

DECONSTRUCTION OF HEGEMONIC RESISTANCE IN THE DOCUMENTARY AMERICAN FACTORY

Bernard Realino Danu Kristianto
Universitas Ciputra Surabaya
Email : bernard.kristianto@ciputra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

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Capitalism permeates all cultural and ideological contexts of everyone, including those who consciously uphold the principles of socialism. A Chinese company called Fuyao, is a company engaged in the production of car glass on an international scale. In an effort to increase the company's production, Fuyao Glass America is immersed in the hegemony of capitalism in the midst of intercultural communication problems that actually become important issues and must be resolved internally in the factory. The context of capitalist hegemony along with ideological conflicts and intercultural communication is what the documentary American Factory depicts. Using Teun Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, researcher wanted to look at the text, cognition and context as a whole that took place in the documentary. Researcher found in depth at the text manifested from dialogue, images, scenes and visualizations, the cognition manifested from the actors of filmmaking including the production house that houses its distribution, as well as the context of intercultural communication issues and ideological battles that exist in it. As a result of this study, the documentary American Factory is a representation of the Chinese version of capitalism presented through policies and doctrines to the workers of Fuyao Glass America company in an effort to increase company productivity and capital investment in the United States.

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1. Introduction

The trade war between America and China has increasingly surfaced and gained international attention since the leadership of the United States president Donald Trump raised the price of imports of goods entering the United States from China. This triggered a similar response from China by raising tariffs on incoming goods from the United States. In that phase, a trade war occurred between the United States and

China, although the implementation of the import tariff increase was effective in mid-July 2018 (Arisanto and Adi Wibawa 2021). This situation is the impact of the global economy that hit the United States. Globalization is the basis for China's economic strengthening over America, on the one hand American policy before Trump focused on capitalism and globalization, while in the Trump era, government policy was directed into domestic affairs and stigmatized by globalization and China's economic dominance in America itself.

In an effort to focus on domestic investment, the condition of the automotive industry in America has deteriorated. General Motors is one of the automotive companies that has experienced a financial decline since 2009 when the United States was hit by a financial crisis. The situation worsened when the era of the American and Chinese trade war intensified during the pandemic began to sweep the world. In the bankruptcy situation, General Motors decided to reduce the number of workers and close a number of plants in the United States and in other countries. As a result of the closure of the General Motor plant, many residents, especially in Ohio, are unemployed. Over time, the original Chinese glass company, Fuyao, set up a factory in Ohio, renovated and restructured the infrastructure of the former factory and hired employees who had been laid off by General Motor.

Fuyao's company's efforts to recruit employees and build its business are packaged in a film called *American Factory*. The film, which was made launched in 2019, tells the story of the gamble of a glass company from China called Fuyao in building a factory in the United States. The clash of communication between Chinese and American work cultures wrapped in factory activities in producing car glass is one of the discourses presented by the film. Intercultural conflicts further came to the fore when Fuyao's company positioned Native Chinese workers as factory supervisors, and Native American employees as laborers. The issue of prestige wrapped in intercultural communication conflicts is the background to Fuyao's productivity problems as an automotive glass manufacturer. Through the film, the ideological context of *American Factory* filmmakers leads the audience to enter into the problems of communication between different cultures as well as the process, adapting to one another for the purpose of the industry. In an attempt to discourse the constraints of intercultural communication in a corporate organization, the final conclusion of the film implies the presence of capitalism in all cultural contexts, regardless of where the culture originates, capitalization permeates all lines of people's lives. In the context of hegemony, power can be represented by the economic power of the owners of capital, when associated with the film *American Factory*, Fuyao's organizational structure and the ideology inherent in it dominates American workers. This effort to exercise complete control over human resources is present in the doctrine of company leaders and agents when describing the characteristics of Americans to Chinese workers. Instead of adapting communication and interaction in work activities, Fuyao as a global-scale company carries out capitalist hegemony which is manifested in efforts to increase factory productivity, although the problem of intercultural communication is an important issue that must be resolved. The context of capitalist hegemony along with ideological conflicts and intercultural communication is what the film *American Factory* depicts. Therefore, the researcher wanted to see the entire plot and context of the film using Teun Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis. The film review process uses Teun Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, starting from the micro components of the

film's structure, namely dialogues and scenes that show intercultural communication conflicts and problems between workers, supervisors, and factory leaders.

