had coronavirus in November. Nj. <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/04/nj-mayor-thinks-he-had-coronavirus-2-months-before-1st-confirmed-case-in-us.html>; Kanzler, K. (2020, May 1). Belleville mayor has coronavirus antibodies, believes he had COVID-19 months ago. NorthJersey.Com. <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/essex/belleville/2020/04/30/belleville-nj-mayor-tests-positive-coronavirus-antibodies/3057925001/>

³⁰ For example, Kong, W. (2020, May 5). U.S. mayor says may have had COVID-19 last November. *Xinhua News Agency*. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/05/c_139032828.htm

³¹ For example, the article “WHO: We did not receive any evidence; Fauci: The virus was not man-made; US’s lie about the origin of the virus was widely doubted [世卫: 任何“证据”都没收到 福奇: 病毒产生并非人为 美病毒源头谎言广遭质疑,” published by *Global Times* on May 6, 2020, said that: “For the past few days, there has been

In addition to blaming the U.S., the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles also provided information suggesting other places might be where the virus originated. In December 2020, the *Global Times* said researchers proposed that the virus could have entered China through frozen seafood.³² Another *Global Times* article published in May 2020 claimed that a research paper in the *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents* discovered that the COVID-19 virus had been in France as early as December 2019.³³ The same *Global Times* article also quoted a news article from the Italian news outlet *Corriere della Sera* suggesting the virus may have already spread in Italy in 2019. Nonetheless, many of the quoted studies were still disputed by scientists during the time when the Chinese state media published the articles and the idea that the virus appeared earlier in Europe still remains contentious (Parodi, 2021). Without providing more background and the validity of the research, *Global Times* and *People's Daily* developed their argument about the origin of the virus and gave readers the impression that these studies were authoritative.

information from all over the world with clear evidence or the patient's statement that the virus had been spread in Europe and the US as early as the end of last year. There were confirmed cases in France last year. A mayor of New Jersey, US, also claimed that the flu he had last November was indeed COVID-19 [最近几天世界各地不断传出至少去年底新冠病毒就已经在欧洲和美国传播的确切证据或当事人的举证。法国发现了去年底感染的确诊病例，美国新泽西州的一名市长声称他去年 11 月所患流感就是新冠肺炎，因为他测出自己已经带有新冠病毒抗体。]” Zhang, M., Ching, M., Chen, X., and Liu, Y. (2020, May 6). WHO: We did not receive any evidence; Fauci: The virus was not man-made; US's lie about the origin of the virus was widely doubted [世卫: 任何“证据”都没收到 福奇: 病毒产生并非人为 美病毒源头谎言广遭质疑]. *Global Times*.

³² *Global Times*. (2020, December 8). The virus was introduced into Wuhan from the cold chain"? It is worth tracing the source [病毒从冷链传入武汉"? 值得溯源].

³³ Fan, L., Chen, Y., & Liu, Y. (2020, May 7). The time of the earliest case is greatly advanced. The traceability of the virus is not a negligent investigation. Earlier cases of new coronary pneumonia were found in Europe and the United States [最早病例时间大幅提前 病毒溯源不是“过失调查” 欧美发现更早新冠肺炎病例]. *Global Times*.

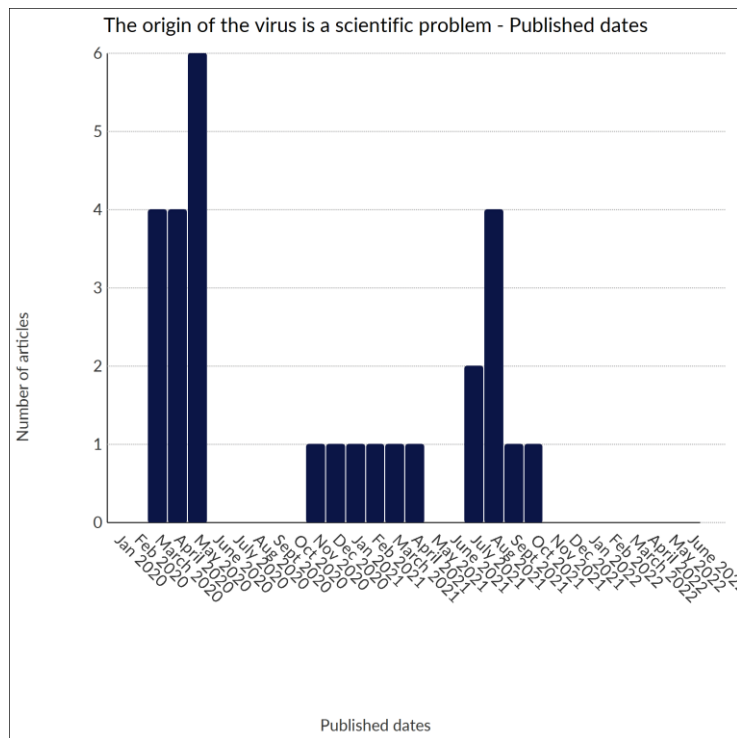


Figure 5.1 Number of articles containing the frame “the origin of the virus is a scientific problem”

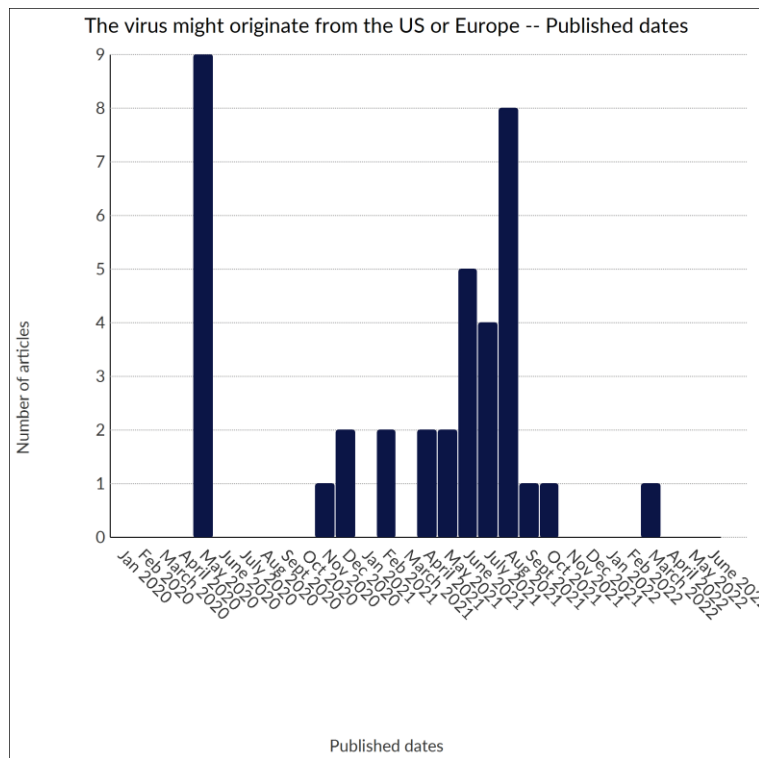


Figure 5.2 Number of articles containing the frame “the virus might originate from the U.S. or Europe”

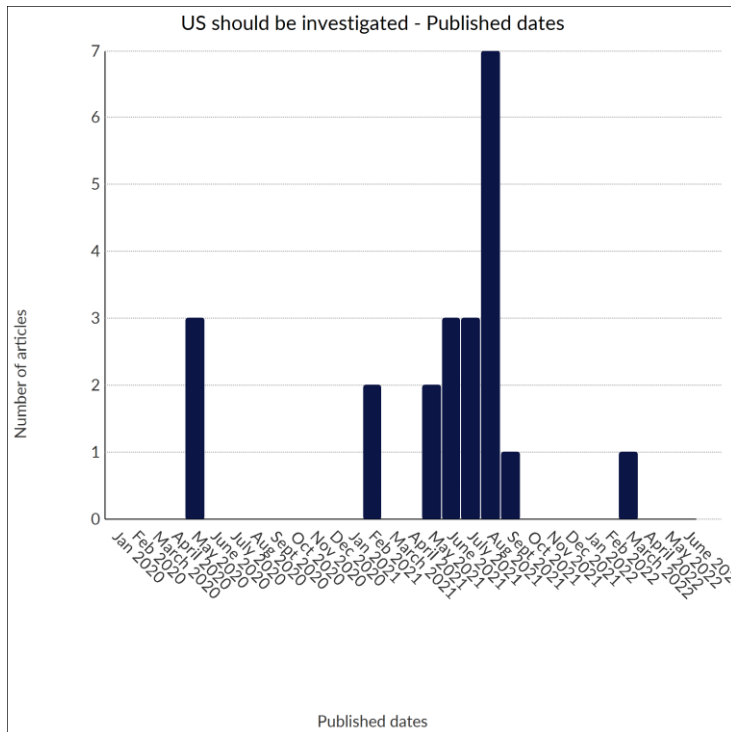


Figure 5.3 Number of articles containing the frame “the U.S. should be investigated”

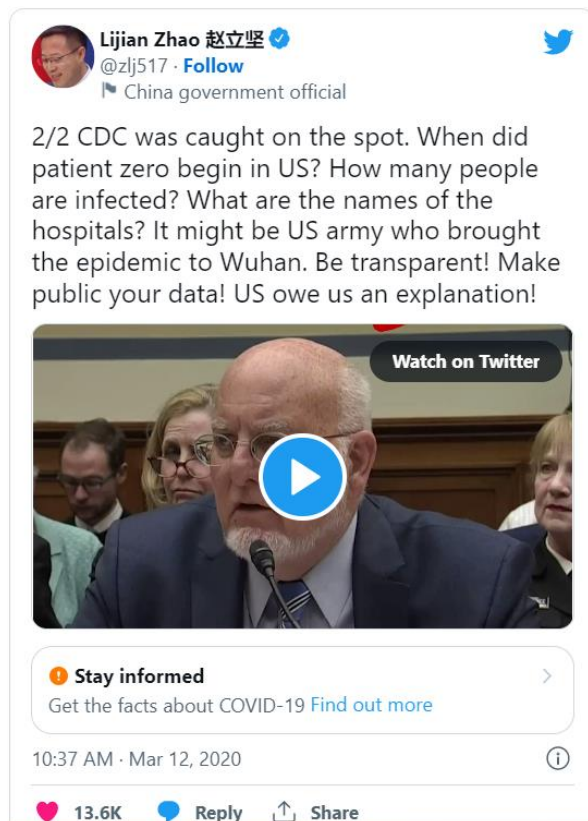


Image 5.1 A tweet from Chinese diplomat Zhao Lijiang, implying the virus could originate in the U.S.

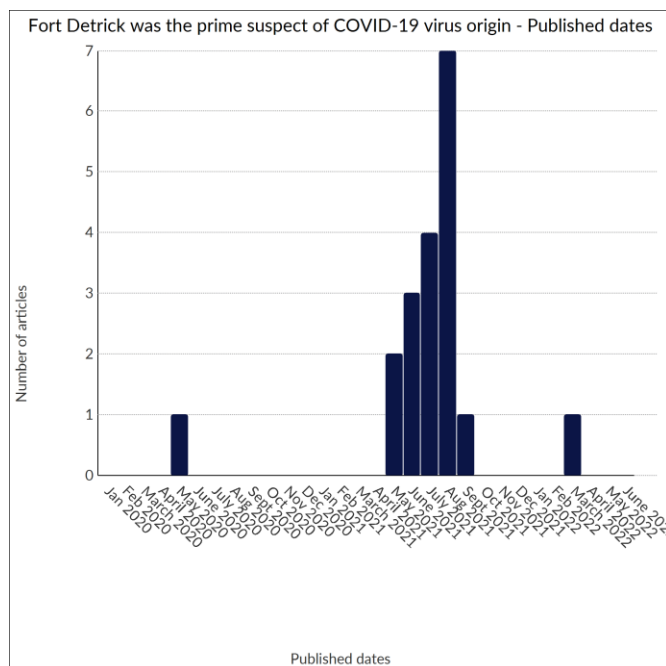


Figure 5.4 Number of articles containing the frame “Fort Detrick was the prime suspect of COVID-19 virus origin”

Interestingly, the Fort Detrick army base in Maryland, United States,³⁴ the center of China’s claim that it might be where the virus originated, was only mentioned once in the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* throughout 2020. In the *Global Times* article dated May 15, 2020, the author mentioned an accident in Fort Detrick that occurred in August 2019 and raised safety concerns. The article quoted a *USA Today* report that there were 1,500 lab accidents in U.S. labs nationwide from 2006 to 2013.³⁵ It also noted that the U.S. had established biolabs in former Soviet countries and carried out tests there that were significantly riskier than those carried out in the U.S. These labs under U.S. operation, argued the article, should all be investigated by the international community.

³⁴ Fort Detrick army base housed the US bioweapon programs from the 1940s through the 1960s and is now still a hub for biomedical research.

³⁵ *Global Times*. (2020, May 15). U.S. laboratories should be the first to receive international inspections[接受国际督查，美国的实验室应是第一拨].

One year later, during the summer of 2021, *Global Times* and *People's Daily* launched another round of attacks against the U.S. with more developed stories and details. It was no coincidence that in May and August 2021, several events rekindled the suspicions of the Wuhan lab leak theory and triggered this new round of counterfire from China (See Table 5.3 for a timeline of important events regarding COVID-19 controversies and investigations). On May 23, 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, according to the information from the U.S. intelligence community, that some researchers from the Wuhan lab fell ill in November 2019 before the pandemic outbreak in Wuhan (Gordon et al., 2021). Several days later, President Joe Biden ordered a review of theories about the origin of COVID-19 (Wilkie, C., & Mendez, 2021).

As Figure 5.4 shows, the “Fort Detrick was the prime suspect of COVID-19 virus origin” frame reappeared in May 2021 and persisted until September of the same year. It portrayed the lab in the Fort Detrick army base as a place with numerous severe safety hazards and a dark past connected to Japanese bioweapons during World War II. The articles also mentioned a number of “suspicious infections” in “nearby communities” in the summer of 2019, including a “mysterious” respiratory infection outbreak in a retirement community in northern Virginia and an outbreak of vaping lung illness in several states, including Virginia and Wisconsin. Other articles containing the Fort Detrick frame indicated other countries’ concerns about the Fort Detrick labs and the demand from Chinese citizens for an investigation into the U.S. labs. By quoting other countries’ wariness of Fort Detrick, the articles showed that the international community was unsettled by U.S. biomedical experiments.

It is noteworthy that the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles also exploited Western media sources to increase the credibility of their news reporting. As Table 5.2 shows, the articles mentioning Fort Detrick heavily quoted American media sources. Even though these original

articles published by American outlets did not support the theory that the virus was leaked from Fort Detrick, they were used by these Chinese outlets to demonstrate the danger of Fort Detrick and the authenticity of the infection outbreaks in the U.S. For example, the *Global Times* story “Investigate the origin of the virus. The U.S. owes the international society an explanation [新冠病毒溯源，美国欠国际社会一个交代]” cited an article from the *New York Times* about the contaminated wastewater in the Fort Detrick lab, which led to the suspension of research on a bacterium that would “threaten the health of the public, plants, and animals or related products” (*Global Times*, 2021).³⁶ After quoting the *New York Times* report, the *Global Times* article argued that virus leaks in Fort Detrick labs are not uncommon and have caused concerns among other countries. Moreover, the U.S. government has refused to admit the truth by “using national security as an excuse.” The *Global Times* article thus concluded that the U.S. had adopted a double standard on the development of bioweapons, which has antagonized the international community (*Global Times*, 2021).

Russian media sources were also used by Chinese media. Five items in the Fort Detrick frames cited Russian media as their sources, as opposed to eight articles that cited American media. In contrast to American sources, Russian sources played a different role. If the American sources served as “circumstantial evidence” to the arguments made by the Chinese media, then the Russian sources were direct references to the conspiracy theory that the Americans were probably producing viruses as weapons. For instance, the *Global Times* article published on August 7, 2021, quoted an article titled “COVID-19 could be caused by American’s virus weapon” from the

³⁶ The original text in Chinese: “...其在“联邦特定生物制剂计划”中注册的项目同时被暂停，暂停的实验室研究中涉及某些已被政府认定为“对公众、动植物健康或动植物产品构成严重威胁”的细菌。” *Global Times*. (2021, July 5). Investigate the origin of the virus. The US owes the international society an explanation [新冠病毒溯源，美国欠国际社会一个交代]. Huanqiu. <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/43oZe5yHXOq>

Russian outlet *Pravda*. The Russian article reported that “the public opinions in the world have increasingly believed the conclusion that the pandemic could be caused by the fault of American bio labs” (He et al., 2021).³⁷ This quote was used by the Chinese media in the context explaining why Chinese citizens petitioned the international community to inspect Fort Detrick army base because the biomedical labs in Fort Detrick “stores the most fatal and infectious virus. Additionally, it has a terrible safety record” (He et al., 2021).³⁸

³⁷ The original text in Chinese: “俄罗斯《真理报》5日题为“新冠肺炎疫情可能是美国作战病毒引发的”文章说，尽管美国官方保持沉默，但世界舆论越来越倾向于认为新冠肺炎疫情很可能是由于美国生物实验室的过错而造成的结论。” He, S., Zhao, J., Yu, J., Bai, C., Chen, X., & Liu, Y. (2021, August 7). Investigation of Fort Detrick's joint signatures exceeded 25 million. The joint signature activity ended. The Global Times thanked everyone [調查德堡聯署突破 2500 萬 聯署簽名活動結束，環球時報感謝大家]. *Global Times*

³⁸ The original Chinese text: “美国军方的德特里克堡生物实验室存放着全世界最致命也最具传染性的病毒，且安全纪录极差” (He et al., August 7, 2021).

Table 5.2 Number of articles about Fort Detrick in Global Times and People's Daily mentioning foreign media outlets

Media outlets	Number of articles mentioned the outlets
Japanese media outlets\Japan Today	1
Other African countries media outlets\突尼斯《晨報》	1
Other Asian countries media outlets\Manila Times	1
Russian media outlets\free media website (Russian)	1
Russian media outlets\Pravda 真理報	1
Russian media outlets\Sputnik	1
Russian media outlets\ Vzglyad(觀點報)	1
Russian media outlets\俄羅斯 Tsargrad 電視台	1
Singapore media outlets\Singapore Lianhe Zaobao	1
South Africa media outlets\South Africa Broadcasting Company	1
French outlets\AFP	1
U.S. media outlets\Boston Globe	1
U.S. media outlets\CNN	1
U.S. media outlets\NPR	1
U.S. media outlets\NYT	1
U.S. media outlets\General U.S. media	1
U.S. media outlets\UPI	1
U.S. media outlets\USA Today	1
U.S. media outlets\Vanity Fair	1

To sum up, the frames “the origin of the virus” and “Fort Detrick” painted a picture in which the virus was not from China but from the U.S. or Europe. The articles claimed that the origin of the virus needed more scientific investigation. The biochemical labs in the Fort Detrick army base in the U.S. were the prime suspect since they had a long history of conducting biomedical experiments and a concerning record of poor safety issues. Nevertheless, while the U.S. demanded

the Wuhan lab be investigated, it covered up hazards in the Fort Detrick labs. Thus, China and the international community strongly demanded an investigation into the Fort Detrick army base.

5.2.2 Theme 2: China was attacked by the conspiracy theory spun by Western countries, particularly the U.S., because Western politicians wanted to shift the blame

While the Chinese media contended that the virus was *not* leaked from the Wuhan lab, they also labeled suspicion surrounding the Wuhan lab and the claims that the Chinese government was not being transparent about the pandemic as “lies” and “conspiracy theories.”

One of the most mentioned “conspiracy theories” identified by the Chinese state media was that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab, intentionally or accidentally. As early as February 2020, a *Global Times* article “The theory about the virus origin covered in the mist[迷霧籠罩下的新冠病毒起源說],” called out the rumor that the virus was a bioweapon leaked from the Wuhan lab as a conspiracy theory. It also quoted the words “extremely crazy” from the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. to describe the bioweapon theory (Ni et al., 2020).³⁹ But the scope of the terms “conspiracy theories” and “lies” used by the Chinese media has kept expanding since then. As the attacks on China increased, the Chinese media used the two terms to refer to any criticism of China’s opacity opaqueness about the pandemic and its reluctance to share information. A *People’s Daily* article published on August 26, 2021, with the headline “Why does the U.S. like

³⁹ The original text in Chinese: “阴谋论的制造者不仅来自于暗处，国际上也有一些势力公然“造谣”，早在 1 月底，美国《华盛顿时报》就刊文声称新冠病毒“或来自武汉实验室外泄的生化武器”，它也是最早传播这一阴谋论的媒体之一。而 2 月上旬，美国参议院军事委员会参议员汤姆·科顿发表一系列言论，指控新冠病毒可能来自中国生物战计划、是武汉实验室外泄的生化武器。中国驻美国大使崔天凯回应称，这一指控真是疯狂至极。”Ni, H., Li, Z., & Jiang, Y. (2020, February 25). The theory about the virus origin covered in the mist[迷霧籠罩下的新冠病毒起源說]. *Global Times*. <https://tech.huanqiu.com/article/3xAkjSDXodF>

to throw the pot so much? [美国为何这么喜欢 “甩锅” ?]”⁴⁰ comprehensively introduced the “lies and conspiracy theory” targeting China.⁴¹

In May 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of China) website carried out a long article that exposed the 24 lies against China that the U.S. had spread: the COVID-19 virus was the “Chinese virus” or “Wuhan virus”; the pandemic was caused by an accidental leak from the Wuhan virus lab; China delayed to let the world know about the pandemic because it tried to cover the situation and resulted in the widespread of the virus; China failed to provide the information that the virus can be transmitted among humans so the U.S. and the world could not understand the fatality and the spread speed of the virus to make timely decisions; China has controlled the WHO with money; China was responsible for the pandemic, Countries should hold China accountable and investigate and file lawsuits against China...

The article maintained that U.S. politicians and the media were the parties creating and disseminating conspiracy theories. Finally, the authors condemned the theories for “lacking facts and logic” and “not being based on science.”⁴²

This was not the only piece that pointed fingers at the U.S. for advancing the anti-China conspiracy theory. Headlines of articles of a similar tone included “ Talking widely to key persons who know

⁴⁰ “Throwing the pot” in Chinese slang means “shifting the responsibility.” This term was frequently used in the Chinese media. The research will discuss the use of this term later in this dissertation.

⁴¹ The original text in Chinese: “2020 年 5 月，中国外交部网站曾刊发长文，揭露了美国关于新冠肺炎疫情的 24 个涉华谎言——新冠肺炎病毒是‘中国病毒’或‘武汉病毒’；新冠肺炎疫情由武汉病毒研究所意外泄漏造成；中国一开始试图掩盖疫情，延误对外发布时机，导致疫情扩散蔓延；中国太晚提供关于病毒人传人的信息，导致美国及世界对病毒传染速度和致命性认识不够，未能及早作出决策；中国控制世界卫生组织，用金钱拉拢世卫组织；中国应对新冠肺炎病毒全球大流行负责，要对中国展开调查，应起诉中国，向中国追责索赔。” Yan, Y. (2021, August 26). Why does the US like to throw the pot so much? [美国为何这么喜欢 “甩锅” ?]. *People’s Daily*.
<https://www.chinanews.com.cn/m/gj/2021/08-26/9551441.shtml>

⁴² The original text in Chinese: “上述种种颠倒黑白的论调毫无科学根据、毫无事实逻辑，让人大跌眼镜。” (Yan, 2021).

the situation and conducting field investigation in nine essential venues, WHO overturned U.S.’s virus conspiracy theory [对关键知情人士广泛访谈 在九处重要地点实地考察 世卫调查推翻美国病毒阴谋论]” (Chen & Liu, 2021), “ American politicians splashed dirty water to China again[美政客又借疫情向中国泼脏水]” (Zhao, 2021), “Disregarding the worsening pandemic (in the U.S.), the GOP invented the virus investigation report and presented the so-called ‘evidence.’ The report was ridiculed as a ‘hallucination’ [不顾疫情恶化专注政治游戏 抛出所谓证据遭讽 实为幻想 美共和党炮制病毒溯源报告]” (Chen & Liu, 2021).

In some other articles, the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* replaced “the U.S.” with “the West” or “overseas media.” Along with the U.S. media, Australia was another country whose media was singled out by the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles.⁴³ For example, an Australian news outlet reported that Chinese military scientists mentioned using the virus that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) to develop bioweapons. A *Global Times* article thus published an article with the headline “Use the publicly published book to mislead public opinion and attract eyeballs by the statement about bioweapons – the Australian media defamed China again by inventing conspiracy theory [用公开发行图书误导舆论 借 “生化武器改造” 吸引眼球 澳媒又炮制 “阴谋论” 抹黑中国]” and lambasted the Australian media for spreading conspiracy theory (Guo, 2021).

⁴³ The relationship between Australia and China deteriorated before the pandemic because of the trade war between the two countries and a political scandal involving an Australian politician and Chinese businessmen. See Ruwitch, J. (2020, December 4). China-Australia Relations Are Quickly Worsening. How Did They Get Bad? NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/04/943264191/china-australia-relations-are-quickly-worsening-how-did-they-get-bad>.

The *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles also explained the motivation of the “defamation” from the West.⁴⁴ The most frequently mentioned explanation was that Western politicians, especially American ones, sought to divert public attention from their inability to contain the outbreak, especially as the 2020 elections drew closer. Another reason was that the West exploited the pandemic and made China the victim because the West had long wished to prevent China from rising.

For example, in the *Global Times* article “China is not afraid of a scientific and fair investigation, but the U.S. is [中国不怕科学公正的调查，美国怕],” the author contended that the purpose behind Washington’s promotion of the idea that China had the responsibility for the pandemic was because the U.S. federal government wanted to “avoid being held responsible by their public” (*Global Times*, May 19, 2020).⁴⁵ A *People's Daily* article, “Fighting against the pandemic, China has done a good job and been helpful! [抗击疫情，中国做得好也帮得好！]” quoted an overseas Chinese’s comment: “[Some overseas media] ...created the public opinions to weaken and suppress China and prevented China from rising peacefully, whose intention was evil” (Gau, 2020).⁴⁶

Again, the Chinese media used comments from foreign media, including American mainstream media, to support their statements. A comment from the *Washington Post* was quoted in the *Global Times* article. According to the *Global Times* piece, the *Washington Post* claimed Trump “tried to divert the public’s attention from his incapacity to control the pandemic” (*Global Times*, April 21,

⁴⁴ The explanations were coded into subframes “It was all because Western politicians wanted to win elections,” “U.S. and Western countries attempted to contain China's rise,” and “U.S. politicians used criticism about COVID measures to inflame racial hatred.”

⁴⁵ The original text in Chinese: “华盛顿的目的是要将自己抗疫不力的责任向北京甩锅，以此逃避美国公众对联邦政府的追责。” (*Global Times*, 2020).

⁴⁶ The original text in Chinese: “近来海外媒体有一些关于病毒起源的阴谋论...向国际舆论场抛出的议题，目的是抹为打压削弱中国制造舆论，阻止中国的和平崛起，可谓用心险恶。” (Gau, 2020).

2020).⁴⁷ Another *People's Daily* piece cited the *New York Times* and said the news outlet revealed the Republican's purpose in blaming China: to distract the American people's attention away from the U.S. government's much-detested pandemic policy (Yan, 2021).⁴⁸

Many quotes from Russian media, other non-Western commenters, and Chinese academics were used to reinforce the idea that the West was disturbed by China's rising role in the world. *Global Times* cited a comment from *Zvezda*, a Russian TV network, saying the U.S. would shift the responsibility to China no matter what the result of the WHO investigation was because "what is important to them [the U.S.] is that China has started to occupy a more and more important place in the world. Therefore, the first priority [for the U.S.] is to consider how to stop China's development [对他们来说，重要的是，中国开始在上占据越来越重要的地位，因此，需要首先考虑如何阻止中国的发展]" (Bai & Li, 2021). Another *Global Times* article quoted a Peking University professor's analysis of why the U.S. defamed China: "Currently, the political party hawkish toward China is in the [U.S.] administration. Some of the party members do wish to take advantage of the pandemic outbreak in China. They hope to impede China's development and isolate China in international society, promoting the world to "off the hook" from China" [当前，美国对华鹰派处于执政地位，他们当中确实有人在中国暴发疫情时落井下石，寄希望于疫情可以削弱中国发展，在国际社会上孤立中国，推动与中国“脱钩”] (*Global Times*, March 20, 2020).

⁴⁷ The original text in Chinese: “《华盛顿邮报》评论说，世界正盯着美国如何应对这种病毒并从中恢复，但到目前为止结果令人沮丧。为了转移对他应对疫情不力的注意力，特朗普及其团队将美国引向“史诗般的大错”：与中国的不明智和“深思熟虑”的冲突。” (*Global Times*, 2020).

⁴⁸ The original text in Chinese, “In fact, "throwing the pot" on China has become one of the things to which American politicians most devoted. In order to shed the responsibility of their own incapability in fighting the pandemic and to realize their strategic goal of suppressing China, they [the American politicians] have tried their best to draw the attention of the public and weave lies[甩锅]中国已成为美国政客做得最用心的一件事。为了推卸自身抗疫不力责任，实现打压中国的战略意图，他们费尽心思，制造话题，编织谎言]" (Yan, 2021).

These quotes from global and domestic sources endorsed the *Global Times* and *People's Daily's* arguments about why the U.S. and the West wanted to attack China. More importantly, by providing the motivation for the attacks, the quoted endorsements enrich the narrative that “the West led by the U.S. spread conspiracy theories against China.”

5.2.3 Theme 3: China was a team player by helping other countries and being transparent, while the US was a troublemaker

At the same time that China contended that the virus might come from the U.S. and Europe and censured the West for peddling conspiracy theories against China, the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* also lauded the achievement of China during the pandemic and denounced the U.S. as a troublemaker who disrupted the international community's effort battling the virus.

To rebuke the criticism that China hid confirmed case numbers during the early days of the pandemic and delayed reporting to WHO, China made efforts to claim they have been transparent from the start. One example of this kind of “clarification” article was a *People's Daily* piece “About the U.S.'s lies about COVID-19 that involved China and the real truth [美国关于新冠肺炎疫情的涉华谎言与事实真相]”(People's Daily, May 10, 2020), in which the author listed the number of news conferences held by the Chinese government and the statements praising China's transparency from international scientists, including the Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and Senior Advisor to the Director-General of the World Health Organization Bruce Aylward.

The article also praised the Chinese government for making efforts to solve the mystery of the origin of the virus. The endeavor included promptly reporting the outbreak to WHO and opening the Wuhan facility to international scientists for investigation. While the Chinese media applauded the openness of the Chinese government, they also contrasted the transparency of China to the

U.S.’s secrecy about Fort Detrick labs: “[China] not only permitted Western virologists to investigate in Wuhan but also opened the labs to American media for visits. However, the United States hasn’t equally opened the labs in Fort Detrick for China’s inspection....” (Bai, 2021).⁴⁹

According to the Chinese media, the U.S. obstructed international investigations by refusing to be transparent about the Fort Detrick labs. Moreover, the U.S. spread lies about the “Wuhan leak theory” and negated the evidence provided by the WHO and scientists. The U.S. even suppressed the opinions of objective scientists, published a baseless investigation report penned by American intelligence, and eventually withdrew from the WHO (Li, 2021; Jia, 2021).⁵⁰ Although the withdrawal of the U.S. from the WHO was mostly an abrupt decision made by the Trump administration and caused much concern among American medical and legal experts (Huang, July 7, 2020), the Chinese media still exploited this event as evidence that the Americans refused international cooperation. Once again, the Chinese media used supporting endorsements from Chinese scholars and international politicians, such as a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences America Institute⁵¹ and politicians from Cambodia, Pakistan, Nepal, and Congo, to show how discontented the international community was with the U.S.⁵²

The above themes substantiate the narratives about how China and the West, mainly the U.S., acted during the pandemic. Furthermore, the broad picture painted by the Chinese media was

⁴⁹ The original text in Chinese: “中国出于对溯源研究工作的支持，不仅允许来自西方国家的病毒学家到武汉进行调查，还开放了武汉病毒所给他们乃至美国媒体参观考察。可美国方面至今没有同等地开放德特里克堡的实验室，给独立于美国地缘政治影响的中国等国调查”(Bai, 2021).

⁵⁰ Jia, P. (2021, August 7). The U.S. spread the virus willfully., They should stop [肆意扩散病毒，美国该收手了]. *People's Daily*. Li, J. (2021, July 27). Politicizing the act of tracing the virus's origin is a bottomless evil[将病毒溯源政治化是毫无底线的恶行]. *People's Daily*.

⁵¹ For example, in the article “The U.S. spread the virus willfully., They should stop [肆意扩散病毒，美国该收手了], “the journalist interviewed with Wen Li, a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences America Institute. (Jia, 2021).

⁵² For example, *People's Daily* (2021, September 2). Important politicians from many countries objected to politicizing the work of tracing the origin of the COVID-19 virus [多国政党政要反对将新冠病毒溯源政治化].

entwined with conspiracy theories -- both the allegations that the U.S. spread lies about China and the “suspicion” that the Fort Detrick army base conducted hazardous experiments and could be the source of the virus. According to the story told by the Chinese media, the U.S. and Western countries spun the lies that the virus originated in China to cover up the failure of Western politicians to control the pandemic in their countries. Moreover, these conspiracy conspiracies were invented and propagated with the nefarious intent of suppressing the rise of China as a global power. In contrast, China was a devoted teammate in the international community while the U.S. was obstructive and selfishly aimed to prevent China from making progress on the global stage.

5.3 Important elements of narratives – distinct protagonists and words

The Chinese state media fostered the above narratives with two main tools –accentuating certain characters and repeating specific terms. The following analysis of the protagonists and the words will demonstrate how the Chinese media strategically constructed the picture and delivered the impression to the audience.

5.3.1 Protagonists

An element of the Chinese narratives is that people or parties mentioned in the articles have distinctive personalities. These individuals or groups are often given adjectives and verbs that make their roles in the narratives more recognizable.

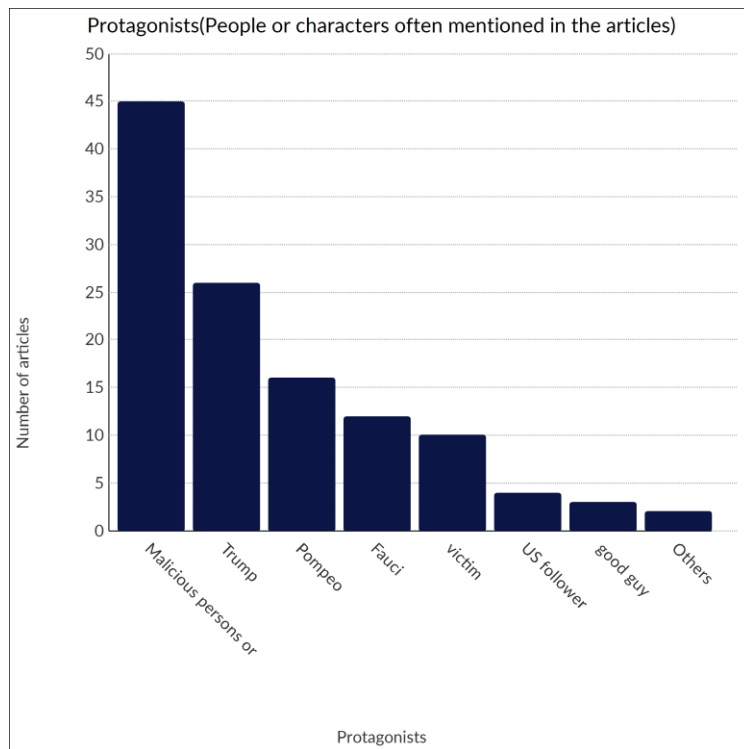


Figure.5.5 The number of articles that the characters or names mentioned

Figure 5.5 shows the number of articles in which the characters or names are mentioned. “Malicious persons” were the characters that appeared most often in the articles, which referred to those who were criticized for being morally corrupt or acting maliciously and causing damage to others. In the Chinese state media narratives, they are usually the persons attempting to harm or criticize China. American politicians, Western media organizations and journalists, etc., were part of this group. For example, the articles condemned American politicians and media for “splashing dirty water [泼脏水]” on China, meaning the politicians and media blemished China’s reputation by bringing up the Wuhan lab leak theory and casting doubt on China’s transparency. Examples include the headline of a *Global Times* article, “American politicians splashed dirty water to China again [美政客又借疫情向中国泼脏水]” (Zhao, 2021), and another *Global Times* interview with a Chinese expert. The Chinese expert asserted that the U.S. constantly “splashed dirty water on

China” so that the U.S. government could deflect the domestic criticism of failing to control the pandemic.⁵³ In other instances, journalists, particularly those who worked for U.S. conservative media, were referred to as “villains”⁵⁴ or “clowns”⁵⁵ who disseminated speculations about lab leaks or stories that hurt China’s reputation. Moreover, the malicious United States did not act alone. There were “U.S. followers,” countries or individuals the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* portrayed as minions joining the United States to attack China (such as Australia).⁵⁶

In contrast to the malicious Western politicians and media, China itself and scientists played the role of “victims” harmed by these “malicious persons.” These scientists claimed the virus was *not* from the Wuhan lab. For example, Peter Daszak, the president of EcoHealth Alliance, an organization that supports global health programs, was often quoted by the Chinese state media for his refutation of the Wuhan lab leak theory. In one article, *Global Times* cited Daszak’s tweet (which forwarded an article by American scientist Peter Hotez), claiming that a group of fervently

⁵³ The original text in Chinese: “Lu Xiang, an expert on American issues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said in an interview with a reporter from the *Global Times* on the 9th that there are more and more contradictions in American society, and they may intensify at any time. Under such circumstances, the United States continues to splash dirty water on China. This action can be understood as [The U.S.’s attempt to] inoculate Americans who are dissatisfied with the government[中国社科院美国问题专家吕祥 9 日接受《环球时报》记者采访时表示，美国社会现在的矛盾越来越多，而且随时有可能激化，在这种情况下，美国不断往中国身上泼脏水，可以理解为是在给对美政府不满的人士打预防针。]” He, S. & Fan, W. (2021, September 10). American media hyped the claim that China is spreading fake news, they falsely stated that China is trying to incite offline protests to “throw the pot” and divert the focus of the pandemic [诬称煽动线下抗议 “甩锅”转移疫情焦点 美媒恶炒中国搞“网络假消息行动”]. *Global Times*.

⁵⁴ For example, a *Global Times* article used the title “There is a villainous host in the Fox News [福克斯新闻台有个流氓主持人].” (*Global Times*, March 6, 2020).

⁵⁵ For example, “And Western media organizations like Murdoch News Group are also keen to provide a platform for these jumping clowns, allowing them to exaggerate the “lab leak theory” of the COVID-19 virus in the public opinion field [而像默多克新闻集团这样的西方舆论机构，也热衷于给这些跳梁小丑提供平台，让他们在舆论场上大肆渲染新冠病毒“实验室泄漏论”] (Bai, May 26, 2021).

