

# **Wag the Press: How Changes in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward China Were Reflected in Prestige Press Coverage of China, 1979 vs. 1997**

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## **Sections:**

Abstract|Introduction|Theoretical framework and hypotheses  
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## **Abstract**

This study used content analysis to compare the news coverage of four U.S. prestige newspapers of the state visits of Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in 1979 and Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 1997. The results showed that news coverage of Deng's visit (1997) was (a) more favorable, (b) had more coverage of controversial issues, (c) used more ideologically loaded labels in reference to the Chinese government, and (d) received more news space than that of Jiang's visit. The study demonstrated that the news coverage of Deng and Jiang's visits was closely related to the U.S. China policy and Sino-U.S. relations. Even supposedly independent prestige U.S. papers seemed to follow the official U.S. diplomatic "party line."

## **Introduction**

History has seen ups and downs in the development of Sino-U.S. relations in the past 50 years. Important political interactions, such as state visits of top government officials, have played an essential

role in that development. The U.S. news media have paid considerable attention to those state visits.

How did the media cover these events, which sometimes turned out to be turning points in international diplomacy, and milestones in U.S.-China relations? While this is a general and rather broad question, this study focuses on selected U.S. prestige newspapers' coverage of two particular political events—the state visits to the United States by Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in 1979 and by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 1997.

Twenty-one years ago, in January of 1979, Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping visited the United States during President Carter's administration. In November of 1997, President Jiang Zemin, at the invitation of President Clinton, also visited the United States. State visits, as a channel of international political communication between the United States and the People's Republic of China, inevitably claim attention in the international political forum and in other fields as well. The U.S. news media in general, and newspapers in particular, devoted considerable space and time to the coverage of both visits. A brief reading of the selected U.S. newspapers during the periods has borne sufficient support for this.

Seen from a historical perspective, these two visits were both politically significant events. Indeed, the political connotations of both were striking. Both visits took place at very critical times. Deng's visit came after China and the United States had had a hard time in their relations for the decades since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. In a sense, the specific historic situation behind Deng's visit actually was one of the most important motivations of his visit. Similarly, the timing of Jiang's visit made his trip to the United States a critical one too. Jiang's visit was the first state visit by the president of the People's Republic of China to the United States in twelve years. As for their status, both visitors were among the top leaders of the Chinese government. Jiang visited as the president of China; Deng, though then a vice-premier of the State Council of China, was well known as the de facto "rein-holding" leader at that time. This study focuses on the U.S. prestige press coverage, as represented by four selected newspapers, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*, of these two visits.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

Several theoretical perspectives were used in this study. Framing analysis was the primary theoretical framework on which this study was based. Framing analysis has been widely used in general media content studies and studies of international news coverage.<sup>1</sup>

Framing analysis fits well the situation under study. As noted earlier, the focus of this study incorporated a comparative review of the political contexts of Deng and Jiang's visits. Study of state visits, as significant political events, must take into consideration the political contexts of these events.

News frames, according to Gamson<sup>2</sup>, are central organizing ideas for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue. The political context of state visits may lead to different frames in news reporting.

This study also reviewed one other theoretical concept-media hegemony thesis. This concept was included because it was closely related to framing analysis in this study. A media hegemony perspective helps us understand the driving forces behind the working of news framing. It provides an explanation for some of the factors in the use of framing in news reporting. It also helps answer a common question: How does a news frame form in news reporting? Why is one particular frame developed, and not others? Specifically in this study, media hegemony helps us understand how the media followed the dominant definitions of the nature of an event and how the elite ideology worked as the sponsor of news frames.

### Purpose and Significance of Study

Voluminous literature has been focused on the connection between the coverage of international news and the foreign policy of the U.S. government in an attempt to find a connection, or correlation, between these two variables.<sup>3</sup> Some studies indeed found a strong correlation between them.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this study was to understand, based on two specific cases, the relation between prestige U.S. newspapers' reporting, as reflected in the selected newspapers, of China and the U.S. China policy in an ever changing context. It was meant to find out the kind of impact that U.S.-China relations and U.S. China policy had on the performance of the U.S. press.

Very often, the visit of the head of one nation to another is a politically significant event. It generally draws immediate media attention and wide awareness of the public. It is especially true in the case of Deng and Jiang's visits to the United States. As the top leaders of China, Deng and Jiang were representatives less of themselves, but more of the nation. News coverage of these leaders and their state visits to a great extent reflected news coverage of China. How the press covered these events is of academic interest and theoretical relevance to mass communication research.

While our literature review did find studies about news coverage of China<sup>5</sup>, we were not able to find any study of the news coverage of Chinese leaders and their visits to the United States, not to mention a study done with a comparative approach. With such lack of academic attention given to the visits at issue here, this study was able to break some new ground for mass communication research.

China and the United States are inherently important as news topics, and are likely to become

increasingly so in the years ahead. The present study partially fills the void in scholarly research on news coverage devoted to the important state visits of Deng and Jiang, and it does so by employing two complementary theoretical perspectives (news framing and media hegemony) and using a longitudinal content analysis approach.

