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Freedom and Power: Chomsky's Theory of Media Control and Its Inspiration for Contemporary International Politics

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Abstract. Chomsky's media control theory sharply criticizes the American capitalist system and profoundly reveals the ruling class's control of the media and its impact on the American domestic even the contemporary international political situation. Starting from Chomsky's theory of media control, the article explains how people became the "spectators of democracy" under the influence of manufacturing consent and propaganda model, which violates the nature of human pursuit of freedom. The paper criticizes U.S. for interfering in international affairs for the sake of national interests through Chomsky's study on terrorism and a large number of examples. Throughout the study of media control theory from various angles, this paper reveals the fact that the United States uses the media to deceive the public and control their thoughts under the veil of freedom and democracy, so that the public can understand the double standard behavior of counter-terrorism and other foreign policies that serve the interests of the American ruling class. The paper warns people to reflect on the use of the media and appeal the public to pursue the objective truth. It also helps people, to a certain extent, break out of the media's control of their minds and boldly pursue freedom and happiness.

Keywords: Media, International politics, Propaganda model

1. Introduction

Noam Chomsky, as a famous American linguist, philosopher and thinker, is not only known worldwide for his profound research on linguistics and the concept of human nature, but also internationally for his incisve media control theory. Influenced by Marxism, Chomsky's theory of media control sharply criticizes the capitalist system in the United States and reveals the control of the media by the ruling class and the power of capital. In this regard, Chomsky's theory of media control is similar to the Frankfurt School. Specifically, it is mainly embodied in the "control of the media" and the "controlled media". Studied from the perspective of media-controlled countries, controlled media includes who controls the media and why control, etc; studied from the perspective of media as a tool for social control, "control of the media" includes "what the media controls", "how the media is controlled" and the "consequences of media control" and so on. In addition, Chomsky mainly focuses on his theory of media control through three books: Media Control, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, and Propaganda and the Public Mind. Throughout books, they profoundly reveals the relationship between the state, the media and

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the people in the society. In the book, from Chomsky's elaboration of the concept of democracy to the critique of the means of propaganda control in the United States all reveal the fact that the American media is controlled by the state and serves the bourgeoisie and political officials. Simply put, the ruling class, the media and the people form a hierarchical pyramid chain, with the ruling class at the top of the pyramid, the mass media, as a medium between the state and the people, is located under the ruling class and is manipulated by the state, and the people, at the bottom of the pyramid, under the influence of the mass media as a tool for indoctrination into the consciousness of the ruling class. Influence has been achieved by the "culture industry" in the form of various literary forms such as cinema, pictures, television, press, bestsellers, etc [1].

In addition to his theoretical work, Chomsky also has been involved in the field in various protests against wars and civilians, as well as the killing of women, children and the elderly, Chomsky was calling for and supporting people's resistance and struggle for a free and good life. In Chomsky's On Hegemony and Ideology: The Managua Lectures Speeches from 1987, there is a reference to an "open society", a term that really means a society that is open to U.S. political control and economic penetration, a society that is open to the exploitation of human labor and the material means of production. This concept accurately and unambiguously punctures the illusion of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in the U.S., it reveals the true face of the United States under the veil of the good and beautiful for the main purpose of exploitation and control of human beings [2]. Through the in-depth study of Chomsky's media control theory, it is possible to realize that the Western hegemony, represented by the United States, has long evolved from the control of the domestic media to the targeted guidance of international public opinion through inaccurate reports in the media, as well as the consequent impact on the world's political and economic situation, including the public.

2. Media control theory

2.1. Manufacturing consent

With regard to the introductory section on the "control of the media" raised by the Frankfurt School, Chomsky argues that the mass media in the United States are controlled by the U.S Government, that is, the information available to the American people is tightly controlled and processed by the government. The American concept of democracy is not the so-called free participation of the public in political activities through various means, but the subtle transformation of the public's ideology through the mass media, and the use of various means of propaganda control to manipulate the public's thinking, propaganda to create "consensus", so that the public is marginalized, unable to know the truth and unable to participate in public discussions by virtue of their free will. The majority of the people became what Lippmann called "the bewildered masses", and eventually became "spectators of democracy" [1].