⁵⁶ For example, a *Global Times* article stated: “During Trump’s term of office, he pursued the “Indo-Pacific strategy,” and Australia was the “South Anchor” in the plan. Australia cannot wait to prove its importance and get some benefits [朗普任期内搞“印太战略”，澳大利亚充当了“南锚”角色。为证明自己的重要性并从中分一杯羹，澳大利亚有些迫不及待]” See Li, X., Ren, Z., & Zhen, X. (2021, March 3). Public opinion smears and reproaches those who are friendly to China. “It is hard to be friendly to China in Australia [舆论抹黑甚嚣尘上 对华友好反遭指责责备 “在澳大利亚做中国的朋友真难”]. *Global Times*.

conservative American lawmakers was threatening well-known scientists and had inflamed an unprecedented “anti-science culture” (Chen & Liu, August 3, 2021).⁵⁷

In addition to the characters mentioned above, the narrative also included “Good guys” who displayed courage during the pandemic. They were usually Chinese citizens who were said to “have fought a gallant pandemic battle by encircling and defeating the virus [打了一場英勇圍剿病毒的“戰疫”] (*Global Times*, March 6, 2020). In the Chinese state media articles, certain names—such as Trump, Pompeo, and Fauci—were mentioned repeatedly. Therefore, the researcher assigned each of the three individuals a separate code and observed how they were depicted in the story in the Chinese official media.⁵⁸

Trump

Former U.S. President Donald Trump was the most mentioned individual among the 94 *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles. The portrait of Trump painted by the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles shows a populist and racist American president who does not believe in science, promoted the Wuhan lab leak theory, and attempted to win the election by taking advantage of the pandemic. Most importantly, *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles cited articles from mainstream American media to support the narrative. For instance, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were used in a *Global Times* story headlined “The 590K were not only a number but lives that perished away – the cautionary tale of America’s pandemic battle [59 万逝去的生

⁵⁷ The original text in Chinese: “达萨克的最新一条推特转发了疫苗专家彼得霍特兹的文章。文章说，一群极端保守的美国国会议员和其他具有极右倾向的公职人员正对美国著名的生物科学家发起有组织、似乎经过精心协调的攻击。与此同时，保守媒体也不断宣称虚假信息，旨在将关键美国科学家描绘成敌人。‘我们中许多人在电子邮件中和社交媒体上受到威胁，有些人在家里被跟踪，这创造了一种前所未有的反科学恐吓文化’ (Chen & Liu, August 3, 2021).

⁵⁸ Since there were separate codes for Trump and Pompeo, these two persons were not coded as “malicious persons,” although their depiction in the Chinese media about them fit into the category.

命，绝不仅仅是数字——美国抗疫警示录]” to show how Trump frequently disseminated false information to mislead the public (Shan, 2021).⁵⁹ Furthermore, Trump erred in blaming the pandemic on China. A *Global Times* article asserted that Trump propagated the view that the virus was from the Wuhan labs and coined the term “China virus” to foment racial animosity toward the Chinese in the U.S. The *Global Times* article further argued, “Trump had never mentioned a word about the theories that the virus could have from Italy or India. He would not call the virus ‘Italy virus’” (Huang, February 20, 2021, emphasis added by the author).⁶⁰

The *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles pointed out that “selfish”⁶¹ American politicians “with the lowest moral standards” (Global Times, March 20, 2020),⁶² such as Trump, who played the anti-China game and disregarded the difficult pandemic situation domestically, had brought calamities to the U.S.

Pompeo

Aside from Trump, Michael Pompeo, the Secretary of State in the Trump administration during

⁵⁹ The original Chinese context: “According to the timeline of the US epidemic recapitulated by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other media, Trump, then the leader of the US government, repeatedly issued false information to mislead the public, saying that the COVID-19 virus is a “big flu,” and the risk of contracting the virus and the death rate is “very low.” He also said the epidemic would soon “miraculously disappear.” All of which contradicts the information on epidemic prevention and control released by American public health agencies and medical experts [根据《纽约时报》《华盛顿邮报》等媒体复盘的美国疫情时间线，时任美国政府领导人特朗普屡次发布虚假信息误导民众，称新冠肺炎病毒是“大号流感”，“感染病毒的风险和死亡率”非常低，“疫情会很快”奇迹般地消失，“这些都与美公共卫生机构、医学专家发布的疫情防控信息相互抵牾。”]” (Shan, May 28, 2021).

⁶⁰ The original text in Chinese: “雖然還有很多說法，比如說新冠病毒的起源地是意大利或者印度等，但特朗普卻隻字不提，他不會把病毒稱為‘意大利病毒’” 華盛頓總把中國置於被告席。”

⁶¹ For example, the title of an article from the *Global Times* called American politicians “selfish”: “The unemployment rate has soared to the highest since WWII. Selfish [American] politicians are still promoting the “China threat” claim. The United States is reopening as a sick country [国内失业率飙升至战后最高 自私政客们仍热炒~中国威胁~ 美国在病态中强行重启]” (Xiao et al., 2020).

⁶² The original text in Chinese: “[A Chinese scholar said to the *Global Times* reporter “they are some [of the American politicians] with the lowest moral standards [一位中國學者對《環球時報》記者說...’他們是品德最低下的幾個政客]’.” (Global Times, March 20, 2020).

the COVID-19 pandemic, was one of the most spotlighted global political figures in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles. Figure 5.5 shows that Pompeo was mentioned in 16 articles. One article was even devoted to addressing how Pompeo was “obsessed with attacking China.”⁶³ This article then offered combative remarks from the Chinese diplomat Hua Chunying to refute Pompeo’s assertions (Global Times, April 1, 2020).

One of the possible reasons that Pompeo received much attention was perhaps that he constantly talked about the Wuhan lab leak theory, which triggered denunciation from the Chinese state media. According to *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles, Pompeo was among the first U.S. high-ranking officials who “brought the conspiracy theory [of the Wuhan lab leak theory] to the world stage” (*People's Daily*, May 10, 2020)⁶⁴ and using the term “Wuhan virus” (Xiao et al., March 25, 2020)⁶⁵. In these articles, Pompeo played the leading role of pushing the Wuhan lab theory and demanding the investigation of the Chinese lab.

Fauci

Compared with Trump and Pompeo, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anthony Fauci, did not receive as much attention from *Global Times* and *People's Daily* as Trump and Pompeo. Fauci, however, had a more favorable portrayal in the two publications than the villain Trump and Pompeo. Unsurprisingly, the slightly more positive image of Fauci was tied to his opinions of the COVID-19 virus origin. Early on in the pandemic, *Global Times* and

⁶³ The title of the article stated: “Pompeo is obsessed with attacking China, Hua Chunying fights back confidently 'This pot is too big, sorry, they can't get rid of it' [蓬佩奥攻击中国成瘾 华春莹理直气壮反击'这锅太大，对不起，他们甩不出去'].”

⁶⁴ The *People's Daily* article (May 10, 2020) stated: “The U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo 'takes conspiracy theory to global stage' and asks China to allow experts into Wuhan Institute of Virology to investigate [美国务卿蓬佩奥将该阴谋论‘带到全球舞台’要求中国允许专家进入武汉病毒研究所调查。]”

⁶⁵ According to the *Global Times* (March 26, 2020): “Pompeo is the first senior US official to use the term 'Wuhan virus' to defame China [蓬佩奥是美国最早使用‘武汉病毒’说法对中国污名化的高级官员。].”

People's Daily presented Fauci as a scientist who dared to challenge Trump and Pompeo's accusations against China. *Global Times* said Fauci "cannot stand the U.S. government's never-ending conduct of 'throwing the pot' (shifting the responsibility)" but can only correct Trump (*Global Times*, March 25, 2020).⁶⁶ According to *Global Times*, Fauci was adamant that the virus was not created in the lab.

However, in an interview with the *Financial Times* on June 4, 2021, Fauci urged China to publish the medical records of three virologists and six miners who became sick after they visited a bat cave near Wuhan (*Nikkei Asia*, 2021, June 4). An article published in *Global Times* the following day tried to justify why Fauci, who had rejected the lab leak theory, suggested China provide documents pertaining to the virus origin. According to the article, "some comments thought that, to a great extent, Fauci flipped his views because of political pressure he faced" (Li, June 5, 2021).⁶⁷ In late June, the Chinese state media noted Fauci had again "changed" his mind and stated the virus came from nature. *Global Times* again published an article titled "Fauci changed his statement again: the COVID virus more probably originated from nature[福奇再改口：新冠更可能源於自然]" and explained that Fauci's previous recommendation to China of making the medical records public might be a result of political pressure he had experienced (Zhao, June 24, 2021).

Global Times and *People's Daily* went on to further illustrate how scientific research was politicized and how scientists were threatened in the U.S. by using Fauci's "flipping statements"

⁶⁶ The *Global Times* article said: "U.S. health officials cannot stand the US government's never-ending conduct of 'throwing the pot.' The *Washington Post* reported on the 23rd that Fauci, a top American medical expert who often attends the COVID-19 pandemic briefing with Trump, admitted in an interview with "Science" magazine that he could not agree with some of the president's accusations against China. [对于美国当局无休止的"甩锅"行为，美国卫生官员也有些看不下去。《华盛顿邮报》23日称，经常与特朗普一起出席新冠肺炎疫情发布会的美国顶级医学专家福奇，在接受《科学》杂志采访时，承认无法认同总统对中国的某些指责]。”

⁶⁷ The original text in Chinese: “有觀點認為，福奇之所以“反復橫跳”，很大程度上是因為政治壓力。”

as an example. Two articles were further published in *Global Times* and *People's Daily*, respectively, in July and August 2021, to detail how Fauci swung between the theory of the man-made COVID virus and the nature-made virus. The two news stories ended with a similar moral: the American's politicization of the pandemic led to the ruin of the U.S. The *People's Daily* article "Mr. Fauci, it was not unreasonable that the U.S.'s battle against the pandemic failed! [福奇先生，美国抗疫失败不奇怪！]" (Lin, August 3, 2021) concluded:

*From what had occurred to Fauci, the world can clearly see that in the U.S., politics override science, politics override lives, and politics override everything. It is the truth of the United States – who has claimed itself as 'the lighthouse of democracy and liberty for the whole world.'*⁶⁸

These personalities – malicious persons, good guys, victims, American followers, and the simplified representations of Trump, Pompeo, and Fauci -- added to the Chinese accounts of the origin of the virus. Although the persons mentioned did not directly make their presence in the narratives of the Fort Detrick conspiracy theory, their portraits contributed to strengthening China's accusations that Western politicians were behind the fabrication of the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory by giving the reasons why and how the West attacked China.

5.3.2 Notable words used in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles

The choice of words is a crucial component in the construction and delivery of meanings. For that reason, the words and phrases employed in the text also offer significant elements in the study of strategic narratives (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019; O'Loughlin et al., 2017).

⁶⁸ The original text in Chinese: “透过福奇的遭遇，世人可以清楚地看到，政治凌驾于科学，政治凌驾于生命，政治凌驾于一切，才是自诩为“全世界民主自由灯塔”的美国的真相。”

In this study, the researcher also identified terms that consistently appeared in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles. The terms “politicize[政治化],” “defamation [抹黑 or 污名化],”⁶⁹ “throw the pot[甩鍋],” and “conspiracy theory[陰謀論]” stood out in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* pieces. Figure 5.6 shows the number of articles that mentioned the terms and the times that the terms were referenced in the articles.⁷⁰

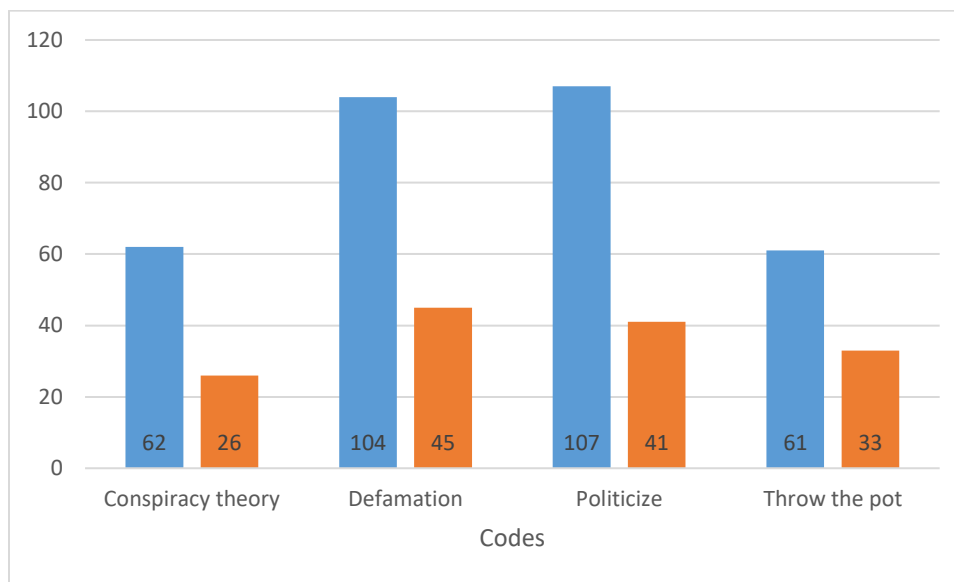


Figure 5.6: Number of coding references (blue columns) and number of articles (orange columns) coded

⁶⁹ In the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles, two words are often used to refer to the same concept of defamation: mohei (抹黑) and wu min hua(污名化). In this research, I used “mohei OR wu min hua” to conduct text search in NVivo. Therefore, the result of “defamation” is the combined results of “mohei” and “wu min hua.”

⁷⁰ These terms are not the terms that appear most often in the articles. The top five terms counted most in the articles are: virus(病毒), pandemic(疫情), the United States(美國), China (中國), retrieve the origin(溯源). However, the terms that appear the most do not mean the terms could capture the core ideas of the articles. For example, the word “virus” was the most often used. But it is hard to identify how the articles presented the idea of the origin of the virus from this single word. On the other hand, the words “politicize,” “defamation,” “throw the pot,” and “conspiracy theory” are more helpful in delineating the narratives. This is the reason why the researcher decided to focus on the four terms instead of the terms that appear most often in the articles.

“Politicize” (政治化)

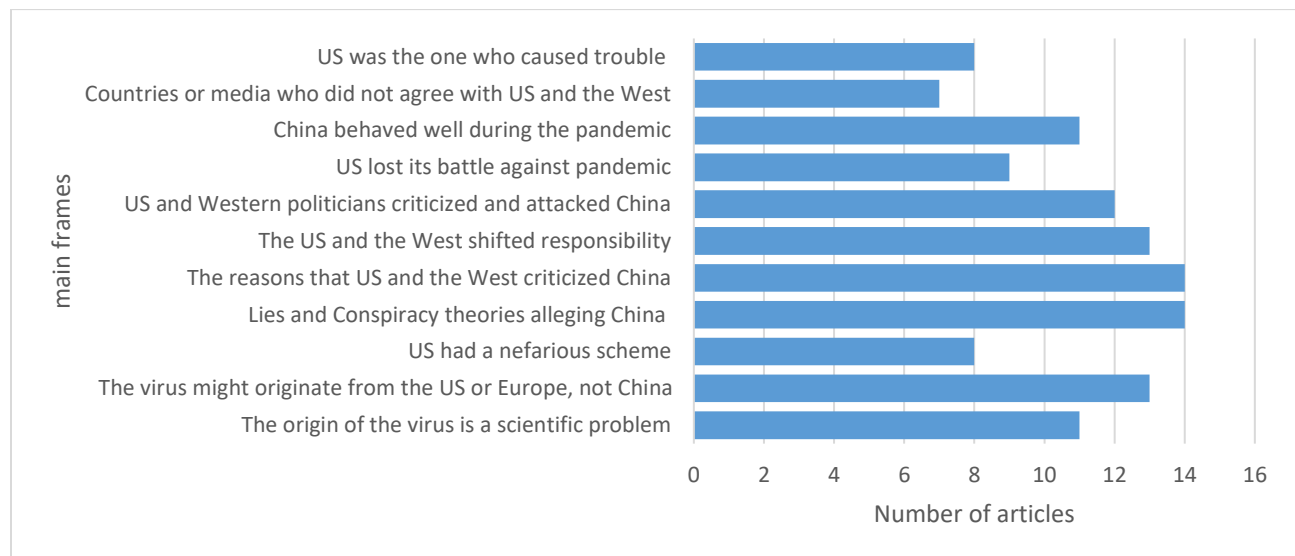


Figure 5.7⁷¹ Number of articles in which the code “Politicize” and notable main frames appear simultaneously

Figure 5.7 shows that the term “politicize” mainly appeared in the articles containing the main frames “Lies and conspiracy theories alleging China was the place where the virus originated,” “The reasons that the U.S. and Western countries attacked China,” “The virus may originate from the U.S. or Europe and was not leaked from the Wuhan lab,” and “The U.S. and the West (spread conspiracy theories to) shift responsibility,” etc. These frames reveal the contexts in which the term “politicize” was used. A closer reading of the articles would find the meaning and the application of the term “politicize” -- *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* used “politicize[d]” to describe the underlying motivations behind the urgings by the United States for more investigations into the Chinese lab. The articles also deemed the criticism of China’s secrecy in the early pandemic situations as a move of “politicizing the pandemic.” In the view of this article, the reason that the U.S. politicized the pandemic was to shift its responsibility for failing to contain

⁷¹ To accommodate the titles of main frames within the figure, their names are shortened without altering their original meanings.

the pandemic there.

“Throw the pot” (甩鍋)

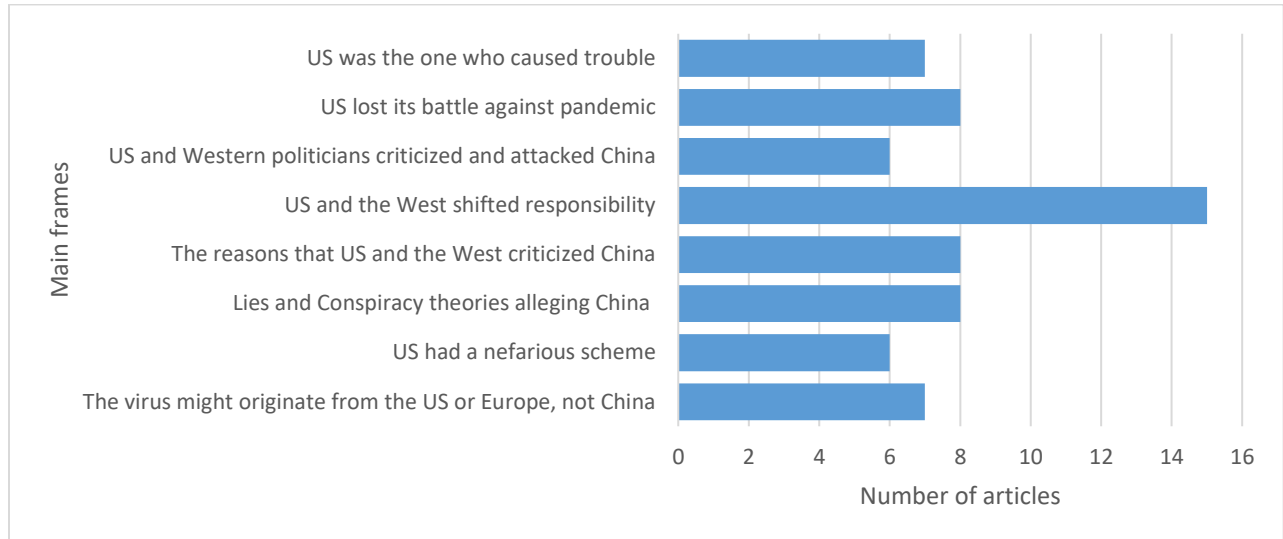


Figure 5.8: Number of articles in which the code “Throw the pot” and notable main frames appear simultaneously

“Throw the pot” was often used by the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles to associate the shift of responsibility by the United States. Figure 5.8 shows that this term often appeared in the main frames “The U.S. and the West (spread conspiracy theories to) shift responsibility,” “The U.S. lost its battle against the pandemic,” “The reasons that the U.S. and the Western countries attack against China,” and “Lies and conspiracy theories alleging China was the place where the virus originated.” These frames indicate that the term “throw the pot” was used in the context to explain why the U.S. and Western countries contended that the virus was from China – because the politicians sought to deflect the blame and win the elections.

Interestingly, the expression “throw the pot,” meaning “shifting responsibilities to others,” came from the video game “League of Legends” and only recently gained popularity during the

pandemic.⁷² Among the 94 articles studied, 33 articles mentioned the term, and 11 articles included it in the headlines. For example, “American politicians showed ‘fancy ways of throwing the pot,’ China asked three questions to refute [美政客 “花式甩锅”抹黑中国，中方连续“三问”反驳]” (Yu, April 17, 2020), “Pompeo was obsessed with attacking China, Hua Chunyin refuted with great confidence: ‘The pot was too big. Sorry, they cannot throw it away.’ [蓬佩奥攻击中国成瘾 华春莹理直气壮反击 ‘这锅太大，对不起，他们甩不出去’]” (*Global Times*, April 1, 2020).

In the articles, commentators or journalists illustrated how the U.S. blamed others and referenced the “history” that the U.S. shifted the responsibility to Germany in the 1918 Spanish flu (*Global Times*, March 20, 2020). They also reminded readers that in the COVID-19 case, the virus might have come from the U.S., too. For example, in the *People’s Daily* article, “The international community must investigate Fort Detrick thoroughly! [国际社会必须彻查德堡!]” (Jia, August 5, 2021), the author stated:

Being confronted by the rational voice of the international community that requested to investigate bio labs in Fort Detrick, the U.S. government again played the trick of ‘throwing the pot’: they endeavored to push the theory that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab and even manipulated WHO to start a second round investigation of the virus in China...In fact, the United States cannot prove its own innocence but only increased the

⁷² An interesting discovery is that the internet encyclopedia provided by the search engine Baidu used this example sentence to explain the meaning of “throw the pot”: “To win the election, some politicians in the U.S. put party interests above national interest, politicized the anti-pandemic battle, and single-mindedly focused on “throwing the pot” to others. [美国一些政客为了选举，将党派利益置于国家利益之上，将抗疫问题政治化，一门心思对外“甩锅”推责]” (Baidu, 2022, June 20).

*suspicion from the international community toward Fort Detrick.*⁷³

Conspiracy theory (陰謀論)

In the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles, the term “conspiracy theory” first referred to the claim that the virus was a *bioweapon* leaked from the Wuhan lab (Global Times, 2020, February 25; 2021, May 10).⁷⁴ But as the global requests for additional inspection into the Wuhan labs intensified, the Chinese media widened the scope of conspiracy theory to include *any* claims that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan labs.

⁷³ The original text in Chinese: “面对近期国际社会要求调查德堡生物实验室的理性声音，美国政府又一次玩起了“甩锅”把戏：极力渲染新冠病毒“武汉实验室泄漏论”，对中国大搞“有罪推定”的阴谋算计，甚至操纵世卫组织开启针对中国的第二阶段溯源工作。但是...[美国]证明不了自身清白，只能加深国际社会对德堡的怀疑”。

⁷⁴ For example, in the *Global Times* article “The theory about the virus origin covered in the mist[迷霧籠罩下的新冠病毒起源說]” (Ni et al., February 25, 2020), the journalists stated: “The creators of conspiracy theories not only come from the shadows. Some international forces openly “spread rumors,” too. As early as the end of January, the *Washington Times* published an article claiming that the COVID-19 virus “may come from a biochemical weapon leaked from a Wuhan laboratory.” It was also one of the first news outlets to spread the conspiracy theory. In early February, Senator Tom Cotton of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee made a series of remarks, accusing that the virus may come from China's biological warfare program and is a biochemical weapon leaked from a Wuhan laboratory.[阴谋论的制造者不仅来自于暗处，国际上也有一些势力公然“造谣”，早在1月底，美国《华盛顿时报》就刊文声称新冠病毒“或来自武汉实验室外泄的生化武器”，它也是最早传播这一阴谋论的媒体之一。而2月上旬，美国参议院军事委员会参议员汤姆科顿发表一系列言论，指控新冠病毒可能来自中国生物战计划、是武汉实验室外泄的生化武器。]。”

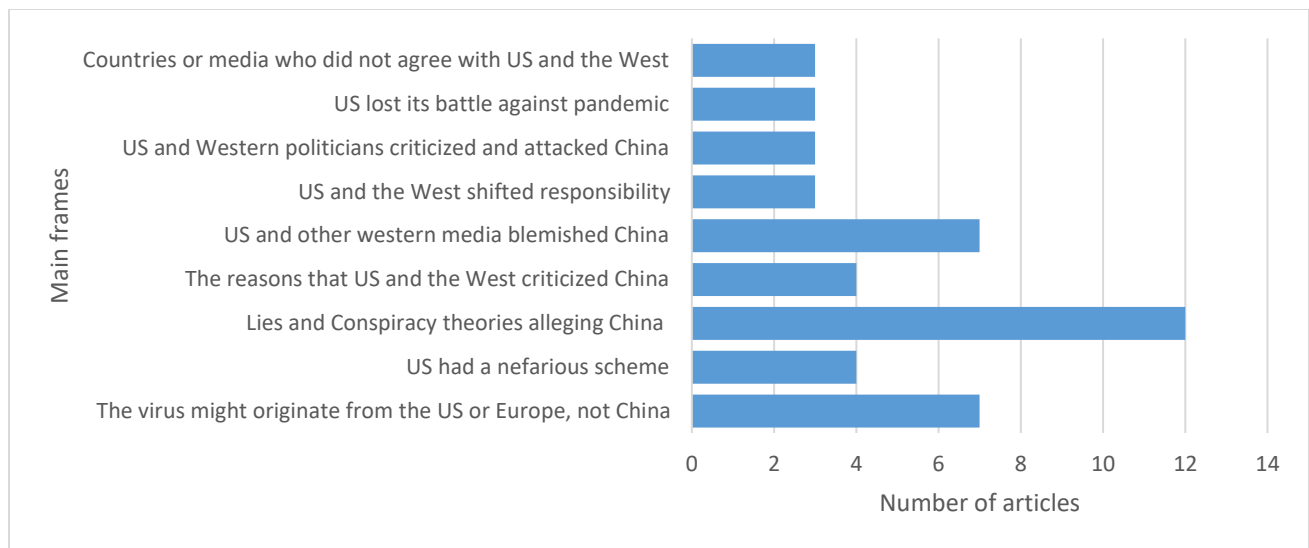


Figure 5.9 Number of articles in which the code “conspiracy theory” and notable main frames appear simultaneously

Figure 5.9 shows the context in which the term “conspiracy theory” was used. It mainly appeared in the main frames “Lies and conspiracy theories alleging China was the place where the virus originated,” “The virus may originate from the U.S. or Europe, but not China,” “The U.S. and other Western media blemished China,” “The reasons that the U.S. and the Western countries attacked China,” and “The U.S. had a nefarious scheme and a history of lying.” Several articles also identified the alleged hands behind the conspiracy theories, for example, “Western media, writers, and public figures” (Ren, September 23, 2021),⁷⁵ Murdoch’s News Corp (Bai, May 26, 2021),⁷⁶ and American politicians such as Tom Cotton (*Global Times*, February 24, 2020).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ For example, “Who are those spreading the “lab leak theory”? According to a report on the *Science Times* website, some Western media, writers, and public figures, rather than scientists, supported this statement [那些散布“实验室泄漏论”的人是谁？科学时代网站的报道称，支持这一说法的是一些西方媒体、作家和公众人物，而不是科学家]” (Ren, 2021)

⁷⁶ For example, “And Western media organizations like Murdoch News Group are also keen to provide a platform for these jumping clowns, allowing them to exaggerate the “lab leak theory” of the COVID-19 virus in the public opinion field[而像默多克新闻集团这样的西方舆论机构，也热衷于给这些跳梁小丑提供平台，让他们在舆论场上大肆渲染新冠病毒“实验室泄漏论]” (Bai, May 26, 2021).

⁷⁷ For example, “U.S. Republican Senator Tom Cotton even publicly promoted this conspiracy theory, which was refuted by many authoritative experts[美国共和党参议员汤姆科顿更是公开宣扬这种阴谋论，遭到许多权威专家的驳斥]” (*Global Times*, February 24, 2020).

Defamation (抹黑)

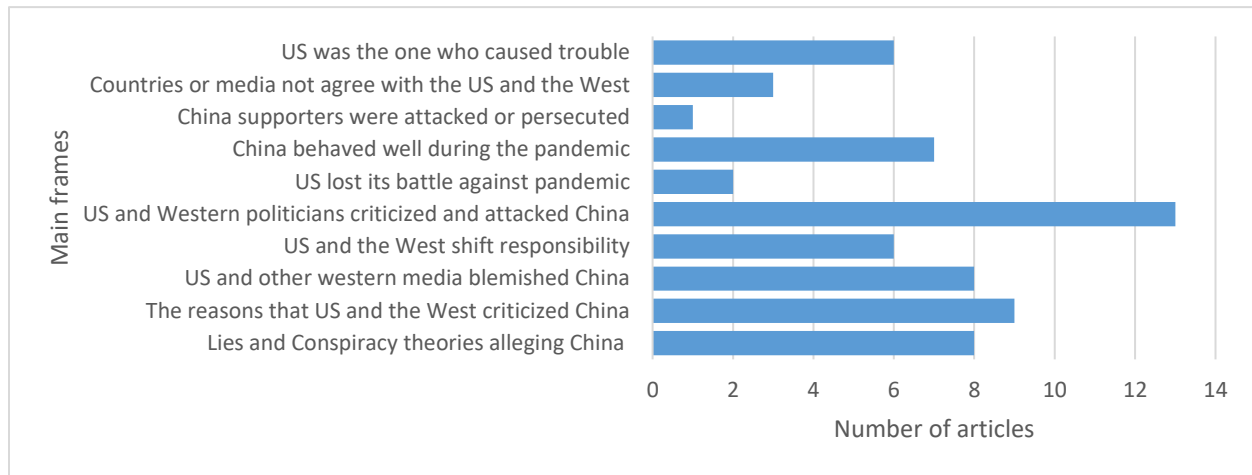


Figure 5.10 Number of articles in which the code “Defamation” and main frames appear simultaneously

The Chinese state media used two words, “mohei[smear 抹黑]” and “wu min hua[blemish 污名化]” interchangeably. Both of them are synonymous with the meaning of “defamation,” meaning to smear someone’s reputation. In the Chinese COVID-19 narratives, the two words were used to criticize the requests from Western countries for China to be transparent or open up for investigation (Global Times, May 25, 2021)⁷⁸ or the labeling of “China virus” or “Wuhan virus” by American politicians (Shan, May 28, 2021).⁷⁹

The above four words, “politicize,” “throw the pot,” “conspiracy theory,” and “defamation” are frequently featured in combination in the articles. Moreover, they evolved into catchphrases over time. For example, a text search turned up 12 articles that used the phrase “politicize the pandemic

⁷⁸ For example, the title of the *Global Times* article: “‘Throwing the pot’ of the origin of the COVID-19 virus, American lawmakers guide the policy to smear China and vow to set up a working group to fight the ‘public opinion war’ [甩锅”新冠病毒起源 指导抹黑中国方针 美议员叫嚣成立工作组打“舆论战”] (*Global Times*, May 25, 2021).

⁷⁹ For example, the *Global Times* article stated: “Some politicians in the Trump administration have repeatedly claimed that ‘China should be blamed for the outbreak’ and fabricated and promoted conspiracy theories such as ‘lab leak.’ They even coined words such as ‘Chinese virus’ and ‘Kung Fu virus’ to carry out smear attacks. [特朗普政府的一些政客多次声称“疫情暴发应怪中国，”杜撰炒作“实验室泄漏”等阴谋论，甚至生造‘中国病毒’‘功夫病毒’等词进行污名化攻击]” (Shan, May 28, 2021).

[疫情政治化 Yiqing zhengzhi hua],” and eight articles utilized the term “virus defamation [病毒污名化 Bingdu wu ming hua].” The repetition of the four key terms and the coinage of the catchphrases not only help to frame the events but also give the overall narrative about the origin of the pandemic a consistent tone.

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 The big picture, according to the Chinese media

This research has identified prominent themes and frames, notable protagonists, and terms used in the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles covering the origin of the COVID-19 virus. These elements and frames enable us to see the big picture behind individual occurrences and reporting. More significantly, they reveal the tools that Chinese propaganda employs to influence their audiences who speak Chinese.

A big picture emerges from the frames, protagonists, and recurrent terms in the articles: The COVID-19 virus did not originate in China; rather, it was from other countries. Given that the U.S. has established biological laboratories worldwide, there was a high likelihood that the virus originated in American labs. The virus could have leaked from the military army base at Fort Detrick. First, Fort Detrick, which continues to be a center for biomedical research, had ties to the Japanese scientists who developed bioweapons during World War II. Second, Fort Detrick lab safety has been a major source of concern. There were a number of incidents in past years. Additionally, many cases of unexplained lung ailments were reported in neighboring states throughout the summer of 2019 as well as in nearby communities. However, the U.S. not only refused to allow outside scrutiny of the Fort Detrick labs but also blamed the virus on China.

Trump and Pompeo were the two leading American villains singled out by the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles. Both of them promoted the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory and constantly used racist terms such as “China virus” and “Wuhan virus” to incite racial hatred and encourage anti-science culture. Scientists such as Fauci, who maintained that the virus was most likely a product of nature, were often threatened and occasionally had to yield to political pressure. One of the reasons behind all these attacks and conspiracy theories against China was that Western politicians wanted to deflect blame and win elections. Moreover, the U.S. and some Western countries wanted to halt the ascent of China. As a result, the U.S. hindered international cooperation in the fight against COVID-19 and disappointed the world. In contrast, China heroically battled the disease, supported other countries, shared data openly, and made contributions to the international community.

5.4.2 The temporal element

The above big picture was not painted in one single stroke; rather, it was augmented with each report, molding the impression in readers' minds over many months.

Nevertheless, rather than being components of an intricately pre-devised propaganda plan, the articles read more like the state's reactions to each news event that agitated China. This argument can be supported by looking at the timeline of significant events and the trend of the months in which the articles were published. Figure 5.11 shows the number of *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles published each month from Jan 2020 to June 2022. It can be seen from the Figure that there were two peaks: March to May 2020 and the summer of 2021.

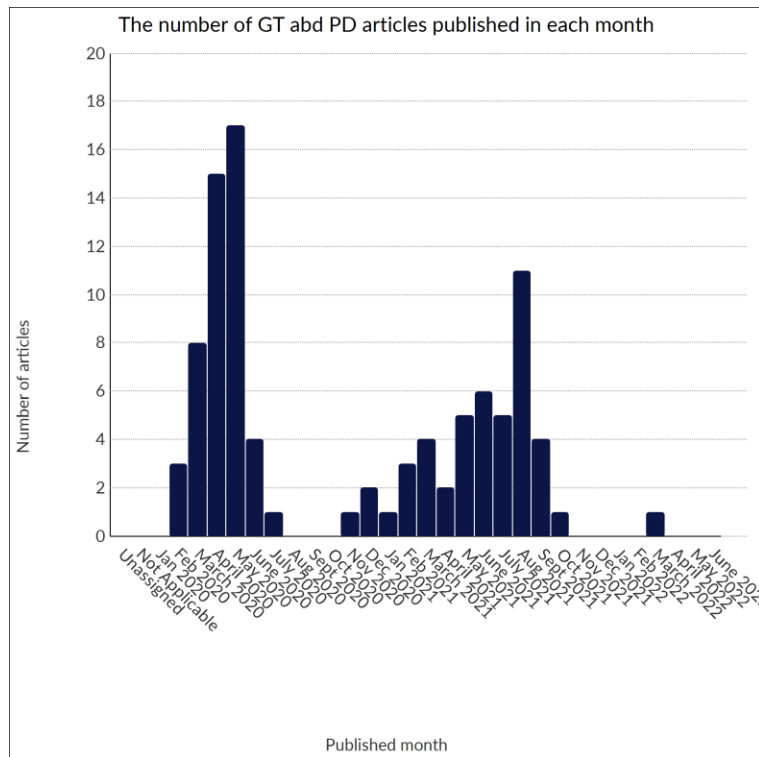


Figure 5.11 The number of *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles included in this research published each month from Jan 2020 to June 2022

The incidents in which foreign politicians and media condemned China or scientific findings about COVID-19 were published are included in Table 5.3. Between March 2020 and the summer of 2021, Western politicians and media made several statements criticizing China. The timing of these occurrences is consistent with the time periods in which articles in *Global Times* and *People's Daily* were published, demonstrating that these articles were more like responses to accusations. These articles provided reinterpretations of the events as well as corrective portrayals of China and Western nations. On the one hand, they reassured the audience that China was not responsible for the pandemic; on the other hand, they re-emphasized the West's hostility against China, just as that has been depicted in the history and contemporary nationalism narratives (Liao, 2017).

Table 5.3 Timeline of important events regarding Covid-19 origin controversies and investigations (Compiled by the researcher)

3/2/2020	Jesse Watters criticized China in his show ⁸⁰
3/12/2020	NBC reported that U.S. politicians such as Pompeo kept using words like “China virus” ⁸¹
3/20/2020	American lawmakers Mike Gallagher and Ben Sasse asked Twitter to close accounts belonging to the Chinese government ⁸²
4/2020	Multiple states in the U.S. filed lawsuits against the Chinese government for mishandling the COVID-19 outbreak ⁸³
4/14/2020	Senator Josh Hawley introduced a bill to hold the Chinese government responsible for the pandemic ⁸⁴
4/29/2020	Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison urged WHO to investigate the virus’s origin ⁸⁵
5/3/2020	Pompeo said ‘enormous evidence’ showed coronavirus came from a Chinese lab ⁸⁶
6/10/2020	Research from Harvard Medical School claimed that Covid-19 might have been circulating in China as early as August 2019 ⁸⁷
1/14/2021	WHO experts arrived in China to conduct an investigation ⁸⁸
2/10/2021	WHO experts finished the investigation ⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Rozsa, M. (2020, March 3). Fox News host claims coronavirus outbreak was caused by Chinese people "eating raw bats and snakes" *Salon*. <https://www.salon.com/2020/03/03/fox-news-host-claims-coronavirus-outbreak-was-caused-by-chinese-people-eating-raw-bats-and-snakes>

⁸¹ Tan, H. (2020, March 10). Beijing objects to term “Wuhan coronavirus,” and says it may not have originated in China. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/10/china-objects-to-term-wuhan-coronavirus-used-by-mike-pompeo.html>

⁸² Miller, M. (2020, March 20). GOP lawmakers call on Twitter to ban Chinese Communist Party from the platform. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/488731-republican-lawmakers-call-on-twitter-to-ban-chinese-communist-party-from/>

⁸³ Shaw, A., & Laco, K. (2021, May 2). States keep up with lawsuits against China for “malicious” role in COVID-19 pandemic. *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/states-lawsuits-china-for-malicious-role-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁸⁴ Shawn, E. (2020, May 19). Hawley bill would let Americans sue China over coronavirus. *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/hawley-lawsuits-china-coronavirus-bill>

⁸⁵ Karp, P., & Davidson, H. (2020, April 29). China bristles at Australia’s call for investigation into coronavirus origin. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/australia-defends-plan-to-investigate-china-over-covid-19-outbreak-as-row-deepens>

⁸⁶ Basu, Z. (2020, May 3). Pompeo says there’s “enormous evidence” coronavirus originated in Wuhan lab. *Axios*. <https://www.axios.com/2020/05/03/pompeo-coronavirus-wuhan-lab>

⁸⁷ Taylor, C. (2020, June 10). Satellite images and online searches indicate China had coronavirus in the fall, Harvard study finds. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/09/coronavirus-may-have-been-spreading-in-china-in-august-harvard-study.html>

⁸⁸ Mcneil, S. (2021, January 14). WHO team arrives in Wuhan to investigate pandemic origins. *AP NEWS*. <https://apnews.com/article/who-team-arrives-wuhan-virus-origins-db3e9adcbfa801d3e8274c1976ea5fcd>

⁸⁹ Woodward, A. (2021, February 10). WHO and Chinese scientists concluded it’s “extremely unlikely” the coronavirus leaked from a lab, after a 4-week investigation. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/who-investigation-concludes-coronavirus-did-not-leak-wuhan-lab-2021-2>

3/30/2021	WHO published report ⁹⁰
5/23/2021	Wall Street Journal reported that an undisclosed U.S. intelligence report says researchers in the Wuhan lab were sick in Nov 2019 ⁹¹
5/26/2021	Biden urged for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19 ⁹²
8/1/2021	Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee published Covid virus origin paper ⁹³
8/27/2021	Biden received the report from Intelligence agencies on COVID-19 origin investigation ⁹⁴

5.4.3 Adding details through specific elements

When analyzing strategic narratives, one of the important elements to be studied is the characters in the narratives (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2021; Colley, 2019). This research found several distinctive personalities in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* articles. These personalities help provide more details to the events, bolster arguments, and furnish key elements of the narratives. For example, Trump and Pompeo were villains, and Fauci was a suppressed scientist. Other interesting characters are the Western media outlets. Some articles described Western media outlets and journalists as rascals or liars. Ironically, however, the articles also frequently quoted Western media to validate the state media's claims about the bad deeds of American politicians and chaos in the U.S. In other words, Western media, especially American ones, played both witnesses and liars on different occasions.