### Framing: Looking Through a Window

Framing analysis is a well-investigated but still “fuzzy” theory.<sup>6</sup> The concept of framing can first be attributed to Goffman, who defined frames as “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, a frame can be considered as the core of a set of interpretive packages for making sense of an issue and the public events that affect it.<sup>8</sup> A news frame can also be viewed as a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue.<sup>9</sup>

Deciphering the way framing works, Tuchman noted that “frames turn non-recognizable happenings or amorphous talk into a discernible event.”<sup>10</sup> In the same vein, Entman<sup>11</sup> pointed out that frames call attention to some aspects of a reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions. He considered news frames as information-processing schemata. Framing essentially involves selection and salience.<sup>12</sup> To frame is to select certain aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Framing is achieved in the way news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement of the news item, the tone of presentation, the accompanying headlines and visual effects, and the labeling and vocabulary. One common framing method, according to Parenti<sup>13</sup>, is to select labels and other vocabulary designed to convey politically loaded images. This method of labeling is very effective because labels and phrases, like the masks in a Greek drama or the Chinese Peking opera, are able to convey positive or negative cues regarding events and persona.

### Media Hegemony Thesis

The concept of media hegemony is part of the culturalist perspective on the origins and development of mass communication. Gramsci<sup>14</sup>, a prominent political theorist and thinker, used the concept of hegemony to describe and analyze how modern capitalist societies were organized, or aimed to be organized, in the past and present. Gramsci defined hegemony as “the ubiquitous and internally

consistent culture and ideology which are openly or implicitly favorable to a dominant class or elite.”<sup>15</sup>

Gramsci was concerned with the nature of power in a liberal-democratic political system. He argued that political power in liberal capitalist societies depends relatively little, except in times of extreme crisis, on the coercive apparatus of the state. It rests instead on the strength of a worldview, a system of assumptions, and social values accepted as “common sense” which legitimates the existing distribution of power and, indeed, renders opposition to it inconceivable for most of the population. The state plays a role in the propagation of that world view, but the legitimating cultural system so crucial to political power is maintained largely by private, autonomous, and in many cases “nonpolitical” institutions, such as the family, the church, the political party, and, without a doubt, the mass media.

The view of news from an ideological perspective incorporates the consideration of the political function of the media. The very concept of hegemony, Hallin<sup>16</sup> believed, is used to conceptualize the political function of the media. The media play the role of maintaining the dominant political ideology: they propagate it, celebrate it, interpret the world in its terms, and, at times, alter it to adapt to the demands of legitimization in a changing world. Summarizing the neo-Marxist perspective, Hallin concluded that the media themselves are subject to the hegemonic process. The dominant ideology shapes the production of news and entertainment.

### Government Agencies as News Sources

News media’s reliance on government agencies and official sources for information and its implications in news production have often been studied. In the analysis of social organization of news work, Fishman concluded that journalists are highly attuned to bureaucratic organizations of the government and that the “. . . world is bureaucratically oriented for journalists.”<sup>17</sup>

From a political-economic point of view, news media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interests. The media need a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news. The powerful sources rely on the news media for dissemination of information in their interests. Herman and Chomsky<sup>18</sup> pointed out that economics dictate that the news media concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs. The White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department, in Washington, D.C., are central nodes of such news activities. On a local basis, city hall and the police department are the subjects of regular news “beats” for reporters. News sourcing via this channel is economically efficient. Gans wrote that “journalists often follow American foreign policy in selecting foreign news because it supplies a quick and easy importance consideration and because no other equally efficient model is available.”<sup>19</sup>

Welch also indicated that foreign policy is a domain in which official sources “inevitably” generate “a

great deal of the news.”<sup>20</sup> Two factors contribute to this phenomenon. First, the government is basically the root, and quite often the only authoritative, source of information concerning U.S. foreign relations and international politics. As Becker<sup>21</sup> observed, more than in any other area of newsgathering, the news media are dependent on governmental sources to provide focus for and information about world events. Second, the structure of the newsroom and routinization of newsgathering, as shown by Tuchman<sup>22</sup>, work smoothly with official news, since most of the news stories originating from the government deal with prescheduled and continuing events.

Hsu<sup>23</sup> pointed out that the media’s adherence to the state propaganda line is functional. News media’s selective coverage depends heavily on the media’s legitimization and delegitimization. He concluded that the hegemony approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests. This is true not only in terms of the news media’s choices and volume of stories about an event, but also in the quality of coverage, such as the attention given to a fact-its placement, tone, context, and fullness of treatment.

The existing literature suggests that news is closely related to the elite ideology and greatly influenced by government foreign policy and international relations. News media tend to apply their cultural values and ideological thinking in the news production. The literature also indicates that fluctuation in the U.S. policy dictates the news media’s reporting of China and Chinese affairs.