Then, by what means does the American government propagandize to manufacturing consent, so that the people who were originally opposed to the government's decisions would eventually support the government under the influence of the mass media? Chomsky further reveals and summarizes the five methods by which the American ruling class uses the media to manipulate the minds of the people, specifically including "public relations construction", "control of public opinion", "conceal the truth", "diversion of attention", and "selective cognition", so that the majority of the people will fall deeper and deeper into the "consensus" customized for them by the ruling class, rejecting their own will and individual thoughts, ignoring the objective facts, and becoming the biggest supporters of the ruling class step by step. These tactics complement each other, and they are the usual tactics

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used by the US and other Western media. Whether it is in the Vietnam War, which the United States portrayed itself as an image of victim, or in the Xinjiang cotton incident in 2020, portrayed China as another destruction of human rights after the history of slavery in the United States, the purpose of its fabrication is to change people's original attitudes by concealing the truth, controlling public opinion, etc. They also suppressing competitors, so that they will be attacked by public opinion and morally condemned by the mass to satisfy the selfish desires in politics and economy of the west. Despite the fact that all of these methods of control have achieved remarkable results, Chomsky believes that in practice the public cannot be completely tamed, so it is necessary to find "enemy" targets by means of attention diversion, to shift the public's attention from domestic to foreign countries, and to build up public relations in order to alleviate the pressure of public opinion on oneself. Furthermore, through selective cognitive reporting, the public is unable to learn the full and objective facts, and thus is unable to oppose the policies of the ruling class, by focusing on what is favorable to them and ignoring what is unfavorable to them [1].

Chomsky not only offers a moral critique of American propaganda consensus-building itself, but also points out that the phenomenon of "Manufacturing Consent" is contrary to human nature. Chomsky argues that human beings are wired to create rather than control. Human beings are born with the ability to use language creatively in accordance with their environment, and emphasizes that the essence of human beings lies in self-control, creative collaboration with others, and the equal and free right of every human being to participate in decision-making and to determine his or her own will. Therefore, it is very dangerous to deny the nature of human beings, from which the ruling class can control and shape human beings, making individuals and even groups lose their creative abilities and become tools of political domination rather than human beings in the true sense. The promotion of the freedom and rights of the human requires an ideal form of social organization that permits the free and full development of each individual, regardless of his or her potential, without control or being controlled, without threats or subordination, instead, with free mutual assistance rather than "consensus-building", with objectivity and impartiality, and free from obscurantism, so that enables everyone to become a complete human being with maximum freedom and initiative [3].

2.2. Propaganda model

Through his study of the inherited nature and creativity of use of linguistics, Chomsky clearly articulates the commonalities between language and the essential characteristics of human beings, as well as the importance of freedom. Chomsky argues that, like the innate existence and creativity of use of language, man's quest for freedom is a result of nature and the essence of man, that "man is born a free individual", and "man's freedom and his consciousness of his freedom are the fundamental mark that distinguishes him from other animals" [4] That is to say, in an ideal society, man's pursuit of freedom and creative development of self-potential are the basic needs of what makes them human, but this does not mean that man is completely free from the constraints of rules, on the contrary, the creativity that man exerts under the constraints of their mind, human nature, in an environment of relative freedom, is the true act of creation. Also, Chomsky's critique of the west is precisely a powerful moral condemnation of the fact that it goes against human nature to the extent that it fails to grant people relative freedom. According to Chomsky, freedom of speech and freedom of thought are regarded as the core of concept of freedom, while western society, represented by the United States, has always guided public opinion and reached the control of people's thoughts through various means of media control, so that people gradually lose the ability to think independently and create freely. This act severely restricts the fundamental freedoms for

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which all human beings are born with and is contrary to the essence of the human, and deprives the necessary condition for an ideal society adapted to the existence of human: developed in accordance with human nature [4].

Based on their questioning of the objectivity and fairness of mass media information in the United States, Chomsky and Herman outlined four filters in the operation of the media, which are four models of propaganda, specifically including the size, ownership distribution and interest orientation of the mass media, advertisements, access to news, news criticism, and news critics [1]. Among these propaganda models, the third which is the symbiotic relationship between the media and the state in sharing "news sources", is the source of the western media's inability to guarantee objectivity and fairness. The significance of the news media has two contradictory sides, on the one hand, the public has great expectations for the authenticity and objectivity of the news sources, however, on the other hand, the news report need to be fast and timely, on the surface, it seems that the two can be balanced, but in fact, in order to ensure the authenticity of the news, is very often unable to ensure that the information can be timely presented in front of the eyes of the public, therefore, the news media need to cooperate with the government and state organizations to maintain the image of the media as objective, fair and timely. At the same time, since the news media and the government have entered into a cooperative relationship, the media cannot go against the wishes of the government if they want to get resources through them, and sometimes they are forced to publish untrue reports. This "symbiotic" relationship can be said to marginalize the general public and turn them into tools who pay the bills for the media and the government, which is contrary to the nature of human beings, also undermines people's beautiful aspiration for freedom of expression and thought.

