

# Exploring news frames of diplomatic visits: A comparative study of Chinese and American media treatment of Vice President Xi Jinping's official tour of the US

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## **Abstract**

The United States and China draw mutual fascination as the current global superpower and an incipient one, respectively. The state visit to the US in February 2012 by Vice President Xi Jinping, who is described as the Chinese president-in-waiting in the Western press, is examined comparatively across leading US and Chinese newspapers. Framing theory is employed in the examination to ascertain different frames that have emerged in the two political cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** China–US relations, comparative study, news frame, political news, soft power.

## **Introduction**

News media play an important role in creating awareness of and shaping public understanding of political issues. The rise of China is a major issue for the United States; one that has repercussions on the US presidential election. As China's leader-in-waiting, Vice President Xi Jinping was of great interest to China watchers. His visit to the US in February 2012 offered opportunities for both the US and China to present messages to their own and each other's wider publics and political elites. Situated within a symbolic interactionist perspective, this study examines comparatively the coverage of the high-level diplomatic visit in Chinese and American media in terms of the different political cultural contexts in the two countries. The behaviour of the actors and media actions in terms of reporting this behaviour are viewed as contributing to the ongoing shaping of social reality and vice versa (Blumer 1969). Notably, the Chinese political cultural context produces official frames of issues in the media, which may be described as official in the sense that all newspapers are either government- or party-affiliated. The US political cultural context facilitates the emergence of alternative frames, which may come from a national strategic perspective. For example, the visit might be described as an exercise in 'soft power' between the two countries, with soft power being '... the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals,

and policies' (Nye 2004, p. 256). There is a mutual attraction between the US and China, despite political differences and potential strategic competition.

The visit to the US offered China the opportunity to introduce Xi Jinping to China and the world, the latter primarily through the US sector of his three-nation tour that included Ireland and Turkey. The Chinese government's objective of the introduction in China would be to gain widespread acceptance within party and governmental structures for the selection of Xi Jinping for the chairmanship of the Communist Party and for the Chinese presidency. The Chinese government's objective of the introduction in the US would be to build up Xi Jinping's profile as a world leader and his summit-level diplomatic experience, as well as to achieve specific discrete foreign policy objectives. Of course, all these objectives are interrelated and mutually supportive. But importantly, these broader objectives are achieved through the signalling of the particular attributes of firmness, friendliness and fairness.

The literature on framing theories and previous research describe variance in news frames as being largely predicated by factors such as news sources, media institutions and social background of media practice. While recognising that political cultural environments have a bearing on differences in Chinese and US media treatment of the visit, this study does not seek to make a connection here. Instead, it seeks to develop and test new categories of measuring and analysing public diplomatic behaviour. It does so by employing an inductive qualitative content analysis of selected reports in three Chinese newspapers—*People's Daily*, *China Daily* (US Edition) and *Economic Daily*—and three US newspapers—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Three research questions are proposed: 1) What was China's intended frame? 2) What were the received / locally constructed frames in US media? 3) How did the different news frames reflect the political cultures in the two countries? The first two research questions are addressed through analysis of coverage of selected Chinese official media and American mainstream media on the visit. The last research question is discussed on the basis of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the two countries. Furthermore, a conceptual approach to framing analysis is developed to examine the pattern of media coverage of political events such as diplomatic visits, as well as the assessment of the visit's fruitfulness. Five key attributes are considered when examining the visit: the 'soft' attributes of *friendliness* (towards countries and their leaders), *folksiness* (the willingness to mingle with ordinary citizens and not just peers), *fairness* (attitudes to equality and reciprocity) and *flexibility* (to adapt to circumstances), and the 'hard' attribute of *firmness* (assertiveness shown in an acceptable manner).