Van Dijk's term of discourse analysis explains that critical discourse analysis becomes a general label for the study of text and language, emerging from criticism of linguistics, semiotic criticism and in general from socio-political consciousness and other means of investigation of language, discourse and communication as the case in many scopes, approaches, and subdisciplines within language and discourse studies.

The study of this discourse derives from critical linguistic analysis. Penetrated into other social sciences, such as critical semiotic analysis, language, discourse, communication, and other social sciences. Although originally derived from the discussion of linguistic discourse, it does not close the opportunity for other social sciences to be researched.

Teun A. Van Dijk chose the term critical discourse studies to replace the term critical discourse analysis because this study involves not only critical analysis, but also critical theory and its critical application (Haryatmoko 2016). The basic assumption of critical discourse studies is that language is used for a variety of functions and language has consequences. It can be to command, influence, describe, palpate, manipulate, move the group or persuade. Every use of language has consequences both foreseen and unexpected. So it depends on the meaning, even though the meaning is directed by the syntactic elements (Haryatmoko 2016). Van Dijk also focused his studies on the strategic role of discourse in the process of distribution and reproduction of the influence of hegemony or certain powers. One important element in the process of analyzing power relations is the pattern of access to public discourse of community groups. Theoretically, we need cognition from forms of society, science, ideology and various other social representations related to social mindsets so that the relationship between hegemony and discourse can be clearly seen, including the relationship of individuals with society, as well as microstructures with macros in that layer (Sugiyanto 2023).

2. Method

According to van Dijk, discourse analysis has a dual purpose: a systematic and descriptive theoretical structure and strategy at various levels and written oral discourse, seen both as a textual object and as a form of socio-cultural practice, interaction and relationships. The nature of this text speaks to the relevant structure of cognitive, social, cultural, and historical contexts. In short, the study of text analysis in context. This model is often referred to as "social cognition". The term was actually adopted from the field approach of social psychology, mainly to explain the structure and process of forming texts. Discourse is described as having three dimensions, namely text, social cognition and social context. The essence of van Dijk's analysis is to combine these three dimensions in a single analysis. In the dimension of the text studied is how the structure of the text and discourse strategies are used to emphasize a particular theme. At the level of social cognition, the process of producing discourse texts involves the individual cognition of the author. Meanwhile, aspects of social context according to Eriyanto (in (Lado 2014)) study the building of discourse that develops in society regarding a problem.

Van Dijk sees the text as consisting of various structures, each of which supports each other. He divided it into three levels, namely:

1. Macrostructure; that is, it is the global / general meaning of a text that can be understood by looking at the topic of a text.
2. Superstructure; is the outline of a text. How the structure and elements are arranged in a text as a whole.
3. Microstructure; That is the meaning of discourse that can be observed by analyzing the words, sentences, propositions, subsentences used.
 - a. Syntactic elements
The syntactic element is one of the important elements used to imply ideology. In other words, through a certain syntactic structure, readers can grasp the intent behind news sentences. Through syntactic structure, text creators can portray certain actors or events negatively or positively. Some important things to note in syntactic elements include: coherence (interweaving between sentences / stories), conditional coherence (the use of proposition that explains facts / text), distinguishing coherence (how two events or facts are to be distinguished), denial (how to hide what you want to express implicitly), sentence form (related to logical thinking, namely the principle of causality), and pronouns (manipulating language with creating an imaginative community).
 - b. Semantic Elements (local meaning)
This semantic element is closely related to lexicon and syntax elements because the use of certain lexicons and syntactic structures in news can give rise to certain meanings. Discourse elements that are classified into semantic elements, among others: background (the part that can affect the semantics (meaning) that one wants to display), detail (control of information displayed by someone), intent (seeing explicit and implicit information), and presupposition (questions used to support the meaning of a text).
 - c. Lexicon elements
Lexicon elements are concerned with the selection of diction. The choice of diction has been known to express both ideology and persuasion, as is the case with "*terrorists*" and "*freedom fighters*". How the same actor is portrayed with two different dictions has implications for the reader's understanding of the actor.
 - d. Rhetorical Elements
The element of rhetoric deals with the use of repetition, alliteration, metaphor that serves as *ideology control*. When a person is less favorable information about a particular actor is made less conspicuous while information about other actors is emphasized. In other words, this rhetoric is used to give positive or negative emphasis to actors or events in the news. These elements include: graphics (to give what is emphasized or highlighted or meaningful to be considered important by someone who can be observed from the text), Metaphors (The use of colloquial expressions, proverbs, sayings, ancestral admonitions, ancient words, even scripture expressions used to reinforce messages).