### Changing Sino-U.S. Relations and U.S. China Policy

For a better understanding of the U.S. news coverage of Jiang and Dung’s visits to the United States from news-ideology and news-framing perspectives, it is necessary first to have a basic idea of the development of Sino-U.S. relations and changing U.S. China policy. After the end of the civil war in China in 1949, with the victory of the Communists over the Nationalists, U.S.-China relationships went through a very tense and hostile period. The ideological orientation and close association of this new Republic with the Soviet Union immediately put China in a hostile position with the United States. The United States refused to recognize the new Republic. President Truman hoped he “. . . will not have to recognize it.”<sup>24</sup>The United States government, as its president claimed, “. . . has never been favorable to the Communists.”<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the two countries inhabited two different camps in a rigidly polarized world separated by an iron curtain. The United States was the leader of a global alliance of capitalist states created to prevent the spread of communism. China cast its lot with the rival block headed by the Soviet Union.

Over the years, however, significant changes took place. Signs of better relations with the United States began to emerge with exchanges of Ping-Pong teams in the early 1970s, as both the United States and China perceived strategic benefits in an alliance against the USSR. Nixon's visit to China in 1972 was the first major attempt to resolve conflict issues between the two nations. The event was a dramatic highlight in the process of conflict resolution.<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking, the tension between China and the United States eased greatly after the Shanghai Communiqué was signed between China and the United States during Nixon's 1972 visit. Nixon's historic trip not only established a direct channel of political dialogues between Beijing and Washington but also opened the China door to the American press and public.

Entering the 1980s, the Sino-U.S. relationship was put to a series of tests. During the 1980 presidential election, Reagan declared his desire to restore some degree of official status to American relations with Taiwan, a broad departure from the concessions on the Taiwan issue that had been made by the Carter administration. China, seeking to avoid excessive dependence on the United States, subsequently announced it would follow a more independent foreign policy, thus abandoning its earlier allusions to a united front with America against the Soviet Union.

The political crisis in China in mid-1989 suddenly and drastically transformed the setting for Sino-American relations. For the United States, the sight of troops in Tiananmen Square tearing down the statue of the Goddess of Freedom and Democracy dashed any hopes that China would soon be adopting American values or emulating American institutions. The wave of repression that subsequently swept the country shattered the image of a progressive Chinese leadership undertaking a concerted effort at political and economic liberalization. Again, in March 1996, the United States sent one of its aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait area, in response to China's missile tests close to Taiwan on the eve of Taiwan's first presidential election.

### News Coverage as a Reflection of U.S. China Policy

Is the U.S. press coverage closely related to the U.S. China policy? Chang observed, ". . . even in a recognized democracy such as the United States, the climate of opinion in regard to relations with other countries is set by the government."<sup>27</sup> Berry, challenging ". . . [the] conventional wisdom about the press," noted that the press ". . . is a moon and not a sun; It only reflects light."<sup>28</sup> A news framing approach enabled the authors to predict that in both visits by Deng and Jiang, the U.S. press grasped well the general government policy toward China, and the press coverage would reflect the U.S. China policy line.

It is obvious that the U.S. government policy and its definition of U.S.-China policy relations set the tone, and outlined the frames, for the U.S. press coverage of political affairs. Framing analysis fits well into this situation, and it also enables us to predict the characteristics of the press coverage. The government provides information to the press. The press, as information processor, applies its own

schemata to present the news to the U.S. public. Sensing the government and dominant attitudes as such, the press would likely view and cover the events with event-specific frames.

## Research Questions

Based upon the previous analysis, then, this study had five research questions:

1. What was the direction of the selected newspapers' coverage of the two visits in terms of favorability of the news reporting? Was it more favorable and supportive, or more unfavorable and critical?
2. How was the news coverage related to the political contexts, especially the U.S. China policies, which were different during Jiang and Deng's visits?
3. What were the news frames in the news coverage of these two visits, given the political contexts of the visits?
4. To what extent did the news coverage pay more attention to the substance of the visits than to the events themselves? In other words, did the news coverage focus on the impact and outcomes of these events, or did it focus merely on these events?
5. To what extent did the news coverage of the selected newspapers emphasize some of the controversial issues, such as human rights issue, between the governments of the United States and China more in one visit than in the other?

This study was an attempt to find empirical answers for these questions. Since there was no prior scholarly literature available focusing on these intriguing questions, the documentary evidence-news from the four selected newspapers-was the primary place for empirical answers.

## Research Hypotheses

Based on the understanding of the foregoing theoretical examination and the review of pertinent literature, the following hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1-The news coverage by the selected newspapers of Vice-Premier Deng's visit in 1979 was more favorable than the news coverage of President Jiang's visit in 1997.

Hypothesis 2-The news coverage of the four selected newspapers presented Vice-Premier Deng's visit in 1979 as more important than President Jiang's visit in 1997. This hypothesis tests the salience and



prominence of news coverage of the visits. By salience, we mean making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to its audience or readers. An increase in salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and process it.

Hypothesis 3-The news coverage of the selected newspapers of Deng's visit was more issue-oriented than the news coverage of Jiang's visit in 1997, which was more event-oriented. This hypothesis was meant to answer the question of whether the news coverage of Deng and Jiang's visits was focused on the substance of the events or merely confined to the events as they happened. In light of the earlier analysis of the political contexts of these two visits, it is plausible to predict that during Jiang's visit, the press would pay much attention to the on-stage bickering between the two governments. This means "dramatic" aspects of the events were of great news value to the media. During Deng's visit, on the other hand, a rapprochement backdrop suggested that the dramatic nature of the event would be less prominent.