A country's image is influenced by its development and its development is influenced by its image. In the past decade, China has experienced phenomenal development and a transfer of wealth from the West to its coffers. It is now viewed as the world's leading incipient power that is seeking to develop its influence, and is viewed in the West variously as offering threats and opportunities. In particular, the US, as the current global hegemon, is ambivalent about China. After more than 30 years of diplomatic relations with the People's

Republic of China, the US is deeply entangled with China in terms of trade, investment, currency disputations, public debt, human rights dialogues, international diplomacy, security cooperation on the prevention and suppression of terrorism, and nuclear non-proliferation. Due to the critical roles the two countries play on the stage of world politics, the Sino-US relationship is regarded as the world's most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century in terms of both political and academic scope.

These potential rivals in global hegemony have very different political systems and political cultures. Both have republican forms of government but the US has a multi-party republican system with liberal (Democratic Party) and conservative (Republican Party) parties vying for control over Congress (House of Representatives and Senate) every two years and for the presidency every four years. China has eight Democratic Parties participating in politics but they all agree that the Communist Party be the ruling party and indeed the Communist Party is so much intertwined with the government and the army that the People's Republic of China has been called a 'Party-State'.

China's elaborate regime of party-state power in public communication has few parallels in the contemporary world. What is apparent is the party's determination to sustain this regime at all costs and by all means, its ability to constantly revamp and perfect this regime, and its progressive amplification and modernization since the early 1990s. (Zhao 2008, p. 61)

Zhao (ibid.) has also mentioned that the Chinese official press is used to 'publishing the same photographs of the nation's new leaders in the same order and in the same place on every front page', and this traditional journalistic practice has remained intact in the current Chinese mainstream press. But when looking at media outlets such as *China Daily* or the English-language version of *People's Daily*, one would be hard-pressed to find explicit official declarations on them.

The Communist Party is as large as a European nation, reportedly with some 68 million members or 5% of the Chinese population, and is stage-managing China's development by drawing on the dynamics of capitalism.

The extraordinary situation in China is that a state that was forged in a communist revolution and still claims to build socialism has been pursuing, in the words of Arif Dirlik, 'a paradigm of development that was the product of capitalism', thus turning socialism into 'a cover for policies of development inspired by capitalism'. (Zhao 2008 p. 9)

The US and Chinese political cultures could be characterised structurally as being politically multi-polar and mono-polar respectively, at the level of central government. In the US, as well as China, there are political polarities in relation to vertical levels of government. But even in these levels there are no party political differences in the Party-State. There is a system of democratic centralism within the Communist Party itself and there is a leadership transition every ten years at the highest levels—those of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, and

the President. Chinese leaders have spoken over a period of time about the progressive expansion of democracy in their country. The premier, Wen Jiabo articulated the position thus:

I have said on several occasions that we must adhere to the practice of self-governance by villagers in China, and villagers' lawful rights to directly elect village committees must be protected. What has happened shows this has been a successful practice. The Chinese villagers have shown strong enthusiasm in participating in this process and strict methods of election have been formulated on the basis of the law of self-governance by villagers of China. I still believe that if the people are able to run the affairs of a village well, gradually they will be able to run the affairs of a township and then a county. We must continue to encourage people to take full steps to experiment and that can help enhance our people's ability in this regard through these very practices. I believe that the democratic system of China will continue to move forward in keeping with China's national conditions and no force will be able to hold this process back. (Wen Jiabo quoted in *China Daily* 14 Mar. 2012)

The year 2012 was a year for both the US and China to prepare for the election of new presidents who would define relations between the two countries in the next decade. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping is seen in the US as being groomed to succeed President Hu Jintao as chairman of the Communist Party and president of China. In 2012, from February 13 to 17, Xi Jinping completed a five-day official visit to the US. For China, this visit offered a rehearsal for Xi Jinping as a diplomatic performer on the international stage. For the US, this visit presented an opportunity to gauge the performance of the next president—in terms of friendliness, folksiness, flexibility, fairness and firmness in asserting policy positions.