⁹⁰ Keaten, J. (2021b, March 29). WHO report: COVID likely 1st jumped into humans from animals. AP NEWS. <https://apnews.com/article/who-report-animals-source-covid-19-coronavirus-8a839c179c330c56fa46a763b7286a7f>

⁹¹ Gordon, M. R., Strobel, W. P., & Hinshaw, D. (2021, May 23). Intelligence on Sick Staff at Wuhan Lab Fuels Debate on Covid-19 Origin. *WSJ*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/intelligence-on-sick-staff-at-wuhan-lab-fuels-debate-on-covid-19-origin-11621796228>

⁹² BBC News. (2021b, May 27). Covid: Biden orders investigation into virus origin as lab leak theory debated. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57260009>

⁹³ Edson, R. (2021, August 2). Wuhan lab report raises further questions about possible COVID-19 lab leak. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/world/wuhan-lab-report-raises-further-questions-about-possible-covid-19-lab-leak>

⁹⁴ Nakashima, E., Abutaleb, Y., & Achenbach, J. (2021, August 25). Biden receives inconclusive intelligence report on covid origins. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/08/24/covid-origins-biden-intelligence-review/>

5.4.4 The “anchoring” terms that define the narratives

This research identified four terms (“politicize,” “throw the pot,” “conspiracy theory,” and “defamation”) that are frequently used in the articles and evolved into catchphrases such as “politicize the pandemic” and “virus defamation.” These phrases encapsulate the main ideas across the articles and define the narrative. Previous studies pointed out that the lexical element is important in constructing strategic narratives (O’Loughlin et al., 2017, Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019, 2021). Using the terms and catchphrases in Chinese propaganda demonstrates how the strategy could make the narrative more impressive. Moreover, these terms could be indicators for observing the efficacy of the Chinese narrative. For example, researchers could observe whether and to what extent the terms are repeated in the statements of the audience or the content in the media of other countries. Knowing these precise terms is also extremely useful in tagging and tracing propaganda with computational content analysis.

5.4.5 Conspiracy theory, strategic narratives, and hybrid media system

The *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* articles also provide an excellent opportunity for researchers to study how the term and content of “conspiracy theory” are used as a strategic narrative and developed in the hybrid media system.

First of all, the process of constructing the COVID-19 virus origin stories shows that in the hybrid media system, state-run media outlets, state-supported information campaigns, and random internet users could each make use of the logic of the medium and contribute to reinforcing particular narratives. At first, Chinese online accounts had circulated rumors about the origin of the COVID-19 virus (such as the virus being from Europe or the U.S.) in January 2020 (Kessler, 2021). Although at that time, the online English accounts of the Chinese state media, such as *CGTN*

and *Global Times*, did mention or forward posts in social media about the origin of the virus, the state media did not spotlight the American biolab conspiracy theories until after the Chinese diplomats intensively tweeted in March and May 2020 regarding the Fort Detrick labs and other “suspicious COVID cases” in the United States. With more abundant space to develop stories in printed and online articles, the state media outlets supplied contentious studies and information that still lacked valid verification to enrich the diplomats’ tweets. In addition, while the state media used contentious information in their reporting, the information was also given legitimacy when it was included in the official narrative of the state media.

Second, the case of *Global Times* and *People’s Daily*’s articles also illuminates that conspiracy theory is a combination of facts, contested historical events, speculations, unsubstantiated stories, and preexisting worldviews. Unquestionably, there were facts in the *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* pieces. For example, the U.S. struggled to contain the disease; Trump referred to the virus as the “China virus,” which fueled violence toward Asian Americans, and hostility against science was indeed rising during the pandemic. However, these facts were deployed to facilitate the claim that the Wuhan lab leak theory was a conspiracy theory against China. The assertion that the West was stifling China’s rise also accords with China’s patriotic ideology, which emphasizes the “century of humiliation” inflicted by the West and the need for the rejuvenation of China in the international community.

In addition, the claims of the Chinese state media about the U.S.-made bioweapon and Fort Detrick conspiracy can also trace its root to China’s historical accusation that the U.S. employed bioweapons during the Korean War and dispersed bacteria in the northeastern region of China (Zhang. n.d; Leitenberg, 2008). This claim is further reinforced by the disinformation spread by Russia that the United States established 200 laboratories producing bioweapons worldwide (The

secret lab conspiracy, 2020). The Chinese state media added yet another component to the “American was producing bioweapon” conspiracy theory: Fort Detrick’s connection to Unit 731 of the Japanese army, which was notorious for testing bioweapons on the Chinese during World War II (*Global Times*, July 5, 2021).⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Chinese media defined “conspiracy theories” in their own terms, labeling the calls for an investigation into the Wuhan labs as spiteful and unjustified “conspiracy theories” created by the West.

With these facts and unverified tales, the Chinese-version claims about the COVID-19 virus origin were blended with a long-standing worldview and nationalism. Due to their appeal to Chinese identity and nationalism, these claims are hard to debunk.

In this aspect, conspiracy theories and strategic narratives (or propaganda in the context of this research) share the same elements. Strategic narratives are powerful because of the emotions they evoke and the belief they reinforce, not because of the veracity of the stories (Khaldarova and Pantti, 2016). In some situations, a group’s long-held narrative may be firmly ingrained in its culture and history, making it even more difficult to challenge and dispel (Halverson et al., 2011). Similar to conspiracy theories, undermining one or two tales or disproving a false claim won’t be enough to counter a strategic narrative because the narratives have deeper roots in the audience’s thinking. In this COVID-19 conspiracy theory case, fact-checking is probably not the most effective defense.

⁹⁵ A *Global Times* article described the history of Fort Detrick as “...the Fort Detrick biological base has carried “evil genes” since its establishment. In 1943, the U.S. Army established a biological warfare research base at Fort Detrick, Maryland. After the end of World War II, the United States obtained data from the Japanese 731 Unit on human experiments, bacterial experiments, bacterial warfare, and poison gas experiments in exchange for an exemption for war crime charges against the Unit 731 members[德特里克堡生物基地自设立之初就携带着“罪恶基因”。1943年，美国陆军在马里兰州德特里克堡设立生物战研究基地。二战结束后，美国以豁免侵华日军731部队战犯战争责任为条件，获取731部队进行人体实验、细菌实验、细菌战、毒气实验等方面数据进行生物武器研究]” (*Global Times*, July 5, 2021).

Nevertheless, there are still probably effective ways to battle conspiracy theories and propaganda. Halverson et al. (2011) suggested avoiding the reinforcement of the narratives, contesting analogies between the past and current situations, and recasting the actors in the events in alternative roles. Hagström & Gustafsson (2021) also found that the narratives promoted by China and the U.S. during COVID-19 were not influential if the audiences had their own agenda. Moreover, their research indicated that the Chinese narrative was constrained by the narrative of the U.S.-led world order, which emphasizes human rights and democratic values.

The next question is: Does Taiwan, which has long been a target of China's influence operations, subscribe to China's narratives, or does Taiwan battle the narratives with its own agenda and the democratic values with which it has identified?

Chapter 6: Your story is not my story: Findings and analysis of Taiwanese media narratives on the origin of the COVID-19 virus

In the previous chapter, this study examined the narratives of the COVID-19 virus origin theories in the Chinese media. The findings demonstrate that the state organs of Chinese propaganda – *Global Times* and *People's Daily* -- promoted the theory that the virus originated outside of China. The conspiracy theory incorporated the idea that the lab at Fort Detrick in Maryland was suspicious since the lab has a history of safety issues. The Chinese narrative further blamed the United States and Western countries for defaming China as the place where the virus originated. It asserted that the Western powers have long been concerned about the rise of China. The narrative also included the idea that Western politicians evaded their responsibility and redirected the public angst over their inability to contain the disease by shifting the blame to China.

The research also identified a number of techniques that the Chinese state media deployed to reinforce their narratives. These techniques included the repetition of key terms and assigning simplified “personalities” to individuals in the news. For example, former U.S. President Donald Trump and former Secretary of State Michael Pompeo were portrayed as nefarious persons since they persistently claimed China was responsible for the pandemic, while Dr. Anthony Fauci, the former Chief Medical Advisor to the U.S. President, was depicted as a brave scientist who eventually succumbed to political pressure.

As a second phase of the research, the analysis in this chapter on the Taiwanese media explores whether Taiwanese media content echoed these strains of narratives in the Chinese state media. While Taiwan has been a self-governing democracy for decades, China has never given up on its goal to annex this island. According to *Beijing's Global Media Influence* report published by the Freedom House in 2022, Taiwan has experienced the most intense media influence campaigns

from China among the 30 countries surveyed. However, Taiwan's resistance to Chinese media influence was also ranked first in the same assessment (Freedom House, 2022).

This part of the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the narratives in Taiwanese media about the COVID-19 virus origin theory?
2. Do the narratives in Taiwanese media overlap with the narratives in the Chinese state media?
3. If not, what are the differences between the narratives of the Chinese state media and Taiwanese media?

The results of the analysis show that Taiwanese media provided more perspectives on the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Instead of echoing the Chinese narratives that the virus originated in the United States or other Western countries, the Taiwanese media articles questioned China's assertion that the virus originated from places other than China. Some of the articles also highlighted the narrative that the virus might originate in the Wuhan lab. Moreover, the Taiwanese media alerted readers to the propaganda and disinformation campaigns from China. However, this research also discovered some unsettling phenomena: While the Taiwanese media were resistant to the Chinese theory about the origin of the virus, they were also drawn to conspiracy narratives spun by American right-wing media by citing these outlets without providing background information or any evidence of verification.

This research also identified ways in which Taiwanese media resisted Chinese media narratives. Despite the fact that China and Taiwan use the same language (Chinese) and the media in both countries even used identical terms in articles to frame events, the meanings, subjects, or contexts of the terms used in the Taiwanese media were often different or directly opposed to those in the Chinese media. Taiwanese media portrayed their version of the COVID-19 origin story, which

differed from the Chinese one, by giving words meanings and portraying characters in their own distinct ways.

6.1 The story told by Taiwanese media –themes of the COVID-19 virus origin

This research analyzed 694 Taiwanese articles and found that the themes about the origin of the COVID-19 virus were more diverse than those in the Chinese state media. Although some of the Taiwanese articles still contained themes identical to those in the Chinese media, more of them told other versions of stories from different angles.

For example, the theme about the origin of the virus includes several theories, such as the inferences that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab or might be a bioweapon developed by the Chinese government. Another theme blamed China for shirking the responsibility of being the first to discover the disease and not sharing enough information with other countries. The articles also cast doubt about the fairness of the investigation by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the origin of the virus in China, suspecting that the Chinese government has influenced the investigation. Since the relationship between the United States and China has deeply impacted Taiwan, the Taiwanese media also deemed the disagreement between the U.S. and China over the origin of the virus an example of conflict between the two great powers. In addition, the Taiwanese articles constantly warned audiences of Chinese information manipulation and propaganda. The comparison of themes and frames in Chinese state media and Taiwanese media is displayed in Table 6.3 at the end of this chapter.

Figure 6.1 shows that more Taiwanese articles contained themes that were unique in the Taiwanese media than the themes echoing the Chinese media narratives. Among all the themes in the Taiwanese media (See Figure 6.2), the theme “Various theories about the origin of the virus”

appeared in most articles, followed by “China should take responsibility but failed to be transparent and kept denying its responsibility,” and the one that echoed the Chinese narrative “The virus came from U.S. and Europe. Fort Detrick is the prime suspect.”

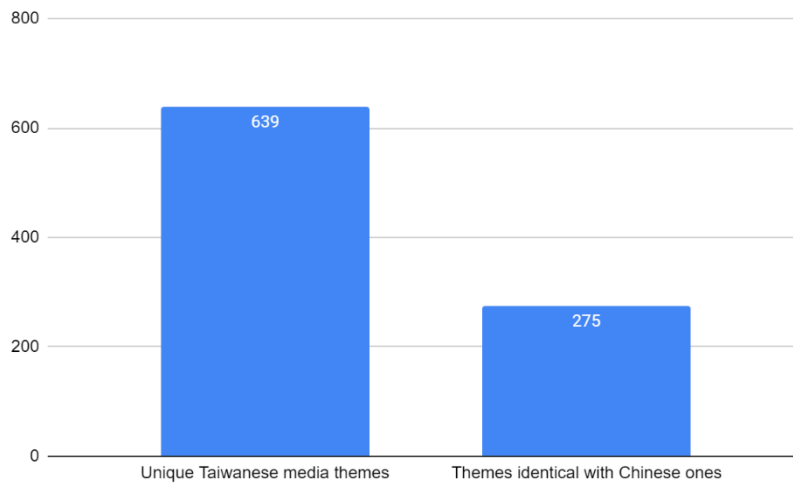


Figure 6.1 A comparison of the number of articles containing themes unique in the Taiwanese media and the number of articles containing themes identical to Chinese narratives

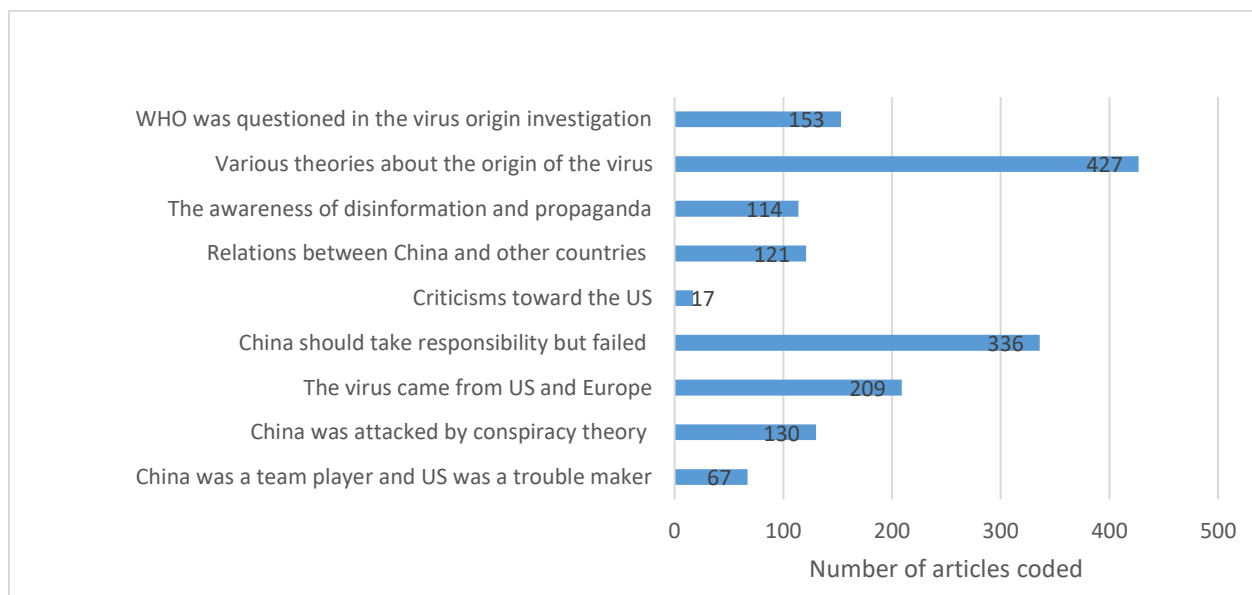


Figure 6.2 Themes in the Taiwanese media⁹⁶

⁹⁶ To accommodate the titles of themes within the figure, their names are shortened without altering their original meanings.

Overall, the coding results of the themes in the Taiwanese media content demonstrate that the Taiwanese media had their own narrative agenda when covering news of the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Meanwhile, Chinese narratives about the COVID-19 virus origin were not emphasized in the Taiwanese media content. There is a more thorough overview of the Taiwanese media narratives in the following section.

6.1.1 Dissecting the themes

Theme 1: The various theories about where and how the virus originated

Compared with the Chinese state media, the narratives about the origin of the COVID-19 virus in the Taiwanese media are diverse. An audience of the Taiwanese media would learn various theories about the origin of the virus from different perspectives. As Figure 6.3 shows, the Taiwanese media content provided multiple perspectives on whether the virus was man-made or arose from nature, whether the currently available data could reach a conclusion about the virus's origin, and whether China's theories about the origin of the virus were plausible. It is worth noting that more articles emphasized that China could be the origin of the virus or expressed uncertainty about the ultimate truth about COVID. The Chinese narrative claiming the virus was from the U.S. or Europe did not prevail in the Taiwanese media. Moreover, some articles (56 out of 694 articles) stated that the virus origin theories "the virus was from the U.S. or Europe" promoted by the Chinese government were not plausible.

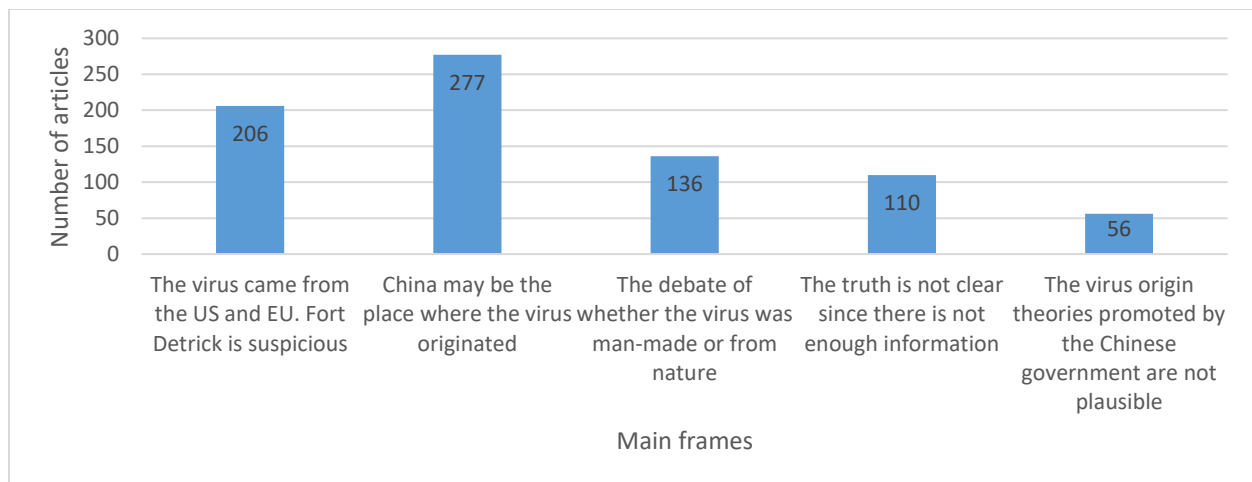


Figure 6.3 The main frames about the origin of the virus

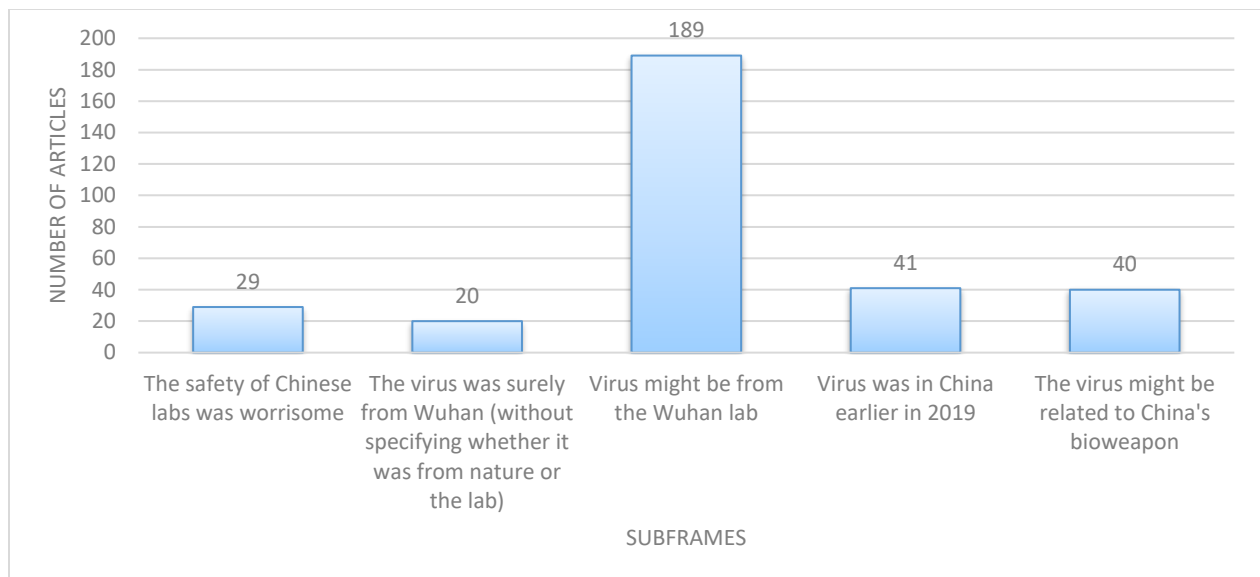


Figure 6.4 subframes about the theories that the virus could have originated in China

It is also noticeable that a large portion of articles (189 articles, see Figures 6.4) in the Taiwanese media emphasized the theories that the virus could be from the Wuhan lab, although these articles did not specify whether the virus was intentionally made or was developed from animals but released by accident. Still, there are other articles specifically covering the speculation that the virus might be related to China's production of bioweapons or expressed concerns about lab safety in China. A few articles also pointed out that the virus had already spread in China before December 2019.

Among the articles stressing that the virus was from the Wuhan lab or related to bioweapon, none of them cited Chinese state media as sources. Rather, these articles heavily depended on Western media's reporting as news sources. For example, As Figure 6.5 shows, the articles containing the subframe "the virus was from the Wuhan lab" frequently quoted Western media, especially American ones. Furthermore, they quoted not only mainstream brands such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fox News* but also the far-right blog Zero Hedge and the War Room podcast produced by the right-wing politician Steve Bannon (See Figure 6.6).

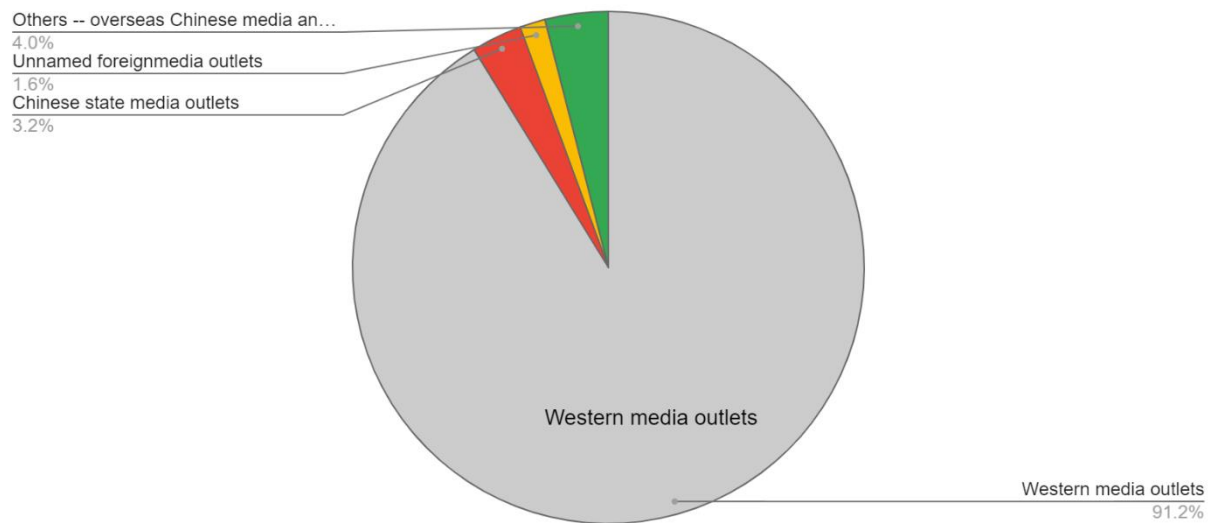


Figure 6.5 Media quoted in articles containing the frame "the virus might be from the Wuhan lab"

Times that the American media sources were referenced

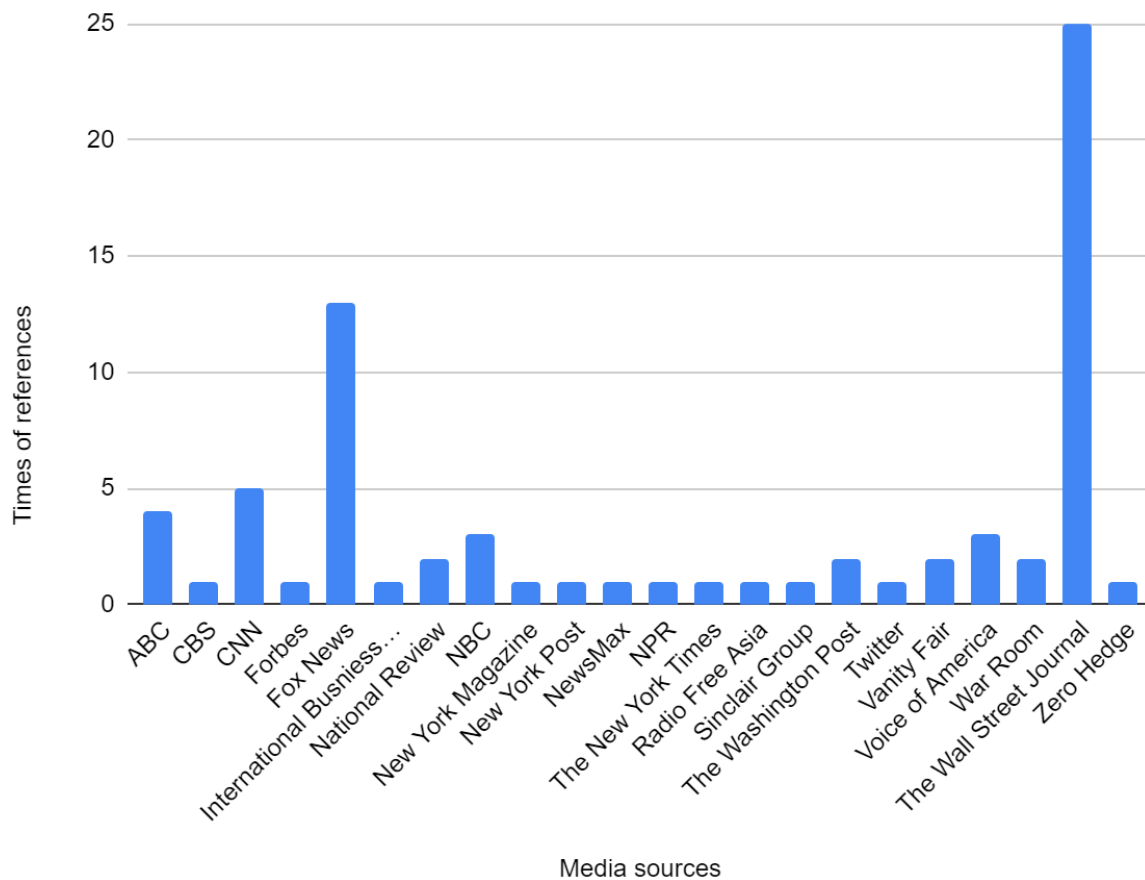


Figure 6.6 American media quoted in the articles containing the frame “the virus might be from the Wuhan lab”

American conservative outlets were also quoted in articles mentioning the subframe “The virus might be related to the bioweapon from China.” The media quoted in the articles include *Fox News*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *War Room*, *The Washington Times*, and *NewsMax*, along with the more liberal *Washington Post* and the media affiliated with the U.S. government agency *Voice of America*.

For example, *Fox News* was quoted in an article published in the Taiwanese online news website *Newtalk* with the title “Why did the United States suddenly ask for the traceability of the virus?”

Fox: The highest-level defector of the CCP leaked the ‘biological weapon plan’ [美為何突然要求病毒溯源? 福斯 : 中共最高級別叛逃者洩漏「生物武器計劃」].⁹⁷ The journalist who authored this article quoted *Fox News* host Tucker Carlson’s words, stating that a high-level defector who had conducted the bioweapon program in the Wuhan lab had maintained secret communication with the U.S. intelligence authority. According to the defector, the Chinese government’s claim that “the virus was from bats” was a deception to cover the truth of the bioweapon program. This *Newtalk* article also listed other facts, such as China’s refusal of WHO’s on-site investigation in the Wuhan lab and China’s orders to delete virus samples, to bolster the article’s main point that the virus was possibly related to bioweapons (Chang, 2021).

Overall, when covering the news about the origin of the place and time of the virus, the Taiwanese media provided more perspectives than the Chinese state media. Although the claim “the virus was from the U.S. and Europe, and Fort Detrick was the prime suspect” did appear in a few Taiwanese articles, it did not gain dominance. On the contrary, more articles in the Taiwanese media suggested that the virus could be from China and discussed whether the virus could be man-made. Nevertheless, a number of articles also pointed out that the truth would never be known. Instead of relying on the sources of Chinese state media, the Taiwanese media preponderantly quoted Western media, especially American ones.

Theme 2: China should take responsibility for the COVID-19 virus pandemic. However, the Chinese government keeps denying its responsibility and suppresses the information

The Chinese state media claim that the United States and other Western politicians defamed and shirked responsibility to China did not gain traction in the Taiwanese media. Although some

⁹⁷ Chang, S. (2021, June 9). Why did the United States suddenly ask for virus traceability? Fox: The CCP’s highest-level defector leaked the “biological weapon plan” [美為何突然要求病毒溯源? 福斯 : 中共最高級別叛逃者洩漏「生物武器計劃」]. *Newtalk*. <https://newtalk.tw/news/view/2021-06-09/586509>

Taiwanese news media did relay the theme, more outlets delivered the theme that China should take responsibility for being the first place where COVID-19 cases were reported. Figure 6.7 compares the number of articles containing the two themes: “China should take responsibility for the COVID-19 pandemic but suppressed the information” and “China was attacked (blamed) by the U.S. and Western countries.” The figures show that more articles carried the theme that China should be responsible for the pandemic but has not acted transparently.

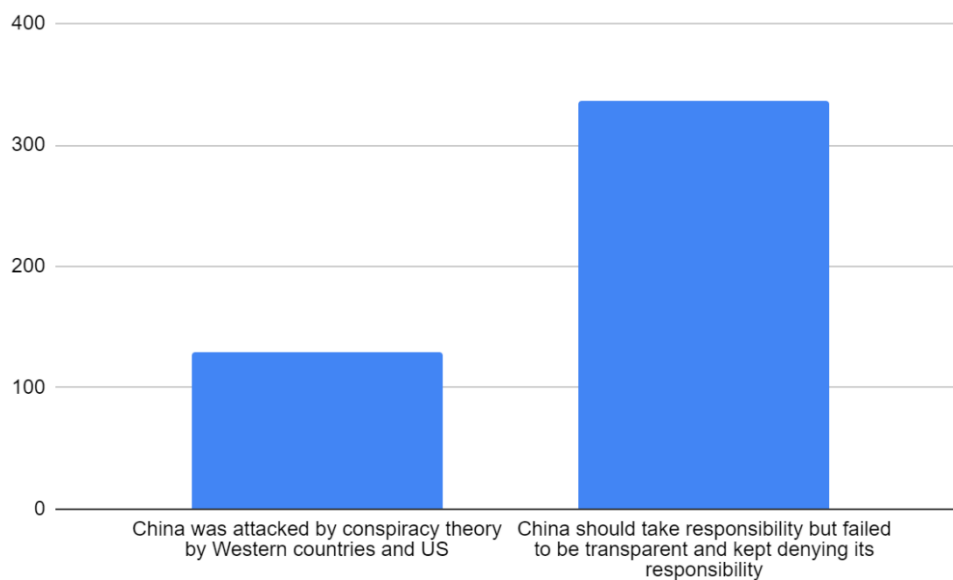


Figure 6.7 The comparison of the number of articles containing the themes “China should take the responsibility but instead covered the truth” and “China was attacked (blamed) by the U.S. and Western countries”

The Taiwanese publications claiming China was to blame for the pandemic went into detail about why China should have been recognized as responsible for the pandemic. The journalists emphasized that the pandemic originated in China and provided examples of remarks made by politicians from other countries urging China to provide further explanations. The publications on this subject focused particularly on China’s deliberate withholding of the facts and evidence pertaining to the origin of the virus.⁹⁸ Examples include the Chinese government’s order to censor

⁹⁸ For example, the article published by Central News Agency “Australian Home Affairs Minister: China must be investigated for the responsibility for the outbreak [澳洲內政部長：疫情責任歸屬 中國須接受調查]” stated that

Chinese scientists' COVID-19-related papers and China's attempt to conceal the discovery of a virus strain close to the COVID-19 one in a Yunnan mine in 2013.⁹⁹

These articles also relied on foreign sources instead of using reporting by Taiwanese journalists on the ground in China. The Taiwanese media quoted articles published in Western media outlets, such as *Voice of America* and *Associated Press*, or directly quoted from Western individuals, such as the officials in the U.S. government, American scientists, and international experts. For example, an *Apple Daily*'s story regarding the Chinese government's censorship of scientific publications used *CNN* as a source (Mainland Center, April 13, 2020), while *Shin (CMmedia)*'s article about the disappearance of the worrisome virus strain found in Yunnan cited *The Sunday Times* (U.K.) (Chiu, July 6, 2020). These Taiwanese news publications merely repeated the claims in the foreign sources without providing more information.

Theme 3: The awareness of disinformation, propaganda, and other manipulation of information

Although the Taiwanese media mostly reiterated the content from Western sources, they were very aware of China's information manipulation related to the discussion of the virus's origin.

One of the main frames in this theme is "China spread fake news and propaganda," which warned audiences of disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda from China.¹⁰⁰ For example, an article published by the *United Daily News* brought readers' attention to the "COVID-19 virus origin conspiracy theory" promoted by the Chinese government. The author quoted a *New York*

an Australian minister said China should be investigated for the country's responsibility for the pandemic (Chiu, April 6, 2020).

⁹⁹ For example, the article "Utilizing large-scale foreign propaganda to broadcast internationally, the CCP attempts to cleanse the 'Wuhan Pneumonia' from the four-part series [利用大外宣在國際上強力放送 中共企圖從「武漢肺炎」洗白脫身四部曲]" pointed out that China exerted strict censorship to cover evidence (Chiu, March 12, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ Although the researcher preferred more precise terms such as "disinformation" and "misinformation," the Taiwanese media generally used the term "fake news [假新聞]" instead of "disinformation" or "misinformation."

Times piece focusing on China's claim that the virus was from the United States and Europe, contending that this kind of false claim had become a "propaganda tool by the Chinese government."¹⁰¹ Some other articles examined how the Chinese state media distorted statements by scientists to boost the Chinese claim that the virus was from other countries. One example was the Italian scholar Giuseppe Remuzzi's remark on how the virus was transmitted in Northern Italy. His talk was misused by the Chinese state media to 'prove' that the virus could be from Italy. The Taiwanese media quoted a news article by the German news outlet *Deutsche Welle* in which Remuzzi clarified his statement and criticized China for disseminating disinformation. Moreover, the Taiwanese article mocked the Chinese media for being corrected by the Italian scientist and described the scientist's correction statement as a "huge smack on the [China's] face" (Zheng, March 28, 2020).

A few Taiwanese outlets also quoted works by Taiwanese fact-checking initiatives. For instance, *Liberty Times* carried a story quoting the fact-checking organization, MyGoPen, and informed readers that the online rumor that "the former U.S. Secretary of the State Mike Pompeo said the COVID-19 virus was a bioweapon made by the U.S." was false information (*Liberty Times*, August 15, 2021).

The Taiwanese media not only alerted their audience to disinformation propagated by China but also warned about conspiracy theories promoted by other individuals such as self-proclaimed "whistleblowers" from China. Among the 83 articles coded to contain the theme of the awareness

¹⁰¹ The title of the *United Daily News* article is: "Throwing the pot" is provocative but useful? Is the CCP's version of the "origin theory" of the COVID-19 virus a propaganda tool? [甩鍋「雖惹議但有用」？中共版新冠病毒「起源論」成宣傳工具？]「甩鍋」雖惹議但有用？中共版新冠病毒「起源論」成宣傳工具？] (Wu, December 25, 2020). The *New York Times* article quoted by the author is "China Peddles Falsehoods to Obscure Origin of Covid Pandemic" by Javier C. Hernández (December 6, 2020).

of information manipulation, five of them questioned the statements made by the “whistleblower” scientist Li-Meng Yan and her supporter, Guo Wengui, an exiled Chinese millionaire.

Yan claimed that she was involved in a program in China in which the virus was made as a bioweapon. With the help of Guo, she fled to the U.S. and exposed the “secret” (Timberg, February 12, 2021). She also was a guest on the War Room podcast hosted by Steve Bannon (Qin et al., January 26, 2021). However, Yan’s statements and cooperation with Guo and Bannon were questioned by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Five Taiwanese articles thus summarized the articles from the *Times* and the *Post*, with the title such as “The New York Times: Yan was used by Guo and Bannon to spread the virus conspiracy theory [紐時：郭文貴、巴農利用閻麗夢 散播病毒陰謀論].”¹⁰² It is worth noting that even though a few Taiwanese news pieces covered the skepticism regarding the Chinese whistleblowers’ assertions on the origin of the virus, a certain portion of Taiwanese media still amplified the dubious claims by the whistleblowers. This phenomenon will be covered in a later section.

Theme 4: Relations between China and other countries

Chapter Five showed how the Chinese state media depicted China as a major help to other nations during the pandemic and the United States as a troublemaker who undermined international collaboration. However, this particular attack on the United States received little attention in Taiwanese media. Only 22 of the 694 articles mentioned the United States as a source of trouble. These passages, however, only served as background information detailing China’s criticisms of the United States. None of the 22 articles addressed China’s allegation that the United States has disrupted international cooperation as a valid takeaway from the articles.