According to van Dijk, although it consists of several elements, all of these elements are a unity, interconnected and support one another. The global meaning of a text (theme) is supported by the outline of the text, and ultimately the choice of words and sentences used.

3. Results and Discussion

The macro structure of the American Factory film can be seen from several activities and relationships that exist between American and Chinese workers, workers with leaders, and leaders with company owners.

Fuyao Glass America Company itself is a company founded by Cao Dewang, known as a Chinese businessman. He is the chairman of Fuyao Group, one of the world's largest glass manufacturing companies. In the days after General Motors closed the plant in Ohio, America, Fuyao renovated and opened the Fuyao Glass America plant. New hope arises because of investment from China to America worth 500 million dollars. Thousands of workers who had been unemployed were again absorbed. As a company originating from China, Fuyao's leadership puts forward the principle of a proper work culture in China. Although the principle of the earth being footed, the sky upheld was also put forward, but it seems that the ambition to create business as well as become an agent of China's greatness in the globalization of markets and industries, trumps everything so that the implementation of management policies and the relationship established between workers and leaders does not run harmoniously in the future.

The problem of differences in work culture between America and China is the main source of company problems that are the cause of declining factory productivity and company losses, especially because Fuyao leaders bring hundreds of Chinese workers to train and supervise American workers. At the beginning of the establishment of the factory, Fuyao's leadership had optimism in terms of unifying the two major cultures (America and China), but in the process it actually emphasized that there was a very deep gap dividing the American and Chinese cultures. The issue of trade unions emerged as one of the hopes for a solution to the gap. Fuyao's management, which is dominated by ethnic Chinese and has a cultural background principle and communist ideology, does not see the existence of trade unions as one of the instruments of harmonization of workers and companies in Fuyao Glass America. One problem is precisely contrary to the principles applied in Fuyao China, where the leader of Fuyao in China also serves as the head of the trade union and the leader of the Fuyao communist party.

The superstructure of the American Factory film can be examined from the framework of the film's storyline itself. **Opening:** The documentary opens with a scene of the closure of General Motor's plant in Dayton, Ohio on December 23, 2008. More than 10,000 workers on board were forced to accept termination due to the company's bankruptcy.

The film scene continues with the construction of new infrastructure in 2010 which is prepared to support the operation of the Fuyao brand car glass manufacturing plant. The title American Factory appears as the beginning of the core story of this film. At the beginning of the preparation for the operationalization of the plant, Fuyao's company offered jobs to the surrounding community to join and work with them, where company representatives stated that Fuyao has developed in the world, from China and is currently expanding in America. Cultural unification between China and America is undeniably certain to occur considering globalization and company development is being carried out. The opening ceremony was also shown by Fuyao's chairman, Cao Dewang and United States senator Sherrod Brown.

Language and cultural barriers between America and China have always arisen in factory activity, and they have affected factory productivity. Although both sides are

constantly pursuing activities to create a close bond between them, minor conflicts related to language always arise and affect the performance of workers in any technical issues of the glassmaking process.

In the conflict and communication problems between the two cultures, there was also the issue of trade unions echoed by some workers, until then supported by a number of other workers. Chairman Cao himself had the principle that trade unions would only reduce work efficiency in the company he owned. In fact, he threatened, if a union appeared, then the factory would be closed. In that situation, American workers feel pressured in the middle position, among the high needs of Chinese workers, because of perceived more efficient and productivity targets for high customer satisfaction. With the high feasibility and operational standards of the plant on the part of occupational safety agencies, American workers feel exhausted, their job safety ignored, while production demands are constantly imposed in order to achieve company goals.

Problem after problem resurfaced when American workers began to feel the lack of safety standards that should be applied at the Fuyao Glass America plant as applied at other factories in America. The issue of occupational safety began to surface and attract media attention. At least many workers began to dare to take to the streets to demand the existence of trade unions as a solution to the problem of treatment they considered unfair. Chairman Cao took a stand by replacing directors and managers who he said could not defuse the situation. He considered that American directors and managers should be expected to defuse the situation and union uprisings and have a positive impact on the company's productivity. He thinks many American workers have a certain sentiment not only for companies, but for China in general.