Even a cursory glance at media commentary about the visit suggests that Chinese and American expectations were different. *People's Daily* said that the visit was tightly scheduled, successful and projected an image of a confident (firm) and more amiable (friendly) future leader. But the main goal of the visiting vice president was emphasised in US and Chinese media as a call for promoting a sustained, sound and steady growth of the mutually beneficial (fair) Sino-US business ties. *People's Daily* saw it as leading to twin successful outcomes, to diplomatic fruitfulness and personal friendliness (*People's Daily* 17 Feb. 2012). US media, for example, the *International Herald Tribune* (the global edition of *The New York Times*), viewed the visit as an 'anodyne' event. In particular, an article in the *International Herald Tribune* predicted that Xi Jinping's visit was 'expected to be so polite, so scripted, so anodyne' (*International Herald Tribune* 15 Feb. 2012, p. 2). But rather than actually seeking contention, the US media appeared to want to see a more positively friendly face of Xi Jinping—and this is what they saw in the end.

For the US media, the visit occurred at a time when they were both astounded by the capacity of growth of China and wary of the prospect of China surpassing the US in the not-too-distant future. The US claimed explicitly that it 'seeks

constructive relations with a strong, stable, open, and prosperous China that is integrated into the international community and acts as a responsible member of that community' (US Department of State 1997). But in his State-of-the-Union address President Barack Obama (27 January 2012) implied that China was not playing fair by failing to adhere to the rules that the US did adhere to, and was taking away job opportunities from US (White House 2012). The *International Herald Tribune* described the Chinese take on this view—the US was whining about China breaking rules and surging ahead in the international economic competition and blaming China for its own shortcomings (*International Herald Tribune* 15 Feb. 2012).

The visit took place in the maelstrom of the Republican primaries, into the discourse of which candidates, particularly Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, had injected the issue of China. The China factor emerged in stump speeches, debates and television advertisements during the campaign. For example, as Merkel-Hess (2012) reports in blog 'The China Beat', it came up in the South Carolina debate when *CNN* moderator John King asked republican candidate Rick Santorum how he would bring back Apple computer jobs from China to the US. Santorum advocated reduction of taxes at home to attract repatriation of investment. He then further employed a martial rhetoric: 'I want to beat China. I want to go to war with China and make America the most attractive place in the world to do business'. In contrast, another Republican Candidate Ron Paul claimed that China should not be the scapegoat for economic problems in the US. He noted that China had successfully used investment to enhance its bilateral influence while the US influence had been sullied by foreign military intervention. This was one of his major campaign themes (*ibid.*). There was no meeting between Xi Jinping and Republican frontrunners. Perhaps this would have happened if the Republican nomination had already been made.

Witnessing the regime transformation of the Arab Spring, as well as the volatile situation in Syria, the Chinese government is concerned about its place on the world stage more than ever before. Apparently, experiencing extraordinary economic growth and seeing the goal of economic pre-eminence become attainable was not sufficient to assuage China's appetite for success. The recent self-confident soft power and 'going out' campaigns carried out by the Chinese government underline China's ambition to be a world-class player in relation to media and cultural industries as well. The political logic of the Communist Party appears to these observers to be that the Party will allow greater political participation when *raison d'État* calls for it.

Clearly we can expect that on the Chinese side there would have been different messages about the visit that were directed at US and domestic Chinese audiences respectively. The visit had diplomatic objectives within the framework of the US–China Strategic Cooperation Dialogue. The well-designed visit embraced various elements that could possibly balance East–West dialogue, political and commercial issues and the needs of high-ranking officials and ordinary people. Significantly, the visit offered the Chinese leadership that sponsored Xi Jinping's ascendancy to present messages about his diplomatic skills and qualities: his ability

to show firmness, fairness and friendliness and the visit to be fruitful as a result. US media too depicted US firmness, fairness and friendliness but also drew attention to Xi Jinping's friendliness of manner and even folksiness.

### Objective and research questions

The objective of this study is to analyse selected Chinese and US media in order to ascertain what frames the Chinese state wishes to project externally to China-watchers in the US and internally to the Chinese political elite and intellectuals, and also how the visit was framed by elite newspapers in the US for the political elite and intellectuals.

As previously noted, and to revisit, the research questions were as follows:

1. What was China's intended frame?
2. What were the received / locally constructed frames in US media?
3. How did the different news frames reflect the political cultures in the two countries?