¹⁰² Central News Agency. (2020, November 15). New York Times: Yan Limeng was used by Guo Wengui and Banon to spread virus conspiracy theories[紐時：閻麗夢受郭文貴、巴農利用 散播病毒陰謀論]. <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aopl/202011200302.aspx>

Notably, the Taiwanese media was more interested in how the statements about the origin of the virus caused friction among China and other countries, especially the United States. The American and Chinese governments traded accusations of being the source of the virus, and the Taiwanese media referred to the fights as a “blaming war,” “throw the pot to each other,” and “war of words.”¹⁰³ In these stories, the concerns surrounding the virus investigation and accountability were presented as a conflict between major world powers.¹⁰⁴

Another country that was involved in the “blaming war” was Australia. But unlike the United States as a counterpart to China, Australia played the role more as a victim threatened by economic revenge from China. The articles that covered the relationship between China and Australia focused on Australia’s demand for China’s transparency, which caused China’s fury and threat against Australia with economic sanctions for Australia’s being a “follower” of the United States.¹⁰⁵

In the eyes of the Taiwanese media, China was never a victim suffering from defamation from the West as the Chinese government and state media said (See the analysis in Chapter Five). On the contrary, Taiwanese media used words such as “clamor [嗆]” and “rage [怒轟]” to illustrate how the Chinese government, especially the Chinese diplomat, reacted to other countries’ requests for

¹⁰³ For example, an article from *China Times* state: “However, this battle of “throwing the pot” between China and the United States is completely unnecessary, because dumping responsibility to each other will not help contain the pandemic[不過，中美兩國這次甩鍋大戰完全沒有必要，因為相互甩鍋，無助於疫情的遏制]” (Chen, March 17, 2020). Another article from the Central News Agency said: “The diplomatic departments of China and the United States unexpectedly started another blaming war of the news coverage[中美外交部門意外因為這則報導再掀罵戰] (August 12, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ For example, the editorial published on the *China Times* website argued that the ordeal of tracing the origin of the virus was also a power struggle between China and the U.S. (Editorial, Aug 25, 2021).

¹⁰⁵ For example, an article published by Radio Taiwan International pointed out that Australia was determined to investigate China’s responsibility for the pandemic and would say “no” to China’s economic intimidation (Hsu, April 30, 2020).

transparency or accountability.¹⁰⁶ These narratives in the Taiwanese media of the roles of China, the United States, and Australia once again demonstrate that the Taiwanese media had their own agenda and were not under the sway of China when they covered the speculations about the origin of the COVID-19 virus.

Nevertheless, a few articles still included criticisms of the United States. One piece questioned the potential for bias in an American lab's virus inquiry. Three other articles criticized the American liberal media for calling the Wuhan lab leak theory a "conspiracy theory."¹⁰⁷ For instance, one piece cited the far-right blog *Zero Hedge*, criticizing how liberal media outlets such as *Vox* "stealthily [偷偷地]" changed a March 2020 story that originally disproved the Wuhan lab leak claim to a more neutral tone (Chen, May 26, 2021).

Theme 5: WHO and scientists were questioned for being influenced by China and helping China to cover the truth

Another unique theme in the Taiwanese media was the suspicion toward WHO and the scientists who denied the possibility of the virus's leak from the Wuhan lab. This theme painted a picture of the untrustworthy WHO investigation in China by indicating that WHO could not enter the Wuhan lab due to China's rejection or because China used political power to influence WHO. These articles further pointed out that China obtained support from some international scientists who have dismissed theories that the virus was created or leaked from the Wuhan lab. According to the articles, many of these scientists had close ties to China.¹⁰⁸ With the futile WHO investigation in

¹⁰⁶ For example, an article published by *Newtalk* used the title: "The WHO Wuhan report was questioned by Britain and the United States. Hua Chunying refuted this with 'three questions' and clamored that the U.S. should also be investigated[武漢報告遭英美質疑 華春瑩提「三問」反嗆美國也要做溯源調查]" (Yang, February 18, 2021).

¹⁰⁷ For example, *Liberty Times* (2021, June 9). Being Questioned by the leaked Wuhan Research Institute's virus report, Blinken bluntly said: there is a problem with the research method [質疑武漢研究所外流病毒報告 布林肯直言：研究方法有問題]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3563295>

¹⁰⁸ For example, an article published at the *TVBS* news website referenced *CNN*, stating that *CNN*'s report cast doubt on the lab funding relationship between WHO expert Peter Daszak and the Chinese scientist Shi Zhengli, who

China in 2021, the Taiwanese media also addressed the international community's steadfast call for a new round of investigation into the virus's origin in China.¹⁰⁹

Among the articles containing this theme, some used the word “whitewash” (meaning “to gain a good reputation”) to refer to the 2021 WHO investigation. For example, an article with the headline “WHO sent scientists to China to investigate the origin of the epidemic. Pompeo: the results may be completely whitewashed [WHO 派員赴中調查疫情起源 龐皮歐：結果恐徹底洗白]” quoted a *Reuters*' interview with then Secretary of the State Mike Pompeo, stating that Pompeo was worried this that the investigation would help China to “pretended everything is well [粉飾太平]” (*Liberty Times*, July 16, 2021).

The themes in Taiwanese media outlined above paint a picture of narratives for the origin of the COVID-19 virus greatly at odds with the one depicted in Chinese state media. In summary, while stressing that the virus could have originated in China, Taiwanese media presented audiences with a variety of other explanations. They also blamed China for withholding information and attempting to absolve itself of responsibility relating to the pandemic. Aware that the relationship between China and the U.S. is important to Taiwan, the Taiwanese media also covered discussions about the virus's origin from the standpoint of international relations.

was also a scientist in the Wuhan lab. See Chen, Y. (2021, February 5). WHO experts praise Wuhan laboratory, CNN questions relationships involving lab funding [世衛專家讚武漢實驗室 CNN 質疑利益糾葛]. *TVBS*. <https://news.tvbs.com.tw/world/1460039>. The researcher will discuss the character of “questionable scientists” in the Taiwanese media narrative in the next section.

¹⁰⁹ One of the examples is the *Liberty Times* article “24 experts from Europe, the U.S., Australia, and Japan questioned the WHO pandemic investigation report, claiming the report was politically polluted by China [質疑 WHO 疫源報告 歐美澳日 24 專家：遭中國政治污染]. The article said 24 scientists from different countries publicly criticized the investigation by WHO (*Liberty Times*, April 8, 2021).

6.2 Important elements of narratives – distinctive protagonists and words

This section analyzes how the Taiwanese media used distinctive words and personalities to bolster the Taiwanese narratives about the origin of the COVID-19 virus. In addition, the section will show how the Taiwanese media transformed the meaning of certain words that were also used by the Chinese media to tell Taiwan's own story about the COVID-19 virus's origin.

6.2.1 Protagonists

In the chapter on the analysis of Chinese state media narratives, the research found that the Chinese state media placed a particular emphasis on Trump, Pompeo, and Fauci. Additionally, the Chinese media characterized some individuals as “malicious persons,” such as American journalists and politicians, and labeled countries such as Australia as “American followers.”

An examination of the Taiwanese media found a similar focus on Pompeo, Trump, and Fauci. The Taiwanese coverage also contained several identical personality categories to the ones in the Chinese state media, such as “malicious persons,” “victims,” or “U.S. followers.” However, the people branded as victims or villains were not the same as those labeled this way in the Chinese media. In addition, there were protagonist types that were exclusive to Taiwanese media, such as “whistleblowers” and “questionable scientists.” Figure 6.8 shows the percentages of each kind of protagonist mentioned in the Taiwanese and Chinese state media. It can be seen from the figure that Chinese media used stereotyped and simplified personalities (malicious persons, victims, etc.) more often in the articles than in the Taiwanese media. But for specific persons, Chinese state media put more spotlight on Trump than Pompeo, while Taiwanese media mentioned Pompeo more often than Trump.

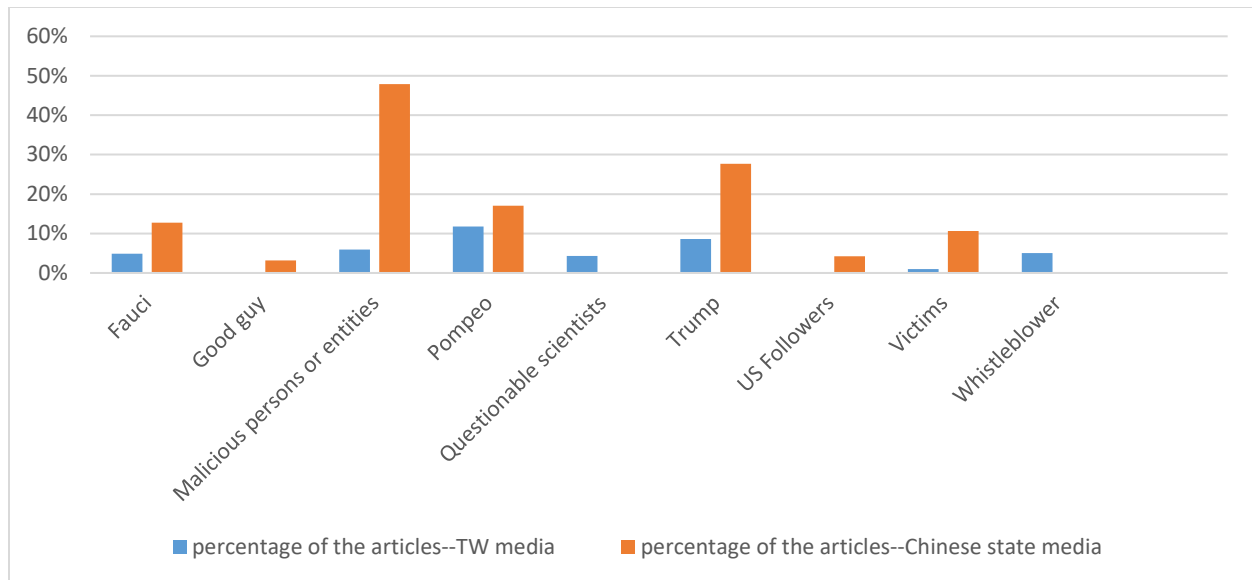


Figure 6.8 A comparison of the percentages that the protagonists were mentioned in Taiwanese and Chinese state media

Pompeo

As Figure 6.8 demonstrates, Pompeo was the most prominent character in the Taiwanese media. He was most often mentioned in the articles of the themes “Various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China” and “China should take responsibility but failed to be transparent and kept denying its responsibility” (see Figure 6.9). The articles including the main frame “China may be the place where the virus originated” often quoted Pompeo, especially his words stating that the virus might be from the Wuhan lab and criticizing China’s avoidance of responsibility.

In these articles, Pompeo played the role of an important and strong voice who persistently urged an investigation into the truth of the virus. One of the examples is the article “Not only COVID-19 – Pompeo revealed that the Wuhan lab is still conducting research on fatal viruses [不只 COVID-19 蓬佩奧爆武漢實驗室還在研究致命病毒]”¹¹⁰ published by the online news website

¹¹⁰ Hung, T. (2021, May 31). Not only COVID-19 -- Pompeo reveals that Wuhan lab is still working on deadly virus [不只 COVID-19 蓬佩奧爆武漢實驗室還在研究致命病毒]. *Newtalk*. <https://newtalk.tw/news/view/2021-05-31/5816341>

Newtalk. The author of the news article stated that Pompeo “exposed [爆料]” the secret of the COVID-19 virus in an interview with *Fox News*. As the former U.S. State Secretary, Pompeo contended that the U.S. military had evidence that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab. Moreover, the lab was still doing experiments on viruses. He further warned that there was still a risk of another lab leak (Hung, May 31, 2021). This article also quoted Pompeo’s talk in 2020, showing that Pompeo had already issued a warning from then.

Aside from focusing on Pompeo’s statement that China was where the virus originated, the Taiwanese media also spotlighted Pompeo’s criticisms of China for not being transparent and evading responsibilities. Some titles of these articles used words such as “censured [轟],” “denounced [痛斥],” and “slapped in the face [打臉]” to describe Pompeo’s remarks on China’s covering of COVID-19 information.¹¹¹ An article published by the online site *ettoday.com* and titled “The U.S. Secretary of State slaps China in the face! Three major accusations exposed: Researchers at Wuhan Institute of Virology were infected with the epidemic in the autumn of 2019 [美國務卿打臉中國！曝 3 大指控：武漢病毒所研究員 2019 秋天就染疫] used *Agence France-Presse* as the news sources to report on Pompeo’s harsh criticisms on China (International News Center, January 17, 2021). Other instances include “The foreign ministers of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia talk about cooperation to contain China. Pompeo first denounced the CCP for concealing the pandemic [美日印澳外長談合作牽制中國 龐皮歐先痛

¹¹¹ International News Center, 2021, January 17). Pompeo censured China again and said the Wuhan Institute was diagnosed in the fall of 2019 [龐皮歐再轟中 武漢所 2019 秋天就有確診]. *Liberty Times*. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/paper/1426083>; Lin, T. (2020, October 7). The foreign ministers of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia talk about cooperation to contain China. Pompeo first denounced the CCP for concealing the pandemic [美日印澳外長談合作牽制中國 龐皮歐先痛罵中共隱瞞疫情]. *Liberty Times*. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3313686>; Zhan, Y. (2021, January 16). The US Secretary of State slaps China in the face! Three major accusations exposed: Researchers at Wuhan Institute of Virology were infected with COVID-19 in the autumn of 2019 [美國務卿打臉中國！曝 3 大指控：武漢病毒所研究員 2019 秋天就染疫]. *ettoday.com*. <https://www.ettoday.net/news/20210116/1900033.htm>

罵中共隱瞞疫情]” (Lin, October 7, 2020). “No more tolerance! Pompeo is advancing step by step: the world has begun to see the true nature of the CCP [不再容忍！龐皮歐步步進逼：世界已開始看清中共本性]” (Liberty Times, May 26, 2020).

However, Pompeo was also quoted in the articles containing the theme “China was attacked by conspiracy theory by Western countries and the U.S.,” particularly in the articles indicating “U.S. politicians blamed China.” In these articles, the Taiwanese media used Pompeo’s comments as background information and stressed the refutations from Chinese diplomats or media. For example, *ettoday.com* also published an article in April 2020 titled “CCTV cannot bear it anymore! The outlet counterattacks for two consecutive days. CCTV’s column Pointed Comment said: Pompeo ‘has broken through the bottom line of being a human being’ [不忍了！央視連 2 天反擊 銳評：蓬佩奧「已經突破作人的底線」] to relay Chinese state media CCTV’s criticism of Pompeo (Ren, April 29, 2020). But overall, articles echoing the narratives in the Chinese state media to criticize Pompeo were less seen in the Taiwanese media (See Figure 6.9).

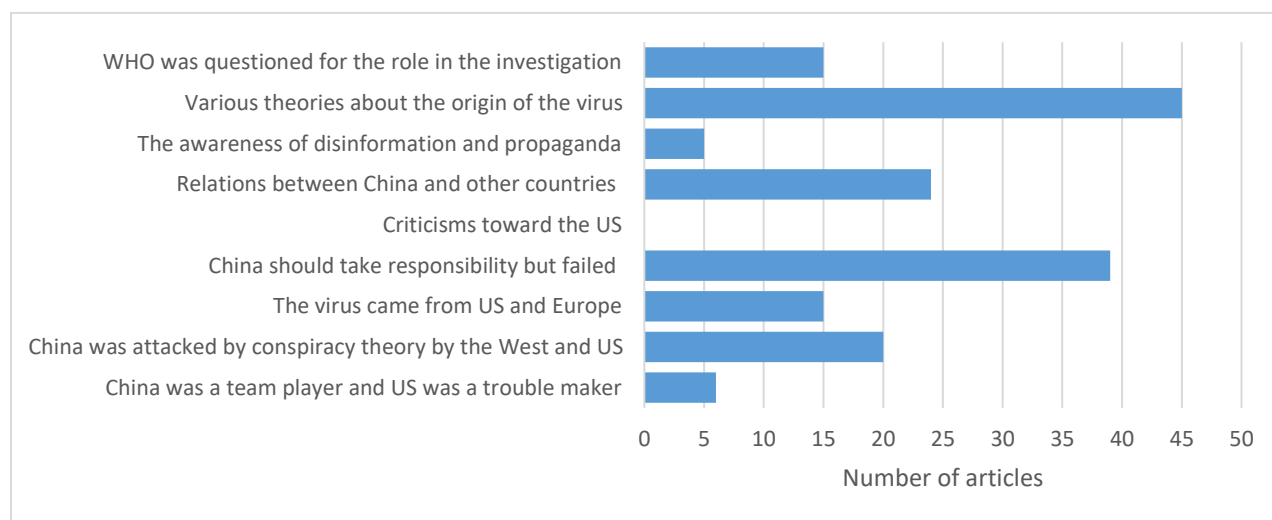


Figure 6.9 The themes in which Pompeo was mentioned

Compared with how Pompeo was depicted in the Chinese state media, Taiwanese media framed Pompeo in a different light, although the events that the Taiwanese and Chinese media covered

were both about Pompeo's propagation of the lab leak theory and his demands for an investigation. In the Chinese media, Pompeo was described as a villain who constantly attacked China (see the Chinese state media analysis chapter). But in the Taiwanese media, Pompeo became a determined American politician who tirelessly asked for the truth and alerted the world of the next virus hazard.

Trump

Former U.S. President Donald Trump was the most quoted individual in Chinese state media narratives concerning the stories about the origin of the COVID-19 virus. While Trump was not featured as frequently as Pompeo in Taiwanese media, Taiwanese news outlets nonetheless gave Trump prominence. Figure 6.8 demonstrates that Trump was the second most-mentioned person in the overall number of publications, trailing only Pompeo.

Trump, like Pompeo, was most frequently mentioned in stories with the themes "Various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China" and "China should take responsibility but failed to be transparent and kept denying its responsibility."

Compared to the role of Trump in the Chinese state media, the Taiwanese media focused more on Trump's "revelation" that the virus could be from the Wuhan lab,¹¹² the criticism that China was not being transparent,¹¹³ and China's influence over WHO.¹¹⁴ For example, in the article "The virus originated from the Wuhan Institute? Trump: I have seen strong evidence [病毒源自武漢研

¹¹² For example, a *Liberty Times* article reported that Trump saw strong evidence that the virus was from the Wuhan lab. *Liberty Times*. (2020, May 1). The virus originated from the Wuhan Institute? Trump: I have seen strong evidence [病毒源自武漢研究所? 川普: 已看到強力證據]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/9>

¹¹³ *World Journal*. (2020, May 5). Trump: The U.S. will announce the origin of the new coronavirus soon [川普: 美國很快會公布新冠病毒起源]. *United Daily News*.

¹¹⁴ Mirror Media. (2020, May 1). Trump: "WHO should be ashamed" after seeing evidence that the virus came from Wuhan laboratory [川普: 看過病毒來自武漢實驗室證據 批「WHO 應感到羞恥」]. <https://www.mirrormedia.mg/story/20200501web001/>

究所？川普：已看到強力證據],” the author quoted Trump’s talk about having seen evidence that the virus was from the Wuhan lab (*Liberty Times*, 2020, May 1).

However, these Taiwanese articles also noted that Trump’s claim was contradicted by other U.S. government officials, such as the intelligence agency’s statement stressing that the virus was more likely from nature.¹¹⁵ A few articles (26 out of 694) echoing the Chinese state media narratives also quoted comments from Chinese diplomats or the U.S. media, pointing out that Trump tried to win the 2020 U.S. Presidential election by attacking China. Nevertheless, overall, the Chinese state media’s framing of a selfish and racist Trump, who resulted in the high death rate of COVID in the U.S., was much less common in the Taiwanese media narratives.

Malicious persons or entities

This research defines “malicious persons or entities” as “individuals or countries who were criticized for being morally corrupt or acting maliciously and causing damage to others.” It is the most prominent category of protagonists in the Chinese state media narratives, where malicious persons were primarily people who harmed China, such as American politicians and Western media outlets. However, in the Taiwanese media, “malicious” characters also included the Chinese government. This is an important twist on how a category can indicate very different content in different media systems, especially between adversaries.

Figure 6.10 demonstrates the themes in which the “malicious persons” appeared. It shows that this category of protagonists appeared more often in themes similar to Chinese media narratives, such

¹¹⁵ In the same *Liberty Times* article (May 1, 2020) stating that Trump saw strong evidence, the last paragraph stated: “However, the U.S. intelligence system also issued a statement on the same day, saying that the Wuhan pneumonia virus was not man-made or genetically modified. The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) issued a statement on April 30, stating that the U.S. intelligence community agrees with a broad scientific consensus that the Wuhan pneumonia virus was not man-made or genetically modified. [不過，美國情報體系當天也發布聲明，稱武漢肺炎病毒並非人造和基因改造。美國國家情報首長辦公室（ODNI）4月30日發布聲明，美國情報體系認同廣泛的科學共識，武漢肺炎病毒不是人造或基因改造的].”

as “China was attacked by conspiracy theory spun by the U.S. and other Western countries” and “The virus came from U.S. and Europe. Fort Detrick is the prime suspect.” In the Taiwanese themes, malicious characters appeared more often in the themes “China should take responsibility but failed to be transparent and kept denying its responsibility” and “Relations between China and other countries.”

It is hardly surprising that malicious characters were usually referenced to U.S. politicians in the stories that echoed the Chinese media storylines. These articles cited Chinese media outlets such as *Global Times* and *CCTV* and Chinese diplomats, who chastised American or Western politicians and media for “lying.” For example, in the *China Times* article “Pompeo blames the Wuhan laboratory, the Chinese media criticizes Pompeo: He is lying for the U.S. election” “[蓬佩奧歸咎武漢實驗室 陸媒批：為美大選說謊],” the author stated that an editorial published by the *Global Times* “harshly criticized [狠批]” Pompeo for his lying “desperately” to preserve the victory of President Trump and the Republican Party.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, in the Taiwanese media themes that did not match the Chinese state media, the “malicious persons or entities” included the Chinese government, which attempted to cover the COVID-19 information, spreading disinformation and propaganda, and influencing the investigation by WHO in China. As an illustration, the *Liberty Times* quoted commentator Melanie Phillips’ article in the U.K. news outlet *The Times* and detailed Phillip’s argument of why the Chinese government should be responsible for its concealing of the truth about the origin of the

¹¹⁶ The *China Times* article relayed the content of an editorial of *Global Times*: “Pompeo lied “desperately” in order to cooperate with Trump to win the U.S. election. He hopes to make President Trump and the Republican Party win. The [Global Times] article pointed out that Pompeo has turned scientific issues into an attack driven by politics, intelligence exposé, and diplomatic accusations; it is ‘anti-science’ and blatantly ‘dirty’ manipulation[蓬佩奧為了配合美國大選而「奮不顧身」地撒謊，希望借此保住總統特朗普和共和黨的勝利。文中指，蓬佩奧將科學問題變成了由政治驅動、情報加料、外交指控的攻擊鏈；是「反科學」、「骯髒的」公然愚弄。]” (Chang, May 4, 2020).

COVID-19 virus.¹¹⁷ Another article published on the online news website *Taiwan People News* claimed that the Chinese government brought disaster to the world by producing lies.¹¹⁸

Overall, while “malicious persons and entities” continued to play a part in Taiwanese media narratives, the individuals or groups branded as “malicious” by Taiwanese media were more varied than those labeled as “malicious” by Chinese outlets. Most notably, the Chinese government, which frequently criticized the United States and Western countries, was portrayed as a *liar* in Taiwanese media.

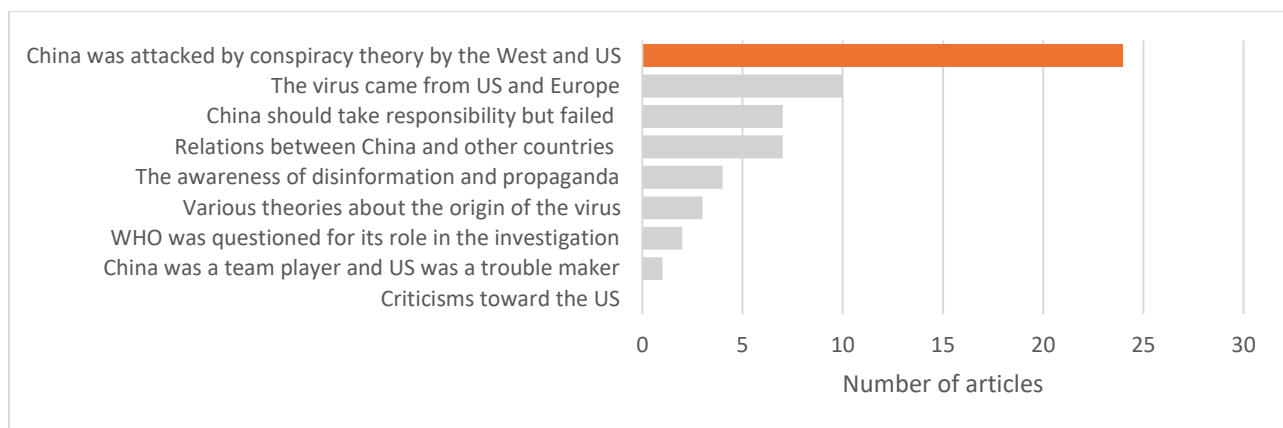


Figure 6.10 How the protagonist “Malicious persons or entities” showed up in the themes. This chart shows that “malicious persons or entities” appeared most in the articles belonging to the theme “China was attacked by conspiracy theory spun by Western countries.”

Fauci and questionable scientists

Another notable example of how the Taiwanese media portrayed an individual differently than the Chinese state media is Dr. Anthony Fauci. The Chinese state media painted Dr. Fauci as a scientist who dared to criticize Trump and Pompeo over the virus’s origin but altered his position due to

¹¹⁷ The *Liberty Times* article stated: “Melanie Phillips, a columnist for the British “Times,” also wrote an article denouncing the spread of the pandemic around the world due to the Chinese government’s lying and concealing information. [She said] China must be held accountable. The West can no longer turn a blind eye to China’s evil deeds 英國「泰晤士報」專欄作家菲力普斯（Melanie Phillips）也撰文痛斥，疫情延燒全球皆因中國政府說謊、隱瞞資訊，必須追究其責任，西方不能再對中國的惡行視而不見。」” (The International News Center, April 9, 2020).

¹¹⁸ The columnist of this article claimed: “The millions of infected people and hundreds of thousands of deaths around the world are all victims of the CCP’s lies [全球數百萬感染者和數十萬死亡者都是中共謊言的犧牲品。]” (Yu, November 4, 2020).

political pressure. However, Fauci was questioned in Taiwanese media for his relationship with the Chinese lab where the virus was suspected to be leaked.

In the Taiwanese media articles, Fauci mostly appeared in the theme “Various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China” and was quoted as an authoritative information source explaining how the virus could have arisen naturally. However, Fauci also appeared in the theme “Criticisms of the United States.” The 15 articles that mentioned Fauci on this theme included sources such as U.S. Republican Senator Rand Paul and far-right media outlets, with a special emphasis on whether the National Institute of Health funded research at the Wuhan lab.¹¹⁹ The *Liberty Times* article “Fauci admitted! He cannot rule out the potential that China exploits U.S. donations to alter the coronavirus [佛奇招了！不排除中國用美國捐款改造冠狀病毒]” initially mentioned that *Newsweek* revealed Fauci previously sponsored COVID virus research. It went on to say that during a Congressional hearing, Paul questioned Fauci about whether the National Institutes of Health ever supported the Chinese lab. According to the news piece, Fauci later admitted that he couldn’t ensure that American taxpayer money was never utilized to aid the Wuhan lab’s study (Chen, January 9, 2022).

This article used the phrase “fall from the altar[跌落神壇],” describing Fauci as no longer respected as a scientist with integrity because of his alleged funding relationship with the Wuhan lab. This article quoted the far-right fake news website The Gateway Pundit and a social media

¹¹⁹ For example, the article published by the World Journal (United Daily News): “Fauci slams funded experiment, accuses Republican Senator Paul of ‘lying’[佛奇怒駁資助中實驗 批共和黨參議員保羅「說謊」]” (World Journal, July 21, 2021); Also, in this article “American pandemic expert Fauci falls from the altar. An investigation organization predicts that there will be another big news[佛奇招了！不排除中國用美國捐款改造冠狀病毒; 美防疫專家佛奇跌落神壇 調查組織預告將再爆猛料],” the reporter stated the “investigation organization” -Project Veritas, will reveal more truth about Fauci (Chen, January 9, 2022).

post by James O’Keefe, the founder of the far-right group Project Veritas, criticizing Fauci for lying to the public (Chen, January 9, 2022).

The reason that Fauci was cast in a negative light could be Fauci’s early insistent assertion that the virus was *not* from the Wuhan lab. As this analysis of the main themes in the Taiwanese media shows, one significant narrative in the Taiwanese media articles was that the virus originated in the Wuhan lab. Fauci’s persistence in ruling out the possibility that the virus originated in the Wuhan facility prompted the Taiwanese media to seek an explanation for Fauci’s claim. As a result, Fauci was portrayed as a scientist who sought to conceal the true source of the virus’s origin in some articles.

Another group of protagonists that Taiwanese media expressed distrust in was “Questionable scientists,” especially the scientists who led WHO’s COVID-19 investigation team in China. The articles questioned the relationship between the leading scientists in WHO investigation and the Chinese government. They said that China’s influence on these scientists might have resulted in a fruitless and even flawed investigation conclusion that ruled out the possibility that the virus was leaked from the lab. For example, an article published by *ettoday.com* quoted the U.K. media *Daily Mail*, stating that Peter Daszak, one of WHO experts who asserted the virus could not have been possibly leaked from the Wuhan lab, had funded the Wuhan lab over the past years and collaborated with Chinese scientists in the Wuhan lab.¹²⁰

Whistleblower

A distinct category of protagonists unique in Taiwanese media content is “Whistleblower,” which refers to “individuals who claimed they discovered the wrongdoings committed by other persons

¹²⁰ The title of the article is: “Lobby scientists to support the theory that “the virus was not leaked from the lab! A WHO expert was accused of financially aiding Wuhan laboratory [遊說科學家「挺新冠非人為洩漏」！ WHO 專家遭爆曾金援武漢實驗室]” (Ye, June 5, 2021).

or countries” in this research (See Appendix Coding Scheme for examples). Interestingly, Dr. Li Wenliang, who was seen as a “whistleblower” by Western media for his early warnings about COVID-19 (BBC News, February 26, 2021), was not often mentioned in the Taiwanese media. His name appeared in 18 articles. Among them, four articles quoted the Chinese state media, which argued Dr. Li was *not* a whistleblower.¹²¹ Compared with Dr. Li, another category of whistleblower – the Chinese individuals who “revealed the secret” about the Chinese government’s experiment related to the birth of the COVID-19 virus, drew more attention from the Taiwanese media.

The whistleblower who appeared most often in the Taiwanese media was Dr. Yan, a post-doctoral student from Hong Kong University who claimed to know the “truth” about the COVID-19 virus (Dapcevich, 2020) and is discussed above. Yan asserted that the virus was created as a bioweapon and that China intentionally released it to the world.

In the Taiwanese media, Dr. Yan was often mentioned in the articles with themes “There are various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China,” “China should take the responsibility but failed in being transparent and kept denying its responsibility,” and “The awareness of disinformation and propaganda.” In the articles about the origin of the virus, Taiwanese media largely quoted American conservative or right-wing sources such as the *War Room*, *Fox News*, and *NewsMax* (See Figure 6.11), where Dr. Yan was invited multiple times as a guest.

In addition to the right-wing American media, the Taiwanese articles also quoted overseas Chinese media such as *Lude Media* [路德社] and *Himalaya Global*. The former was a YouTube channel

¹²¹ For example, the article “Chinese Ambassador to the UK: Li Wenliang is not a whistleblower, China is not the source of the virus [中國駐英大使：李文亮非吹哨人 中國非病毒源頭]” published by *Liberty Times* stated that the Chinese ambassador to the UK said, “Li was not a whistleblower” (Liberty Times, May 2, 2020).

founded by Chinese businessman Wang Dinggang, who claimed to be a dissident (Qin, 2021). The YouTube channel owned by Wang asserted it to be “Original, real, free, down-to-earth, hot! A platform where you can speak freely! [原创、真实、自由、接地气、热点！您可以自由发声的平台！] (Lude media, N.A.). Nevertheless, according to the research by the social media analytics firm Graphika, this “dissent media outlet” and *Himalaya Global* were part of the disinformation network established by Chinese exiled Guo Wengui (Graphika, 2021). This disinformation network propagated disinformation about Hunter Biden and engaged in a harassment campaign against other Chinese dissidents (Graphika, 2021).¹²²

Even though these media have been questioned about their credibility, Taiwanese media articles still relayed the information without questioning the accuracy of the information or adding caveats. One of the examples was the article “I can’t bear it anymore! A Chinese expert fled the United States and revealed: the virus came from a military laboratory [不忍了！陸專家逃美爆：病毒來自軍方實驗室]” published by *Eastern Broadcasting Company (EBC)*, it quoted Yan’s interview with *Lude Media* and stated Yan’s research led to the conclusion that the virus was from the Chinese military (Chen, July 30, 2020). Nevertheless, the article did not provide many details or vet the information.

Interestingly, Taiwanese media were not unaware of the criticisms of the dubious overseas media. A few Taiwanese outlets, including those promoting Yan’s statements, reported the investigation from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and Graphika about their findings on the

¹²² Guo was charged by the American government in March 2023 for defrauding his online followers out of more than \$1 billion by soliciting them to invest in his business, including his GTV media group. See Mangan, D. (2023, March 16). DOJ charges Chinese businessman Guo Wengui, associate of Steve Bannon, in \$1 billion fraud. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/15/doj-charges-guo-wengui-steve-bannon-associate-in-1-billion-fraud.html>

promotion of Yan’s contentious statements by Guo’s disinformation network.¹²³ However, these Taiwanese media outlets still continued reporting on Yan’s talk in separate articles, citing both overseas Chinese media outlets and American right-wing media without mentioning the criticisms of these controversial media outlets.¹²⁴

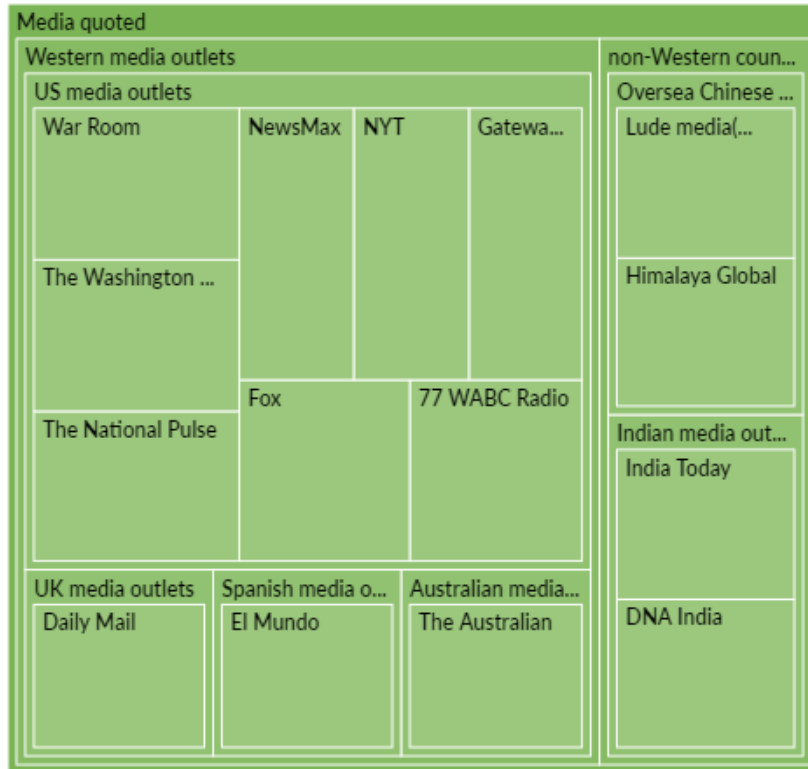


Figure 6.11 Media outlets quoted by the articles mentioning “Whistleblowers.” The American media quoted included War Room, The Washington Post, The National Pulse, NewsMax, Fox News, Gateway Pundit, 77WABC Radio.

¹²³ For example, *Liberty Times* reported that the *New York Times* said Guo and Bannon worked together to use Yan as a puppet (Guan, November 21, 2020). Another *Liberty Times* article quoted the *Washington Post*, pointing out that the news outlets *GNews* and *GTV* owned by Guo are “the center of broadcasting fake news” (Guan, May 18, 2021).

¹²⁴ For example, the *Liberty Times* covered the *New York Times* article “How Steve Bannon and a Chinese billionaire created a right-wing Coronavirus media sensation” in November 2020. But in the following months, the *Liberty Times* still continued spotlighting Yan’s comments on the virus as a Chinese bioweapon, such as the article “The CCP launched a biochemical war to the world! Limeng Yan Revealed: The Virus Was Deliberately Released[中共向全球發動生化戰！閻麗夢爆：病毒遭蓄意釋放]” published on May 17, 2021 (Finance Channel, May 17, 2021).

The above analysis of the protagonists in the Taiwanese media showcases how the narratives about the COVID-19 virus's origin differed from those in the Chinese state media. First of all, the Chinese and Taiwanese media outlets paid specific attention to the same individuals or categories of personalities. However, the Taiwanese media presented these individuals or groups in distinct ways (See Table 6.1). In particular, those such as Pompeo, who were villains in the Chinese media, became adamant warriors against the Chinese government that tried to conceal important information. Meanwhile, those who were portrayed as brave scientists who spoke up about the truth in the Chinese media turned out to be questionable in the Taiwanese media because of suspicious donation ties. Overall, the Taiwanese media offered more diverse narratives than the Chinese state media. Some Taiwanese media also expressed other kinds of framing of these protagonists. However, the Taiwanese media generally told their own stories about the characters and did not follow the narratives in the Chinese state media.

