Rhetorical Perspective of “China Practice” in the Fight Against COVID-19

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Abstract. The following paper is going to elucidate rhetorically how “China practice” can be embodied in narrative in the post-pandemic age as an attempt to dissolve divergence and establish a community of a shared future. It argues that as COVID-19, the virus, affects people’s life physically, virtually and symbolically, the rhetorical meaning of “China practice” can be a counteractive rhetorical strategy to offset the impact and restore a new order of equality, respect, trust, cooperation and commonality. “China practice” narrative as embodied rhetorical experience can be archived in the body and mind of COVID-19 community which is a worthwhile attempt to review how China has got through it and how the post-pandemic age can be apprehended. As an immediate and timely response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the narrative has shown proof and hope that by following the given way can any community contain the spread of virus, regain humanity, and strive for freedom in a desperate and decisive manner. If this pattern of activity has been proved to be effective, it can motivate others to reconsider their former perspectives, analyze the newly prescribed pattern of behavior. If things can be put in order and the world can return to normal with a new pattern, interruption and inequality can be carefully recognized and effectively alleviated. The respect for human life, the value of a shared community, the urgency of coordination and cooperation, the trump of science, the dedication and professionalism will be identified with the rhetoric of “China practice” physically, virtually and symbolically. A rhetoric of unity is hard to achieve just as the hard-won victory over the virus. It’s positive that communities of a shared future can act together to create a sense of order, shape the stronger, inclusive, and humane psyche of the post-pandemic generation.

1. Introduction

This paper is going to elucidate rhetorically how “China practice” can be embodied in narrative in the post-pandemic age as an attempt to dissolve divergence and establish a community of a shared future. The paper argues that as COVID-19, the virus, affects people’s life physically, virtually and symbolically, the rhetorical meaning of “China practice” can be a counteractive rhetorical strategy to offset the impact and restore a new order of equality, respect, trust, cooperation and commonality.

In a special issue released by Philosophy & Rhetoric, scholars from Loyola Marymount University have showcased the way viruses have infected people: physically, virtually and symbolically in the midst of COVID-19. I found the three aspects inspirational and reasonable to be employed in the rhetoric of “China practice”. But I would argue that despite interruption, inequality and ambiguity, order, commonality and transparency can be discovered rhetorically in the embodied
narrative of “China practice”. All the narrative of “China practice” under discussion will be based on the articles available on China Daily website [1]. It can be exemplified briefly as follows: Ying Shou Jin Shou (to leave no one unattended/to leave no one behind), Bu Xi Yi Qie Dai Jia (to protect people’s lives and health at all costs), Dui Kou Zhi Yuan (counterpart assistance), Ju Guo Zhi Li (a whole nation fighting as one), and Lian Fang Lian Kong (joint prevention and control).

As Mailoux regards embodied experience as narrative and narrative as embodied experience [2], this essay focuses on “China practice” narrative as embodied rhetorical experience archived in the body and mind of COVID-19 community in an attempt to review how China has got through it and how the post-pandemic age can be apprehended. The narrative of “China practice” can be analyzed as an immediate and timely response to the COVID-19 outbreak, in a three-dimensional fashion: physically, virtually and symbolically.

2. The Rhetoric of “China Practice” Towards The Virus

2.1. Physical Virus

Covid-19 is a virus, in Burkean fashion, of three levels, physical level, virtual level and symbolic level [3].

First of all, the narrative of “China practice” has been formed as a sign of equality and respect. Despite the structural inequalities and the emergency of the outbreak, “China practice” has responded to the inequality with all-out efforts and shown respect for every human life. “China practice” such as Ying Shou Jin Shou (to leave no one unattended) rhetorically formed the image of tremendous efforts, unshakable responsibility, invaluable equality. The first three make-shift hospitals were set up in only 29 hours, accommodating 4000 patients. In total, 16 makeshift hospitals were set up in Wuhan, treating 12,000 patients with mild symptoms. By the end of February hospitals in Wuhan treating COVID-19 patients increased to 48 from only 2 in January, from patients waiting for beds to beds waiting for patients in hardly any time at all. On February 17, a three-day door to door inspection plan was launched in Wuhan’s 3300 communities and villages. The respect given to every life, the necessity to satisfy the growing population of patients, and the quickness to expand hospital capacity contribute to an order of value and a prescribed pattern. Such a pattern and order can be quite persuasive in motivating people to take actions. Therefore, the narrative of “China practice” such as “Ying Shou Jin Shou” succeeds in creating a sense of order and recognizing equality.