### Theoretical framework

Over the last few decades, literature on framing has developed in many fields (Borah 2012). Framing studies fits well within the larger framework of symbolic interactionism of George Mead (Blumer 1969). Various definitions of frames have emerged since this term was coined. Erving Goffman, who is the father of the concept of frames in social science, characterised them as 'schemata of interpretation' that allow one 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' the world of experience (Goffman 1974, p. 21). Gitlin (1980, p. 7) defines frames as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse'. By highlighting particular aspects of a topic, a frame makes it easier to understand an event or issue. Cappella and Jamieson (1997 cited in de Vreese 2005, p. 53) 'suggest that frames activate knowledge, stimulate "stocks of cultural morals and values, and create contexts"'. Thus, frames are said to simultaneously "define problems", "diagnose causes", "make moral judgments", and "suggest remedies" (Entman 1993 cited in de Vreese 2005, p. 53). Frames have also been characterised as 'central organizing ideas' (Gamson & Modigliani 1989, p. 3) and constructs that 'yield coherent ways of understanding the world' (Reese 2001, p. 11).

As Pan and Kosicki (1993, pp. 55–6) argue, framing analysis is used 'to view news texts as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts'. Frames are viewed as being 'devices embedded in political discourse' (Kinder & Sanders 1990, p. 74).

## Method

Pan and Kosicki's framing analysis method was employed in a modified form for analysing data from online newspapers. Selected framing criteria from the method identified by Pan and Kosicki were employed in this study in order to represent broadbrush frames. Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that in examining discourse one could look at syntactical, script, thematic and rhetorical structures. Syntactical analysis looks at macrosyntax, script analysis considers various news values, thematic analysis examines structures identifiable through macrostructural elements, and rhetorical analysis relates to structures involving stylistic choices such as those identified by Gamson (cited in Pan & Kosicki 1993, p. 61): 'metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images'. Pan and Kosicki seek to integrate the four structures in their method.

The present study looks only at rhetorical structure and analyses the following pair of framing devices: metaphors and depictions. Exemplars, catchphrases and visual images from the rhetorical structure were not looked at in this study. Elements from script and thematic structure were also excluded from the text because it was believed that those devices would be better observed from a greater quantity of data gleaned in relation to an event or event series that had a longer duration. As they were not used, the devices are not discussed here.

Six online newspapers were selected for the study: three in the US and three in China. The reasons for their selection are explained below. Stories about Xi Jinping's visit to the US were selected by entering the following text into a search engine (Google):

Xi Jinping visit US - [Name of newspaper]

e.g. Xi Jinping visit US - *Washington Post*

Headlines and first paragraphs of newspapers were analysed for frames, and for each newspaper the dominant, secondary and idiosyncratic but noteworthy frames were reported. Dominant frames are defined here as the ones that appear most often. Secondary frames are those that have the second highest number. Idiosyncratic but noteworthy frames may appear in one story or a small number of stories but appear to be outliers. Representative articles were selected for each newspaper under the dominant and secondary categories and analysed more fully using the approaches referred to above.

China's intended frames may be gleaned from media that are close to the Chinese government. The *People's Daily* is the foremost official publication of the Communist Party as well as of the Chinese government. Its opinions are seen as reflecting those of the mainstream voice of the Party-State. While the English version of the *People's Daily* presents intended frames to English-speaking officials and intellectuals, as well as China-watchers abroad, the Chinese version is more internally directed and aimed at government officials and party cadres, as well as the Chinese public. The latter version, then, is where frames that are intended for domestic audiences may be found.

*China Daily*, while under the Party-State aegis, is more independent in that its editors use their own judgement about what to publish. It is directed outwards towards China-watchers, and the US edition is specifically directed towards US audiences, delivering Chinese news and views in a matrix of hard news and entertainment news from the US. But it can be assumed that frames of the Xi Jinping visit published in the US edition will be consistent with those intended by the State.