Table 6.1 How the Taiwanese media transformed the characters of COVID protagonists

Protagonists	Chinese state media	Taiwanese media
Pompeo	A villain who constantly attacked China	A determined American politician who tirelessly asked for the truth and asked China to take responsibility
Trump	A selfish and racist American President	American President who asked China to take responsibility but was occasionally contradicted or rebuked by other U.S. government officials.
Fauci	A scientist who dared to criticize Trump and Pompeo over the virus origins but altered his position due to political pressure	A scientist who was questioned for concealing financial ties with the Wuhan lab.
Malicious persons or entities	Western politicians, journalists, and media outlets who criticized China or asked China to take responsibility for the pandemic	Included the Chinese government

6.2.2 Notable words used in the Taiwanese media

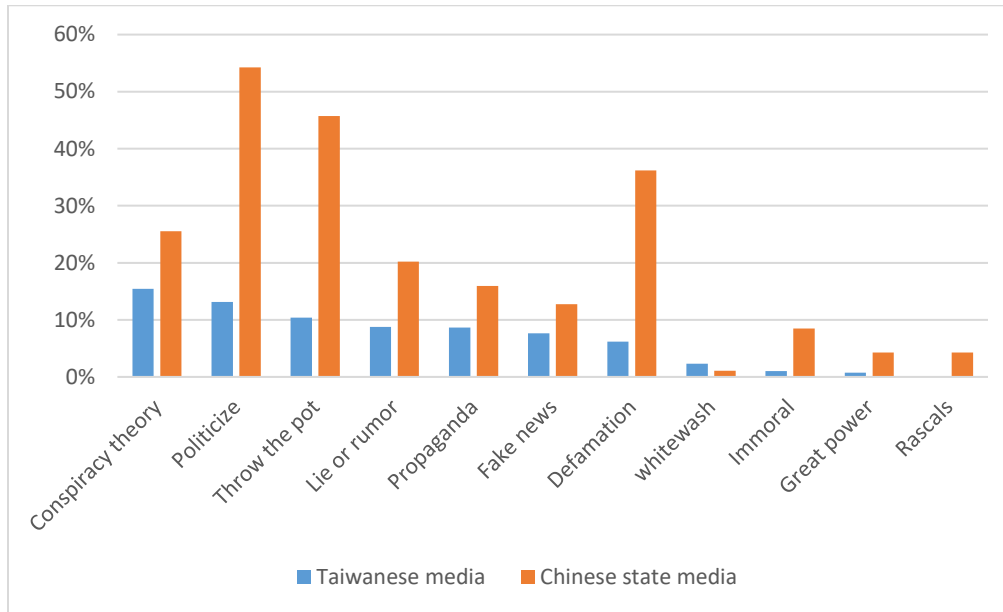


Figure 6.12 A comparison of the percentage of articles that the words appearing in Taiwanese and Chinese media

In Chapter Five, the research identified several words that the Chinese state media employed to bolster their narratives related to the theory of the COVID-19 virus’s origin. These words include “politicize[政治化],” “throw the pot[甩鍋],” “conspiracy theory[陰謀論],” and “defamation[污名化].”

Figure 6.12 compares the percentage of articles in which the words appeared in the Taiwanese and Chinese state media. It shows that Chinese state media more frequently used the words “politicize,” “throw the pot,” “conspiracy theory,” “defamation,” “lies,” and “propaganda.” As the analysis in Chapter Five pointed out, the Chinese media employed these words to defend itself from the criticism of not being transparent or as the possible place where the virus originated. These words also appeared in the Taiwanese media content. However, just as Taiwanese media reframed the protagonists frequently referenced in Chinese official media, they redefined the terms to create their own narratives.

A broader scope of Conspiracy theory (陰謀論)

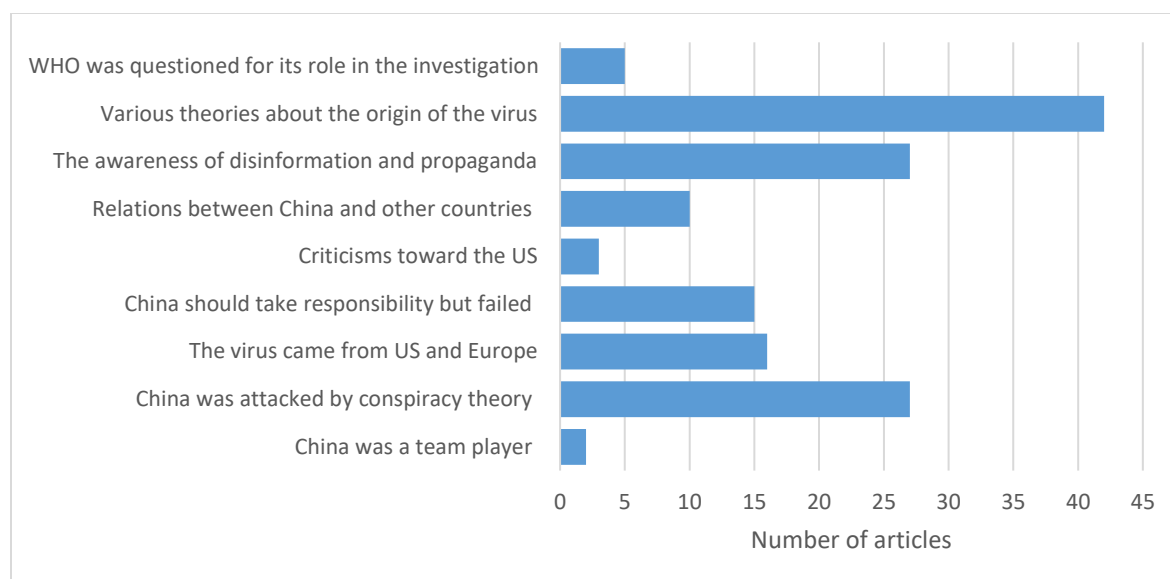


Figure 6.13 Themes in which the term “conspiracy theory” was mentioned. This figure shows that the word “conspiracy theory” was used in a variety of themes.

In contrast to the Chinese state media narratives, in which “conspiracy theory” was used to include any claims that the virus was from the Wuhan lab, Taiwanese media do not use the term “conspiracy theory” for a specific theory of the COVID-19 virus’s origin. Instead, as Figure 6.13 demonstrates, this term appeared in multiple themes, including those unique to the Taiwanese media as well as themes identical to the Chinese state media. Moreover, Taiwanese media showed the awareness that conspiracy theories might be related to propaganda and disinformation.

Unsurprisingly, some Taiwanese media articles still echoed the theme of Chinese state media, which saw the Wuhan lab leak theory as a conspiracy theory.¹²⁵ By only quoting the Chinese state media, these articles repeated China’s claim that Western politicians, especially Americans, pushed this “conspiracy theory” that blamed China for the origin of the virus.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ For example, the *China Times* article quoted a Chinese diplomat’s talk to refute a Harvard study. The study claimed the virus had caused infection in August 2019. Chen, Y. (2020, June 10). The study claimed that there was a pandemic in August last year, and China criticized it as absurd [研究稱去年8月有疫情 陸批荒謬]. *China Times*. <https://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20200610000505-260119?chdtv>

¹²⁶ For example, another article published by *China Times* with the title “Chinese Media People’s Daily: American Politicians tried to get rid of conspiracy theories against them and threw the pot to China. [陸媒人民日報：美國政客清除陰謀論 甩鍋大陸]; (Li, May 15, 2020).

But other Taiwanese media articles that did not echo Chinese narratives focused on the struggle of defining “conspiracy theory.” Several pieces centered on the shifting perception of the Wuhan lab leak hypothesis. According to these stories, the hypothesis that the virus was leaked from Wuhan was originally considered a conspiracy theory. However, when additional evidence emerges, the Wuhan lab leak theory may be shown to be valid.¹²⁷

A few articles (11) further alerted readers that China’s “conspiracy theory” label could be disinformation and a propaganda strategy. The article “Debunking China’s COVID-19 shirking tactics[戳破中國的新冠肺炎卸責術]” published by the online news website *Up Media* said:

*Most of the conspiracy theories concocted by China point the finger at the United States. A conspiracy theory believes that some of the winter flu cases in the U.S. since the end of last year were actually COVID-19 cases. [This theory] blames the United States as the source of new coronary pneumonia. But such conspiracy theories are easy to debunk (Sung, April 30, 2020).*¹²⁸

Another article published by the *Central News Agency* quoted a *Washington Post* piece, stating that the Chinese government promoted the conspiracy theory that the virus was from the United States to shirk its own responsibility and encourage nationalism in China (Jiang, July 3, 2020).

How did the Taiwanese media see the “The virus was from the Fort Detrick lab in the U.S.” theory propagated by the Chinese state media?

Although the biochemical lab in the U.S. army base Fort Detrick, Maryland, was implicated as the origin place of the COVID-19 virus in Chinese state media’s narratives, the Taiwanese outlets did

¹²⁷ For example, the *China Times* article quoted *Forbes* and stated that the virus could be from labs (Feng, June 10, 2020).

¹²⁸ The original text in Chinese: “絕大部分中國炮製的陰謀論都把矛頭指向美國。一種陰謀論認為美國從去年年底開始的冬季流感，很可能就混有新冠肺炎，指責美國才是新冠肺炎的源頭。但這種陰謀論很容易戳破。”

not place the same amount of emphasis on the Fort Detrick theory. Out of the 694 Taiwanese media articles studied by this research, only 44 articles mentioned Fort Detrick. Among the 44 articles, 13 claimed that the Fort Detrick theory was a conspiracy theory created and promoted by China.¹²⁹ The remaining 31 articles either quoted the Chinese state media's allegation¹³⁰ or simply referenced the theory as background information.¹³¹

These 31 articles that did not call China's Fort Detrick theory a "conspiracy theory" were ambiguous about the facts. For example, in the *Newtalk* article "No political interference -- China arranges WHO COVID-19 investigation team to visit Wuhan Anti-pandemic Achievement Exhibition[不會受政治干擾~中國安排 WHO 新冠溯源團隊參觀武漢抗疫成就展]" first said the claim that the virus was from Fort Detrick has been verified to be false information, but the article further pointed out that the Chinese state media has said the vaping lung disease might be related to the virus (Yang, 2021, February 1).¹³²

One probable explanation for why these Taiwanese articles did not include additional information concerning the Fort Detrick theory's veracity is that Taiwanese media had trouble gaining access to facts on the ground in China and had to rely on secondary news from either Chinese or Western outlets. The inability to check or even recognize the flaws of the referenced sources highlights

¹²⁹ For example, Cheng, Y. (2020, May 14). Throw the pot! China's official media talk about "vaping disease" and question the pandemic had been in the United States earlier [大甩鍋！中國官媒扯「電子菸疾病」質疑美國早流行類新冠肺炎]. *Newtalk*. <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/大甩鍋-中國官媒扯-電子菸疾病-質疑美國早流行類新冠肺炎-051634516.html>; *Liberty Times*. (2021, August 4). China's conspiracy theory targets "Fort Detrick" vigorously and promotes the theory that the U.S. military base was the origin of COVID-19 [中國陰謀論目標「德特里克堡」大力宣傳美軍基地是武肺起源]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3648286>

¹³⁰ For example, Lin, Z. (2021, August 6). People's Daily says the United States is a major suspect of the COVID-19 source [人民日報指 美國是新冠病毒來源重大嫌疑國]. *United Daily News*.

¹³¹ *Apple Daily*. (2020, December 16). China is trying its best to "throw the blame" on the origin of the virus, pointing the finger at the United States, Italy, the West, and India, but does not investigate Wuhan [中國拼命「甩鍋」病毒起源 矛頭指向美、義、西、印度 就是不查武漢].

¹³² The original text in Chinese: "該說法源自於一家加拿大親俄研究機構指病毒是來自德特里克堡生物實驗室的文章，事後被證實為假消息，但中國多家官媒隨即報導稱，該實驗室去年關閉後不久，美國就出現症狀類似武漢肺炎的「電子菸肺炎」，暗指該實驗室關閉與武漢肺炎疫情有關。"

another disadvantage of relying on media sources from foreign countries. This inability to verify may also contribute to the spread of misinformation or disinformation as well as mislead viewers' understanding of the truth. The problem will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Overall, the Fort Detrick theory did not gain much traction in Taiwanese media. Some media also called this theory a conspiracy theory and warned readers that it could be Chinese propaganda, while others presented it in straight news but could not verify the theory's truth.

Who was the country that “threw the pot,” “defamed others,” and “politicized the pandemic”?

As was pointed out in the analysis of the Chinese state media, the terms “throw the pot,” “defamation (or blemish),” and “politicize the pandemic” are the three most-mentioned terms to reinforce the Chinese narratives (see Figure 6.12). According to the Chinese media, the West, particularly American politicians and media, defamed and blamed China as the origin of the virus and turned pandemic issues into political attacks. The reason that Western politicians attacked China was that they wanted to deflect their responsibility for failing to contain the pandemic in their countries and deter the rise of China as a great global power.

In the narratives of the Taiwanese media, the words “politicize” and “throw the pot” still ranked high in the number of articles mentioning these two words (See Figure 6.12). But defamation was not as prominent as it was in the Chinese counterpart. The gap between the term “defamation” in the Chinese state media and Taiwan media indicated the difference in the focus: While the Chinese media saw the West's call for China to bear responsibility for the origin of the virus as an attack on the country's reputation, Taiwanese media did not share this view.

The phenomenon that Taiwanese and Chinese media used the same words to shape distinct narratives was even more conspicuous with the term “throw the pot.” In the Chinese state media,

the party that threw the pot (shifting responsibility to others) was mainly the U.S. In the Taiwanese media, nevertheless, the party that shirked responsibility to others was China.

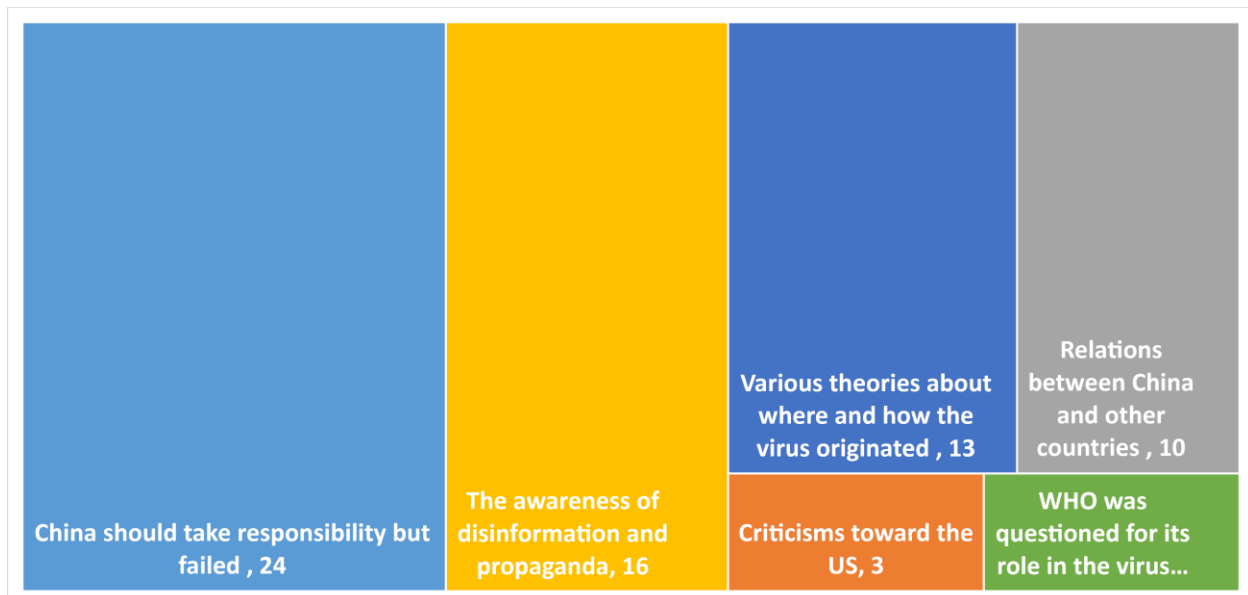


Figure 6.14 The themes unique to Taiwanese media containing the term “throw the pot.” The numbers are the articles that include both the themes and the term “throw the pot.”

Figure 6.14 illustrates that when the term “throw the pot” was used in the unique Taiwanese media paragraph frames, it more often showed up in the theme “China should take the responsibility but failed in being transparent and kept denying its responsibility,” “The awareness of disinformation and propaganda,” and “There are various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China.” These articles pointed out that China rejected responsibility for the origin of COVID-19 and denied the virus originated in Wuhan. They also warned readers that the Chinese government shifted its responsibility by promoting false information and propaganda.

As for the term “politicize,” it was employed in articles with a variety of themes – including themes identical to the Chinese media narratives and those unique in the Taiwanese media. This word appeared in the articles that quoted Chinese sources, which alleged that the U.S. politicized the

pandemic.¹³³ But it was also used in articles that included the themes “Various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China,” “Relations between China and other countries,” and “WHO investigation was questionable.” These contexts where “politicize” was used tell the story that the Taiwanese media positioned the arguments of politicizing the investigation against the context of an international power struggle.¹³⁴ The debate about the origin of the virus was not only a scientific issue but also involved the intense relations between the U.S. and China, as well as the two great powers’ influence on WHO.

The awareness of Chinese propaganda

In the Chinese state media, the words “propaganda [宣傳]” and “fake news [虛假信息]”¹³⁵ were mostly about how Western politicians and media. For example, the *Global Times* article stated Western media pushed “black propaganda” and fabricated “fake news” (Fan, May 18, 2020).

The claim highlighted by the Taiwanese media as propaganda was the Chinese claim alleging that the European Union or the United States was where the virus originated. According to these Taiwanese media articles, the purpose of Chinese propaganda campaigns was to shift responsibility to the U.S. and to “whitewash[洗白]” China’s tainted image in the international community. For example, the *China Times* article “Imported frozen food was found to contain the

¹³³ For example, this *SETN* article quoted the talk of the Chinese diplomat Hua Chunying: “A reporter asked whether China was opposed to investigating the origin of the virus. Hua Chunying emphasized that what China opposed was the move by the United States and other countries to “politicize” the issue of tracing the virus’s origin[有記者詢問中國是否反對進行溯源調查，華春瑩強調，中國反對的是美國等部分國家，企圖將病毒溯源問題「政治化」]” (international News Center, May 7, 2020).

¹³⁴ For example, this *Liberty Times* article quoted Pompeo’s words rebuking China’s allegation of the U.S. politicizing pandemic: “Pompeo reiterated that “the virus originated in China” and blasted the Chinese government’s claim that the virus originated from the Europe and U.S. military. He said that China’s approach is very dangerous. He said an investigation has nothing to do with politicization [龐皮歐重申「病毒起源於中國」，並砲轟中國政府暗指病毒源自歐洲及美軍投毒的說法，他表示，中國的做法很危險，與政治化無關]” (*Liberty Times*, April 23, 2020).

¹³⁵ Taiwan and China use different but similar words to refer to “fake news.” In Taiwan, the term is “假新聞,” while in China, the prevailing term is “虛假信息.”

COVID-19 virus. The Chinese media promoted another round of propaganda campaigns to shape the discourse of COVID-19 virus origin [進口冷凍食品檢出病毒 陸媒再掀新冠疫情起源宣傳戰]¹³⁶ asserted that the purpose of the propaganda campaign was to “reverse the international impression that the virus originated in Wuhan” (Lu, November 17, 2020).¹³⁶ Another news report by *TVBS* said the Chinese internet army spread the lie that the virus was from the U.S. and “used seven languages on 30 social media platforms to help Beijing carry out large-scale foreign propaganda...in an attempt to confuse the international audience” (Huang, September 9, 2021).¹³⁷ Articles such as the above two examples explicitly cautioned audiences that the virus theories fabricated by the Chinese government and their supporters could be propaganda and disinformation.

To sum up, although the Chinese state media and the Taiwanese media both used identical words in the articles covering the origin of the COVID-19 virus, the meanings, the subjects, or even the contexts of the words in the Taiwanese media were different or even directly opposed to those of the Chinese media (see Table 6.2). The Taiwanese media portrayed their version of the origin narrative for COVID-19, which diverged from the Chinese one, by giving words alternative meanings and portraying characters in their own unique ways. These findings underline the limitations of keywords for defining meaning in content analysis.

¹³⁶ The original text in Chinese: “扭轉國際上對於病毒起源於武漢的印象”

¹³⁷ The original text in Chinese: “大陸網軍多語言出擊！散播「新冠源自美國」謠言“現在大陸網軍，已經能用七種語言，30個社交媒體平台，幫助北京進行大外宣，甚至擔任「網路戰狼」角色，包括把新冠病毒源頭甩鍋給美國等，企圖混淆國際視聽。”

Table 6.2 A comparison of meanings and usage of notable terms in Chinese and Taiwanese media

Terms	Chinese state media	Taiwanese media
Conspiracy theory	Chinese state media used the term “conspiracy theory” to describe claims that the COVID-19 virus was from Wuhan or any criticisms of China’s hiding of data.	Taiwanese media listed different theories of the origin of the virus and warned that China could use the label of “conspiracy theory” as propaganda.
Throw the pot	The U.S. “threw the pot” by blaming China as the place where the virus originated	China “threw the pot” (shirked responsibility as the country first to discover the disease) by suggesting the virus originated from other countries
Defamation	Western politicians and media defamed and blamed China as the origin of the virus and for not being transparent	The word did not often appear in the Taiwanese media. Only 6% of the articles used the word, and mostly used it when quoting Chinese sources.
Politicize	Western countries and media politicized the pandemic and related investigations – to fulfill Western politicians’ political purposes.	Taiwanese media positioned the argument of “politicizing the pandemic investigation and other issues” in the context of the power struggle between the U.S. and China
Propaganda and disinformation	The U.S. and other Western countries promoted propaganda and disinformation to attack China.	China was the party that propagated propaganda and disinformation to shirk responsibility and to maintain a good reputation.

6.3 Discussion

The narratives in the Taiwanese media articles painted a different picture of the origin of the COVID-19 virus than those in the Chinese state media.

First, while the Chinese state media stressed that the COVID-19 virus was probably from Europe or the United States, especially the lab in Fort Detrick, the Taiwanese media offered multiple theories about the origin of the virus. Although a few news articles repeated the Fort Detrick story and other origin theories propagated by China, more Taiwanese articles proposed the scenario that the virus could be leaked from the Wuhan lab or delivered the lesson that the truth remained unknown. In contrast to the Chinese state media that criticized Western countries for blaming China, the Taiwanese media suggested China was the one responsible for suppressing information and causing the worldwide pandemic.

As a prime target of China's state propaganda, Taiwanese media outlets were highly aware of China's information manipulations. Taiwanese media avidly followed the disagreements about the responsibility of the virus's origin between China and the United States, the two countries that are crucial to the island's future. They framed the narratives against the backdrop of global politics. Additionally, the articles resonated with the United States' criticisms of WHO (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2021) and questioned the results of the WHO investigation in China.

However, it is notable that several Taiwanese media articles also amplified the information relayed by right-wing American media outlets, such as the War Room, Newsmax, or overseas Chinese media organizations that are known for promoting disinformation. The Taiwanese media relied on these news sources in the reporting to support the claims that the virus could be a bioweapon developed by China. In part, the Taiwanese media were vulnerable to amplifying disinformation

due to a lack of independent reporting from within China, which led to some reliance on foreign sources for information about the virus and its origin.

Like the Chinese media, the Taiwanese media spotlighted several individuals or groups and repeated specific terms to reinforce images and ideas of the stories. These protagonists and repeated terms helped to substantiate the narratives. Both Taiwanese media and Chinese state media paid much attention to Pompeo, Trump, and Fauci. The media in both countries also used the same terms: “conspiracy theories,” “throw the pot,” “politicize,” etc. However, some characters, such as whistleblowers and questionable scientists, were unique in the Taiwanese media narratives. The Taiwanese media also highlighted terms such as “propaganda” to warn audiences of China’s information manipulation.

A phenomenon that stands out in comparing the narratives in the Taiwanese and Chinese media was how they used the same terms and protagonists to shape narratives that sharply contrast with each other. For example, in the Chinese state media narratives, Pompeo and Trump were villains who lied about the virus origin theory and blamed China out of selfish political interests of winning the 2020 U.S. presidential election. On the other hand, Fauci was a scientist who believed the truth in his heart but faced enormous political pressure from the villain Trump.

The same characters were given new roles in the Taiwan media narratives, even though the scenes of this COVID-19 drama remained the same. The villain Pompeo became a hero who was not afraid of the scathing criticisms from Chinese diplomats and bravely chased after the truth about the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Even Trump, who was labeled as a failed and racist American president by the Chinese media, was cast more positively in the Taiwanese media as just a president whose claim was challenged by his own staff. Nevertheless, the conscientious scientist Fauci became suspicious in the eyes of the Taiwanese media because he had previously rejected

the theory that the virus could have leaked from the Wuhan lab. According to the Taiwanese media, he might have an unrevealed connection with the Wuhan lab. Besides these characters, the Taiwanese media also gave attention to suspicious WHO scientists who helped China to cover the truth of the COVID-19 virus's origin. Another type of protagonist that was highlighted was the exiled Chinese whistleblowers who claimed the virus was a part of China's bioweapon program. The Taiwanese media also redefined the words used by the Chinese state media. An example of redefining words is "conspiracy theories." In the Chinese state media narratives, conspiracy theories include any theories that allege China is the origin of the virus or any claim that requires China to be responsible for the pandemic. According to the Chinese media, the conspiracists were Western media and politicians. However, Taiwanese media also deemed China's theory that the U.S. produced the COVID-19 virus a "conspiracy theory." The claim that the virus was from the lab of the U.S. Army base Fort Detrick was indeed mentioned in some Taiwanese media. Still, other articles pointed to the Fort Detrick theory as a conspiracy theory. Moreover, the Taiwanese media used the term "throw the pot" to refer to China's avoidance of responsibility for the pandemic, whereas, in the Chinese state media, it was the United States and some Western countries or media that "threw the pot (responsibility)" to China.

Overall, this study discovered that Taiwanese media narratives demonstrated both awareness of and resistance to the propaganda influence from China. This study also reveals a number of techniques used by Taiwanese media to construct their own narratives about the same stories propagated by China. The next question is: Why could Taiwan counter China's influence campaign in the case of the COVID-19 virus-origin theory? The question is especially intriguing because Taiwan speaks the same language as China, has a complicated relationship with China, and has been the main target of Chinese propaganda. The final chapter will attempt to answer this

question and discuss the vulnerabilities of Taiwanese media through the theories of strategic narratives and the hybrid media system.

Table 6.3 Comparison between the themes and main frames in Chinese media and Taiwanese media

The Chinese state media themes and main frames	The Taiwanese media themes and main frames
<p>The virus came from the U.S. or Europe. The lab in the Fort Detrick army base in the U.S. was the prime suspect of the birthplace of the COVID-19 virus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The virus may originate from the U.S. or Europe and was not leaked from the Wuhan lab. • The origin of the virus is a scientific question. • The U.S. should be investigated thoroughly. • Fort Detrick is the prime suspect. • The U.S. had a nefarious scheme and a history of lying 	<p>The virus came from U.S. and Europe. Fort Detrick is the prime suspect. (The theme echoes the Chinese narrative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The origin of the virus was not from the Wuhan lab but from the U.S. or Europe. Fort Detrick is suspicious. • The origin of the virus is a scientific question. • The U.S. should be investigated thoroughly. • China said the virus was from nature. • The U.S. has had a nefarious scheme and a history of lying
<p>China was attacked by the conspiracy theory spun by Western countries, particularly the U.S., because Western politicians wanted to shift the blame to China.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are lies and conspiracies against China. • The American and other Western media blemished and politicized China. • The U.S. and Western politicians attacked, criticized or treated China unfairly. • The reasons that the U.S. and Western countries attacked China. • The U.S. lost its battle against the pandemic. 	<p>China was attacked by conspiracy theories spun by Western countries and the U.S. (The theme echoes the Chinese narrative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. or other countries politicized the pandemic. • China was under attack by non-US Western countries. • U.S. politicians blamed China. • The U.S. and other Western media tarnished the reputation of China with accusations about China's concealment of the origin of COVID. • The reasons that the U.S. and Western countries attacked China. • The U.S. lost its battle against the pandemic.
<p>China was a team player by helping other countries, while the US was a troublemaker.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China behaved well and was transparent during the pandemic. 	<p>China was a team player, and the US was a troublemaker (The theme echoes the Chinese narratives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China was being transparent.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. was the one who caused trouble in the investigation and disrupted international collaboration. • Those who supported China were attacked or persecuted by American politicians or the media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. was the one who caused trouble in the investigation and interrupted international collaboration. • The international community should collaborate with China. • There were people or media who did not agree with the U.S. and Western countries' accusations and praised China.
	<p>Various theories about where and how the virus originated other than the conspiracy theories propelled by China. (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China may be the place where the virus originated. • The debate of whether the virus was man-made or from nature. • The truth is not clear since there is not enough information. • The virus origin theories promoted by the Chinese government are not plausible
	<p>China should take responsibility but failed to be transparent and kept denying its responsibility. (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chinese government was not being transparent with the information about the pandemic • China denied the virus originated in Wuhan. • China should be investigated for the origin of COVID. • China rejected responsibility for the global pandemic. • China should take responsibility for the origin of COVID. • China failed to control the disease in the early stage.
	<p>The awareness of disinformation and propaganda (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China spread fake news and propaganda.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chinese whistleblowers were not trustworthy. ● Fact-checking pieces correcting information. ● Media made mistakes regarding experts' comments.
	<p>Relations between China and other countries -- The international geopolitical conflicts between China, the U.S., and Australia (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The U.S. and China disagreed on issues regarding COVID-19. ● Australia and China disagreed on the origin of the COVID-19 virus. ● Chinese media criticized U.S. or U.S. politicians. ● China threatened non-US countries. ● Authoritarian China was a big challenge to the world.
	<p>Criticisms toward the U.S. (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The U.S. may have a responsibility too for the origin of the virus. ● The statements about the COVID-19 virus origin by the U.S. organizations might be incorrect.
	<p>WHO was questioned for its role in the virus-origin investigation. (The theme is unique in Taiwanese media).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There were people who helped China to suppress the virus origin theory unfavorable to China. ● WHO failed to take caution at an early stage. ● WHO Investigation was problematic.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation investigated how the COVID-19 virus-origin conspiracy theories were constructed as propaganda tools by Chinese state media and whether these conspiracy theories influenced Taiwanese media. In order to answer these questions, the research identified narratives on the origin of COVID-19 in Chinese state media and Taiwanese media. If narratives in Taiwanese media were not identical to the narratives in Chinese state media, what were the differences between the two narratives?

After analyzing COVID-19 virus-origin narratives that contained conspiracy theories propagated in the Chinese state media system, the study discovered that mainstream Taiwanese media told a story different from the Chinese one. More interestingly, while Taiwanese media recounted the same event (where the COVID-19 virus originated) with the same protagonists (Pompeo, Fauci, Trump, etc.) and even used identical terms in the Chinese language (throw the pot [甩鍋], defamation [汙名化], conspiracy theory [陰謀論], politicize [政治化]), they presented these elements within narratives that were in stark contrast to the Chinese versions.

The crucial issue is how the Chinese state media and Taiwanese media could tell such divergent versions of the same event using nearly identical elements. What were the factors that led to resistance of Taiwanese media against the influence of the Chinese media? The findings demonstrate that Taiwanese media countered the narratives of the Chinese state media by transforming the meaning of the terms and reshaping the characters of the protagonists. Additionally, Taiwanese media used quotes and content from Western media to build up their own narratives. The research further argues that behind the measures against the Chinese narratives was a battle of ideologies and identities. In this final chapter, the researcher concludes that one of the

keys by which Taiwan successfully resisted Chinese narratives was both distrust of China and awareness of Chinese propaganda. Nevertheless, relying on ideology to counter foreign propaganda could also be dangerous since it could cause citizens to fall into another ideology trap. These findings are critical for both theory development and policymaking. From a policy standpoint, the lessons from Taiwanese media could help other countries strengthen their defenses against disinformation and propaganda. It may even provide compelling proof for debates about the most viable solutions for disinformation countermeasures. In terms of theory development, the results help to better conceptualize propaganda, conspiracy theories, and strategic narratives and enrich the knowledge of key elements determining strategic narrative success or failure. Furthermore, this case study sheds light on why and whether conspiracy theories created in an authoritarian country's media system will fail or succeed when they enter the hybrid media environment of democracy. Finally, although this research finds encouraging evidence that the media in a democratic society is resilient enough to counter propaganda from an authoritarian country, it also identifies vulnerabilities in the free and open media system.

This concluding chapter will summarize the findings by engaging theories of the hybrid media system, strategic narratives, and conspiracy theories. Through the discussion, the researcher will also explain how this work could contribute to the above theories and advance the understanding of propaganda. In the second part of the chapter, the discussion will provide suggestions for combating hostile propaganda exerted by foreign countries based on this case study and propose future research directions.

7.1 It is a battle of ideology, not truth

7.1.1 China used conspiracy theories as a propaganda tool

This research found that Chinese state media narratives claimed that the virus could originate from other countries but not from China. The Fort Detrick lab in the U.S. could be the prime suspect and should be investigated by the international community. According to the Chinese narratives, there were multiple pieces of evidence supporting their theories. The state media further criticized the U.S. for rejecting requests for an open investigation. They contrasted the secrecy of the U.S. with the “openness” in China and Chinese collaboration with scientists and WHO. The Chinese narratives then pointed out that the U.S. and some Western countries spread conspiracy theories to defame China by asking China to take responsibility for the pandemic. The reasons behind this malicious conduct by Western politicians and media, according to China, were to suppress the rise of China and to cover the failure of Western politicians in controlling the pandemic.

The Chinese claims that Western countries were responsible for the pandemic have been proven to be false by international fact-checking organizations. But it is noteworthy that the picture portrayed by China shares several resemblances to the conspiracy theories drawn by other authoritarian states, for example, the misconduct and intent of Western countries to undermine the regime or achievements of the authoritarian governments.

As other studies have pointed out, conspiracy theories promoted by authoritarian leaders are often mixed with national trauma, such as having been an object of invasion or experienced civil violence (Radnitz, 2019). These leaders use conspiracy theories as tools to maintain their legitimacy or eliminate enemies (Yablokov, 2019). In times of unexpected crisis, authoritarian leaders depend even more on conspiracy theories to gain public support by rhetoric distinguishing between “us” and “the others.” In many cases, “the others” are often Western countries,

particularly the U.S. (Radnitz, 2019; Yablokov, 2019). The conspiracy theories produced by authoritarian countries usually express nostalgia for the past and allege that Western countries try to interfere with the stability of the regime. The theories further claim that the West is the hand behind the chaos, such as the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia (Radnitz, 2019).

This research found a similar social context and employment of conspiracy theories in the Chinese government's propagation of the COVID-19 virus origin theory. For a decade prior to the pandemic, the Chinese government stressed the humiliation that Chinese people suffered from the invasion by foreign countries before the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party government in 1949. By victimizing China in the past, the narratives glorify the prospect of Chinese rejuvenation under the leadership of Xi Jinping (Liao, 2017). When the pandemic broke out in Wuhan in China, the Chinese government again resorted to conspiracy theories targeting Western countries. What was different from the conspiracy theory narratives of other authoritarian countries was that the Chinese narratives did not express nostalgia for past glory. Instead, the narratives in the Chinese media expressed indignation that the West tried to impede the progress of China in becoming a global power like the United States.

The COVID-19 conspiracy theory promoted in the Chinese state media was thus rooted in a worldview that is highly suspicious of Western countries. They also merged with dubious and unverified rumors, such as the U.S. hiring ex-Japanese war criminals to develop bioweapons (*Global Times*, July 5, 2021).¹³⁸ These storylines were brought up to readers multiple times

¹³⁸ At the time (April 2023) when the researcher wrote this chapter, a simple Google search could still find top search results prioritizing the claim that World War II Japanese bioweapon scientists and military officials came to Fort Detrick and helped Americans develop bioweapons. Not surprisingly, most of these articles were published by Chinese state media in both English and Chinese. For example, Yuan, S. (2021, June 18). From Unit 731 to Fort Detrick: What is the U.S. hiding from the world? CGTN. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-18/From-Unit-731-to-Fort-Detrick-What-is-the-U-S-hiding-from-the-world--11bPpnpvfr2/index.html>. According to the investigation of Taiwan FactCheck Center, which consulted Japanese historical records, there is no evidence that Japanese scientists and bioweapon military officials came to the U.S. and helped Americans to develop bioweapon. However, the records showed that the Japanese gave Americans part of the information about bioweapon research during WWII.

whenever the Chinese state media published articles to refute condemnation or requests from the international society for an open investigation.

One of the most noticeable features of Chinese state media articles was the use of recurring words or catchphrases such as “throw the pot[甩鍋]” and “defamation[汙名化]” to highlight the hostility of Western countries, particularly the United States. Furthermore, unique characters were given to specific personalities in the articles to strengthen the narratives. Trump and Pompeo, for example, were immoral villains who attacked China, whereas Fauci was a scientist who was torn between his moral consciousness and political pressure.

With these narrative tools of words and stereotype characters, the Chinese government skillfully used its hybrid media system to build conspiracy theory narratives. As this research has pointed out, the Chinese state media joined in the allegation that the virus might originate in the United States after Chinese social media users first spread the theory and Chinese diplomats highlighted the narratives on Twitter. The audience was first drawn in by the conversation on social media about the suspicious Fort Detrick or American soldiers who brought the virus to China. The state media’s subsequent coverage of the virus-origin theories further legitimized and encouraged these suspicions. This finding also echoed another recent research by Cheng et al. (2022), which studied how Chinese Weibo accounts formulated and propagated virus-origin conspiracy theories.¹³⁹ Cheng et al. (2022) found that Chinese leaders refrained from directly expressing their doubts toward Western countries. Instead, they allowed non-official Weibo accounts to spread “more

See Taiwan FactCheck Center (2021, September 27). [False claim] It is reported on the Internet that "the real events of Unit 731 were filmed by the Japanese themselves, and produced by Japanese NHK...Under the protection of the United States, Shiro Ishii and Unit 731 conducted research in Fort Detrick Biochemical Research after the war...There was even an Ishii building at the Fort Detrick base"?[【錯誤】網傳「日本人自己拍的，日本 NHK 拍攝製作的 731 部隊真實的事件.....在美保護下，石井四郎與 731 部隊戰後在德堡生化研究....德特里克堡基地建了一座石井大樓」？]. <https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/articles/6362>

¹³⁹ Weibo is a popular microblogging website. *The New York Times* called Weibo “China’s Twitter” (Ren, Y. November 19, 2018).

exaggerated and conspiratorial narratives” (p. 1188). Moreover, considering that China imposed censorship online extensively, the popularity of these “virus originated in the U.S.” theories might be a sign that the narratives were endorsed by the government.

The Chinese state media articles address not only readers living in China but overseas Chinese speakers as well. Both the overseas editions of *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* explicitly claim that they serve Chinese readers living overseas (A Brief Introduction to People’s Daily, n.d.; About Huanqiu.com, n.d). In other words, these publications aim to communicate with a global community that speaks Chinese. Therefore, the Chinese government also used these *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* articles to promote the Chinese version of pandemic narratives. However, the findings in this research show that the stories in the Taiwanese media about the origin of the COVID-19 virus were different from the Chinese ones. The strategic narratives of Chinese media failed in this battle. The research argues that the key reason leading to the failure is that Taiwan did not share the same worldview and identity as Chinese propagandists.

7.1.2 Taiwanese media had their own agenda

Most Taiwanese do not directly receive news from Chinese media.¹⁴⁰ However, Taiwanese media outlets often quote Chinese media sources when covering events relevant to China (Lin, 2022a). As a result, Taiwanese mainstream media outlets have become easy targets for Chinese propaganda. One of the ways in which China manipulates Taiwanese media is by befriending Taiwanese media owners to intervene in editing decisions in newsrooms or by purchasing advertorials without disclosing sponsors of the advertisements (Huang, 2019; Freedom House, 2022). However, recently, scholars also discovered that Taiwanese media unwittingly quoted

¹⁴⁰ See Figure 4.4 for the major news brands in Taiwan. None of the top 15 media outlets that the Taiwanese used in 2022 is a Chinese media outlet.

disinformation and propaganda sown in the Chinese media and became “useful idiots”¹⁴¹ to amplify Chinese propaganda (Lin, 2022a).