Chairman Cao restructured the management of Fuyao Glass America by appointing a new president, he hoped Fuyao would move in a new and better direction. The gap between American and Chinese workers and the work system implemented in the company has made some American workers believe that unions are the solution and hope for change. Workers are faced with difficult problems. On the Chinese worker side, they have high motivation to work and self-development with the company but are limited by language barriers and differences in work ethic. On the American worker side, they are divided into two camps, some have fears of job loss, some consider their performance to be unappreciated by companies. Outside the factory, many people, including former workers, protested and persuaded workers to support Fuyao's union. Inside the factory, the company's management made use of leaflets pasted on the walls of the factory wall and T-shirts worn by Chinese workers bearing narratives to reject the Fuyao union.

The film closes with a public vote showing 60% of workers choosing not to join a union. Over time, the company's management also improved by changing production styles using automation and robotic equipment that replaced human labor. At the end of the story, the film presents scenes of workers doing roll time home and walking out of the factory after finishing work. The scene is accompanied by a written narrative that contains future challenges where there will be more than 357 million workers lost their jobs due to automation systems, especially in manufacturing.

The microstructure of this film can be seen from the elements that arise from the dialogue and scenes contained in the film, both related to intercultural communication, as well as power relations between capital owners, company leaders, and Fuyao glass factory workers.

One of the **syntactic elements** is the conditional **coherence element** shown in the *voice over* of Fuyao Glass America Vice President, Dave Burrows, who said,

"The chairman said, from the beginning this is an American company. This is Fuyao Glass America. So, it has to be all American, treated like an American company."

Wong as Furnace Engineer said,

"Because of language barriers and cultural differences, it's hard to quickly grasp everyone's ideas."

Chairman Cao also told the directors,

"If there is a union, I will shut down" "they continue to disrupt my production" "losing money is worse than the union". Then he told John Gauttier "John, if you want to keep the director's finger, listen to my advice."

These sentences are sentences that have a causality relationship.

The second element in the microstructure is the semantic element. Jimmy Wang as *vice president* of Fuyao said,

"I paired Americans and Chinese. the Americans are the main operators, watched by the Chinese", "They are slow. Their fingers are fat".

The sentence has the meaning that because of fat fingers, American workers become slow and cannot reach the expected production targets.

In one Chinese worker training session, the speaker laid out some American habits, saying,

"America is a place to let your personality be free".

The presumptive sentence could mean that according to the Chinese, Americans highly glorify the principles of liberalism, democracy and everyone's personal rights.

The third element is the rhetorical element. Chairman Cao said,

"Where the earth stands, there the heavens are upheld".

The proverb was addressed to Jimmy Wang as *vice president* of Fuyao that he valued local culture, in that sense, Chinese workers and Fuyao management are immigrants who are obliged to respect the indigenous culture that already exists in Ohio, America.

When viewed in terms of **social cognition**, American Factory is a documentary directed by Julia Reichert and Steven Bognart. The film, which was made from February 2015 to 2017, produced at least 1200 hours of video footage. The film is distributed by Netflix through the production house Higher Ground Production owned by Barack and Michelle Obama. Julia Reichert and Steven Bognart previously made the documentary The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant in 2009, which tells the story of a factory closed by General Motors and the impact on workers and residents around Ohio, America. With the achievements of the film, it is possible that Julia Reichert and Steven Bognart do not need to do research again because they already understand the subject of the film (Dony Hermansyah and Kesenian Jakarta 2018), in this case, the people and workers of the Fuyao factory, most of whom were General Motor factory workers, were about ten years earlier.

Separately, in interviews with Julia Reichert and Steven Bognart, they told Barack and Michelle Obama that they wanted to present reality as it is while maintaining

neutrality. They want to present the reality that the hardships of American workers at Fuyao Glass America are a portrait of workers with all the difficulties of life and the challenges of globalization (Reichert 2019). The presence of Barack Obama in the production of this documentary, legitimizes his concern for economic issues in America, even though he is no longer serving as president of the United States. On one occasion when Julia Reichert won her Oscar, she also stated on stage, "... People wear uniforms, set clocks, and make a better life for the family. Working people face difficulties and it is getting harder today. We believe that it will be better when all the workers in the world unite." (Goldsberry 2020).