*Economic Daily* is the top economic newspaper and is run by the State Council and under the supervision of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China (CCCPC). Published nationwide, *Economic Daily* has become one of the most influential newspapers in China. Based on its strong official background, it has been a major channel for enterprises and policymakers to know about China's market. It usually reports China's economic reform, opening up of market, transformation of policy and improvement of people's living standards.

In the US, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are the leading newspapers that are read by opinion leaders not just in these two cities but also across the country. These were included in the study along with *The Wall Street Journal*, which was chosen to represent news frames of the visit from the business point of view. *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have the second-, third- and fifth-largest daily circulations in the US, respectively (Refdesk.com 2005).

*The New York Times* is considered to be of liberal persuasion and read by opinion leaders, intellectuals and politicians. Being one of the most serious news sources in the US as well as the world, it is considered by international watchers as a major source of international news and views on global political issues. With China's rise in recent years, the newspaper includes an increasing number of stories about China. Notably different from previous times, a greater number of stories is now published in *The New York Times* about different strata of Chinese society.

*The Washington Post* is the leading liberal newspaper in the US capital and is read by US congressman, senators, congressional staff, government servants, employees of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, diplomats and intellectuals. Being one of the oldest and largest newspapers in Washington DC, *The Washington Post* is famous for its Watergate exposé in 1970s (which brought down the Nixon Administration) as well as other investigative journalism. Focusing more on domestic news, it is viewed by readers as an important political compass of the US.

*The Wall Street Journal* is one of the premier financial newspapers in the world. Financial newspapers may be viewed as having greater reason to strive for objectivity in news reporting because investors depend on accurate news for decision-making. If investors find that news published in *The Wall Street Journal* leads them to make wrong investment decisions on a consistent basis, they are likely to be wary of the newspaper. At any rate, *The Wall Street Journal* is more on the conservative side of the spectrum and offers a conservative foil to the two liberal newspapers in the selection. It is serious in its reporting style but has a



variety of topics and viewpoints in opinion pieces. Reports include American and international business news, finance and investment, consulting and industry.

By framing the visit strategically, the six newspapers constructed the visit in their own ways. Based on the discussion of macro-determinants of news frames and the research on news media's institutional behaviour, this paper analyses the role of political culture and investigates which elements of political culture are recognisable in media framing of political news in distinct political contexts.

The sample of newspapers was compiled through randomly selecting every tenth article that appeared in a search with a date prior to February 13, 2012; articles dated February 13 to 17; and articles dated after February 17. From the Chinese newspapers there were 51 *People's Daily*, 42 *China Daily* and 51 *Economic Daily* articles found in total, from which 5 from *People's Daily*, 4 from *China Daily* and 5 from *Economic Daily* were chosen. With US newspapers, as there were only 24 articles found in total (8 *New York Times*, 5 *Washington Post* and 11 *Wall Street Journal*) all were selected. Altogether there were 38 articles chosen, among which 28 were in English and 10 in Chinese.

After selecting articles, we extracted the title and first paragraph. For those few articles in which the first paragraph did not provide sufficient information, we also extracted the second paragraph. We analysed the title as well as the first (and second) paragraph. The first binary of frame categories that emerged consisted of successful and challenging visits. After data was tabulated under these categories, subcategories began to emerge. The four subcategories that emerged from a preliminary review of the tabulated data were related to three qualities of interaction: stating a position with some degree of forcefulness and confidence (firmness—replacing the challenging visit terminology), friendliness in speech and act (friendliness); maturity and balance in approach (fairness); and interest in meeting ordinary folk (folksiness). These four categories were extracted from the original successful visit category, but a non-behavioural evaluative aspect of the successful visit was also retained as a category. Single words commencing with the letter f were selected for the categories. The term 'fruitfulness' was selected for the residual successful visit category. Before proceeding with the detailed content analysis the researchers posited another category, flexibility, on the basis that common sense suggests that diplomats need to be flexible.

## Results

The number of articles in each selected newspaper in the pre-visit, visit and post-visit period are provided in Table 1, and frames are outlined below the table under the rubrics of dominant, secondary and idiosyncratic frames. The broad frames were identified as 'successful visit' and 'challenging visit'.