In this study of the narratives of the COVID-19 virus origin theories, the analysis found that a few Taiwanese media still quoted Chinese media as news sources and reflected Chinese narratives. However, Taiwanese media used more Western media sources and painted a picture different from the Chinese media. Instead of reiterating China’s story that the virus was from the U.S. or other countries, Taiwanese media offered more explanations about the origin of the virus. One of the most prominent themes was the theory that the virus could have been leaked from the Wuhan lab. Furthermore, Taiwanese media also criticized China for rejecting the calls for investigation and for being secretive about information. When WHO finally received permission from China to conduct the investigation, the Taiwanese media questioned the integrity of the investigation results. Nevertheless, when China and the U.S. engaged in verbal fights about the origin of the virus and China’s responsibility, Taiwanese media relayed arguments from both sides and saw the disagreement as a struggle between the two world powers.

As a prime target of China’s state propaganda, Taiwanese media outlets during the pandemic were highly aware of China’s information manipulations. In several articles, Taiwanese media cited investigative reports or news articles from Western think tanks or media organizations to warn audiences about Chinese disinformation. In the major narratives of Taiwanese media, the claims propagated by Chinese media, for example, the virus was from Fort Detrick, were conspiracy theories and untrustworthy.

¹⁴¹ “Useful idiots” refers to someone who is used by propagandists to propagate messages. For example, local media in a country may use sources and narratives without being aware that the information is planted by Russia. The motives of local media’s use of Russian sources could be innocent, for example, to attract readers and bring in more advertising profits, or just to push the agenda supported by the local media (Benkler et al., 2018).

Why did Taiwanese media tell different stories than Chinese propaganda? In their study on the limitations of strategic narratives, Hagström & Gustafsson (2021) pointed out that pre-existing narratives of international value and a country's own agenda could offset the influence of other countries' strategic narratives. In their research studying how the narratives of the United States and China about the COVID-19 pandemic affected other countries, Hagström & Gustafsson found that democratic and human rights values promoted by the U.S. still prevailed in the international community. In addition, other countries stressed their own agendas, such as international cooperation, instead of engaging in the arguments between the U.S. and China about the origin of the virus or who should bear responsibility for the pandemic. Additionally, scholars also suggested that identities played important roles in affecting the efficacy of propaganda (Colley, 2019).

The factors of identities, pre-existing narratives, and agendas help to explain why Taiwanese media could resist the influence of China's narratives. A 2022 survey by the Election Study Center at the National Chengchi University showed that 60.8% of Taiwanese identified themselves as Taiwanese, while only 2.7% identified themselves as "Chinese." Another 32.9% thought they were both Taiwanese and Chinese (Election Study Center, 2023).

As for the impression that China makes on the Taiwanese, several public opinion surveys indicate that the Taiwanese have distrusted China as well as felt growing hostility from China. A 2019 survey conducted by the Center for Survey Research in Academia Sinica of Taiwan found that 71.8% of the participants said China was unfriendly or very unfriendly to Taiwan. In contrast, 72% of the participants had a "favorable" or "very favorable" impression of the United States (Center for Survey Research in Academia Sinica of Taiwan, 2019). The latest research by the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, also showed that 82.5% of the surveyed Taiwanese participants disagreed that China was a country of credibility (Yang, January 26, 2023).

When it comes to the awareness of “fake news,” although studies on previous cases found that Taiwanese media were susceptible to Chinese information campaigns (Lin, 2022a), the media and citizens have gradually developed an awareness of foreign influence campaigns. A study conducted in 2022 by Taiwan FactCheck Center found that nearly 90% of Taiwanese said they had seen fake news, and 55% said they believed “foreign forces” produced fake news every day or often, although the survey did not specify which countries fall into the scope of “foreign forces” (Taiwan FactCheck Center, 2022).¹⁴²

The above surveys show that a large percentage of Taiwanese have developed their own national identity and deem China a threat to Taiwan’s security. Moreover, the Taiwanese are aware of the attack of fake news as a part of the disinformation campaign from foreign countries. This awareness of Taiwan’s deteriorating relationship with China, distrust in the Chinese government, and the alertness of disinformation and propaganda campaigns were thus reflected in the Taiwanese narratives. As a result, many Taiwanese media did not subscribe to China’s narratives in the COVID-19 virus origin case.

Another evidence of the limitation of the Chinese narratives is that the Taiwanese media positioned the COVID-19 origin narratives within Taiwan’s own international relations agenda. While China portrayed itself as a victim of the West’s criticisms and accused the West of intentionally suppressing its rise as a great world power, Taiwanese media did not see the power struggle through China’s lens. Instead, Taiwanese media were watchful of how China and the United States criticized each other as well as the international community’s responses since Taiwan has long been isolated in international relationships due to China’s pressure on the global community

¹⁴² This survey did not distinguish between different types of “fake news[假消息]” and used the term “fake news” generally.

(Wong and Qin, March 24, 2022; Copper, 1992). For the Taiwanese, the changing perception of China could also mean a new scenario and opportunities in international relations.

All in all, the case of Taiwanese media's resistance to the Chinese media narratives showcases the limitations of strategic narratives and serves as an example of how crucial identities, emotions, and agendas are to the effect of propaganda.

7.1.3 How to combat strategic narratives?

Reframing the stories and protagonists and changing the definitions of words were the main ways the Taiwanese media created their own narratives in the case of the origin theories of the COVID-19 virus. Recasting the actors in alternative roles is a viable strategy to combat the existing narratives, as Halverson et al. (2011) proposed in their research on the master narratives of Islamist extremists. Taiwanese media used similar tactics to define the characters and create distinctive pictures for the protagonists, which were starkly different from those in the Chinese state media. By repeated framing of protagonists and recurrence of words in articles throughout different news events during the pandemic, the framings of the protagonists and events formed consistent images and storylines, eventually reinforcing distinctive narratives in the Taiwanese media. Although there were still articles that echoed the Chinese state media narratives, one can still detect distinctive master narratives through the conspicuous images of the protagonists and the words used in the Taiwanese media outlets, which aligned with Taiwanese identities and their vigilance against China's influence campaigns.

The research also wants to emphasize another tactic that helped the Taiwanese media counter the Chinese media narratives—quoting non-Chinese media sources, particularly Western media outlets. As the analysis found, the Taiwanese media are heavily dependent on Western media sources to cover the news about the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Multiple reasons contributed

to the lack of Taiwanese reporters on the ground in China, including the limited financial resources of news outlets and the fact that Taiwanese reporters faced a higher risk of being arrested by the Chinese government due to political reasons (Chen, 2022). Even though some Taiwanese reporters received permission from the Chinese government to be stationed in China, they encountered more restrictions than foreign correspondents from Western countries (Chen, 2022). The reliance on other international media that can access information from China thus has become an optimal solution for the Taiwanese media to report events in China.¹⁴³

The choice of which media sources to quote would therefore impact the narratives of the events in the Taiwanese media. From a certain point of view, the choices of news sources also demonstrate Taiwanese media's agency – although Taiwanese reporters cannot deliver firsthand accounts, they can *choose* which foreign news reports to use and *how to relay* the original messages to Taiwanese audiences. As Figures 7.1 and 7.2 demonstrate¹⁴⁴, among the Taiwanese articles reporting the origin of the COVID-19 virus, 91.2% (443 articles) of the articles quoting foreign news sources used Western media sources. In comparison, 3.2% (93 articles) used Chinese state media sources. *CNN*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, and *Fox* are among the sources popular in Taiwanese news media. One possible factor that Taiwanese media chose to quote Western media, especially American ones, could be that American and Taiwanese news outlets shared similar democratic and news values. Another reason could be that Taiwanese media trusted the quality of these American outlets.

¹⁴³ An ironic and concerning trend is that more foreign journalists have been expelled from China and can only “cover” China from Taiwan or South Korea. See Foreign Correspondents Club of China. (2020). Track, trace, expel: Reporting on China amid a pandemic. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/xye6bhhic0s4hqm/2020%20FCCC%20Report.pdf?dl=0>; Agence France Presse. (2023, March 1). Foreign Journalists In China Restricted And Tracked In 2022: Press Group. *Barron's*. <https://www.barrons.com/news/foreign-journalists-in-china-restricted-and-tracked-in-2022-press-group-9aa5492f>

¹⁴⁴ Figure 7.1 is the same as Figure 6.5 in Chapter 6.

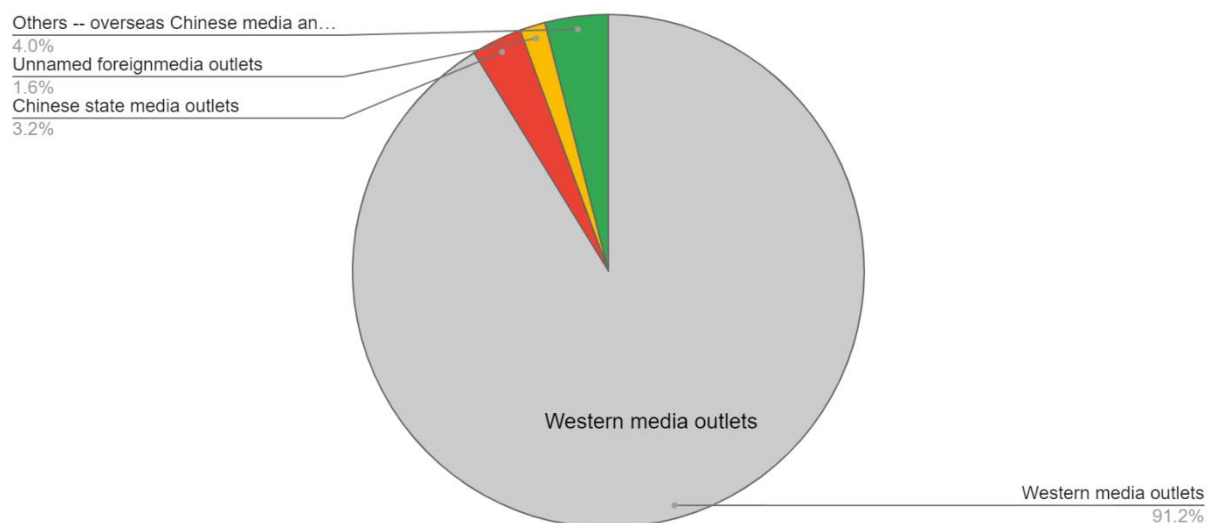


Figure 7.1 Media sources quoted by the Taiwanese media

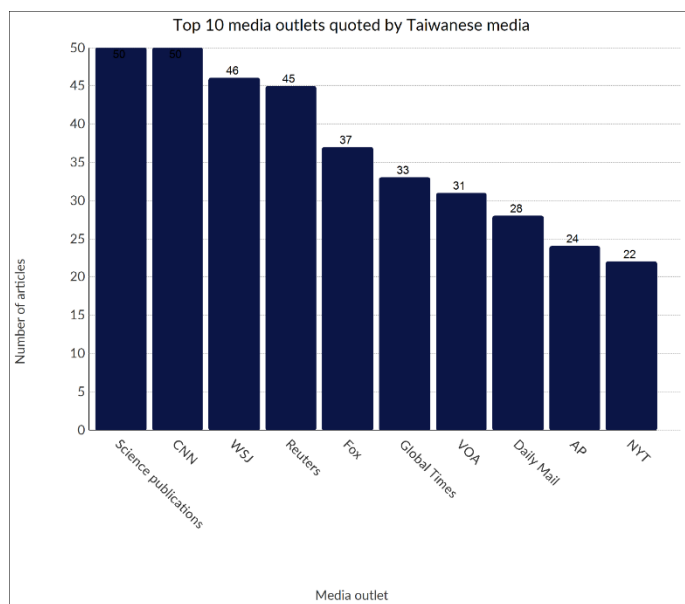


Figure 7.2 Top 10 media outlets quoted by the Taiwanese media

Using Western news items as sources does not mean that the media are true to the messages that the original media outlets intended to convey. The Chinese state media, as was shown in Chapter Five on the narratives of Chinese state media, did not refrain from using Western media. Nevertheless, the Chinese media tended to misrepresent the information or use the original

messages out of context. This research did not see similar practices in the Taiwanese media when the Taiwanese media used either Western sources or Chinese state media sources. But the research identified a worrying trend in Taiwanese media's use of second-hand news sources, which could impair Taiwan's defense against foreign information influence.

7.1.4 Depending on ideology to fight foreign conspiracy theories could be building a bulwark on the sand

This research noted in Chapter Six on Taiwanese media narratives that Taiwanese media used not only mainstream foreign sources such as *CNN*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Reuters* but also right-wing American media such as Steve Bannon's War Room podcast, Zero Hedge, and the Gateway Pundit. The Taiwanese media also used media funded by Chinese exiles. Mainstream media and researchers have labeled these websites, videos, or podcasts as significant disinformation creators and spreaders. (Helmus et al., 2018; Eisler, 2021; Thompson, 2023, Graphika, 2021). However, in the Taiwanese media content examined by this study, Taiwanese journalists or editors rarely offered context for these foreign outlets. Furthermore, Taiwanese media functioned more like a transcription machine, translating or repeating the main points of English content into Chinese for Taiwanese viewers.¹⁴⁵

For example, since the pandemic, Bannon has promoted the theory that the virus was a bioweapon from China (Qin et al., January 26, 2021). Since April 2020, Bannon claimed in his War Room show that a whistleblower had escaped from the Wuhan lab and would expose the secret in the Wuhan lab. The Chinese scientist Yan then appeared as the whistleblower and appeared several times in Bannon's program, asserting she had worked for labs in China and found evidence

¹⁴⁵ In the case of the content produced by the Chinese "exile" media, such as Lude media, the content was in Mandarin Chinese, which is the main language used in Taiwan. The Taiwanese media thus directly quoted the Lude media's Chinese content, saving the translation step.

showing the virus was the bioweapon from the Chinese military. The Taiwanese media *Liberty Times*, a pro-Taiwan independence newspaper with a wide audience in print and online (The Reuter Institute, 2022), closely followed Bannon's show and reported on Bannon's comments as well as his interviews with Yan. From January 2020 to June 2022, the *Liberty Times* produced six articles that quoted the War Room podcasts introducing Yan and the COVID-19 bioweapon theory. None of the *Liberty Times* articles mentioned the political inclination of Bannon or controversies about the podcast. The only information about Bannon provided by the Taiwanese authors in these six articles is "former White House chief strategist [前白宮首席策士班農]Steve Bannon," which sounds like attestation to Bannon's authority.

In these articles, which ranged from 500 to 900 words in length, the War Room and Yan were usually the only sources cited (See Table 7.1). These articles also seldom provided verification of information stated by Bannon or Yan. As noted in the previous analysis, although the *Liberty Times* and other news publications did have one or two pieces of articles questioning the accuracy (by quoting other media sources, such as the *New York Times*) of Yan's information, these warnings were inconsistent and did not necessarily reach the audiences who had consumed the bioweapon virus theory intermittently propagated by Banon and Yan.

It was through the continuous repetition of the right-wing or disinformation content produced by the War Room and other questionable American right-wing outlets that some of the Taiwanese media amplified the messages of another strain of conspiracy theory without fair reporting.

Table 7.1 How the Liberty Times used the War Room as a media source

Date of the publication	Title of the article	Word count	Sources
April 26, 2020	武漢病毒所疑雲將曝光？班農：有人會現身說法[Will the suspicion of the Wuhan virus be exposed? Bannon: Someone will speak out] ¹⁴⁶	517	War Room Unnamed media source
May 2, 2020	被爆攜千份秘密文件「叛逃」美國 武漢實驗室石正麗急說明[It was revealed that she had “defected” with thousands of secret documents. Shi Zhengli, a Wuhan laboratory in the United States, urgently explained] ¹⁴⁷	724	War Room <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> <i>Global Times</i> Twitter
August 6, 2020	籲全球究責 閻麗夢：中共不會只製造 1 個病毒[Calling for the international community to hold China accountable. Yan Limeng: The CCP will not only create one virus] ¹⁴⁸	760	WHO Bannon Yan
August 11, 2020	掌握證據！閻麗夢：若中國不公布改造病毒過程 疫苗不會有效[She has the evidence! Yan Limeng: If China does not disclose the process of transforming the virus, the vaccine will not be effective] ¹⁴⁹	887	War Room Yan

¹⁴⁶ *Liberty Times*. (2020, April 26). Will the suspicion of the Wuhan virus be exposed? Bannon: Someone will speak out [武漢病毒所疑雲將曝光？班農：有人會現身說法].

<https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3146559>

¹⁴⁷ *Liberty Times*. (2020, May 2). It was revealed that she had “defected” with thousands of secret documents. Shi Zhengli, a Wuhan laboratory in the United States, urgently explained [被爆攜千份秘密文件「叛逃」美國 武漢實驗室石正麗急說明]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3152889>

¹⁴⁸ *Liberty Times*. (2020, August 6). Calling for the international community to hold China accountable. Yan Limeng: The CCP will not only create one virus [籲全球究責 閻麗夢：中共不會只製造 1 個病毒].

<https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3251351>

¹⁴⁹ *Liberty Times*. (2020, August 11). She has the evidence! Yan Limeng: If China does not disclose the process of transforming the virus, the vaccine will not be effective [掌握證據！閻麗夢：若中國不公布改造病毒過程 疫苗不會有效]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3256186>

October 13, 2020	武漢肺炎是中國「超限戰」？閻麗夢：論文獲美國專家認可 [COVID-19 is China's "unrestricted warfare"? Yan Limeng: The paper was recognized by American experts] ¹⁵⁰	475	War Room Yan
May 25, 2021	控中共蓄意放毒禍害全球！閻麗夢：願赴美國會作證 [Accusing the CCP of intentionally poisoning the world! Yan Limeng: Willing to Testify in the U.S. Congress] ¹⁵¹	650	War Room Yan

¹⁵⁰ *Liberty Times*. (2020, October 13). COVID-19 is China's "unrestricted warfare"? Yan Limeng: The paper was recognized by American experts [武漢肺炎是中國「超限戰」？閻麗夢：論文獲美國專家認可]. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/3319347>

¹⁵¹ Finance Channel. (2021, May 25). Accusing the CCP of intentionally poisoning the world! Yan Limeng: Willing to Testify in the U.S. Congress [控中共蓄意放毒禍害全球！閻麗夢：願赴美國會作證]. *Liberty Times*. <https://ec.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/3545676>

Multiple reasons could contribute to the amplification of foreign disinformation or conspiracy by the Taiwanese media. The first factor is probably that the ideology behind the right-wing disinformation resonated with the distrust of China by Taiwanese news outlets and their target audiences. As researchers have already pointed out, identities and ideologies play an important part in the spread and amplification of disinformation or conspiracy theories (Gagliardone et al., 2021). The Taiwanese media, although rejecting conspiracy theories promoted by China, might find specific interest in international media content that exposes the wrongdoings of the Chinese government.

Secondly, there could be limitations on the ability of the news organization or the journalists to verify the information. Several studies conducted by Taiwanese journalism scholars have pointed out that Taiwanese news organizations focus on “breaking news” and the type of news that can attract the most clicks online. The performance of journalists is also evaluated by the number of articles published and the clicks that the articles attract on online news websites (Liu, 2018). According to Liu (2018), in order to meet the requirements of news organizations, journalists in the Taiwanese media tend to look for news available online and have little or no time to verify the information. They also prefer news that is sensational or that can evoke audiences’ emotions but has little news value. Lin (2022a) also criticized the same news practice in Taiwanese media, in which journalists look for eye-catching but unfounded information online and publish the news as “breaking news” without further fact-checking. In her study of how a piece of fake news resulted in an unfortunate suicide of a Taiwanese diplomat dispatched to Japan, Lin (2022a) warned that this kind of media practice had been one of the biggest weaknesses in Taiwan’s battle to counter disinformation.

This research also sees the identical issue in Taiwanese media's reporting on the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Although Taiwanese media showed the ability to counter China's propaganda and disinformation by using credible international media sources, they still failed to provide valid reporting with useful context to audiences. This is to say that they were highly aware of China's information influence but could not or did not apply the same attentiveness to every foreign source they used. Moreover, the doubt toward China could lead some of the Taiwanese media to embrace other flawed narratives. In this way, what helped Taiwanese media to safeguard against disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy could be said to be anti-China ideology instead of a valid and robust journalistic practice.¹⁵²

A bulwark made of national identity and the sentiment of distrust against a hostile neighbor might serve as a strong defense in the COVID-19 virus-origin scenario. However, this bulwark is built on sand since identity and sentiment can also be easily manipulated, especially in societies that react strongly to ideology issues. A truly robust safeguard should still be supported by the foundation of a healthy information ecosystem that delivers correct information for decision-making.

7.2 Implications of this research

This research developed methods and anchored analysis based on theories of conspiracy theory, propaganda, disinformation, and hybrid media systems. In turn, the researcher would like to discuss how the research findings could enrich these theories.

¹⁵² As for the question of whether fact-checking organizations help to resist disinformation and propaganda, this requires further research. However, research for this dissertation did not find fact-checking pieces done by fact-checking organizations being widely quoted by the Taiwanese mainstream media. Only four articles quoted fact-checking organizations' fact-checking results.

7.2.1 Ideology as a juncture for conspiracy theories, propaganda, and disinformation

For the past years, scholars have defined the terms “fake news,” “disinformation,” “propaganda,” and “conspiracy theory” from various perspectives (Freelon and Wells, 2020; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, Tandoc et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2019; Damstra et al., 2021). The research dives further into the relations among these concepts and identifies the nexus of ideology that makes propaganda and conspiracy theories powerful or ineffective.

Here it is important to define the term “ideology” before illustrating how “ideology” connects the above concepts. Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives general but concise definitions for “ideology: it is “a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture.” More broadly, ideology is “a systematic body of concepts, especially about human life or culture” (Definition of ideology, 2023). In political science, ideology is generally referred to as how actors define their position and devise strategies in the political field (Martin, 2014). But media scholars define ideology not only as how actors read their political situation but more as “the basic ways in which the world is defined” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2018, p.160). That is to say, ideology is a fundamental view by which actors identify themselves, differentiate “us” and “others,” and understand how world affairs are operated. This study also follows the broad definition to see ideology as actors’ worldviews and identities.

This research indicates that Chinese narratives construct conspiracy theories based on a long-standing ideology entrenched by the Chinese government in its domestic propaganda. During the pandemic, Chinese state media defined conspiracy theories as any claims that could tarnish China’s reputation. The state media further propagated ideology mixed with partial facts, disinformation, and historical myths. But the discourse of the conspiracy theories, although produced to meet the challenge in this specific pandemic, was still based on a fundamental

worldview and identity -- the malicious Western actors who brought humiliation and tried to interfere with China. As prior studies have shown, this has long been the storyline in Chinese dogmas about the history of China, who they are, and how the Chinese see the world (Liao, 2017; Wang & Chew, 2016).

However, the same ideology also causes the Taiwanese media to reject Chinese conspiracy theories. The findings of this study suggest that Taiwanese media outlets do not share the same worldview due to their identity as Taiwanese and a radically different perspective that sees the United States in a more amicable way. The attempt of Chinese propaganda to win recognition and stoke resentment toward the West through conspiracy theories thus failed to succeed in Taiwan. This research finding shows evidence of the importance of ideology in the study of conspiracy theories and propaganda, particularly when they cross borders. Although an identical language may facilitate the spread of propaganda, a shared ideology is key to achieving influence.

7.2.2 Careless use of foreign media sources could also propagate conspiracy theories

This research also finds that conspiracy theories could be introduced to other countries by the mainstream media's careless journalistic approach to international news reporting. Without a rigorous process of research, verification, and reporting, the domestic media can actively propagate conspiracy theories and disinformation coming from abroad.

Existing research on the transnational spread of conspiracy theories argues that language and local communities played important roles in the spread of COVID-19-related conspiracy theories. For example, Bruns et al. (2020) found that English-based social media groups tied by religion and common interests were intermediaries in disseminating 5G conspiracy theories¹⁵³ to different

¹⁵³ The theory claims that 5G causes or facilitate the spread of COVID-19 virus. See Tibken, S. (2021b, October 30). 5G has no link to COVID-19 but false conspiracy theories persist. CNET. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/mobile/5g-has-no-link-to-covid-19-as-false-conspiracy-theories-persist/>

countries. A study by Gagliardone et al. (2021) on how online users spread conspiracy theories also showed that fear and suspicion against other countries or international celebrities would facilitate the spread of conspiracy theories domestically.

This study expands the understanding of how domestic mainstream media can play a role in adopting and spreading foreign-born conspiracy theories. In this case, American right-wing media outlets such as War Room, Newsmax, and even Tucker Carlson on *Fox News* did not plan to contribute to a propaganda campaign attractive to Taiwan by claiming that the COVID-19 virus was a Chinese bioweapon. Taiwanese media, on the other hand, promoted the content of these right-wing media voices to Taiwanese audiences, who have long distrusted the Chinese government. (Yang, January 26, 2023). By quoting the problematic content without providing verification or more contextual information, the Taiwanese media actively sought other threads of conspiracy theories in which China was the perpetrator, although they also warned about the Chinese conspiracy theories at the same time.

To summarize, the findings suggest another way for conspiracy theories to spread in a transnational setting: In a country that heavily relies on foreign media sources to receive information about global events, domestic media outlets could actively and selectively introduce problematic information abroad, thereby becoming “useful idiots.”

7.2.3 Analyzing conspiracy theories with strategic narratives

This study also contributes to connecting the concepts of conspiracy theories and strategic narratives. More significantly, this study shows that the framework for analyzing strategic narratives could be useful in dissecting conspiracy theories and assessing their influence.

There are several similarities between conspiracy theories and strategic narratives. The first aspect they have in common is that they both revolve around stories. Previous studies have shown that

conspiracy theories are stories that offer explanations for events or emergencies. (Uscinski & Parent, 2014; Byford, 2011; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Strategic narratives are also a series of stories about a specific occurrence. (Oates, 2018). Second, both conspiracy theories and strategic narratives are promoted in order to accomplish the actors' goals. While conspiracy theories seek to define the issue and imply solutions, strategic narratives build stories to promote actors' interests and values. (Oates, 2018; Miskimmon et al., 2017). Finally, the success of conspiracy theories and strategic narratives is dependent on ideology and identity. Whereas conspiracy theories exploit social groups' beliefs and identities, strategic narratives attempt to sway audiences by touching on their identities and evoking strong feelings. (Byford, 2011; Marwick & Partin, 2022; Halverson et al., 2011; Wagnsson & Barzanje, 2021).

The tools for the analysis of strategic narratives thus can be useful implements to dissect conspiracy theories. The investigation begins by paying specific attention to the time when stories emerge, the sequence and causality of the events; the way actors are presented; and the lessons delivered at the end (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2021; Hagström & Gustafsson, 2021). Patterns emerge after researchers systematically categorize these elements. Through the analysis, researchers should be attentive to how narrators define events, suggest solutions, make judgments on individuals, as well as further discover ideologies behind the discourse. The elements extracted from the content could also be applied to compare texts, examine whether the narratives are reflected in other content, and assess the influence of conspiracy theories. This research adopted this approach to discover the themes, repeated terms, significant protagonists, and underlying ideologies in Chinese and Taiwanese media. The research portrayed two contrasting narratives and concluded that Taiwanese media were resistant to Chinese influence.

7.2.4 Measures to combat conspiracy theories and propaganda

Following a discussion of the theoretical implications, it is important to highlight the findings that help in devising strategies for combating cross-border propaganda and conspiracy theories.

Many of the current proposals on countermeasures against conspiracy theories and foreign propaganda emphasize fact-checking and media literacy. For instance, the two European Commission documents on fighting disinformation, “Tackling online disinformation: A European Approach” (2018) and “On the European democracy action plan” (2020), highlight the importance of media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. In Taiwan, the government and civil society also have deemed fact-checking and media literacy as two important pillars of countering false information (Executive Yuan, 2018). Nevertheless, the findings of this research, which shows the crucial role of ideology in conspiracy theories and cross-border propaganda, could bring a new perspective to rethink the efficacy of fact-checking and media literacy.

As advocates for media literacy and fact-checking argue, media literacy helps to enhance awareness of information manipulation and detect disinformation, while fact-checking can issue timely warnings of questionable messages and provide verification (European Commission, 2018, 2020). But in the case of Taiwan, even though Taiwanese audiences and media are highly aware of Chinese information influence campaigns, ironically, they both still spread another thread of problematic information from American right-wing media outlets. The research also demonstrates that conspiracy theories are powerful because they strongly resonate with the identity and worldviews of audiences. Could fact-checking, which focuses on individual pieces of information, be effective enough to combat the persistent ideology behind the single pieces of information? Moreover, the changing verdicts by major American fact-checking centers on the origin of the COVID-19 virus (Kessler, May 25, 2021) also highlights the dilemma of fact-checking – when the

core truth is still being debated and involves elements of ideology, the result of fact-checking could be used for another round of political attack and harm the credibility of the fact-checking institution.

This does not mean media literacy and fact-checking are ineffective. On the contrary, media literacy initiatives and fact-checking continue to play crucial roles in combating conspiracy theories and propaganda. However, we must acknowledge the reality that media outlets and fact-checking could also be entangled in ideological struggles and reconsider what to offer in media literacy classes and media content.

It is challenging to combat an ideology based on identity and worldview. Effective resistance to foreign propaganda may need the ability to decipher messages and identify their underlying purpose. Moreover, it also requires the awareness not only of “what others think” but also “what and how I think.” In other words, it requires understanding one’s own ideology to know the weakness oneself. This kind of awareness can also be developed through media literacy training.

Other knowledge that can be delivered by media literacy class is awareness about foreign news sources. The information about foreign news outlets to be learned should include not only hostile foreign resources but also the outlets that domestic media quote. Moreover, media literacy lessons should educate learners on how media outlets gather information about international news events, select quotes, and present news stories.

As for news reporting and fact-checking practices on international news events, media outlets should use information from foreign sources with greater care. In the digital age, where news can flow even more easily and quickly across geographical and language borders, the authenticity of information about international news events is particularly important. The best scenario is that reporters could be on the scene and relay the news firsthand. However, for news organizations

restrained by budgets or threats against journalists on foreign soil, the most viable way is to quote foreign news sources. Therefore, it is important that domestic news sources prudently select news sources, use available sources to verify information, and provide audiences with more context, including the background of foreign sources quoted in the news articles.

In addition, through the research process, the researcher also realized the importance of making information available to international audiences in fighting information warfare. As this study found, news organizations lacking international reporting resources rely heavily on foreign news outlets, especially established ones. Nevertheless, Chinese news organizations have aggressively expanded their international presence and established collaborations with countries lacking media resources (Lim et al., 2021; Freedom House, 2022). Facing competition from China to define news events, democratic countries should make their news articles more available to international audiences to win the ideological battle. It is fortunate that democratic values have shaped the mainstream worldview for the past decades and still facilitate countries to resist Chinese narratives (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2021). But democratic countries should be aware of the rising Chinese media influence and take action.

7.3 Future research directions

This research identified several interesting and relevant issues worth investigating during the research process.

First, this dissertation attempts to define ideology and showcases the importance of ideology in propaganda and conspiracy theories. The research also demonstrates how Taiwanese media counter the influence of Chinese state media with ideology. Nevertheless, the meaning, scope, and types of ideology merit more nuanced exploration in future research. In this research, the ideology

that helps the Taiwanese to counter Chinese influence is the identity as Taiwanese and the distrust of Chinese information. But in other cases, the ideology could be different. For example, what would be the ideology in the United States to counter information from China or Russia? Would there be other ideological traps that would lead American media or audiences to embrace foreign propaganda?

Second, it would also be interesting to see how other language versions produced by Chinese state media sway the media content of other countries. For example, how often are the Chinese state media quoted in the media of other countries? What terms in other countries' media content resemble those used in the Chinese media? Do they share similar themes? The analysis framework on strategic narratives developed by extant studies and this research could serve as a starting point for similar investigations in different languages and regions.

Lastly, the journalism practice of using foreign sources is also worth exploring. This was beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focused on news content. However, for future work, interviews with Taiwanese reporters (or local reporters for cases studied in other countries) would help to understand how and why they choose foreign news sources. The interview result could also be triangulated with an analysis of media content and offer more insights into how media reporting perpetuates or resists ideologies.

7.4 Conclusion

This dissertation focuses on the influence of Chinese state media on Taiwanese media. However, the research findings can be beneficial not only for Taiwan but also countries seeking to combat the information influence of authoritarian countries.

Authoritarian nations have conducted more aggressive information control and influence campaigns in recent years. Domestically, these regimes strengthened censorship by refining

surveillance systems and enacting even harsher censorship laws (Yang, June 20, 2022; “Russia: With War, Censorship Reaches New Heights,” 2022). The objective is to ensure that historical accounts and discussions of current events are consistent with government-approved narratives. In an effort to suppress the values of human rights and democracy in the international community, these governments have also expanded their global capabilities to promote the ideologies that support perpetuating authoritarian regimes (Nossel, 2021; Tiezzie, 2021). One example is China’s attempt to define the truth of the origin of COVID-19 and the assertion that the democratic political system contributed to the inability of Western countries to control the COVID-19 pandemic (Kurlantzick, 2020). By restricting access to accurate information and amplifying messages that distort the truth, authoritarian governments compromise the integrity of global information and media systems and further impact how citizens perceive the world and make the best decisions in so many areas beyond geopolitics.

Countering the information influence from authoritarian regimes is thus not only a fight exclusively faced by Taiwan. It is indeed a challenge encountered by all democratic societies. The case study of China’s influence on the Taiwanese media system provides an informative example to identify the strength and weaknesses of media in open societies and the opportunities to preserve the freedom that we have all long cherished.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Codebook of Chinese state media

Important Elements	Description/Notes	Example
<u>Categories of persons who were quoted</u>	Persons whose statements were quoted in the articles	Examples or exemplary sentences from Chinese media
Chinese diplomats	Chinese officials who served the Chinese embassies or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	For example, the spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry Geng Shuang, Zhao Lijian, Hua Chunying
Chinese experts	Scholars or academics from China	For example, the senior research fellow of the China Institute of International Studies Cui Hongjian
Chinese ordinary people	Unspecified Chinese people, including Chinese internet users	
Officials or representatives of the Chinese government (non-diplomats)	Chinese officials who served the government but were not diplomats	Representatives of the National People's Congress
International political figures	Lawmakers or leaders of political parties who are from countries other than China, the U.S., and Taiwan	
International experts	Scholars or academics who are from countries other than China, the U.S., and Taiwan	
U.S. Government	Statements that are issued by the branches of the U.S. government, such as the President, the State Department	
U.S. experts	U.S. scholars or academics	
U.S. ordinary people	Unspecified Americans, including American internet users	
U.S. politicians	U.S. lawmakers, or politicians who previously served in the U.S. government but have left	

WHO	Statements from WHO or people who worked for WHO	
<u>Distinct words or concepts</u>	Notable words or concepts constantly appear in the articles	Example sentences from Chinese media
(阴谋论)Conspiracy theory	The article uses the word "conspiracy theory" to refer to something or events or statements	“中国阴谋论”成美政客竞选工具 “China Conspiracy Theory” has become a campaign tool for U.S. politicians.
(强国 or 大国) Great Power	Words referring to a country as a world power	支援全球团结抗疫，体现了一个负责任大国的担当 [China] supported the global effort to combat the pandemic, demonstrating that it is a responsible great power [in global affairs].
(道德低下 做人下限) Immoral/low moral standards	Words referring to a person who doesn't follow moral standards	这些人可以说代表了美国商品德最低的那几个政客 These people can be said to represent the politicians with the lowest moral standards in the United States
(谎言 谣言) Lie or rumor	The article uses the words “lies” or “rumors” in a statement	“武汉实验室”谎言背后是资本主义大国的统治精英希望将这场大流行的责任从自己的灾难性政策转嫁到中国 Behind the "Wuhan Lab" lie is the plan of ruling elites of a capitalist power, who did not want to be responsible for their disastrous policies, and sought to shift the responsibility to China.
(流氓 无赖) Rascal	The article uses the words “rascal” to describe a person or a country as rascal	福斯新闻台有个流氓主持人 There's a rascal host in Fox News.
(无耻)Shameless	The article uses the word "shameless" to refer to countries or individuals	英國小報《每日快報》無恥地臆測“新冠病毒可能早在去年 9 月就從中國傳到了意大利” The British tabloid Daily Express shamelessly speculated that “The Covid-19 virus may have spread from China to Italy as early as September last year.”
(政治化)Politicize	The article uses the words such as “政治化” (politicize), “政治操弄” (political manipulation) ¹⁵⁴	病毒溯源已经被高度政治化 The tracing of the virus's origin has been highly politicized.

¹⁵⁴ Other similar words include: "political game" (政治遊戲), "political interference" (政治干擾), "political performance"(政治表演), "political calculation" (政治算計), "political tool" (政治工具), "political intention" (政治意圖), "political struggle" (政治鬥爭), "political weapon" (政治武器), "political reasons" (政治原因), "political

(污名化)Defamation	Words meaning the actions that one tarnish another's reputation, such as “抹黑 (mo-hei)” or “污名化” (wu-min-hua)	澳媒做法严重伤害中国人民感情，对此表示强烈谴责和坚决反对。严正要求《每日电讯报》作出公开道歉，敦促该报立即停止对疫情的政治化和对中国的污名化 The actions of the Australian media have seriously hurt the feelings of the Chinese people, and we strongly condemn and firmly oppose this. We solemnly request the "Daily Telegraph" to make a public apology and urge the newspaper to stop politicizing the pandemic and defaming China immediately.
(甩锅)Throw the pot	Words meaning the actions of shirking responsibility	面对国内新冠肺炎疫情的急剧恶化，美国当局仍在持续想方设法向中国“甩锅” Even at a time when the American government was facing the critical deterioration of the pandemic situation, it still tried to “throw the pot” to blame China.
Media Quoted	Media outlets that are quoted in the Chinese state media content	
non-western countries' media outlets		
Media outlets of East European countries		Ukraine media outlet
H.K. media outlets		South China Morning Post, H.K. Economic Daily, HK Asia Times
Japanese media outlets		Japan Today, Nikkei, Japan Today, Yomiuri Shimbun, Ryūkyū Shimpō
Korean media outlets		The Korea Times, Yonhap News Agency
Media outlets of Middle Eastern countries		Al Jazeera
Media outlets of African countries		Al-Ahram, Le Soleil (Senegal), ZIMLIVE. 突尼斯《晨報》，South Africa Broadcasting Company, The Star (South Africa)
Media outlets of Asian countries		Manila Times
Russian media outlets		Free media website (Russian), Komsomolskaya Pravda. Pravda. RIA, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, RT, Sputnik. TASS, Zvezda, Взгляд, Независимая газета, 今日经济, 俄罗斯《欧亚日报》，Tsargrad

attack"(政治攻撃), political movement(政治運動), political pressure(政治壓力), "to push political agenda" (推展政治進程), "political virus" (政治病毒)

Singaporean media outlets		Singapore CNA, Lianhe Zaobao, The Business Times
Media outlets of South American countries		El Tiempo
Western News Outlets		
Australian outlets		Australia ABC, Australia Daily Telegraph, Australian Financial Review, The Age(時代報), The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald, Unnamed Australian media
French media outlets		AFP, LCI France, Le Figaro, RFI, Valeur Actuelle,
German media outlets		Der Spiegel, Der Stern, Deutsche Welle, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Die Welt, Die Zeit, Handelsblatt, Junge Welt, Unnamed German media
Finnish media outlets		Helsinki Times
Spanish media outlets		Rebellion, Corriere della Sera
Science publication		Nature Medicine, Science, The International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents, The Lancet, PANS,
U.K. outlets		BBC, Daily Express, Financial Times, International Business Times, Reuters, Sky, The Guardian, The Independent, The Sun, U.K. Metro
U.S. media outlets		For example, ABC. AP, Breitbart, Bloomberg, BuzzFeed, CBS, CNN, Daily Wire, Forbes, Fox News, Intercept, NBC, NPR, The New York Times, The Hill, TMZ, Vanity Fair, WSJ, The Washington Times, World Socialist Web Site
Protagonists (People mentioned in the articles)	People constantly mentioned in the articles	
Anthony Fauci		
Michael Pompeo		
Donald Trump		
Good guy	The individuals or countries who are praised as good persons or heroes	
Malicious persons or entities	The individuals or countries who were criticized for being morally corrupt or acting maliciously and causing damage to others	
U.S. follower	The countries or persons that were described as "following U.S.'s steps" or "minions of the U.S."	