3. International political relations from the perspective of media cybernetics

3.1. Chomsky's criticism of American hegemonism

American hegemony inevitably involves the attitude of the United States towards terrorism and its international policy. In Chomsky's view, the foreign policy of United States towards terrorism is basically driven by national interests, where national interests do not only refer to the internal interests of the country, but also naturally include various international interests that are favorable to the United States. For example, as far as the foreign policy of the United States is concerned after the World War II, it has established alliances with Western Europe and Japan by means of economic assistance, impeded and interfered in the development of the third world countries under the banner of the "communist threat", and coincidentally taken advantage of the situation of the cold war with the Soviet Union to control their respective spheres of influence. The essence behind these foreign policies was to clear the way for domestic business groups to open up the world market and maximize economic benefits. After the Cold War, the occurrence of the "9.11" incident changed the foreign policy of the United States from "anti-communism" to combating international terrorism. However, this change of the United States did not completely eliminate the breeding ground of terrorism and adjust the relations among countries in the capacity of "world police" as the world expected. Although the United States has in fact made some contribution to the fight against terrorism, in reality, it is still trying to safeguard American hegemony, that is, it is only standing on the side of those who are in favor of itself. For example, in the military operation launched by the United States in 2003 on the grounds that Iraq was hiding weapons of mass destruction to support terrorists, the United States never searched for the so-called weapons of mass destruction, and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict starting in 2023, the United States has never shown any obvious criticism

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of Israel's bullying of the weak and its serious violation of humanitarianism in the conduct of the war, instead, it has provided military assistance to its ally, Israel. As Chomsky argues, “Because of the limited information available to ordinary Americans as a result of the propaganda that the American mainstream media has put its name to, the ‘facts’ they have are selected and described, and they remain in ‘a web of lies’ without realizing it” [2].

The United States has always boasted itself as the freest country in the world and has interfered in the affairs of other countries at will under the banner of freedom. It has also made use of the media to publicize and exaggerate its own “freedom and democracy” and to disprove the “unfreedom and undemocracy” of other countries, so as to achieve the goal of freedom bullying in the international arena. For example, the United States has been using the media to propagate all kinds of so-called real cases of no human rights in China at home and even internationally, so as to weaken China’s goodwill in the hearts of the people of the world, and to take advantage of this opportunity to maximize its self-interest. On this point, Chomsky sharply dismantled the U.S. veil of hypocrisy and exposed the hegemonic practices in the name of freedom, pointing out that “the best way to control the news is to dominate the pages with ‘truth’, or with a so-called spread that is sufficiently official to qualify as official news, and thus force the rest of the news to be postponed or simply canceled”, in this way “incessant repetition ..... turns the doctrine ..... into a fait accompli” [5]. It follows that Freedom is originally the most essential pursuit of all mankind, but it is demonized by the United States driven by interests, which makes it condescend to power and eventually forms the American hegemony, and it is not only the people of the world who suffer from this hegemony, but also the American people who gradually lose the opportunity to listen to the real world under the influence of the hegemony.

3.2. Terrorism and its propaganda

Chomsky has been working on terrorism since 1970, and in his view, “ ‘international terrorism’ and ‘war on terror’ are both propaganda terms of the U.S. government, as well as one of the key instruments of U.S. foreign policy. After the 9-11 incident, the United States tried to portray itself as the embodiment of justice and goodness and a hero who does good deeds everywhere, and portrayed the hostile countries as the embodiment of evil and the perpetrators of terrorism through words such as “terrorism”, in an attempt to deceive the masses and create social panic through the media and propaganda, so as to make the U.S. public support its domestic and foreign policies and, as a matter of course, intervene in other countries by force and destabilize the regime. domestic and foreign policies, and logically intervene by force and subvert regimes in other countries [2]. Historically, the Middle East due to its geographic location and rich oil resources has become a controversial and conflict-prone region in the international arena, but also by a variety of forces as the spoils of war, and the United States, the “big brother” naturally cannot be alone, and cannot allow their own hegemony in the world’s authority to be challenged in order to maintain their interests in the Middle East, the United States under the banner of eliminating terrorism to eliminate one after another unwilling to submit to the “terrorist countries” are the real victims of the bitter. In order to safeguard its interests in the Middle East, the United States, under the banner of eliminating terrorism, has eliminated one force after another that is unwilling to submit to it, such as overthrowing Saddam’s regime and launching the Iraq War, etc., and has fostered pro-United States forces, for example, by making Israel its agent in the Middle East, tacitly approving of Israel’s terrorist attacks on the Palestinians, and providing assistance to Israel in the name of humanitarianism. This is one of the methods of implementation of U.S. interventionism summarized by Chomsky, i.e., supporting its affiliated countries or organizations to carry out terrorism against other countries or regions [2]. The