**Table 1. The total numbers of articles for the pre-, during- and post-visit periods**

Newspaper	Pre-visit	During visit	Post visit
	13 Feb 2012	13–17 Feb 2012	17 Feb 2012
<i>The New York Times</i>	2	6	0
<i>The Washington Post</i>	1	3	1
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	1	9	1
<i>China Daily</i>	12	28	2
<i>People's Daily</i>	1	47	3
<i>Economic Daily</i>	1	49	1

### *Frames as found in each newspaper*

#### *The New York Times*

Dominant Frame: Challenging Visit e.g. 'With Edge, US Greets China's Heir Apparent' [US firmness]

Secondary Frame: Successful Visit Frame e.g. 'For the Vice President of China, Tea Time in Iowa' [US and Xi's friendliness]

Idiosyncratic Frame: Whiner US Frame e.g. 'Communist Party to US: Stop Your Whining' [Chinese firmness]

There was an equal distribution of Chinese and US firmness and friendliness frames, but the dominant frame was US firmness—what the US readership would want to see in relation to the visit of a contending superpower.

#### *The Washington Post*

Dominant Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Approachable Leader e.g. 'Chinese VP Xi' [Xi's friendliness]

Secondary Frame: Challenging Visit Frame e.g. 'China's Xi Jinping visits Capitol Hill' [US firmness]

Here, the dominant frame was Xi's friendliness, displacing US firmness, a public diplomacy success for the Chinese in Washington DC.

### *The Wall Street Journal*

Dominant Frame: Challenging Visit Frame e.g. ‘Xi Gets an Earful on Capitol Hill’ [US firmness]

Secondary Frame: Successful Visit Frame e.g. ‘China's Xi Cultivates Relaxed Image on US Trip’ [Xi’s friendliness]

The pattern in this more conservative newspaper was the predictable one of US firmness being ahead of Xi’s friendliness. All in all, the US newspapers examined took a conventional US media approach to visiting leaders who are not allies in emphasising US firmness. *The Washington Post* offered some variance to this.

### *China Daily*

Dominant Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Enhances Sino–US Relations. e.g. ‘Relations are “globally important”’. [Fruitfulness]

*China Daily*, which is said to take its cue from *People’s Daily* and Xin Hua News Agency’s *Beijing Review*, has been chosen to emphasise the fruitfulness factor.

### *People’s Daily*

Dominant Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Warm welcome. e.g. 习近平会见艾奥瓦州州长 感叹宾至如归 (‘Xi Jinping meets governor of Iowa, saying returning makes him feel at home’) [US and Xi’s friendliness]

Secondary Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Fruitful. e.g. 记习近平副主席美国之行 (A Memo on President Xi’s visit to the US) [Fruitful]

Secondary Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Win-Win e.g. 习近平：中美经贸合作“双方都是赢家” (‘Xi Jinping: China–US economic and trade cooperation, “both sides are winners”’) [Fairness, fruitfulness]

The emphasis here was on friendliness shown by both sides and then on the fruitfulness of the visit.

### *Economic Daily*

Dominant Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Economic reassurance/advice. e.g. 习近平洛杉矶演讲：中国经济决不会“硬着陆” (‘Xi Jinping speaks in LA: China’s economy will definitely not be “hard landing”’) [Economic reassurance]

Secondary Frame: Successful Visit Frame: Enhances Sino–US Relations. e.g. 习近平会晤奥巴马：做朋友做伙伴是中美唯一选项 (‘Xi Jinping met with Obama: Being friends and partners is the only choice of China and the United States’) [Xi’s firmness, fairness, fruitfulness]

Here, given the economic focus, China’s role as a key economic player is emphasised with an economic reassurance frame. Firmness, fairness and fruitfulness are secondary frames.

All-in-all the US articles tended to show the US as being firm and Xi Jinping as being friendly while the Chinese newspapers showed the visit to have been fruitful and friendly. Idiosyncratically, a US newspaper depicted Xi as being firm. The Chinese side seems to have invested in the notion of Xi Jinping performing successfully on the world stage whereas the US seems to have been keen to see the president-in-waiting as friendly and the US as firm.