Hypothesis 4-There was less coverage of controversial issues between the United States and China by the selected newspapers during Vice-Premier Deng's visit in 1979 than there was during President Jiang's visit in 1997. As other scholars have pointed out, the salience and contentiousness of controversial issues between the United States and the People's Republic of China have changed over time.<sup>29</sup> In a time of reconciliation, the two nations would seek common grounds and reserve existing differences, while in a time of confrontation, those differences would become the focus.

Hypothesis 5-In references to the Chinese government, general terms were used more often during Vice-Premier Deng's visit in 1979 than during President Jiang's visit in 1997, when politically loaded terms were more often used.

This hypothesis tests the use of politically loaded symbols in reference to the Chinese state apparatus in the coverage of China and the visits of its leaders to the United States by the four selected newspapers. It is based on an assumption of the significance in the labeling of governments. Using politically loaded and culturally familiar symbols and labels in news coverage is one of the most frequently adopted techniques in news framing.<sup>30</sup> The words used most often reflect the value of reporters and the value of the media organizations, and the ideology of the United States. For example, in Anglo-American connotation, the very word "government" is one of legitimacy, and the word denotes the governing individuals and apparatuses that are presumed to be legally and, thus, morally constituted. However, the word "regime" is often used to convey less legitimacy.<sup>31</sup> This hypothesis proposes that, put in "confrontation" and "reconciliation" frames, the Chinese visits would be covered differently, in terms of the labeling of the state apparatus of China in the news.

## **Method**

*Selection of newspapers.* For this study, four prestige newspapers were selected: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times*. These four newspapers have weekday circulations of more than half a million, and Sunday circulations of well over one million. These selected newspapers are also considered “elite” or “prestige” newspapers.<sup>32</sup> In addition to being considered elite papers in and of themselves, the papers are also influential in terms of syndication, thus potentially reaching the vast majority of the American public.

*Study periods.* The analytical periods of this study were bound by these specific events, and had to be determined on the basis of the periods of the visits. Vice-Premier Deng was in the United States from Monday, January 29 to Sunday, February 4, 1979. President Jiang was in the United State from Sunday, October 26 to Monday, November 3, 1997. The entire periods of visit were included in the study. In addition, it is also a general practice to extend the period of study for certain days before and certain days after the event at issue. This study also included two days before and two days after the visits. Thus four extra days were included in the analysis besides the actual visit periods of seven days for Deng and nine days for Jiang.

Therefore, for Deng’s visit, the study period was from Saturday, Jan. 27 to Tuesday, Feb. 6, 1979, 11 days in total. For Jiang’s visit, the study period was from Friday, Oct. 24 to Wednesday, Nov. 5, 1997, totaling 13 days. There inevitably is a difference in the length of study periods, due to the difference in the length of the visits; however, this was accounted for in the statistical analysis.

*Study universe.* Indexes of the four newspapers were used to identify the relevant contents. All the articles about China, and/or the official visitors, were categorized under “China”, a geographical subject heading. All the articles indexed, except correction notices from the editors, were recorded for later analyses. In a preliminary study, we checked thoroughly the original issues of newspapers for omission of significant items in the index. The results produced a total of 375 concerning the two visits. These 375 stories formed the universe of this content analysis.

*Units of analysis.* Different types of units of analysis were used. For the directional analysis, a single paragraph, instead of the entire story, was used as the unit, because news text generally is multi-dimensional, and very often a coder is faced with conflicting cues in coding an entire news story for direction. For the coding of importance of event as presented in the news coverage, an entire story was used as the unit of analysis. For the coding of orientation (issue-orientated vs. event-orientated), an entire story was used as the unit of analysis. For the coding of presence/absence of controversial issues, a specific issue was used as the unit of analysis. For the coding of labeling of the Chinese government (government vs. regime), specific words were used as the units.

## Operational Definitions

*Directional Analysis.* For directional analysis, what is favorable and what is not must be operationally clarified in order for coders to efficiently and reliably carry out the coding process. The followings are the detailed definitions used in this study, which were adapted from M.L. Wang<sup>33</sup>; Budd, Thorp, and Donohew<sup>34</sup>; and Chang<sup>35</sup>:

**Favorable:** Those items reflecting social cohesion and cooperation and political and economic stability and/or strength. Favorability was judged on the basis of international cooperation (political, social and economic) in which the People's Republic of China, or any group or individual of, or representing, the People's Republic of China, was depicted as strong, right, friendly, open, peace-loving, cooperative and the like. In internal affairs, favorability was judged on the basis of persons cooperating, and government effective functioning, in political, social, and economic affairs. For example, events and incidents which depicted the People's Republic of China, or any group or individual within the People's Republic of China, as progressive, successful, peace-loving, moral, intelligent, lawful, unified, or as exercising leadership, were considered favorable.