The early COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan is closely connected with the bodily pain and struggle of the infected either as an individual or a community. A rhetoric of unity is hard to achieve just as the hard-won victory over the virus. At least, this narrative has shown proof and hope that by following the given way can any community contain the spread of virus, regain humanity, and strive for freedom in a desperate and decisive manner. As “China practice” in the case of “Ju Quan Guo Zhi Li (a whole nation fighting as one)” rhetorically transforms the physical pain into physical reliance, support and confidence. It is recognizable that rates of infection are higher in Wuhan, Hubei province at large. Rather than sluggishness or incompetence to face the challenge, higher rates are alarming siren calls for the intensified focus and greater efforts. As the normal livelihood of people is in jeopardy, the united efforts of a nation predict the maintenance of order in the community. The bodily pain and struggle of the infected has been alleviated as the medical staff and resource arrived in a joint effort to fight together. Bodily memories of staying at home, correctly
wearing masks, keeping social distancing form the rhetoric of the pandemic as interruptive, abnormal and compulsive. The social interruption in bodily terms also shapes the rhetoric as both collectively distanced and collaboratively connected. The narrative of “Ju Guo Zhi Li” rhetorically serves as an embodiment of collective courage and wisdom in the face of the alienating virus. Though the bodily memory of the hardest-hit population in China can be recorded as painful, isolating, and hopeless as virus hits physically. If the virus was handled both physically and physiologically through the narrative mentioned above can unite the community and restore order in people’s body and mind. From rhetorical perspective, the overwhelming narrative of “China practice” has been structured as an immediate responsiveness to a challenging exigency downplaying desperation and frustration. The physical pain the virus inflicted can be possibly alleviated if substantial actions have been taken to treat the affected and curb the spread of the virus. Physical aspects were taken good care of with unified force, swift mobilization and top-down determination in the rhetoric of the above “China practice”. If things can be put in order and the world can return to normal with a new pattern, interruption and inequality can be carefully recognized and effectively alleviated. The respect for human life, the value of a shared community, the urgency of coordination and cooperation, the trump of science, the dedication and professionalism will be identified with the rhetoric of “China practice” physically. Viruses not only exposed people to physical pain and struggle, solidified personal quarantine, bombarded people with constant interruption but also physically challenged the bodily respect and values, clarified the very basic bodily relief and comfort, and oriented towards human survival and bond.

2.2. Virtual Virus

Viruses have affected people physically and virtually ranging from real-time space to cyberspace. The following part elucidates the effect of COVID-19 in cyberspace and particularly exemplifies how the narrative of “China practice” manages to strengthen the bond and unity, reduce the side effect and transform the virtuality of cyberspace into substantial force.

At the initial stage of outbreak in Wuhan, cyberspace rhetoric has been characterized as limited information, ambiguity and uncertainty. Online misinformation and doubts exacerbated the emergency and aroused fear and disorder in public as “these sudden, infinite interruptions to our individual being” took a long time for people to comprehend. As cyberspace is always a double-edged sword, it could be effective and swift, once proper governance and science-based response have been put in place. Misinformation was soon transformed to transparency and guidance in an explosive and routinely manner. Scientific and up-dated knowledge of the virus is being produced, circulated, and monitored in the virtual world. The virtual world is not only about technology but also technology users who largely rely on the technology to remain connected, updated and guided. Physical distancing and isolation forced people to turn to virtual space to make sense of the pandemic. Digital rhetoric becomes the storehouse of information amidst the pandemic which connects and unifies the isolated and the worried, the hopeless and helpless. Even if people who are not infected or put under quarantine can feel isolated because of the lockdown. The online delivery service not only makes life easier by supplying daily necessity but also alleviates the tension with convenience and efficiency. The whole community relies on the virtual space for help, guidance, convenience, and readiness. For the general public who are asked to stay at home to save lives, they turn to delivery service, online shopping, and online supermarkets, even convenience stores to get daily necessities; they turn to social media APP to keep informed of the outbreak and keep in touch with their families and friends afar and stuck; they can even make the best use of the
online APP to entertain, exercise, and play. Though the virtual world can be dominated by virus-related stuff, either scientific advice or fake news, the way we access the presented virus-related stuff could be essential. If it is the scientific advice that is going viral, the whole community would benefit from it. If it is the fake new that is going viral, it would bring harm to the whole community. Moreover, not only the hardest-hit areas rely on the web to solve the problem and tackle the challenge locally, but also nationwide, even worldwide, all due to the virtual space.