***Structural elements of stories identified as being under the dominant frame above***

***The New York Times***

Title: 'With Edge, US Greets China's Heir Apparent' [US firmness]

Lead: China's vice president and likely future leader, Xi Jinping, embarked on a get-to-know-you tour of the United States on Tuesday, with a day of meetings from the White House to the Pentagon. But he was met with blunt criticism [firmness] from his host, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., who declared that the United States and China could cooperate "only if the game is fair"[fairness].

Proposition of lead: Xi received criticism from a firm Vice President Biden during his visit.

Theme: Get-acquainted tour includes blunt criticism from the US.

Rhetorical structure: Metaphors—Heir Apparent (Xi); embarked (Xi); fair game;

Depictions—VP and future leader; Quotations—"only if the game is fair".

***The Washington Post***

Title: 'Chinese VP Xi Jinping attends Lakers game' [folksiness]

Lead: Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping wrapped up his four-day US visit in Southern California style—in a box seat at the Los Angeles Lakers' game against the Phoenix Suns on Friday night.

Proposition of lead: A folksy Xi watched Laker's game in LA.

Theme: Californian basketball game wrap-up.

Rhetorical Structure: Metaphors—Wrapped up (visit); Depictions —Sports fan (Xi).

***The Wall Street Journal***

Title: 'Xi Gets an Earful on Capitol Hill' [US firmness]

Lead: Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping visited Capitol Hill Wednesday, where he heard congressional leaders voice strong concerns about economic issues and human rights.

Proposition of Lead: Xi received complaints in Capitol Hill.

Theme: Chinese VP was blamed for economic and human rights issues.

Rhetorical Structure: Metaphor—Capitol Hill.

*China Daily*

Title: ‘Relations are “globally important”’

Lead: A healthy and stable Sino US relationship is crucial to both nations and is globally important, Vice-President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama agreed.

Proposition of Lead: Xi and Obama agreed on enhancing Sino-US relationships.

Theme: Significance of Sino-US relationships.

Rhetorical Structure: Metaphor—Feel ‘at Home’ (Xi); Depictions—Polite, friendly.

*People’s Daily*

Title: 习近平会见艾奥瓦州州长 感叹宾至如归 (‘Xi Jinping Meets with Iowa Governor laments a home away from home) [friendliness, folksiness]

Lead: 当地时间2月15日, 正在美国访问的国家副主席习近平在得梅因市会见了艾奥瓦州州长布兰斯塔德、堪萨斯州州长布朗巴克、密歇根州州长斯奈德等 (‘On February 15th, Visiting Vice President Xi Jinping met Iowa Governor Blanchard Amare, Governor Sam Brownback of Kansas, Michigan Governor Snyder in Des Moines. Xi Jinping said that friends in Iowa was very hospitable to the Chinese delegation, and made them feel at home.’)

Proposition of Lead: Folksy Xi received warm welcome in Iowa.

Theme: Chinese VP acknowledges warm hospitality in Iowa.

Rhetorical Structure: Metaphor—Feel ‘at Home’ (Xi); Depictions—Polite, friendly, folksy.

*Economic Times*

Title: 习近平洛杉矶演讲: 中国经济决不会“硬着陆” (Xi Jinping speaks in LA: China’s economy will definitely not be “hard landing”) [firmness, fairness]

Lead: 国家副主席习近平当地时间17日上午说, 扭转中美贸易不平衡, 最有效的办法不是限制中国对美出口, 而是要扩大美国对华出口。(Vice President Xi Jinping said on Feb 17, to reverse the trade imbalance between China and US, the most effective way is to not limit China’s export but rather to expand the US’s exports to China.)

Proposition of Lead: Xi suggests ways to reverse trade imbalance between China and US.

Theme: China is not to blame for trade imbalance.

Rhetorical Structure: Metaphor—hard landing; Depictions—Strongly assertive leader.