**Unfavorable:** Those items that report social conflict and disorganization and political and economic instability and/or weakness. Unfavorability was judged on the basis of international tensions (political, social, and economic) in which the People's Republic of China, or any group or individual of, or representing, the People's Republic of China, was depicted as weak, wrong, uncooperative, dangerous, aggressive, evil and the like. In internal affairs, unfavorability was judged on the basis of civil disruption in which there was conflict between persons or groups of persons representing, or within, the People's Republic of China in political, economic or social affairs. For example, events and incidents which depicted the People's Republic of China, or any group or individual representing, or within, the People's Republic of China, as backward, domineering, immoral, impractical, unlawful, disunified or lacking in leadership were classified as unfavorable.

**Neutral:** Those items that reflected neither favorable nor unfavorable conditions, either through balance of content or a lack of direction. In cases where it was difficult to tell the direction, the items were coded as neutral.

**Importance of Event.**

The importance of event as presented in the news coverage was evaluated according to three indicators. The first indicator was news space in terms of number of paragraphs in a news story. The second indicator was the placement of news items. The third indicator was the use of illustrations with news stories.

**Orientation of Story.**

The categorizing scheme of the orientation of a news story was adapted from Ryan and Owen's study.<sup>36</sup> In their study, they used the categories of issue-oriented and event-oriented to classify the content of news.

**Event-oriented:** To be included in the "event-oriented" category, the starting point of the stories (story lead) must be timely events; happenings must be definite and pinpointed in terms of space and time; and stories must convey important details of the events. Story lead was defined as "the first unit of the story which performs the function of telling the entire story in epitomized form"<sup>37</sup>, which allows for instances in which the lead was not in the first paragraph.

**Issue-oriented:** Articles included in this category must provide an overview of or background for a timeless social problem or issue, or one aspect of a larger social problem or issue. The issue is the starting point of the article, not a specific event pinpointed in time and space.

*Presence of Controversial Issues.* Presence of controversial issues basically involved subject matter categorizing, because in order to be able to tell whether a controversial issues is present, a coder must be able to tell what the story is about. Subject matter is one of the most frequently used categories in content analysis. Subject categories, however, did not help in the test of our hypothesis. Guided by framing analysis, which proposes that in news reporting, a frame leads newsmen to make frame-confirming data more salient in the news text and to de-emphasize contradictory data, our emphasis and intent were on the interpretation of the difference in the coverage of controversial issues between these two visits, rather than on classification of the items into different subject categories.

From our reading of studies on U.S-China relations, we identified the following issues, which have been labeled as controversial by scholars and experts in that field<sup>38</sup>:

- a. General human rights
- b. Democracy vs. dictatorship
- c. Arms control, including sales/purchases of weaponry.
- d. The Tibet issues

All the articles were coded, according to these subject matter categories, either as “present” or “absent.” In case of multiple issues, all issues were recorded and coded. Dichotomous categorizing for this purpose is valid and relevant. Cassara<sup>39</sup>, in her study of the Carter human rights policy’s effect on U.S. coverage of Central and South America, used dichotomous categories. Chang et al.<sup>40</sup> also used dichotomous measurement-either an event/subject was covered in the media or it was not.

*Labeling of the Chinese Government.* The use of labels and symbols has been a point of interest in content analysis studies. According to Chang’s<sup>41</sup> study, in the U.S. media coverage of the Mainland China and Taiwan, three types of labels were used. These labels were general/legal, geographical, and ideological. Such terms as “the People’s Republic of China”, or “China,” belong to the first categories, while “Beijing/Peking” are geographical labels, and “Red China” is an example of an ideological label.

The measurement of this variable turned on the use of terms. This study examined two types of terms- i.e., in reference to the Chinese government, whether general terms or ideological terms were used. On the coding sheet, coders were presented with four choices: use of general terms, use of ideological terms, both types, and no reference.

General terms included such terms as “Chinese government,” “China”, or “Beijing/Peking,” “Jiang’s government,” and the like.

Ideological terms included “regime,” “dictator/dictatorship” “the authoritarian government,” “the totalitarian government,” and the like. If both types of terms were used, the item was coded as “both. If no reference of the Chinese government was identified, the item was coded as “no reference.”

*Coding procedures and reliability tests.* Three coders participated in the actual coding. Prior to the actual coding, an orientation and training session was held to strengthen the methodological clarity and to eliminate ambiguity and personal biases as far as possible. An inter-coder reliability check was also done.

For the inter-coder reliability checking, one issue of each of the four selected newspapers for each of the two visits was randomly selected. A total of 38 stories was generated and two coders coded all the items according to the coding scheme. Using the formula from North, Holsti, Zaninovich, and Zinnes<sup>42</sup>, we obtained the following inter-coder reliability scores: direction, 81.4%; controversial issues, 86.8%; story placement, 100.0%; story orientation, 84.2%; and labeling, 92.1%.

## Results

A total of 375 stories, published in the four newspapers during the study periods, Jan. 27-Feb. 6, 1979 and Oct. 24-Nov. 5, 1997, respectively, was coded in this study. There were 203 stories from 1979 and 172 stories from 1997.

### Direction of News Reporting

Hypothesis 1 inquired into the direction of the news coverage of these two visits. It predicted that the news coverage of Chinese Vice-Premier Deng's visit in 1979 was more favorable than that of President Jiang's visit in 1997. To find the direction of news reporting, news stories were coded by paragraph according to three categories-favorable, unfavorable, and neutral. A total of 3,183 paragraphs was coded into these categories. The summary results are presented in Table 1.