The narrative of Dui Kou Zhi Yuan (counterpart assistance) is a very good case in point. The rhetoric is meant to mobilize all the resources throughout China to help cities all over Wuhan in Hubei province. 19 provinces and municipalities have been mobilized and paired with 16 cities in Hubei. These cities were also hit by the virus and was short in resources. Help from the provinces and municipalities makes one-on-one battle less of a burden because the support and resources have already been considered if not mobilized. One-on-one assistance was ready and fast once the need was identified. Physically, the narrative of the Wuhan city or Hubei province, on the lockdown, could be isolating and alien imaginably, as people were no longer allowed to move freely, denied access and remained physically stagnant. If viruses know no boundaries, “Dui Kou Zhi Yuan” makes its way to places in great need of help and relief and breaks down the barriers with a heavy blow. “Dui Kou Zhi Yuan” can be put into practice more efficiently and conveniently. For example, the shortage of masks can be identified immediately and transmitted to the regulators to stimulate mass production. As divergent perspectives were presented, “China practice” such as the narrative of “Dui Kou Zhi Yuan” will be archived in our collective internet history.

For another, the narrative of Lian Fang Lian Kong (joint prevention and control) optimized the technology and the convenience of the virtual world. A top down and an inclusive system created by 32 government departments was used to fight the virus. This is called joint prevention and control. On January 21, these government departments work together to create an emergency response team covering a wide range of actions from medical treatments, virus control and vaccine development, telling people how to wear a mask which number they should call if they have a fever and how to wash their hands correctly. Not only online news conferences but also official subscriptions have kept people informed of the overall plan, science-based and targeted response, and effective measures. The virus invades human domain unnoticeably swift while the virtual virus cannot go viral as fast the virus itself due to the joint control and prevention of the virtual virus. Together with the substantial measures in physical world, both the CODID-19 virus and the virtual virus can be put under control. It is said that the goal of the system is to protect the people and curb the spread of the outbreak. In the narrative of “Lian Fang Lian Kong”, China's market regulator licensed companies capable of making masks to expand mass production. The department also ensures that the retail price remained affordable. By the end of February, the daily output of masks surpassed 100 million so that the masks could arrive at hospitals as soon as possible. The Ministry of Transport had to open a green route by sea, land and air. Guidelines from the health commission showed medics and individuals how to make sure every mask was used professionally. Regulators, producers and consumers rely heavily on the web-based network to make things work smoothly. As a study published in the *Journal of Population Economics* estimated that 1.4 million infections and 56000 deaths may have been avoided because of the public health measures imposed in China, this system not only rhetorically but also practically proved to be highly effective.

Though “interactions happening across digital space exacerbate the symptoms of the pandemic at the same time that they attempt to alleviate them”[4], the narrative of cohesive efforts by
governments, medical workers, scientists and public has reassured us that the virus can be defeated, and humanity will win this battle in retrospect. With courage, resolve and compassion which lit the dark hour, we have confronted the disaster head on [5]. The risk of worsening the symptoms of the pandemic in the digital space has been effective lowered as the rhetoric of China practice stands for power, stands for determination, stands for actions, which all originate from the original faith in human equality, human happiness, human security and human dignity.

2.3. Symbolic Virus

So far, the narrative of “China Practice” has been proved to be influential in physical and virtual aspects. The physical virus and virtual would give up in the face of the persuasive narrative of “China practice”. More profoundly and symbolically, the narrative can touch upon the psyche of people and help to shape the mindset of future generation. If Camus’s The Plague has played an importantly conciliatory role in making sense of the current pandemic, and perhaps what it can continue to do is inspire hope in the face of global crisis [6]. The fact that viruses don’t discriminate has exposed an innate and inescapable vulnerability of life: mortality. Viruses have awakened the vulnerability hidden deep at the bottom of people’s heart and caught us off guard. Human internal inadequacies are our mutual enemy in our pandemic politics, as they are Dr. Rieux’s. The inescapable reality of COVID-19 should provide common ground—a rare moment of worldwide identification [7]. A moment of identification doesn’t necessarily lead to a community of equality or justify coordination and cooperation. It only serves as a touchstone to distinguish order from chaos, commonality from disparity, and connection from isolation. The narrative of “China practice” takes it into full consideration and pays special respect to human life and equality so as to form a rhetoric of unity.