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public only knows through the media that the United States is eliminating terrorists for the people of the world, but they do not know that these "terrorists" are created by the foreign policy of the United States, and that the events of September 11th are the strongest proof that the United States is being retaliated against because of this, and that "national security" and "war" are the most important elements of the United States' policy. The 9-11 incident is the strongest proof that the U.S. has been retaliated against for this reason, and "national security" and "war" have once become powerful symbols for the U.S. to divert the attention of the public and coordinate the internal and external people's hearts and minds to face the enemy. However, underneath this coat, the U.S. used media propaganda to deceive people at home and abroad and to cover up the naked reality of its own use of the "war on terror" to further expand its own power, and for the innocent people who were displaced because of the U.S. military intervention, the U.S. intervention was no different from any other act of terrorism [2].

Freedom seems to be precarious and to lose its authenticity under the weight of power. As the English novelist Orwell once questioned, "Why is it that men seem to know so little of the facts, though the evidence of reality is so abundant?" According to Chomsky, "At the heart of Orwell's problem is the ability of social institutions and political forces to shackle people's cognitive abilities, and the ability of ideology to close their horizons". In today's world, the world is a place where people have no idea of what is going on [6]. In today's social constructs, especially the more democratic societies, the power of the people and public opinion is immense and vital to the state, mastering public opinion is equivalent to mastering the hearts and minds of the people, and controlling the media is tantamount to controlling public opinion, the ruling class fears the power of the people, and therefore is more likely to utilize the media to control the minds of the people, and the people are weak, and very few people will be able to fight with a mantis against a flood, which makes it convenient for the ruling class to use the media to manipulate the people, as Chomsky argues, "the 'more liberal and democratic' the government is, the more necessary it is to control the minds of the people in order to ensure their obedience to the rulers", [6] before the ruling class' position becomes more secure. The independence and weakness of the populace is similar to that of the media, but what differs from the populace is the statehood of the media. The fact that the media is generated by the state and depends on the ruling class for a stable and reliable source of information determines that the media is actually a state tool to safeguard the interests of the ruling class. Although the U.S. government constantly emphasizes the independence and objectivity of the media, in essence the media cannot survive independently of the ruling class and the maximization of capital efficiency. This also reveals why freedom, as the most essential pursuit of human beings, is gradually destroyed under the oppression of power, and why human beings, who have the ability to fully understand the external world, are uncontrollable everywhere, [6] all of which is attributed to human beings' desire for power and greed, and war, terrorism, etc., are the carriers of such desire.

4. Conclusion

Chomsky not only interprets the U.S. diplomatic strategy from the media and political point of view, but also helps the public to understand the U.S. government from the language aspect in a deeper level. In Chomsky's political diatribe, the details explain that the U.S. government officially blurs the truth, shapes or flips the country's image by adding rhetoric and metaphors and other types of "grips" and adds credibility to the content through the cutting of news fragments and the propaganda of the media to change news from "objective" to "subjective", thus achieving the goal of guiding the news from 'objective' to "subjective", as a means of guiding the public to understand the U.S. government. The news is cut up by news fragments and media propaganda to increase the credibility

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of the content, so that the news is changed from “objective” to “subjective”, so as to achieve the guidance and mastery of social opinion. The “anti-terrorism” that the United States cares most about is a product of the linguistic grip. In its foreign policy, it has turned black and white and opened up the “American style of counterterrorism”, which is unique to the United States, i.e., interfering in the regimes of other countries in order to gain its own interests under the righteous vest of “counterterrorism” and enhancing the blind worship of the ignorant people to the U.S. government by playing with rhetoric [7]. The media is the biggest accomplice of “American-style counterterrorism”, as Chomsky argues, “The media uncritically relayed government propaganda about the threat to U.S. security posed by the United States. The media uncritically relayed government propaganda about the threat to U.S. security posed by Iraq, its involvement in 9-11 and other terror, etc. Some amplified the message on their own. Others simply relayed it. Others simply relayed it” [8].

Although Chomsky’s research on American political revelations and media communication is intense and to the point, the macroscopic nature of his theories leaves much to be desired. For example, although Chomsky’s models of propaganda are classic, he himself has to admit that they cannot explain all media phenomena, and that they need to be enriched with diversity in continuous practice [1]. Furthermore, Chomsky’s sharp critique of the American media and hegemony, though strongly resented by many, is also thought-provoking in its revelations. The double standard behavior and profit-driven nature of the U.S. government and mainstream media have made everyone deeply aware of the nature of U.S. propaganda and foreign policy, thus giving a warning in their own country’s use of the media that it should be objective, fair and factual, and maximize its role as much as possible to be the voice of the people, the voice of democracy, and the voice of truth.

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