**Discussion**

This paper examines the political cultural context to see which distinct political culture is reflected in the framing of political news by media in different political backgrounds. The results are congruent with the supposition that that news frames are shaped by the political values of a nation as embedded in its political

and media cultures, reduced propositionally in this study to the notions of central political multipolarity / diverse (US) and unipolarity / conformism to state (China).

The first research question sought to identify China's intended frame. This frame may be revealed in the analysis of frames in Chinese official media as a 'successful visit' frame. All three Chinese newspapers employ 'successful visit' frames, but with different emphases. *People's Daily* reported the visit on an event-to-event basis. But the overall frame constructs the visit as fruitful and friendly on both sides. Xi Jinping is viewed as having acquitted himself excellently in this first diplomatic mission to the world's remaining superpower.

The second question sought to discover the received / locally constructed frames in US media. As expected, newspapers in the US demonstrated divergence in frames—'challenging visit' and 'successful visit', with 'successful visit' resonating with the intended Chinese frame. We note that the more liberal *New York Times* and the more conservative *Wall Street Journal* had a 'challenging visit' and 'successful visit' as dominant and secondary frames respectively, providing two angles for the newspapers' broad readership in New York and further afield. But the pattern was reversed in *The Washington Post*, also liberal but providing two angles to Beltway readers as well as a broader readership. *The New York Times*, in the host city of the United Nations, also has an interesting idiosyncratic frame that spells out a Chinese view of American whinging. But the dominant frame is the firmness shown by the US and the friendliness of the visitor—a suitable depiction for the US public that wants to see the US standing tall.

US newspapers saw Xi Jinping as approachable, relaxed (friendly, folksy) and being lectured to by members of the Obama Administration and politicians on Capitol Hill (US firmness). Chinese media saw Xi Jinping being welcomed warmly (US friendliness), contributing to enhancement of Sino-US relations (fruitfulness) and providing economic reassurance to the US (Chinese firmness).

Interestingly, in US frames, Xi Jinping was explicitly regarded as a president-in-waiting. But, in China's frame, this point was implied. It appeared to the researchers that the Chinese were allowing the US media to in effect make the announcement through its framing rather than do it themselves. The timing of the visit, taking place just before the annual National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in February 2012, could be viewed as suggesting that the success of the US visit would strength the claims of those supporting Xi Jinping for the succession.

How did the different news frames reflect the political cultures in the two countries? What is more significant than the apparent mirroring described above is the presence of an alternative and sometimes dominant frame—the 'challenging visit'. The apparent mirroring of the intended Chinese frame in the US newspapers should perhaps be seen less as a mirroring and more as a result of mutuality of interest in a successful visit, but to have an empirical basis for coming to this viewpoint it would have been necessary to interview journalists and editors at the two US newspapers to uncover their framing process, a method that was outside the scope of the present study.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to compare the role of political culture in China and US by examining the influence they exerted on news frames. News frames are largely influenced by political culture, which is very much shaped by political institutions, their policies and practices. The employment of desired attributes for projection (that is friendliness, folksiness, fairness and firmness) as derived inductively from the data, were seen to be useful, and further exploration of these concepts in high-profile diplomatic visits in other contexts will be undertaken in future. Interestingly, flexibility, which is a necessary attribute in diplomatic negotiations, was not one that was discerned in the public posturing of the diplomatic visit examined. The notion of flexibility is perhaps in direct conflict with the projection of firmness, a key attribute for US leaders to convey to the American people. This is also true about Chinese leaders vis-à-vis the Chinese people. Both sides desire that their people perceive their leaders as able to protect their national interest in international encounters. At the same time friendliness is seen as a good quality for building mutually beneficial relationships. Diplomatic visits are opportunities to project firmness and friendliness. The speech and acts of leaders at diplomatic trysts, particularly in relation to firmness and friendliness, are of interest to media and are selected in their own acts of mediation that contribute to the shaping, variously, of frames constructing the image of these leaders in the minds of audiences. A question that arises that could lead to further research is whether public diplomacy strategists are aware of this interest and therefore whether they deliberately choreograph firmness and friendliness in the diplomatic performances of the leaders they mind.

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