Overall, for Deng's visit in 1979, 17.9% of the paragraphs were favorable, while in the news coverage of Jiang's visit in 1997, 8.5% were favorable. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported ( $X^2 = 1221.56$ ,  $df = 2$ .  $p < .001$ ).

The data in Table 1 also provide some breakdown statistics about the direction in the news coverage of these two visits. In terms of percentage, we can see the dominant patterns in the news reporting of all four newspapers: (1) the majority of the stories were neutral (74% for Deng and 55.3% for Jiang); (2) in the news coverage of Deng's visit, there was more favorable news than unfavorable news, while in the news coverage of Jiang's visit, there was more unfavorable news than favorable news.

**Table 1: Direction of news reporting in 1979 and 1997.**

	Favorable % (N)	Neutral % (N)	Unfavorable % (N)	TOTAL % (N)
1979	17.9 (604)	74.0 (2,490)	8.1 (271)	100 (3,365)
1997	8.5 (270)	55.3 (1,759)	36.3 (1,154)	100 (3,183)

Table 1 can be conveniently simplified by using the concept of margin of favorability<sup>43</sup>, and Table 2 presents the data in this fashion. The margins of favorability were calculated by subtracting the percentage of unfavorable stories from that of favorable stories. The percentage of stories that were neutral was not used in this calculation.

**Table 2: Margin of favorability in the news coverage of the selected newspapers.**

Newspapers	Margin of Favorability	
	1979	1997
<i>Washington Post</i>	6.6%	-31.0%
<i>New York Times</i>	9.7%	-27.3%
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	9.0%	-23.5%
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	17.7%	-30.2%
Overall	9.8%	-27.8%

$t = 12.46, df = 373$  (CI = 95%),  $p < .001$

Table 2 shows that the margin of favorability is 9.8% in the news coverage of Deng’s visit and -27.8% of Jiang’s. Generally and statistically speaking, these data reveal that the news coverage of Deng’s visit was significantly more favorable ( $t = 12.46, df = 373, p < .001$ ) than the news coverage of Jiang’s visit.

#### Importance of Events as Represented in the News Coverage

Hypothesis 2 examined the importance of both visits as seen by the selected newspapers and as reflected in their news coverage. It predicted that Deng’s visit in 1979 was presented in the news coverage as more important than Jiang’s visit in 1997. Three indicators were used for this measurement.

First, the number of paragraphs in a news story was counted and used as an indicator to measure news space devoted to the specific event. Conceivably, the number of paragraphs as an indicator of news space is just an approximation. The study did find that the approximation was warranted, because the closeness of newspaper column width and the average number of lines in a paragraph (6.4).

As noted earlier, total news space (3,365 paragraphs) for Deng’s visit represented a period of 11 days, but that for Jiang’s visit spread over a period of 13 days. Treating the raw data of the news space for these two visits equal-handedly would be misleading. These numbers must be weighed to be comparable. Table 3 takes a look at news space in terms of number of paragraphs per day. It indicates that the average number of paragraphs for Deng’s visit in 1979 was 76.5 per day and 57.8 per day for Jiang’s visit in 1997.

**Table 3: News space in terms of number of paragraphs per day.**

	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	Average number of paragraphs
Deng's visit in 1979	107.8	91.9	52.5	53.6	76.5
Jiang's visit in 1997	71.3	80.5	61.4	31.6	57.8

A *t* value was obtained ( $t = 2.06$ ,  $df = 373$ ,  $p < .05$ ) which confirmed the statistical significance of the difference between the news space devoted to Deng and Jiang's visits by the selected news media. Therefore, on average the selected newspapers devoted significantly more space to the coverage of Deng's visit than to Jiang's visit, thus supporting hypothesis 2.

Second, the placement of news stories was coded using a five-point categorizing scheme. Placement indices were recorded on all levels (1-5) for both visits and the averages were calculated. While *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* had a higher placement index for the coverage of Deng's visit than for Jiang's, the other two newspapers had a higher placement index for Jiang's visit than for Deng's visit. As a result, the overall average placement score was 2.3 for Deng's visit and 2.5 for Jiang's visit. According to the coding scheme and design, these raw data indicate that news stories of Jiang's visit was generally given slightly better placement by the four newspapers than that of Deng's visit.

A two-independent-sample *t*-test was done to test whether the difference was significant. The results show that the difference between the 1979 and 1997 placement indexes was not statistically significant ( $t = 12.46$ ,  $df = 373$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As a result, these data go against the expectation that news coverage of Deng's visit in 1979 had a higher placement score than that of Jiang's in 1997.

A third indicator of the importance that the news media attached to the event, the use of illustrations with news stories, was also coded using a dichotomous scheme. An item was coded either as yes (there are illustrations) or no (no illustration). Of the 203 stories during Deng's visit, 86 (42.4%) of them had illustrations. Of the 172 stories during Jiang's visit, 82 (47.7%) of them had illustrations, and this indicator did not support the expectation that there were more use of illustrations in the news coverage of Deng's visit than of Jiang's visit.