Victim	Victims who suffered from viruses, criticism, or propaganda	
Lessons	The most important things that authors of the articles want to convey to the readers	Examples
China gained recognition from other countries and important people		<p>各方赞赏中方始终秉持公开透明的态度积极参与全球溯源工作</p> <p>[Many important politicians from different countries] appreciated that China has always upheld an open and transparent attitude and actively participated in the global project of tracing the origin of the COVID-19 virus.</p>
China was under attack by Western countries and Western media		<p>他认为，在未来数年中，西方在疫情议题上针对中国的舆论攻势仍会持续</p> <p>He believes that in the next few years, the West will still continue attacking China with comments on the issue of the pandemic.</p>
Scientists politicized the virus problem		<p>这些科学家制造对立必遭反噬</p> <p>These scientists who create confrontation will suffer from their deeds.</p>
Scientists speak the truth while Western politicians and media spread conspiracy theories		<p>西方国家一些人和媒体持续散布新冠病毒是中国实验室泄漏的阴谋论。不过，也不乏负责任的西方媒体和科学家讲出真相</p> <p>Some people and media in Western countries continue to spread the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 virus was leaked from a Chinese laboratory. However, there are still responsible Western media and scientists who tell the truth</p>
The need for cooperation among nations		<p>当前，世界各国应该形成数据、信息的共享机制来合作进行科学溯源。</p> <p>At present, all countries in the world should establish a data and information-sharing mechanism to cooperate in tracing the origin of the COVID-19 virus in a scientific way.</p>
The origin of the virus		
-The U.S. Fort Detrick biolabs were related to the source of the virus		<p>德特里克堡太危险，其真相必须公之于众。病毒溯源的下一个调查重点必须是德特里克堡</p> <p>Fort Detrick is too dangerous, and the truth must be revealed. The next investigation focus of the origin of the virus must be Fort Detrick.</p>

Other countries don't agree with U.S.'s Wuhan origin theory		<p>美国纠集了 13 个国家发表联合声明，对溯源报告提出“质疑”。白宫新闻秘书点名指责“中国不透明”，几家美国大媒体也叫嚣着向中国“追责”。对此，参与溯源联合研究的中外专家和有良好的外国媒体，纷纷谴责一些国家政治操弄溯源报告的企图，一致呼吁世界各国尊重科学和科学家的研究成果</p> <p>The United States gathered 13 countries to issue a joint statement to "question" the [WHO virus-origin investigation] report. The White House press secretary named and accused "China of being opaque," and several major American media also clamored to "hold China accountable." In this regard, Chinese and foreign experts and conscientious foreign media participating in the joint research on the virus investigation have condemned the attempts of some countries to politicize the report...</p>
-The determination of the origin needs scientific research		<p>当前，世界各国应该形成数据、信息的共享机制来合作进行科学溯源。</p> <p>At present, all countries in the world should establish a data and information-sharing mechanism to cooperate in tracing the origin of the COVID-19 virus in a scientific way.</p>
-The virus could be from other places (other than the U.S.)		<p>路透社 16 日引述意大利米兰国家癌症研究所（INT）最新发表的一项研究报告称，该国 2019 年 9 月采集的居民血液样本中已测出新冠病毒抗体，这意味着新冠病毒在意大利的传播时间远早于今年 2 月，可能要追溯至 2019 年夏天</p> <p>Reuters quoted a new research report published by the National Cancer Institute (INT) in Milan on the 16th, saying that antibodies to the COVID-19 virus had been detected in the blood samples of residents of the country collected in September 2019, which means that the virus had prevailed in Italy. This evidence shows that the time that the virus appeared in Italy was much earlier than February this year and may date back to the summer of 2019.</p>
-The virus was not from the Wuhan lab		<p>据美国《纽约时报》14 日报道，身处风暴中心的该所病毒科学家石正丽日前罕见接受美媒采访，强调新冠病毒“实验室泄漏论”毫无根据</p> <p>According to a report by the U.S. "New York Times," on the 14th, Shi Zhengli, a virus scientist at the institute at the center of the storm, recently accepted a rare interview with the U.S. media. She</p>

		emphasized that the "laboratory leak theory" of the COVID-19 virus is groundless.
-The virus could be from the U.S.		五大疑问待解，新冠溯源早该去美国 Five major questions need to be answered. The investigation of the origin of the virus should be conducted in the United States.
The U.S. smeared China		美国少数政客为了推卸自身抗疫不力的责任，罔顾事实，诋毁抹黑中方 In order to shirk their responsibility for failing to battle the pandemic, a small number of American politicians disregarded the facts and smeared China.
U.S. politicized the virus investigation		美国这些将溯源政治化的行为已经严重干扰和破坏国际溯源研究合作，为各国抗击疫情、挽救生命制造困难和障碍 The actions of the United States to politicize the virus investigation have seriously interfered with and damaged international cooperation, creating difficulties and obstacles for countries to fight the epidemic and save lives.
The U.S. shirked the responsibility to China for various reasons		俄罗斯"红星"电视台 3 月 31 日发表评论称，无论世卫组织对新冠病毒起源的结论如何，美国都会找理由将责任归咎于中国，"对他们来说，重要的是，中国开始在上世界上占据越来越重要的地位，因此，需要首先考虑如何阻止中国的发展" Russia's "Zvezda" T.V. station commented on March 31 that no matter WHO's conclusion on the COVID-19 virus's origin, the United States will find reasons to place the blame on China. "For the U.S., it is an important fact that China has achieved an increasingly important position on the global stage. Therefore, the U.S. needs to first consider how to prevent China's further development".
The U.S. persecuted those who opposed lab leak theory		福奇再次重申新冠病毒更可能源于自然的立场，也立刻遭到一些美国政客的批评 Fauci once again reiterated the position that the COVID-19 virus is more likely to originate from nature, and was immediately criticized by some American politicians.
Frames	The main points that the author presented in each paragraph of the articles	

China gained respect from other countries		<p>中国为全世界抗击疫情作出了重要贡献。对于这一点，国际社会有目共睹，也都普遍给予高度赞赏</p> <p>China has made important contributions to the world's fight against the epidemic. The international community has seen it all and highly appreciates China's contribution.</p>
China helped other countries		<p>中国对有需要的国家提供了力所能及的帮助，还积极推动国际抗疫合作</p> <p>China has provided assistance within its capacity to countries in need and has also actively promoted international anti-epidemic cooperation</p>
China was being transparent		<p>自疫情发生以来，中国始终及时公开信息，与世卫组织和全球各国保持沟通，分享疫情信息和中国抗疫经验</p> <p>Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has always disclosed information in a timely manner, maintained communication with WHO and countries around the world, and shared pandemic information and China's experiences.</p>
China was making efforts to solve the origin mystery		<p>疫情发生以来，中方始终本着开放、透明的态度，毫无保留与各国分享防控诊疗经验。中方两次接待世卫组织专家来华，同世卫组织发布联合专家组溯源研究报告，为全球溯源工作作出积极贡献</p> <p>Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has always followed an open and transparent attitude and shared its prevention, control, diagnosis, and treatment experience with other countries without reservation. China received WHO experts to China twice and released a joint expert group investigation report with WHO, making positive contributions to the global COVID-19 investigation work</p>
China made an effort to control the pandemic		<p>疫情发生后，中国采取积极有效的抗疫措施，取得抗疫成功</p> <p>After the outbreak of the epidemic, China adopted active and effective anti-epidemic measures and achieved success in the fight against the epidemic</p>
Chinese political system handled the pandemic better than the Western ones		<p>中国的制度、政府在处理这的重大挑战方面优于其他国家的政府</p> <p>The Chinese system, the government, is superior to other governments in dealing with this major challenge</p>

The pandemic united the Chinese all over the world		<p>中华民族的凝聚力再次凸显，华侨华人义无反顾地支援祖（籍）国抗疫，证明海外侨胞对祖（籍）国的家国情怀从未减弱。</p> <p>The cohesion of the Chinese nation has once again been highlighted. Overseas Chinese have unhesitatingly supported their home country in the fight against the pandemic. This proves that overseas Chinese's feelings for their home country remain strong.</p>
The flawed U.S. political system resulted in formidable repercussions		<p>美国抗疫失败充分暴露了联邦体制碎片化、政党政治极化、地方政府和联邦政府之间互相扯皮推诿等制度问题</p> <p>The failure of the United States to fight the pandemic has fully exposed institutional problems in the U.S., such as fragmentation of the federal system, political polarization of political parties, and buck-passing between local governments and the federal government</p>
The origin of the virus		
-Fort Detrick could be the origin of the virus		<p>德特里克堡实验室，“越来越令世人担忧和怀疑，目前肆虐全球的新冠病毒是否与之有联系”</p> <p>Fort Detrick laboratory “has raised increasing concerns and doubts about whether it is connected to the COVID-19 virus that is currently ravaging the world.”</p>
-History shows that there were other diseases that originated in the U.S.		<p>1918—1919 年的“西班牙流感”导致数千万人丧生，期间一些美国人把传播病毒的罪责归于当时的敌国德国。实际上，尽管美国疾控中心表示专家至今不确定“西班牙流感”起源于哪里，外界则更多认为源自美国。</p> <p>The "Spanish flu" in 1918-1919 killed tens of millions of people. During this period, some Americans attributed the responsibility for spreading the virus to Germany, the enemy country of the U.S. at that time. In fact, although the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention stated that experts are still not sure where the "Spanish flu" originated, the outside world believes that it originated in the United States.</p>
-The U.S. could be where the virus originated		<p>美国在 1 月 11 日就开始研发新冠病毒疫苗。美国在病毒起源和传播问题上到底是一个什么样的角色，已经成为重大疑问</p> <p>The United States began developing a COVID-19 vaccine on January 11. What is the role of the</p>

		United States in the origin and spread of the virus has become a major question.
-Experts said the virus was not man-made		专家们遵循普遍公认的基因证据，认为病毒起源于自然界 Experts follow generally accepted genetic evidence and agree that the virus originated in nature
-Other countries (besides the U.S.) should be investigated		世卫专家应前往西班牙、意大利、美国、巴西等已发现出现更早病例的国家开展溯源研究 WHO experts should visit and investigate Spain, Italy, the United States, Brazil, and other countries where earlier cases have been found.
-The origin of the virus cannot be confirmed yet		国际各方目前所搜集的证据还不能明确病毒最初起源的具体地点 The evidence currently collected by the international community still cannot clarify the exact location of the origin of the virus.
-The origin of the virus is a scientific problem		这个问题（实验室是否泄漏）应听取科学家的意见，交给科学家解决。据科学家分析，如果病毒是从实验室泄漏出来的，那么无论是中国或是法国、美国的实验室都有可能泄漏。 Regarding this question (whether the virus was leaked from the laboratory), we should listen to scientists and leave the question to scientists to solve. According to the analysis of scientists, if the virus was leaked from a laboratory, it is possible that the laboratory in China, France, or the United States may be the origin where the virus was leaked.
-The virus could have originated in other countries (not China or the U.S.)		路透社 16 日引述意大利米兰国家癌症研究所（INT）最新发表的一项研究报告称，该国 2019 年 9 月采集的居民血液样本中已测出新冠病毒抗体，这意味着新冠病毒在意大利的传播时间远早于今年 2 月，可能要追溯至 2019 年夏天 Reuters quoted a new research report published by the National Cancer Institute (INT) in Milan on the 16th, saying that antibodies to the COVID-19 virus had been detected in the blood samples of residents of the country collected in September 2019, which means that the virus had prevailed in Italy. This evidence shows that the time that the virus appeared in Italy was much earlier than February this year and may date back to the summer of 2019.

-The virus was not leaked from the Wuhan lab		<p>据美国《纽约时报》14日报道，身处风暴中心的该所病毒科学家石正丽日前罕见接受美媒采访，强调新冠病毒“实验室泄漏论”毫无根据</p> <p>According to a report by the U.S. "New York Times," on the 14th, Shi Zhengli, a virus scientist at the institute at the center of the storm, recently accepted a rare interview with the U.S. media. She emphasized that the "laboratory leak theory" of the COVID-19 virus is groundless.</p>
-The U.S. should be investigated		<p>要想取得国际社会的信任，美国必须尽快拿出透明、负责的态度，邀请世界卫生组织专家赴美，调查德特里克堡生物实验室，还世界一个真相。</p> <p>To gain the trust of the international community, the United States must adopt a transparent and responsible attitude as soon as possible, invite experts from World Health Organization to the United States to investigate the Fort Detrick biological laboratory and present the truth to the world.</p>
The reasons that the U.S. and the Western countries criticized China	The text or statement explained why the U.S. and the Western countries criticized China	<p>某些西方国家政客为掩盖对疫情防治不力、转移国内民众追责，向国际舆论场抛出的议题，目的是抹黑中国全民的抗疫努力，电锅中国，在全世界挑起事端，为打压削弱中国制造舆论，阻止中国的和平崛起，可谓用心险恶</p> <p>In order to cover up the ineffective prevention and control of the pandemic and divert the people's attention to question the government's responsibility, some politicians in Western countries have created issues in the international community. Their purpose is to smear the effort that all the Chinese citizens have made, to create commotion in the world, shirk the responsibility to China, and prevent China's peaceful rise. Their intention can be described as wicked and evil.</p>
There were countries or media who did not agree with U.S. and Western country's China lab leak theory		<p>华盛顿近来公然指控武汉病毒所的实验室是新冠病毒的源头，这一毫无根据的政治构陷遭到了全球科学家的反对，连美国的盟友也因该指控的栽赃目的过于明显而与之切割</p> <p>Washington has recently openly accused the laboratory of the Wuhan Institute of Virology as the source of the novel coronavirus. This groundless political framing has been opposed by scientists around the world, and even the allies of the United States disagree with the U.S. because it</p>

		is very obvious that the U.S. tries to shirk responsibility to China.
U.S. (politicians) attacked China		<p>早在 3 月 6 日，蓬佩奥就公开对外使用“武汉病毒”的提法，此后美方一些政客和高官持续不断地借此污名化中国</p> <p>As early as March 6, Pompeo publicly used the term "Wuhan virus" to the outside world. Since then, some U.S. politicians and senior officials have continued to use this to defame China.</p>
The U.S. and other Western media tarnished the reputation of China	The texts accused the Western media of criticizing China, for example, for not being transparent about the truth of Covid-19	<p>中国抗疫成绩令西方无法反驳，但仍有一些西方媒体在借机攻击中国</p> <p>China's anti-pandemic achievements are so great that the West is unable to deny them, but some Western media are still taking the opportunity to attack China</p>
Social media platform was unfair to China		<p>美国社交媒体巨头推特公司公然宣布删除超过 17 万个与中国“国家当局相关”的账号，诬称这些账号用于散播有关新冠肺炎疫情、香港局势等问题的虚假信息</p> <p>The American social media giant Twitter announced the deletion of more than 170,000 accounts related to China's "national authorities," falsely claiming that these accounts were used to spread false information about the pandemic and the situation in Hong Kong, among other issues.</p>
The U.S. and the West spread conspiracy theories to shift responsibility		<p>我们也注意到，近来海外媒体有一些关于病毒起源的阴谋论，提出对中国疫情统计数字的质疑，甚至有国家因新冠肺炎疫情向中国索赔。这是某些西方国家政客为掩盖对疫情防治不力</p> <p>We have also noticed that overseas media have spread some conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus, raised doubts about China's pandemic statistics, and some countries have even claimed compensation from China for the loss of COVID-19. This is the attempt by some politicians in Western countries to cover up their ineffective prevention and control of the pandemic.</p>
The U.S. had a nefarious scheme	The text or statement indicated or implied that the U.S. was secretly doing wicked projects	
-The U.S. attempted to make up the report and smear China		尼泊尔农工党主席比久克切表示...坚决反对将溯源问题政治化、标签化，尤其反对美国情报部门杜撰虚假报告

		<p>The chairperson of the Nepal Labor Party said...[he] firmly opposes the politicization and labeling of the virus origin issue, especially against the fabrication of false reports by the American intelligence agencies.</p>
-The U.S. made bioweapons		<p>美国《波士顿环球报》称，德特里克堡不仅有长期研究致命病原体的历史，还生产各类生物武器和毒剂，被指"策划饥荒和疾病"</p> <p>The U.S. "Boston Globe" stated that Fort Detrick not only has a long history of researching deadly pathogens but also produces various biological weapons and poisons and is accused of "planning famine and disease."</p>
-The U.S. spread false information about virus origin		<p>美国长期以来一直利用"信息战"来推进其全球议程。我们目睹了太多美国在其国际广播、纸媒和社交媒体的全球主导地位帮助下，有效地利用信息战技术颠覆真相和破坏目标国家主权完整的例子</p> <p>The United States has long used "information warfare" to advance its global agenda. We have witnessed too many examples in which the United States, aided by its global dominance of international broadcast, print and social media, effectively used information warfare technology to subvert the truth and undermine the sovereign integrity of targeted countries</p>
-The U.S. was covering facts		<p>美国政府竭力捂着全世界最大的新冠病毒溯源疑点——拥有美军唯一生物安全四级实验室的德特里克堡生物实验室，不敢公开其内幕</p> <p>The U.S. government is trying its best to cover up the world's largest mystery about the origin of the COVID-19 virus—the Fort Detrick Biological Laboratory, which has the only biosafety level 4 laboratory in the U.S. military. The U.S. dare not disclose real information.</p>
The U.S. lost its battle against pandemic		<p>美新增病例正日趋年轻化。今年3月，新泽西州20至29岁年轻人新冠肺炎住院人数飙升31%，40至49岁年龄段人群飙升48%。福布斯网站报道，约1/5美国受访者表示有亲朋在疫情中丧生。美国疾控中心主任瓦伦斯基在白宫疫情简报会上曾坦言，她感觉就像"濒临末日"，对此她"非常害怕"</p> <p>The new COVID-19 cases in the United States are getting younger. In March of this year, the number of hospitalizations for COVID-19 among young</p>

		<p>people aged 20 to 29 in New Jersey soared by 31%, and the number of people aged 40 to 49 soared by 48%. According to the Forbes website, about one-fifth of American respondents said that they had relatives and friends dying from the pandemic. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, admitted at the White House briefing that she felt "on the verge of doomsday" and she was "very scared" about it.</p>
The U.S. or Western scientific studies were flawed		<p>以福奇为代表的权威科学家遭受迫害，被迫违背初衷，证明了政治大于科学</p> <p>Authoritative scientists such as Fauci were persecuted and forced to go against their will. This proves that [in the U.S.] politics is greater than science.</p>
The U.S. politicians used criticism about COVID measures to inflame racial hatred		<p>英国《自然》杂志日前就刊文指出，美国力推“实验室泄漏说”的做法令人不安，可能阻碍病毒溯源工作，这些有毒言论也加剧了对敢于直言的科学家的在线欺凌和对亚裔的歧视。</p> <p>The British "Nature" magazine recently published an article pointing out that the United States' push for "laboratory leak theory" is disturbing and may hinder the work of virus origin investigation. These toxic remarks have also exacerbated online bullying of outspoken scientists and escalated discrimination against Asian Americans.</p>
The U.S. was the one who caused trouble in the investigation and interrupted international collaboration		<p>美国一开始无视中国发出的疫情蔓延警告，甚至对中国的疫情幸灾乐祸。等自身暴发疫情后，美国慌了手脚，不仅无法有效应对，还疯狂推责“甩锅”中国和世卫组织，给国际抗疫合作制造障碍。</p> <p>In the beginning, the United States ignored China's warnings about the spread of the pandemic and even gloated over China's epidemic situation. After its own outbreak of the pandemic, the United States panicked. Not only was it unable to respond effectively, but it also frantically blamed China and WHO for "throwing the pot" and creating obstacles to international cooperation.</p>

Appendices

Appendix 2 Codebook of Taiwanese media

Important Elements	Descriptions/Notes	Example
<u>Categories of persons who were quoted</u>	Persons whose statements were quoted in the articles	Example sentences from Taiwanese media
Chinese diplomats	Chinese officials who served the Chinese embassies or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<p>中國外交部發言人趙立堅日前宣稱，武漢肺炎可能是美軍把疫情帶到武漢。</p> <p>Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian recently claimed that the Wuhan pneumonia might be brought to Wuhan by the U.S. military.</p>
Chinese exiled	Chinese who claimed the Chinese government persecuted them and thus lived overseas, such as Li-Meng Yan and Guo Wengui	<p>閻麗夢認為，「這些人知道發生了什麼事情，但他們卻為了中共和自己的利益而選擇隱瞞」</p> <p>Yan believes, “These people know what happened, but they choose to hide it for the benefit of the CCP and themselves.”</p>
Chinese experts	Scholars or academics from China	<p>大陸防疫專家鍾南山 18 日再次表示，「新冠肺炎的疫情是發生在大陸武漢，但是不等於它的源頭在大陸」。</p> <p>Zhong Nanshan, an epidemic prevention expert from China, said again on the 18th that “the outbreak of new coronary pneumonia occurred in Wuhan, China, but it does not mean that its source is in China.”</p>
Officials of the Chinese government (non-diplomats)	Chinese officials who served the government but were not diplomats	<p>中國國台辦晚間發出新聞稿稱，「民進黨當局不斷編織各種謠言誣衊攻擊大陸。」</p> <p>The Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council of China issued a press release in the evening stating, “The DPP authorities continue to weave various rumors to slander and attack mainland China.</p>

Chinese ordinary people	Unspecified Chinese people, including Chinese internet users	<p>中國網友上個月已在熱議，不排除去年 10 月底在武漢舉行的第 7 屆世界軍人運動會時，病毒從境外被帶入。</p> <p>Chinese internet users have been discussing since last month and saying it could not be ruled out that the virus was brought in from abroad during the 7th Military World Games held in Wuhan at the end of October last year.</p>
The governments of other countries	The official statements issued by governments of countries other than the U.S., China, and Taiwan	<p>澳洲態度強硬，說中國大陸必須接受調查。英國也公開質問大陸。</p> <p>Australia took a tough stance, saying that China must be investigated. Britain also openly questioned China.</p>
International political figures	Lawmakers or leaders of political parties who are from countries other than China, the U.S., and Taiwan	<p>英國保守黨前黨魁史密斯（Iain Duncan Smith）指出，「中國正明顯試圖隱匿證據」。</p> <p>Iain Duncan Smith, former leader of the British Conservative Party, pointed out that “China is clearly trying to hide evidence.”</p>
International writers	<p>Columnists or writers from countries other than China*, the U.S., and Taiwan</p> <p>*Writers from Hong Kong were counted as “international writers” for the purpose of this dissertation since at the time of COVID-19, Hong Kong writers still enjoyed more latitude regarding free speech than those in China during the time of the pandemic.</p>	<p>蘋果日報的專欄作家李平文章痛批，「該文章完全不提中國隱瞞疫情白白犧牲了多少中國民眾...」。</p> <p>Apple Daily columnist Li Ping criticized, “The article does not mention how many Chinese people have been sacrificed in vain by China’s concealment of the pandemic....”</p>
International experts	<p>Scholars or academics who are from countries other than China, the U.S., and Taiwan</p> <p>*Scholars from Hong Kong were counted as “international scholars” for the purpose of this dissertation since at the time of COVID-</p>	<p>英國動物疾病專家達斯札克（Peter Daszak）告訴「星期日泰晤士報」：「病毒並非源於市場，而是其他地方。」</p> <p>Peter Daszak, a British animal disease expert, told the Sunday Times: “The virus didn’t originate in the market, it came from somewhere else.”</p>

	19, Hong Kong writers enjoyed more latitude regarding free speech than those in China during the time of the pandemic.	
International internet users	Internet users whose nationalities were not specified	<p>社交媒體上便傳布有涉及該研究所的說法，只不過，頗帶陰謀論色彩，指稱該研究所從事秘密生化武器研究。</p> <p>There are rumors on social media involving the institute, but the rumors are mostly conspiracy theories alleging that the institute was engaged in secret biological and chemical weapons research.</p>
Taiwanese ordinary people	Unspecified Taiwanese people, including Taiwanese internet users	<p>大批台灣網友熱議，許多人紛紛怒轟「繼續相信中共的簡直是白痴」</p> <p>Many Taiwanese internet users heatedly discussed it, and a large portion of people raged, “Those who continue to believe in the CCP are truly idiots.”</p>
Taiwanese government	The official statements issued by branches of the Taiwanese government	<p>我外交部今（30）日則呼籲中國，應開放讓各國到武漢調查。</p> <p>The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China called on China today (30th) to allow countries to investigate in Wuhan.</p>
Taiwanese politicians	Taiwanese lawmakers, or politicians who previously served in the Taiwanese government but have left	<p>新黨台北市議員潘懷宗日前上談話節目，宣稱武漢肺炎的起源不在中國，而是美國</p> <p>New Party Taipei City Councilor Pan Huaizong recently appeared on a talk show, claiming that the origin of Wuhan pneumonia is not in China but in the United States.</p>
U.S. experts	U.S. scholars or academics	<p>哈佛大學醫學教授約翰·布朗斯坦博士（Dr. John Brownstein）表示這些證據是間接的。</p> <p>Dr. John Brownstein, a professor of medicine at Harvard University, said the evidence was circumstantial.</p>
U.S. Government	Statements that are issued by the branches of the U.S. government, such as the President, the State Department	<p>美國白宮周四（7/22）表示，對中國拒絕世界衛生組織（WHO）第二階段 COVID-19 病毒溯源調查「深感失望」。</p> <p>On Thursday (7/22), the White House expressed “deep disappointment” for China’s rejection of the second phase of the COVID-19 virus tracing investigation by the World Health Organization (WHO).</p>

U.S. politicians	U.S. lawmakers, or politicians who previously served in the U.S. government but have left	從疫情發生之初，共和黨籍阿肯色州聯邦參議員柯頓(Tom Cotton)便把苗頭指向武漢實驗室，要求中國說明。 From the very beginning of the outbreak, Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas had targeted the Wuhan laboratory and demanded an explanation from China.
Thinktank or analysts	The statements issued by thinktanks or analysts working for thinktanks or NGOs	「大西洋理事會」日前指出，自 2016 年起，假消息最大來源國為俄羅斯。 The Atlantic Council recently pointed out that since 2016, Russia has been the largest source of disinformation.
U.S. tech companies	Tech companies such as Google and Twitter	美國網路搜尋引擎谷歌（Google）宣布，旗下影音分享平台 YouTube 上個月移除了約 3000 個頻道 U.S. Internet search giant Google announced that its video-sharing platform YouTube removed about 3,000 channels last month.
WHO	Statements from WHO or people who worked for WHO	世衛秘書長譚德塞（Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus）公開呼籲中國配合、提高透明度，並提供「原始數據」。 WHO Secretary-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus publicly called on China to cooperate, increase transparency, and provide “raw data.”
<u>Distinct words or concepts</u>	Notable words or concepts constantly appear in the articles	Example sentences from Taiwanese media
(政治化) Politicize	The article uses the words such as “政治化” (politicize), “政治操弄” (political manipulation) ¹⁵⁵	陸外交部批美「大搞疫情政治化」。 China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticizes the United States for “politicizing the pandemic.”
(汙名化) Defamation	Words meaning the actions that one tarnish another’s reputation, such as “抹黑 (mo-hei)” or	“美方根本不在乎事實和真相，也沒有興趣進行嚴肅的科學溯源，而是想藉疫情搞污名化和政治操弄，甩鍋推責。” “The U.S. does not care about the facts and the truth at all, nor is it interested in conducting serious scientific traceability.

¹⁵⁵ Other similar words include: "political game" (政治遊戲), "political interference" (政治干擾), "political performance" (政治表演), "political calculation" (政治算計), "political tool" (政治工具), "political intention" (政治意圖), "political struggle" (政治鬥爭), "political weapon" (政治武器), "political reasons" (政治原因), "political attack" (政治攻擊), political movement (政治運動), political pressure (政治壓力), "to push political agenda" (推展政治進程), "political virus" (政治病毒)

	“污名化” (wu-min-hua)	Instead, it wants to use the pandemic to blemish [China], conduct political manipulation, and throw the pot.”
(甩鍋) Throw the pot	Words meaning the actions of shirking responsibility	“美方根本不在乎事實和真相，也沒有興趣進行嚴肅的科學溯源，而是想藉疫情搞污名化和政治操弄，甩鍋推責。” “The U.S. does not care about the facts and the truth at all, nor is it interested in conducting serious scientific traceability. Instead, it wants to use the pandemic to blemish [China], conduct political manipulation, and throw the pot.”
(資訊戰) information warfare	Words meaning that one country conducts information warfare against another country	《環球時報》記者也在 13 日發文護航...批評美方一向透過「資訊戰」指控中國散播病毒。 A reporter from Global Times also published an article on the 13th...criticizing the United States for waging “information warfare” and accused China of spreading the virus.
(洗白) Whitewash	Words meaning that one takes actions to conceal wrongdoings	美國國務卿龐培奧 (Michael Pompeo) 週三 (15 日) ...指責世衛 (WHO) 赴中國調查新冠起源是為了替中國洗白。 U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo...criticized that the WHO helped to whitewash China’s mistakes by conducting the investigation in China.
(陰謀論) Conspiracy theory	The article uses the word “conspiracy theory” to refer to something or events or statements	在川普政府時期，「實驗室洩露說」被美國主流媒體視為陰謀論。 During the Trump administration, the “laboratory leak theory” was regarded as a conspiracy theory by the mainstream media in the United States.
(假新聞) fake news or (虛假訊息) fake information ¹⁵⁶	The article uses the words “fake news” or “fake information”	中國在散布病毒起源的不實消息方面「冠絕全球」。 China “leads the world” in spreading disinformation about the origin of the virus
(強國 or 大國) Great Power	Words referring to a country as a world power	N/A ¹⁵⁷
(道德低下 做人下限) Immoral/low moral standards	Words referring to a person who doesn’t follow moral standards	中共的政治公關戰略已經如火如荼，甩鍋文宣與戰術幾乎沒有道德底限。 The CCP’s political public relations strategy is in full swing, and its propaganda and tactics of throwing the pot have almost no moral bottom line.

¹⁵⁶ Taiwanese media generally used the term “fake news[假新聞]” in news reporting instead of distinguishing between “disinformation” or “misinformation.”

¹⁵⁷ This term “great power [大國/強國]” appeared several times in Chinese state media and was thus coded in the first-phase research. But this term did not appear in the articles in Taiwanese media.

(謊言 謠言)Lie or rumor	The article uses the words “lies” or “rumors” in a statement	這些謠言的一個來源是印度科學家發表的一篇論文。 One source of these rumors is a paper published by Indian scientists
(外宣 內宣)Propaganda	Including propaganda targeting domestic audiences and propaganda targeting international audiences	中國砸大錢 打造大外宣網路。 China spends much money to build a big international propaganda network.
(流氓 無賴) Rascal	The article uses the words “rascal” to describe a person or a country as rascal	N/A ¹⁵⁸
(無恥) Shameless	The article uses the word “shameless” to refer to countries or individuals	N/A
<u>Media quoted</u>	Media outlets that are quoted in the Taiwanese media content	
Chinese media		
CCTV (China Central Television) 中央電視台	A Chinese state-run broadcaster (broadcasted mostly in Chinese)	
CGTN	A Chinese state-run English-language news channel	
Global Times 環球時報	A Chinese state-run newspaper	
Guancha ¹⁵⁹ 觀察者網	An online website popular among Chinese nationalists	

¹⁵⁸ In this codebook, “N/A” means this term appeared several times in Chinese state media and was thus coded in the first-phase research. But this term did not appear in the articles in Taiwanese media.

¹⁵⁹ Gunacha is also a source of disinformation that caused the tragic event “Kansai Airport incident,” which led to a suicide of a Taiwanese diplomat stationed in Japan. More discussion of this website and the incident will be in the chapters of the dissertation. Doublethink Lab. (2022, January 6). Tracing control and influence at Guancha news |

People's Daily 人民日報	A Chinese state-run newspaper	
Xinhua Agency 新華社	A Chinese state-run news agency	
www.ce.cn(中國經濟網)	A Chinese state-owned newspaper and website focusing on economic news	
Pages of Weibo accounts	Chinese social media pages	
The Paper (澎湃新聞)	A Chinese news outlet owned by the Shanghai United Media Group	
Quishi (求是)	A magazine owned by the Chinese Communist Party	
People's Liberation Army Daily(解放軍報)	The official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)	
Chinese scientific research	Chinese academic science publications	
China Daily	An English daily newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party	
China News Service(中國新聞社)	The second largest state news agency in China (After Xinhua News Agency)	
Non-Western countries' media outlets (and also outlets not owned by China)		
Turkish media		

Taiwanese media		
H.K. Media		Apple Daily (Hong Kong), MinPao, South China Morning Post
Singaporean media		
Russian media		
Japanese media		
Indian media		
Middle Eastern media		
Oversea anti-Chinese government media	News outlets owned by oversea Chinese for example, Lude Media, Himalaya Global, and Epoch Times.	
Unnamed foreign media(外國媒體)	The media that was addressed by Taiwanese media articles as “foreign media” without specifying the name of the media	
Western media outlets		
U.S. media outlets		For example, Zero Hedge, Yahoo News, NBC, Associated Press, CNN, Fox News, NJ.com, NPR, The New York Times, Politico, Radio Free Asia, Sinclair Group, Unnamed American media, Voice of America, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, War Room, The National Pulse, The Intercept, New York Post, ABC, Axios, Gateway Pundit, Newsweek, NewsMax, Vanity Affair, The Seattle Times
U.K. media outlets		BBC, Daily Mail, Reuters, The Guardian, The Times (U.K.), The Sun, The Economist, Financial Times, Channel 4, Infosecurity magazine, Sky News, The Daily Telegraph
Spanish media outlets		La Sexta (Spanish), El Mundo
Australian media outlets		For example, The Australian, Australia ABC, Nine News, News.com.au
French media outlets		Le Figaro, Radio France Internationale, La Croix, Agence France-Presse

German media outlets		For example, Deutsche Welle, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Spiegel, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Norwegian media outlets		NRK
Italian media outlets		La Repubblica
Canadian media		National Post (Canada)
Belgium media outlets		Het Nieuwsblad (Belgium)
Science publications		For example, Science, Nature
<u>Protagonists</u> <u>(People mentioned in the articles)</u>	People constantly mentioned in the articles	
Anthony Fauci		
Michael Pompeo		
Donald Trump		
Good guy	The individuals or countries who are praised as good persons or heroes	N/A
Malicious persons or entities	The individuals or countries who were criticized for being morally corrupt or acting maliciously and causing damage to others	<p>閻麗夢指出，應該對武漢肺炎疫情負責的是中共政權，以及在這場瘟疫中和他們合作的人，「這個政權的罪責是一起有組織的罪刑，他們應該為此負責並賠償」</p> <p>Yan pointed out that it is the CCP and those who cooperated with them that should be responsible for the Wuhan pandemic, “The regime committed an organized crime for which they should be held accountable and compensate victims.”</p>
Questionable scientists	Scientists whose conduct was questioned or criticized by authors or quotes from the article	<p>閻麗夢認為，「這些人知道發生了什麼事情，但他們卻為了中共和自己的利益而選擇隱瞞」，閻麗夢強調，「中國政府和某些海外組織、科學家」掩蓋了真相</p> <p>Yan believes that “these people knew what happened, but they chose to conceal it for the benefit of the CCP and themselves.” Yan emphasized that “the Chinese government and some overseas organizations and scientists” covered up the truth.</p>
U.S. followers	The countries or persons that were described as	N/A

	“following U.S.’s steps” or “minions of the U.S.”	
Victims who suffered	Victims who suffered from viruses, criticism, or propaganda	美國是受害國，先是被武漢肺炎襲擊，接著又被中國謊言襲擊 The United States is a victimized country, which first was attacked by Wuhan pneumonia and then attacked by lies spun by China.
Whistle-blowers	Individuals who claimed they discovered the wrongdoings committed by other persons or countries, such as Li-Meng Yan and Guo Wengui	流亡在美國的中國商人郭文貴 20 日說「共產黨試圖在今年夏秋交接之際，要在美國和歐洲西方再次地釋放冠狀病毒，而且這次釋放病毒的危險性一定比上一次還高。」 Guo Wengui, a Chinese businessman in exile in the United States, said on the 20th that “the Communist Party is trying to rerelease the coronavirus in the United States and the West in Europe during the late summer and early autumn this year. Moreover, the danger of the newly released virus must be greater than the last time.”
Lessons	The most important things that authors of the articles want to convey to the readers	
<u>Lessons echoed in Chinese state media</u>	<u>Lessons that Taiwanese media seem to be the amplifier of Chinese messages (i.e., the article provides quotes or evidence only or predominantly favoring China’s message)</u>	<u>Examples</u>
China gained recognition from other countries and important people		N/A
China was under attack by Western countries and Western media		2019 冠狀病毒疾病（武漢肺炎）肆虐全球，國際對中國質疑四起，並要求調查病毒來源。 The 2019 coronavirus disease (Wuhan pneumonia) has ravaged the world, and the international community has questioned China and asked to investigate the source of the virus.