To be specific, “Ying Shou Jin Shou” (to leave no one unattended/to leave no one behind) narrates the equal and desperate measure taken to respect life, to protect health and to safeguard human vulnerability. Rather than scapegoating or blaming, life has been treated respectfully, seriously and equally regardless of age, occupation and identity. The narrative is characterized by the tremendous size of the damaged population, at the same time, as the demanding task of leaving no one behind. If the overwhelming size of affected population cannot be properly looked after at the beginning, swift measures, nationwide mobilization and strong sense of responsibility would clear the way and strive to meet the need of the emergency and minimize the side effect of the outbreak. The narrative of “Ying Shou Jin Shou” fully considers the difference and polarities and pays special respect to human life and equality, eventually help to present a sense of unity in the rhetorical atmosphere.

Moreover, “Bu Xi Yi Qie Dai Jia” (to protect people’s lives and health at all costs) tells the story of putting people and life first and eventually builds up the confidence in human inadequacy in a sweeping manner. In accordance with human rights, the basic human right is to live. Therefore, to meet the basic need, to guarantee the basic human right, the price has to be paid no matter how high it could be. The average cost of a severe case was 150000 Yuan with extreme cases costing over 1 million. The Chinese government allocated 150 billion Yuan of funds to epidemic control by the end of April. The narrative of force and determination has been formed. The narrative of “Bu Xi Yi Qie Dai Jia” tells us human life trumps economics to combat the virus. People are treated with respect rather than the killing of the virus in an inhumane manner. Dr. Rieux says about the plague, “The only means of fighting a plague is—common decency,” as it is imperative that “We must use
this moment to recognize our inequalities and our privileges to take a step toward changing our polarized status quo.” [8] “Ju Guo Zhi Li” (a whole nation fighting as one) pinpoints cohesion of a nation and unity of its people which can back up the people’s war in Chinese context. Even though it is the virus which should be eradicated, the way the virus can be eradicated should be delicate because the virus-carrier is a human. Therefore, human rights and human dignity should be taken into consideration in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. It is recognizable that we must work together with common decency to defeat and survive. As a community of a shared future, we will share weal and woe.

If rhetoric has been defined by Kenneth Burke as any form of symbolic activity, that is, any use of symbols to motivate others to see the world in a given way and act in response to that perspective. The narrative of “China practice” as a whole can rhetorically symbolize the victory on the basis of unified force, swift mobilization and top-down determination. A rhetoric of unity is hard to achieve just as the hard-won victory over the virus. At least, this narrative has shown proof and hope that by following the given way can any community contain the spread of virus, regain humanity, and strive for freedom in a desperate and determined manner. If this pattern of activity proved to be effective, it can motivate others to reconsider their former perspectives, analyze the newly prescribed pattern of behavior. If things can be put in order and the world can return to normal with a new pattern, interruption and inequality can be carefully recognized and effectively alleviated. The respect for human life, the value of a shared community, the urgency of coordination and cooperation, the trump of science, the dedication and professionalism will be identified with the rhetoric of “China practice” physically, virtually and symbolically. It is positive that communities of a shared future can act together to create a sense of order, shape the stronger, inclusive, and humane psyche of the post-pandemic generation. Viruses not only exposed people to fatal weakness and vulnerability, solidified personal separation, indulged people in unusual interruption but also challenged humans’ set of core values, clarified the common grounds of cooperation and oriented towards common decency of mankind.

3. Conclusion

“China practice” exemplified by Ying Shou Jin Shou (to leave no one unattended/to leave no one behind), Bu Xi Yi Qie Dai Jia (to protect people’s lives and health at all costs), Dui Kou Zhi Yuan (counterpart assistance), Ju Guo Zhi Li (a whole nation fighting as one), and Lian Fang Lian Kong (joint prevention and control) has rhetorically offered an insight into the shaping of mankind amid a pandemic, the forming a community of shared future which shares weal and woe, and the restoration of order in the post-pandemic era. This specific rhetoric in Chinese context has symbolized the key to the hard-won battle: a unified force, swift mobilization and top-down determination. It could definitely call for the respect for human life, the value of a shared community, the urgency of coordination and cooperation, the trump of science, the dedication and professionalism as physical viruses, virtual viruses, and symbolic viruses surrender to “China practice” from rhetorical perspective. A new order of commonality, humanity and coordination is on its way to be restored so as to eventually defeat this deadly, inhumane, novel and alien COVID-19. It is the symbolic message and stimulating rhetoric which hopefully motivates and persuades people to take coordinated actions, identify the common decency of mankind and finally bring life back on the right track.
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