In summary, while the first indicator did support hypothesis 2, the second and third indicators failed to provide any support. Therefore hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

### Analysis of News Orientation

Hypothesis 3 examined whether the news coverage was focused on the underlying substance and



impact of the events or whether it was merely confined to the basic events as they happened. To measure this variable, a dichotomous coding of items into event- and issue-oriented categories was employed. Based on the event-oriented and issue-oriented distinction, hypothesis 3 predicted that the news coverage of Deng's visit in 1979 was more issue-oriented than that of Jiang's coverage in 1997.

**Table 4: Chi-Square test of news orientation.**

	1979	1997
Issue-oriented % (N)	57.1 (116)	45.3 (78)
Event-oriented % (N)	42.9 (87)	54.7 (94)
TOTAL	100.0 (203)	100.0 (172)

All the 375 stories from the four newspapers were coded either as "issue-oriented" or "event-oriented" according to Ryan and Owen's<sup>44</sup> definitions. The data in Table 4 indicate that all the newspapers had larger proportions of issue-oriented stories for Deng's visit in 1979 than for Jiang's visit in 1997. Overall, there was a slightly higher proportion of issue-oriented stories during Deng's visit (57.1%) than there was during Jiang's visit (45.3%), but the difference was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} = 3.59$ ,  $\chi^2_{\text{critical}} = 3.84$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Therefore hypothesis 3 was rejected.

#### Controversial Issues in the News

Hypothesis 4 assessed the salience and contentiousness of controversial issues in the news coverage of Deng's visit in 1979 and Jiang's visit in 1997. By counting presence of controversial issues in the news coverage, we predicted that there were more references to controversial issues in the news coverage of Jiang's visit in 1997 than there were during Deng's visit in 1979.

**Table 5: Controversial issues in the news of the selected newspapers.**

		<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	Overall
<b>1979</b>	Human rights	3	6	1	2	12
	Democracy vs. dictatorship	1	1	0	4	
	Arms control	5	1	1	9	
	Tibet issues	0	0	0	0	
	TOTAL	9	10	3	25	

<b>1997</b>	Human rights	37	37	33	16	123
Democracy vs. dictatorship	14	14	16	7	51	
Arms control	17	15	14	8	54	
Tibet issues	22	15	11	6	54	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>282</b>	

$t = 18.39, df = 206.22$  (CI = 95%),  $p < .001$

All the news stories were coded for references to controversial issues. For each story, the presence and absence of four different issue categories were examined and coded. For each issue category, either a “yes” (present) or “no” (absent) was assigned. Table 5 presents the details of the coding results. The numbers shown in this table represent the numbers of references to respective controversial issue in the news coverage. If we look at the data by individual newspaper, the pattern is very clear. For example, *The Washington Post* had nine references to controversial issues in its coverage of Deng’s visit. But in its coverage of Jiang’s visit, the number of references to controversial issues climbed to 90. This pattern also holds for the rest of the newspapers. Again if we look at the overall results, we find the sharp contrast between the number of references to controversial issues in the news coverage of Deng and Jiang’s visits: 25 vs. 282.

The Tibet issue is a good, individual example of this contrast. Although the status of Tibet was the same during each visit, the Tibet issue was never mentioned in the coverage of Deng’s visit in 1979, but was a big issue during Jiang’s visit in 1997 (54 references to the Tibet issue in the selected newspapers). For other issues, the general pattern held true: more controversial issues were covered during Jiang’s visit than during Deng’s visit.

The t-test of the difference obtained a  $t$  value of 18.39 and  $p < .001$ . Thus it was confirmed that there was a significant difference in the news coverage of controversial issues during Jiang’s visit and Deng’s visit, and hypothesis 4 was supported.

### Labeling of the Chinese Government

Hypothesis 5 examined the use of politically loaded labels in the references to the Chinese government in the news coverage of Deng and Jiang’s visits. It hypothesized that in the news coverage of Deng’s visit general terms were more often used in the references to the Chinese government, while in the coverage of Jiang’s visit, ideologically loaded terms were more often used.

To examine the labeling of the Chinese government, each story was coded according to four categories: (1) use of general terms, (2) use of ideological terms, (3) use of both types of terms, and (4) no reference to the Chinese government. The results are shown in Table 6. The numbers in the table represent the numbers of stories in which the respective labeling was used.

**Table 6: Labeling of the Chinese Government in the news coverage.**

		<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	TOTAL N (%)
<b>1979</b>	General Terms	61	56	27	34	178 (87.7)
	Ideological Terms	0	1	0	3	3 (1.5)
	Both	4	2	1	2	9 (4.4)
	No Reference	0	7	6	0	13 (6.4)
<b>1997</b>	General Terms	31	38	29	13	111 (64.5)
	Ideological Terms	5	2	2	0	9 (5.2)
	Both	11	11	7	6	35 (20.3)
	No Reference	6	5	3	3	17 (9.9)

Table 6 indicates that general terms were predominantly used: 87.7% of all the stories in 1979 and 64.5% of all the stories in 1997. The use of ideological terms was infrequent (1.5% in 1979 and 5.2% in 1997).