Scientists politicized the virus problem		<p>中國網民表示「美國就只會甩鍋還會幹啥」、「哈佛大學徹底砸牌子了」、「哈佛變成政治工具」...</p> <p>Chinese internet users said that “the United States will only throw the pot away and do what it wants,” “Harvard University has completely smashed its brand,” and “Harvard has become a political tool”...</p>
Scientists speak the truth while Western politicians and media spread conspiracy theories		N/A
The need for cooperation among nations		<p>目前，華府與北京最該做的事不是互相推卸責任，而是相互研究、合作抗疫。</p> <p>At present, the most important thing for Washington and Beijing to do is not to shield responsibility but to cooperate to research the disease and fight the pandemic together.</p>
The origin of the virus		
-The U.S. Fort Detrick biolabs were related to the source of the virus	The lesson explicitly expressed or implied that the U.S. labs were related to the origin of the COVID-19 virus	<p>中共黨報人民日報 6 日直指，「美國是新冠病毒來源重大嫌疑國」，要求美國開放位於馬里蘭州的陸軍德特里克堡（Fort Detrick）等實驗室接受國際調查。</p> <p>The Communist Party newspaper People’s Daily pointed out on the 6th that “the United States is a major suspect of the source of COVID-19”, demanding that the United States open the Army’s Fort Detrick and other laboratories in Maryland for international investigations</p>
-Other countries don’t agree with U.S.’s Wuhan origin theory		N/A
-The determination of the origin needs scientific research		<p>17 位國際科學家周四（13 日）在「科學」（Science）雜誌發表聯署信，要求對新冠肺炎疫情的起源進行徹底調查，並呼籲在反亞裔的高漲情緒中，回歸科學。</p> <p>17 international scientists published a joint letter in Science on Thursday (13th), calling for a thorough investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and calling for a refocus on science research amid the rising anti-Asian sentiment.</p>
The virus was not man-made		<p>國家情報總監辦公室 30 日聲明指，美國情報界相信新冠病毒並非人造或基因改組。</p> <p>The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in a statement on the 30th that the U.S. intelligence community</p>

		believes that the COVID-19 virus is not man-made or genetically modified.
-The virus could be from other places (other than the U.S.)		可能來自澳洲？環球時報揭武漢新冠病毒起源。 The virus could be possibly from Australia? The Global Times reveals the origin of the new coronavirus in Wuhan
-The virus could be from the U.S.		早在今年 3 月，中國外交部發言人趙立堅就發推稱， "可能是美軍把疫情帶到了武漢"。 As early as March this year, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian tweeted that "it may be the U.S. military that brought the pandemic to Wuhan."
-The virus was not from the Wuhan lab		中國駐美大使崔天凱痛批病毒是由武漢生化戰實驗室流出的說法「完全發瘋」、「絕對瘋狂」，並警告此說會挑動種族歧視及仇外恐慌 Cui Tiankai, Chinese ambassador to the United States, dismissed the rumor that the virus was leaked from a biochemical laboratory in Wuhan as "completely crazy" and "absolutely crazy" and warned that it would stir up racial discrimination and xenophobic panic.
U.S. politicized the virus investigation	The article delivers the lesson that the U.S. was motivated by political reasons to demand an investigation in China.	美國等部分國家，企圖將病毒溯源問題「政治化」，迫不及待要搞「有罪推定」的國際調查。 Countries such as the United States are trying to "politicize" the issue of virus origin tracing and can't wait to conduct an international investigation on the presumption that China is guilty.
The U.S. smeared China	The article delivers the lesson that other countries "blemished," "defamed," or "hurt China's reputation."	華春瑩說，「認為可以通過對中國的污蔑和誹謗，使美國再次強大的想法太天真了...」。 Hua Chunying said, "It is naive to think that the United States can be made strong again by defaming and slandering China.
The U.S. shirked responsibility to China	The article delivers the lesson that the U.S. "shirked responsibility" or "threw the pot"	新冠肺炎的病毒根源真的與美國無關嗎？真的與參加武漢軍運會的美軍無關嗎？美國沒有隱匿疫情，把新冠肺炎指為流感企圖推卸責任？ Is the cause of the COVID-19 virus really not related to the United States? Did it really have nothing to do with the U.S. military participating in the Wuhan Military Games? Did the United States not hide the COVID pandemic situation by claiming it was just flu and attempt to shirk responsibility?
The U.S. persecuted those who opposed lab leak theory		N/A

Lessons in Taiwanese media	<u>The lessons that do not appear in Chinese state media</u>	
China refuted criticism		<p>目前已有美、英、德等 7 國向中國提出求償，金額上看新台幣 1,290 兆元。對此，中共外交部發言人耿爽回應，此時應聚焦在抗疫，而非「搞什麼索賠」。</p> <p>At present, seven countries, including the United States, Britain, and Germany, have filed claims against China, with an amount of NT\$1,290 trillion. In this regard, Geng Shuang, spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responded that the at this moment, the focus should be on fighting the pandemic rather than “arguing for compensation.”</p>
China should take responsibility for being the origin of COVID		<p>他認為美國的國民有權利知道這些資訊的來龍去脈，若是 COVID-19 來源是武漢病毒實驗室，那麼中國政府就必須擔起後續責任。</p> <p>He believes that American citizens have the right to know all this information. If the source of COVID-19 is the Wuhan virus laboratory, then the Chinese government must take subsequent responsibilities.</p>
China's manipulation of information		
-China suppressed information and data about the virus		<p>中國卻發出通告，限制大學公開有關病毒源頭的論文，要經過上報國家科技部，研究是否適合發表。</p> <p>However, China has issued a notification requiring universities to report to the Ministry of Science and have the study involving the origin of the virus to be reviewed and determined by the Ministry if the study is suitable for publication.</p>
-China spread fake news and propaganda		<p>就連多數美國人都沒聽說過的美軍基地德特里克堡（Fort Detrick）卻在中國相當知名，原因跟中國刻意推動的陰謀論有關，中國宣傳人員聲稱，武漢肺炎（新型冠狀病毒病，COVID-19）病毒就是在這裡製造並外洩。</p> <p>Even Fort Detrick, a U.S. military base that most Americans have never heard of, is well-known in China because of conspiracy theories deliberately promoted by China, where Chinese propagandists claim that the Wuhan pneumonia (COVID-19) virus was created and leaked from here.</p>
-Taiwanese amplified China's disinformation	The article criticized Taiwanese individuals or entities for their amplification of China's disinformation	<p>他們...直批潘懷宗這番言論，與中共政府為了維穩所發動的資訊戰不謀而合，呼籲大家一起消滅這種「害人、出賣台灣人」的錯誤資訊。</p> <p>They directly criticized Pan Huaizong's remarks, which coincided with the information war launched by the CCP government to maintain stability. They also called on everyone</p>

		to eliminate this kind of false information that “harms people and betrays Taiwanese.”
Some scientists’ roles were questioned	The article explicitly said or implied that scientists may have helped China to conceal the truth or knew the virus was leaked from the lab but kept silent.	<p>佛奇當前身陷涉嫌隱瞞疫情起源的相關爭議，儘管他一貫否認外界的指控，但美國國立衛生研究院（NIH）官員已間接承認此事，即佛奇涉嫌向國會作偽證。</p> <p>Fauci is currently involved in a controversy related to the alleged concealment of the origin of COVID-19. Although he has always denied the allegation, officials from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have indirectly admitted that Fauci is suspected of perjury to Congress.</p>
The origin of the virus		
-China may be the origin of the virus		
--The virus may have appeared in China earlier than the winter of 2019		<p>根據美國 abc 新聞報導，哈佛大學醫學院最新研究指出，武漢肺炎疫情可能早在去年夏天，就已在中國武漢市傳播。</p> <p>According to ABC news, the latest research from Harvard Medical School pointed out that the Wuhan pneumonia may have spread in Wuhan, China as early as last summer.</p>
--The virus was from the Wuhan lab		<p>美國總統川普及其政府官員先前宣稱，握有新冠病毒是刻意從武漢實驗室釋出的證據。</p> <p>U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration have previously claimed to have evidence that the COVID-19 virus was deliberately released from a Wuhan lab.</p>
--The virus might be from China (but probably not the lab)		<p>華裔科學家何大一，在接受美國之音專訪時表示，他不認為新冠病毒是「有可能被惡意製造出來」，或是「從實驗室中外流的」。何大一也強調，新冠肺炎大流行，起源於中國大陸是「毋庸置疑的事」。</p> <p>Chinese American scientist Ho Dayi said in an exclusive interview with Voice of America that he does not think that the virus was “possibly created maliciously” or was “leaked from the laboratory.” Ho Dayi also emphasized that it is “unquestionable” that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in mainland China.</p>
-China’s theory that the virus was from other places was not plausible	The article introduced China’s argument that the virus was from other countries but alerted readers that	中國官媒曾將病毒來源「甩鍋」（推卸責任）給美軍實驗室，又將西方科學家的研究報告斷章取義，暗示新冠病毒源於義大利和西班牙。儘管疫情首先在湖北武漢大規模爆

	this kind of argument could be flawed	<p>發，但中國當局似乎從來無意在武漢追查新冠病毒的起源。</p> <p>Chinese state media once “threw the pot” (shirked responsibility) on the virus origin to the U.S. military laboratory and took the research reports of Western scientists out of context, implying that the COVID-19 virus was from Italy and Spain. Although the outbreak first broke out on a large scale in Wuhan, Hubei Province, Chinese authorities never seemed interested in tracing the origin of the new coronavirus in Wuhan.</p>
-More information and research are needed to understand the origin		<p>許多國際科學家更認為，單以世衛的初步結論就排除實驗室外洩可能是言之過早。美國和其他國家都敦促中國分享更多資訊，尤其是來武漢病毒研究所的資訊。</p> <p>Many international scientists even believe that it may be too early to rule out laboratory leaks based on WHO’s preliminary conclusions. The United States and other countries have urged China to share more information, especially from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.</p>
-Other places might be the virus origin, but the info was not confirmed		<p>這項發現可能應證中國政府的「武漢非起源說」，然而柯恩的說詞尚未得到證實。</p> <p>This discovery may support the Chinese government’s theory that “Wuhan was not the place where the virus originated,” but Cohen’s claim has not been confirmed.</p>
-Chinese people believed that the virus was probably from the U.S.	The article contained a critical viewpoint or mocked the belief that the virus was from the U.S.	<p>想不到有許多中國人信以為真，還在網路上留言「我敢打賭病毒始於美國，1 億美元」。</p> <p>Many Chinese even believed it and left messages on the Internet, “I bet the virus started in the United States, \$100 million.”</p>
-The virus might be a bioweapon from China		<p>流亡美國的中國病毒學家閻麗夢日前直指病毒是遭到中共蓄意釋放的生物武器。</p> <p>Li-Meng Yan, a Chinese virologist in exile in the United States, pointed out that the virus is a biological weapon deliberately released by the CCP.</p>
U.S. and China had conflicts	U.S. and China disagreed on issues or criticized each other	<p>在情報機構遞交新冠病毒溯源報告後，美國總統拜登今天譴責中國仍扣住關鍵疫情起源資訊不公開。中國駐美大使館反擊，稱科學議題的溯源由情報圈來做毫無可信度。</p> <p>U.S. President Joe Biden today condemned China for withholding key information about the origin of the outbreak after intelligence agencies submitted a report on the origin of the virus. The Chinese embassy in the United States countered, saying that the virus’s origin is a scientific issue. It is not</p>

		credible if the investigation was conducted by the intelligence department.
WHO disagreed with China on the origin of the virus		中方宣稱武漢肺炎非源於中國，WHO 主任打臉 China claims Wuhan pneumonia did not originate in China, WHO director disagreed.
WHO investigation was questionable		
-China influenced WHO investigation	The article indicated that China tried to influence the process of WHO investigation, WHO willingly concealed the truth for China, or WHO helped China to get off the responsibility	美國前國務卿龐皮歐九日接受福斯電視台訪問時，質疑 WHO 專家小組的說法，批評 WHO 「向習近平總書記下跪」。 Former U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo questioned the statement of the WHO expert panel in an interview with Fox TV on the 9th, criticizing the WHO for “kneeling to General Secretary Xi Jinping”
- There should be an independent investigation	The international community or individuals argued that there should be an independent investigation into the virus’s origin	美國、澳洲、英國和德國等多國近期陸續公開呼籲國際社會，應對中國的病毒來源進行獨立調查。 Many countries, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany, have recently publicly called on the international community to conduct independent investigations into the source of the virus in China.
-WHO investigation only benefited China	The result of the WHO would “clean” China’s reputation	龐培歐（Mike Pompeo）擔心，這恐怕會是一個洗白的過程，大陸政權已經完成掩飾。 Mike Pompeo is worried that this [investigation] may be a whitewashing process, and China might have already completed the cover-up.
Frames	The main points that the author presented in each paragraph of the articles	
<u>Chinese state media narratives</u>	<u>Chinese narratives that the Taiwanese media seemed to amplify</u>	
China was being transparent		趙立堅聲稱，聯合考察組國際專家多次在不同場合對中方的開放透明態度給予積極評價。 Zhao Lijian claimed that the international experts of the joint inspection team have repeatedly made positive comments on China’s open and transparent attitude on various occasions.

China helped other countries		N/A
China gained respect from other countries		N/A
China was making efforts to solve the origin mystery		N/A
Chinese political system handled the pandemic better than the Western ones		N/A
The pandemic united the Chinese all over the world		N/A
The flawed U.S. political system resulted in formidable repercussions	U.S.'s political system that claims to enshrine liberty and democracy resulted in chaos and a high death toll in the U.S. during the pandemic	談到美國強調的自由與民主，華春瑩接著評論，「如果美國真的民主，為什麼它忽視了大多數民眾的呼聲，不採取有效的措施，眼睜睜看著 23 萬美國人因新冠疫情死去？」 Talking about the freedom and democracy emphasized by the United States, Hua Chunying continued to comment, "If the United States is really democratic, why does it ignore the voice of the majority of the people and not take effective measures, and just watch 230,000 Americans die from the COVID-19 pandemic?"
International society should collaborate with China		大陸將繼續堅定同國際社會一道，並肩作戰、抗擊疫情。目前不該去相互指責，甚至去咎責，這些作為都沒有建設性。 China will continue to work firmly with the international community to fight shoulder to shoulder to fight the pandemic. At present, it is not appropriate to blame each other since these actions are not constructive.
Non-US countries or individuals (not including media) attacked, criticized China or treated China unfairly	The text or statement by which Chinese officials or supporters accused non-US countries of covering the truth or being unwilling to cooperate with the international community	中國駐英大使劉曉明之前在一個網路座談會也提出，有關所謂中國掩蓋及隱藏疫情的猜測及虛假訊息，都不是事實，質疑一些人抱有先入為主的偏見。 Liu Xiaoming, Chinese ambassador to the U.K., also pointed out in an online symposium that the speculation and false information about so-called China's cover-up and concealment of the pandemic are not true. He said that some people have preconceived prejudices.
There were lies and conspiracy theories alleging that China was the place where the virus originated	The text or statement calls the theory that the virus was from China a conspiracy theory or lie	西雅圖弗雷德哈欽森癌症研究中心（Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center）研究員特雷弗·貝德福德（Trevor Bedford）駁斥社交媒體上流傳的關於新冠病毒是由武漢病毒研究所，或者中國其他地方製造出來的謠言，這些謠言促使世界衛生組織（WHO）發出警告，提醒人們注意由關於此次疫情的虛假新聞引發的「訊息疫情」。

		<p>Trevor Bedford, a researcher at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, has dismissed rumors circulating on social media that the novel coronavirus was created by the Wuhan Institute of Virology or elsewhere in China. These lies also prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to issue a warning against the “information pandemic” caused by the fake news in this pandemic.</p>
The origin of the virus		
-Fort Detrick could be the origin of the virus		<p>華春瑩說，「請你回想一下，疫情發生以來，美歐等國一些政客和領導人、議員，他們發表了多少針對中國的謠言謊言？發表了多少關於所謂實驗室洩露、實驗室製造等各種各樣的謠言謊言？你們追究了多少呢？而且關於德特里克堡生物基地問題，始終有一個大大的問號。」</p> <p>Hua Chunying said, “Please recall, since the outbreak of the pandemic, how many rumors and lies have they published against China by some politicians, leaders, and congressmen in the United States, Europe and other countries? All kinds of rumors and lies? How much have you tried to know the truth? And there is always a big question mark about the Fort Detrick biological base.”</p>
-The origin of the virus is a scientific question		<p>在 20 日的例行記者會中，中國外交部發言人耿爽回答現場記者提問時指出，中國已多次表示、澄清，新冠病毒源頭是「科學問題」，應交由科學家、醫學專家研究，「不應被政治化」。</p> <p>In a regular press conference on the 20th, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang pointed out in response to questions from reporters. He said that China has repeatedly stated and clarified that the source of the COVID-19 virus is a “scientific issue” that should be studied by scientists and medical experts and “should not be politicized.”</p>
-The virus could have originated in other countries (not China or the U.S.)		<p>義大利米蘭國家癌症研究所最新一項研究表示，新冠病毒可能從去年 9 月開始，就在義大利傳播，引發外界對於病毒溯源的討論。</p> <p>The latest research from the National Cancer Institute of Milan, Italy, shows that the new coronavirus may have been spreading in Italy since September last year, triggering discussions on the origin of the virus.</p>
-The virus was not leaked from the Wuhan lab		<p>武漢病毒研究所研究員袁志明，他表示 2019 年 12 月 30 日，研究所才首度接獲醫院送來的 2019 冠狀病毒樣本，疫情不可能起源於實驗室。</p> <p>Yuan Zhiming, a researcher at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, said that it was only on December 30, 2019, that the institute received the 2019 coronavirus sample from the hospital for the</p>

		first time, and the outbreak could not have originated in the laboratory.
-The virus was not man-made (it arose naturally)		美國公衛專家佛奇 4 日受訪時（Anthony Fauci）則表示，他認為病毒是從自然界演化而來。 Anthony Fauci, an American public health expert, said in an interview on the 4th that he believed that the virus evolved from nature.
-The U.S. could be where the virus originated	The statement specifically pointed out that the virus could originate in the U.S.	評論稱，「事實上，美國是新冠病毒來源重大嫌疑國，也是政治病毒溯源的重點對象國」。 The comment stated, “In fact, the United States is a major suspected country of the source of COVID-19, and it is also a key country where the political virus originated.”
-The U.S. should be investigated more thoroughly as the possible origin of the virus		趙立堅反問：美軍德特里克堡生物基地與侵華日軍 731 部隊有千絲萬縷的聯繫，發生洩漏事故的消息早已被媒體曝光，美方有沒有意願和勇氣讓世衛組織專家赴美國進行調查呢？ Zhao Lijian asked back: The biological base at Fort Detrick in the U.S. military is inextricably linked to Unit 731 of the Japanese military. The news of the leak has already been exposed by the media. Does the U.S. have the willingness and courage to send WHO experts to the U.S. for investigation?
-History shows there were other diseases that originated in the U.S.		N/A
Other countries should be investigated		N/A
The reasons that the U.S. and the Western countries criticized China	The text or statement explained why the U.S. and the Western countries criticized China	王毅說，美方「炒作有罪推定的實驗室洩漏論」，目的在轉移自身抗疫不力的責任，達到抹黑打壓別國的政治目的。 Wang Yi said that the U.S. “hypes up the theory of laboratory leakage with the presumption of China being guilt” in order to shift the responsibility for the U.S.’s own failure to fight the pandemic and achieve the political purpose of crushing and tarnishing the reputation of other countries.
There were countries or media who did not agree with U.S. and Western country’s China lab leak theory		N/A
U.S. (politicians) blamed China		大陸官媒央視 28 日晚間《新聞聯播》，刊發國際銳評《背負四宗罪的蓬佩奧已經突破做人底線》，內容嚴厲指責美

		<p>國國務卿蓬佩奧（Mike Pompeo），造謠大陸隱匿疫情、公開稱新冠病毒是「武漢病毒」，甚至發動向大陸索賠言論。</p> <p>On the evening of the 28th, China's state media CCTV "News Network" published a commentary "Pompeo, who has committed four crimes, has broken the bottom line of being a human being." The commentary criticized the Secretary of State Michael Pompeo for publicly spreading the rumor that China covered the truth. He also called the COVID-19 virus the "Wuhan virus" and even required China to take responsibility.</p>
The U.S. and other Western media tarnished the reputation of China	The texts accused the Western media of criticizing China, for example, for not being transparent about the truth of Covid-19	<p>華春瑩今天在中外交部例行記者會上指稱，個別西方媒體有關中方拒絕分享可能讓世界更了解病毒起源的原始數據，與世衛調查團在中國的經歷「完全不符」，西方媒體故意曲解、斷章取義專家的報告。</p> <p>Hua Chunying said at a regular press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China today that some Western media reports that China refuses to share raw data that may allow the world to better understand the origin of the virus are "completely inconsistent" with the experience of the WHO investigation team in China. The Western media deliberately misinterpreted and took the expert's report out of context.</p>
Social media platform was unfair to China		N/A
The U.S. and the West spread conspiracy theories to shift responsibility		N/A
The U.S. had a nefarious scheme	The text or statement indicated or implied that the U.S. was secretly doing wicked projects	<p>趙立堅也細數美國 200 多個生物實驗室散播全球、2019 年 7 月維吉尼亞州北部出現不明原因呼吸系統疾病、威斯康辛州爆發「電子菸疾病」，其中有什麼隱情？並指美國欠國際社會一個交待。</p> <p>Zhao Lijian also detailed the spread of more than 200 biological laboratories established by the United States around the world, the unexplained respiratory disease in northern Virginia in July 2019, and the outbreak of "vaping disease" in Wisconsin. He asked, what was behind these incidents? He also pointed out that the United States owed an explanation to the international community.</p>
The U.S. lost its battle against pandemic		「美國很擅長實施攻擊中國戰略，但在面對現實和處理新冠疫情方面卻很糟糕。」

		“The U.S. is very good at implementing a strategy of attacking China, but terrible at facing reality and dealing with COVID-19.”
The U.S. or Western scientific studies were flawed		<p>哈佛大學醫學院日前發布一則最新的衛星影像研究，指稱武漢肺炎（COVID-19）在去（2019）年夏天便已經在中國武漢地區傳播。對此，世界衛生組織（WHO）維持在本次疫情的一貫立場...駁斥了哈佛大學醫學院的研究。</p> <p>Harvard Medical School recently released a new satellite image study alleging that Wuhan pneumonia (COVID-19) had spread in Wuhan, China in the summer of 2019. In this regard, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintains its consistent position on this pandemic...refuting the study of Harvard Medical School.</p>
The U.S. politicians used criticism about COVID measures to inflame racial hatred		N/A
The U.S. and other countries politicized the pandemic		<p>大陸外交部發言人趙立堅：「美方一些人，嘴上鼓吹真相，心裡卻全是政治操弄。」</p> <p>Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian: “Some people in the U.S. seemed to advocate for the truth, but they were actually thinking of political manipulation.”</p>
The U.S. was the one who caused trouble in the investigation and interrupted international collaboration		<p>趙立堅在例行記者會上指稱，溯源工作的確受到了政治因素的干擾，但不是來自中方，而是美國等個別國家。</p> <p>Zhao Lijian claimed at a regular press conference that the work of determining the virus origin was indeed interfered with by political factors, but not from China, but from individual countries such as the United States.</p>
<u>Taiwanese media narratives</u>	<u>The narratives that did not appear in Chinese state media</u>	
Australia and China disagreed on the origin of the COVID-19 virus		<p>發起[COVID-19 origin]調查提案的澳洲，卻遭到中國政府威脅「停止進口澳洲牛肉」、「提高澳洲大麥關稅」，北京顯然對於相關調查依舊有所忌憚。</p> <p>Australia, which initiated the [COVID-19 origin] investigation proposal, was threatened by the Chinese government to “stop importing Australian beef” and “raise tariffs on Australian barley.” Beijing is obviously still wary of related investigations.</p>
Authoritarian China was a big challenge to the world		在專訪中，閻麗夢痛批中共是個黑暗、邪惡、撒謊的政權，希望能有更多人站出來、反抗中共政府。

		In the interview, Li-Meng Yan criticized the CCP as a dark, evil, and lying regime, and hoped that more people would stand up and resist the CCP government
China failed to control the disease in the early stage		<p>【華爾街日報】等媒體也發表調查文章指出，中國在武漢肺炎爆發早期的一連串失誤導致疫情的大爆發。</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal and other media also published investigative articles pointing out that a series of mistakes made by China in the early stage of the Wuhan pneumonia led to the outbreak of the pandemic.</p>
China pressured other countries		<p>在中國壓力下，歐盟修改[疫情假資訊調查報告]批評中國的部分。</p> <p>Under pressure from China, the European Union revised the part of the [Investigation Report on Epidemic False Information] that criticized China.</p>
China rejected responsibility for the origin of COVID		<p>一年來，中國用盡力氣要使人忘記他們是疫情的源頭，中共當局不停的重寫歷史，以甩掉所有責任。「為了說服他國，中國甚至還說病毒來自外國的進口冷凍食品」。</p> <p>Over the past year, China has tried its best to make people forget that they are the source of the pandemic, and the CCP authorities have kept rewriting history to get rid of all responsibilities. “In order to convince other countries, China even said that the virus came from imported frozen food from foreign countries.”</p>
China should take responsibility for the origin of COVID		<p>龐培奧警告：「全球絕對會讓中國為新冠全球大流行付出代價... 大家可以看到，無論我走訪到哪，與我交談的每位外交官都承認看到中國對世界所做的一切。」</p> <p>Pompeo warned: “The world will definitely make China pay for the COVID-19 pandemic... You can see that wherever I go, every diplomat I talk to admits to seeing what China has done to the world. “</p>
China spread fake news and propaganda		
-China distorted information or others' words		<p>克庫勒(Alexander Kekule)提到，新冠肺炎病毒在義大利出現變異後傳染給他國。中國媒體卻將其曲解成新冠肺炎大流行始源於義大利，讓克庫勒相當不滿。</p> <p>Alexander Kekule mentioned that the COVID-19 virus mutated in Italy and then spread to other countries. However, the Chinese media misinterpreted it as saying that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in Italy, which made Kekul quite annoyed.</p>

-China spread false information		<p>美國當局與大量媒體也察覺中共積極甩鍋的醜態與節奏，例如《華盛頓郵報》（The Washington Post）3月5日指稱，中國網路近來散布大量假訊息與煽動民粹言論。</p> <p>The U.S. authorities and a large number of media have also noticed the CCP's active throwing of the pot (rejecting responsibility). For example, The Washington Post alleged on March 5 that Chinese Internet users have recently spread much false information and incited populist speech.</p>
-China spread propaganda	Texts or statements that mentioned China was spreading propaganda such as the “Grand External Propaganda Strategy” (大外宣 propaganda targeting foreign countries) and “Grand internal Propaganda Strategy” (大內宣 propaganda targeting Chinese citizens).	<p>德國馬歇爾基金會研究顯示，自今年4月以來，中國外交部門和官媒旗下的200多個推特帳號，總共發布9萬多條配合新冠疫情外宣工作的推文，從1月至今已增加將近一倍。</p> <p>Research by the German Marshall Fund in the United States shows that since April this year, more than 200 Twitter accounts under the Chinese foreign ministry and official media have posted a total of more than 90,000 tweets in support of external propaganda related to COVID-19. The number of tweets has nearly doubled since January.</p>
-Chinese diplomats and media spread conspiracy theories		<p>在趙立堅刻意以中英文雙語所發的幾條推文上，這位外號「戰狼發言人」的「新秀」對美國嗆聲：「零號病人是什麼時候在美國出現的？有多少人被感染？醫院的名字是什麼？可能是美軍把疫情帶到了武漢。美國要透明！要公開數據！美國欠我們一個解釋！」</p> <p>In a few tweets, Zhao Lijian deliberately posted in both Chinese and English, the “news star” nicknamed “Wolf Warrior Spokesperson” choked on the United States: “When did patient zero appear in the United States? How many people are there? Infected? What is the name of the hospital? Maybe the U.S. military brought the pandemic to Wuhan. The U.S. must be transparent! The data must be released! The U.S. owes us an explanation!”</p>
-Taiwanese amplified China's disinformation		<p>潘懷宗這番言論，與中共政府為了維穩所發動的資訊戰不謀而合，呼籲大家一起消滅這種「害人、出賣台灣人」的錯誤資訊。</p> <p>Pan Huaizong's remarks coincided with the information war launched by the CCP government. The organization called on everyone to eradicate this false information that “harms and betrays Taiwanese.”</p>
Criticisms toward the U.S.		

- Statements made by American organizations might be incorrect		<p>達薩克（Peter Daszak）十日則在推特回應說...不要太相信美國情報，因為「這些情報在川普執政下愈來愈漫不經心，而且坦白講在許多方面都有錯」。</p> <p>Peter Daszak responded on Twitter on the 10th, saying... don't have too much faith in American intelligence because "this intelligence has become increasingly sloppy under the Trump administration and is frankly wrong in many ways."</p>
-The U.S. may have a responsibility too for the origin of the virus		<p>不過美國中央情報局（CIA）前代理局長莫雷爾（Michael Morell）4月30日指出，其實美國政府一直對武漢病毒研究所提供新冠病毒的研究資金。因此如果病毒真的是從武漢研究所外洩，這不僅只是中國的問題。</p> <p>However, Michael Morell, the former acting director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), pointed out on April 30 that the U.S. government has actually been providing research funding for the new coronavirus to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. So if the virus really leaked from the Wuhan Institute, it's not just a Chinese problem.</p>
WHO Investigation		
-The result of the WHO investigation is questionable		<p>世界衛生組織（WHO）日前發表組團到中國武漢調查武漢肺炎（新型冠狀病毒病，COVID-19）起源的報告，英美兩國對結果都表示質疑，要求中國必須提供疫情初期的一切原始數據。</p> <p>The World Health Organization (WHO) recently published a report on a mission to Wuhan, China to investigate the origin of Wuhan pneumonia (COVID-19). Both the United Kingdom and the United States questioned the results and demanded that China must provide all original data from the early stages of the pandemic.</p>
-WHO could have been influenced by China		<p>世衛一直被質疑偏袒中國，病毒溯源調查國際專家組在完成調查後，除了排除病毒是從武漢實驗室外洩，又緊跟中國口徑說病毒有可能是由冷凍食品傳入中國。</p> <p>The WHO has always been questioned as being biased toward China. After the completion of the investigation, the international expert team of the virus investigation ruled out that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan laboratory and then echoed China's statement that the virus may have been introduced into China through frozen food.</p>
-WHO had difficulty accessing enough info		<p>世衛總幹事譚德塞（Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus）當時指調查團隊在獲取原始數據時遇到困難，希望未來進行「更及時、更全面的數據共享」。</p> <p>WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the time that the investigation team had encountered difficulties</p>

		obtaining raw data and hoped for “more timely and comprehensive data sharing” in the future.
-China refused the second run of investigation the by WHO		<p>根據世衛官員，這個新團隊受命調查疫情起源可能性，包括 COVID-19 病毒是否可能源自實驗室，這項假設尤其使中國感到憤怒。</p> <p>According to WHO officials, the new team was tasked with investigating the possibility of the origin of the outbreak, including whether the COVID-19 virus might have originated in a laboratory, a hypothesis that has particularly angered China.</p>
-The international society urged for a thorough investigation in China		<p>以川普為首的共和黨員近日屢屢將矛頭對準武漢病毒實驗室，國務卿龐培歐(Michael Pompeo)力促中國開放實驗室讓國際科學家進入調查。</p> <p>Republicans headed by Trump have repeatedly targeted the Wuhan virus laboratory in recent days. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo urged China to open the laboratory to international scientists for an investigation.</p>
The origin of the virus		
-China's virus origin theory is not plausible		<p>事實上，目前世界上大概只有中國認為冷凍食品包裝有傳播病毒的風險。WHO 之前也表示，經由冷凍食品感染新冠病毒的風險較低；美國疾病防治中心（CDC）也曾表示，目前並無證據顯示處理和攝取食物與新冠病毒有關。</p> <p>In fact, China is probably the only country in the world that considers frozen food packaging to be a risk of spreading the virus. The WHO also previously stated that the risk of contracting the new coronavirus through frozen food is low; the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also stated that there is currently no evidence that food processing and consumption are related to the new coronavirus.</p>
-Fort Detrick theory is disinformation		<p>病毒來自德特里克堡的說法難以成立，因為德特里克堡實驗室是去年 7 月關閉，但該實驗室所在的馬里蘭州費德里克郡，直到今年 3 月 16 日才出現首起確診病例，距離華盛頓州通報全美首起病例的 1 月 21 日已時隔近 2 個月 The claim that the virus came from Fort Detrick is difficult to establish because the Fort Detrick laboratory was closed in July last year, but Frederick County, Maryland, where the laboratory is located, did not have the first confirmed case until March 16 this year.</p>
-More data is needed to understand the origin		<p>這項報告的結論指出，如果沒有來自中國的新資訊，例如找出病毒從動物傳染給人類的途徑，或是武漢病毒實驗室</p>

		<p>曾經在疫情爆發前處理相關病毒的證據，就無法對病毒起源做出更明確的解釋。</p> <p>The report concludes that without new information from China, such as figuring out how the virus jumped from animals to humans or evidence that the virus was handled in Wuhan's virology lab before the outbreak, no conclusions and clearer explanation can be made about the origin of the virus.</p>
-The truth of the virus's origin is still unknown		<p>美國總統拜登 5 月曾要求該國情報機構在 90 天內檢視情資查明疫情起源，但 8 月公布的調查報告仍未有明確答案，並指病毒源於自然或實驗室意外的 2 種說法都言之成理。</p> <p>In May, US President Biden asked the country's intelligence agency to review information to find out the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic within 90 days, but the investigation report released in August still has no clear answer and pointed out that the virus could have originated either from natural or from laboratory accidents.</p>
-The virus might be China's bioweapon		<p>流亡美國的中國病毒學家閻麗夢近日表示，這是證明中共開發非傳統生物武器計劃的「確鑿證據」，而武漢肺炎（新型冠狀病毒病，COVID-19）就是源於中國解放軍實驗室的生物武器，遭到中共蓄意釋放。</p> <p>Li-Meng Yan, a Chinese virologist in exile in the United States, recently stated that this is "conclusive evidence" that the CCP has developed a non-traditional biological weapon program, and Wuhan pneumonia (COVID-19) virus is a biological weapon that originated from a laboratory of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and was deliberately released by the CCP.</p>
-The virus could be produced in the lab (without specifying which lab)	Texts or statements indicate that there is a possibility that a lab could produce the COVID-19 virus	<p>研究人員指出，新冠病毒被竄改為能夠與人體緊密結合的狀態。</p> <p>The researchers pointed out that the COVID-19 virus has been tampered with and can be closely integrated with the human body.</p>
-The virus might be originated in China		
-The safety of Chinese labs was worrisome		<p>不過美國福斯新聞網（Fox News）日前獨家報導，美國政府掌握的文件與證據顯示，新冠病毒雖然是自然產生，但武漢一家生化實驗室取得並進行研究之後，未做好相關安全措施，導致一名工作人員遭到感染，成為「零號病人」（patient zero），再傳染給武漢市民。</p> <p>However, according to Fox News's exclusive breaking news a few days ago, the documents and evidence held by the U.S. government show that although the COVID-19 virus is from nature, a biochemical laboratory in Wuhan obtained it for research. The lab did not take relevant safety measures,</p>

		resulting in a staff member being infected and becoming “patient zero” (patient zero), who in turn infected the citizens of Wuhan.
-China should be investigated by the international community		<p>美國、澳洲、英國和德國等多國近期陸續公開呼籲國際社會，應對中國的病毒來源進行獨立調查。</p> <p>Many countries including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Germany have recently publicly called on the international community to conduct independent investigations into the source of the virus in China.</p>
-The virus was man-made by the Wuhan lab	Texts or statements suggested that the virus could be man-made but did NOT specify that the virus was a bioweapon	<p>新冠病毒是否源自武漢 P4 實驗室迄今仍是外界討論焦點，如今更有法國諾貝爾得主宣稱，新冠病毒為人工製造，來自武漢實驗室。</p> <p>Whether the COVID-19 virus originated from the P4 laboratory in Wuhan is still the focus of discussions. Now even a French Nobel laureate claims that the virus is man-made and came from the Wuhan laboratory.</p>
-The virus might be from the Wuhan lab	Texts or statements said the virus might be from the Wuhan lab but did not specify if the virus was from natural or man-made	<p>「華爾街日報」今天引述熟悉機密文件人士報導，美國政府國家實驗室的 2019 冠狀病毒疾病（COVID-19）病源報告推斷，病毒從武漢實驗室外洩的假說貌似可信，值得進一步調查。</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal reported today, citing people familiar with the confidential documents, that the U.S. government’s national laboratory’s report on the origin of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) inferred that the theory that the virus escaped from the Wuhan laboratory was plausible and warranted further investigation.</p>
-The virus was in China earlier		<p>根據美國 abc 新聞報導，哈佛大學醫學院最新研究指出，武漢肺炎疫情可能早在去年夏天，就已在中國武漢市傳播。</p> <p>According to the US ABC news report, the latest research from Harvard Medical School pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic may have spread in Wuhan, China as early as last summer.</p>
-WHO didn’t buy some of China’s theories about the virus’s origin		<p>早前到中國武漢調查病毒源頭的世衛調查小組主席、跨物種動物疾病專家班恩巴瑞（Peter Ben Embarek）說，世衛不會跟進中國稱病毒最初可能經是由冷凍食品傳入中國的論述。</p> <p>Peter Ben Embarek, chairman of the WHO investigation team who earlier went to Wuhan, China to investigate the source of the virus, and an expert on trans-species animal diseases, said</p>

		that the WHO will not follow up with China's claim that the virus may have been introduced into China through frozen food.
-The Chinese gov was not being transparent with the information about the pandemic	Texts or statements criticizing the Chinese government for not being transparent with the information about the pandemic	<p>蓬佩奧認為，中共是個不會公開真實疫情資訊的政權，而新冠疫情至今已導致逾 10 萬名美國人死亡。</p> <p>Pompeo believes that the CCP is a regime that will not disclose real information about the pandemic, and the COVID-19 virus has killed more than 100,000 Americans so far.</p>
-The reason why China “threw the pot,” i.e., accused others while denying blame		<p>中共顯然警覺群眾不堪疫情，民怨沸騰，因而亟欲轉移焦點，成就「甩鍋」（嫁禍）給美國等國家之「大國戰疫」戰略。</p> <p>The CCP is clearly aware that the Chinese people are overwhelmed by the pandemic and are full of grievances. Therefore, the CCP is eager to shift the focus and deploy the “big power pandemic war” strategy, which is “blaming” the United States and other countries.</p>
-There were people who helped China to suppress the virus origin theory unfavorable to China		<p>世界衛生組織疫情溯源專家小組英國成員達斯札克（Peter Daszak），一再否定「實驗室洩漏論」，不過，後來被踢爆他與中國武漢病毒研究所關係密切，並把美國政府大筆撥款資助該研究所。</p> <p>Peter Daszak, a British member of the World Health Organization's expert group on the origin of COVID-19 pandemic, has repeatedly denied the “laboratory leak theory.” However, it was later revealed that he had a close relationship with the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, and that he had allocated a large sum of money from the U.S. government to fund the institute.</p>
The U.S. and China had conflicts over issues regarding the virus's origin	Texts or statements showing that the U.S. and China fought with each other on issues related to COVID-19 origin	<p>有關新冠肺炎疫情源頭和爆發時間點，美中 2 國已爭論了數月，互相指控對方甩鍋責任。</p> <p>The United States and China have been arguing for months about the origin and timing of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, accusing each other as the one who should bear the responsibility.</p>
WHO failed to take caution at an early stage		<p>白宮發言人麥肯內尼（Kayleigh McEnany）1 日在白宮記者會指中國處置失當，而 WHO「很糟糕」（really damning），WHO 從今年初起屢屢錯過忽視重要訊息，包括台灣官員曾在去年底示警病毒人傳人，甚至反對美國採取旅行限制預防疫情蔓延。</p> <p>At the White House press conference on the 1st, White House spokesperson Kayleigh McEnany pointed out that China has mishandled the pandemic, and the WHO is “really damning.” Since the beginning of this year, the WHO has repeatedly missed and ignored important information since last year by Taiwan officials on human-to-human transmission of the virus.</p>

		The WHO even opposed the United States to adopt travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the epidemic.
The U.S. refuted China's allegation of the U.S. being the virus's origin		<p>美國國防部發言人推文，中共發布新冠肺炎病毒源頭來自美軍，是不實且荒謬的陰謀論。</p> <p>The spokesperson of the U.S. Department of Defense tweeted that the CCP's announcement that the COVID-19 virus came from the U.S. military is a false and absurd conspiracy theory.</p>

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