In the **social context dimension**, the cultural clash presented in the American Factory documentary should have been predicted in advance. This should already be evident from the characteristics of work culture that are indeed far different between America and China. America itself since the era of revolution has set the working hours of manufacturing companies where most factories are no more than eight hours a day (Rosner and Markowitz 2020). Unlike the case with countries in Asia such as China, their workers even work in factories for more than 60 hours per week, which means a minimum of 12 hours in a day if only 5 days during one week (Liu et al. 2019). From this different work culture, it can be suspected that there will be a *gap* between different ways and systems among workers of different cultures. The film also shows how Chinese workers perceive American workers as very slow and less productive. On the other hand, Chinese workers are considered accustomed to working like machines, so even on Sundays they are still willing to come to work.

American Factory is the first Oscar-winning film distributed by Barack and Michelle Obama's Higher Ground. Obama himself saw the film when it was screened at the Sundance film festival. That is, the American Factory film at the beginning of its creation was not directly intended to be commercialized. But what deserves a deeper look is the position and role of Barack Obama as a former president who has a business line in the field of film media. In this position, Obama may see political and economic opportunities while having a moral responsibility to contribute significantly to society in the field of film media.

From the time the film begins when the General Motor factory is closed and the Fuyao Glass America factory begins to be made until the end of the film when hundreds of workers walk out of the factory, the plots built into the plot of the film lead the audience to Fuyao's domination of workers, both Chinese and American. This dominance is present in every effort to increase factory productivity, in this case car glass products, which is actually the decline in factory productivity influenced by *gaps* that occur in communication between Chinese and American workers. Fuyao's management made efforts included indoctrination of Chinese workers with Americans' characteristics that were described as below the Chinese work ethic, solely for the sake of increasing the company's production.

The documentary American Factory is a portrayal of the reality of American workers dominated by Chinese capitalists. Instead of indoctrination and legitimacy of socialism in the scope of Fuyao factory workers in Ohio, America, Fuyao leaders from China actually took a radical capitalist role by exercising control over the human resources of their workers. The role of the capitalist is manifested in the speeches, policies and doctrines conveyed by the leadership of the Fuyao company to the management of Fuyao Glass America and its workers.

The foregoing is in line with the principle of typical Chinese economic dogma which believes that the economy 'trickles down'. That is, the Chinese government allows some people to become very rich in order to benefit all elements of society. China is confident that the system will bring them out of disaster in the accelerated program of the Cultural Revolution (McDonell 2021).

The loosening of the new socialist philosophy typical of China became a new ideology in the present replacing radical socialism which was no longer acceptable so that in the implementation of its policies it was 'not too socialist'. In the end, the Chinese government and society implemented two systems and ideologies at once, economic liberalism and the principle of political communism. The successful implementation of capitalist liberalism is supported by the development of globalization which inspires China to progress and adapt to existing developments.

When viewed from Derrida's concept of deconstruction, a "meaning" that we simply consume will always spread and intertwined with an open and infinite environment of intertextuality. Therefore, there is no dialectic between *intentio operis* (*intention of the work*) or *intentio lectoris* (*intention of the interpreter*) as envisioned by Umberto Eco (Barton 2013). From the context of the American Factory film work, the filmmakers clearly stated that the film was a representation of the reality of factory workers that the makers (directors and producers) often encounter in the United States (Reichert 2019). As for the audience or interpreter as Derrida, American Factory clearly presents a new format of Chinese capitalism

4. Conclusion

Finally, the documentary American Factory is a representation of the Chinese version of capitalism presented through policies and doctrines to the workers of the Fuyao Glass America company in an effort to increase company productivity and capital investment in the United States. This is in line with the basic concept of hegemony as Lenin said long before Gramsci that hegemony is a revolutionary strategy that must be implemented by the working class and its members in order to gain majority support (Siswati 2018). In the context of the documentary American Factory, Chinese and American workers are the objects of this hegemony. As a company affiliated with the Chinese state, the hegemony of Chinese capitalism is clearly displayed by the film American Factory, although in the process and implementation, raises a considerable dilemma between economic and humanist values in each of its policies.

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