A striking difference, however, does exist between the use of both labels in 1979 and 1997. For example, 20.3% of the stories in the selected newspapers during Jiang's visit used both general terms and ideological terms, while in the news coverage of Deng's visit, only 4.4% of the stories used both labels. If we group the categories "ideological terms only" and "both" together, the percentage will be even higher (25.5%) for Jiang's visit. This means that ideological labeling of the Chinese government was much more often in the news coverage of Jiang's visit than of Deng's visit.

**Table 7: Chi-Square test of the use of labels.**

	1979	1997
General Terms Only	178	111
Ideological Terms Only	3	9
Both Terms	9	35
No References	13	17

TOTAL

203 172

$X^2_{\text{calculated}} = 30.49$ ,  $X^2_{\text{critical}} = 7.81$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$

The chi-square test statistics for this difference are reported in Table 7. As these statistics show, the chi-square value was 30.49 ( $p < .001$ ). It is concluded that there existed significant difference in the use of labels in references to the Chinese government. Therefore hypothesis 5 was supported.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The hypothesis testing confirmed that the selected newspapers' coverage of Deng's visit was more favorable than that of Jiang's visit. In the examination of coverage of certain controversial issues, it confirmed that controversial issues were much less covered during Deng's visit than during Jiang's. In the examination of the use of labels, it also confirmed that general labels were more often used in the news coverage in references to the Chinese government during Deng's visit, and ideologically loaded terms were more often used during Jiang's visit.

In the examination of the event importance as presented by the selected newspapers, the results did not completely support the research hypothesis. As far as news space was concerned, it was confirmed that the selected newspapers devoted more news space per story to the coverage of Deng's visit than to Jiang's visit. However, it was not confirmed that news of Deng's visit had better placement than that of Jiang's visit, nor was it confirmed that more news reports during Deng's visit were accompanied by illustrations than during Jiang's visit. Consequently, not enough evidence was collected regarding the event importance as represented in the news reporting.

The failure of an overall support for hypothesis 2 can possibly be attributed to the changing nature of editorial designs of newspapers over time. As far as this study is concerned, we are comparing the news media 18 years apart. With this elapse of time, changes in the use of illustrations and in news story placement were inevitable and should have been expected. Indeed, this raises a serious question about the use of illustrations and news placement as indicators of importance of news events, especially in a longitudinal study such as this.

In the examination of news orientation-yet another effort to find the relation between the U.S. China policy and the news media performance-the collected data failed to support the prediction that news coverage of Deng's visit paid more attention to the substance of the event, while news coverage of Jiang's visit was primarily confined to the event as it happened. This failure seems to suggest that the issue-oriented vs. event-oriented distinction may be an appropriate categorizing tool for general purpose, but it might not serve the intended purpose of measuring and comparing the focus of news coverage.

Despite the rejected hypothesis, the supported hypotheses concerning direction, controversial issues, and use of labels basically confirmed the relation between the news coverage of these selected newspapers and the U.S. China policy. The results demonstrated that the news coverage of the selected newspapers of Deng and Jiang's visits was closely related to the U.S.-China relations and U.S. China policy at the time of the visits.

## Implications of Study

The relation between news and foreign policy has been a continuing focus of academic research. It deserves more discussion here. As a specific case, the study of news coverage of Deng and Jiang's visits provided a more vivid situation and easier access to this problem. As this study has found, given the reconciliatory nature of Sino-U.S. relations during Vice-Premier Deng's visit, the selected newspapers tended to produce more favorable news coverage of the event, devote more news space for the coverage, trivialize those controversial issues that existed between the United States and China, and label the Chinese government with legal and geographic terms. Conversely, in a conflict context, the news coverage of Jiang's visit in 1997 tended to be less favorable, accentuate controversial issues, and label the Chinese government in a manner that reflects the ideological values of the news media and the political elite.

The applications of framing analysis and the media hegemony thesis in this study have theoretically demonstrated that, from the government perspective, the U.S. government and the political elite's voices in foreign policy, international relations, and other political affairs could shape, to a great extent, the news media's performance in news selection and news presentation. From the news media perspective, the elite ideology and government voice on certain events dictate the types of news frames used in the coverage of international affairs and facilitate the news reporting. This analysis basically answers the research questions raised at the start of this paper.

This study also demonstrated that framing analysis and the media hegemony thesis are good starting points for studying news media. As mass communication researchers, by identifying the news frames in the news reporting, and considering the media performance from a media hegemony perspective, we are able to predict the trends and characteristics of the media coverage of a certain events. This study once again confirmed that news framing is one of the convenient ways of news reporting (albeit subconsciously), and news frames are the products of the hegemonic process of news production.

As the diplomatic euphemism often goes in the struggle for a normal relationship between the United States and China, our nations should seek common ground and reserve differences. In this power game, the political powers are by no means the only players. The news media, by putting events in totally different frames and binding the news reporting with them, play a strong, harmonious tone. The news reporting of Deng and Jiang's visits provided an excellent example.

## Limitations of Study

First, in order to verify the relationships between the news coverage of these two political events and the foreign policy of the U.S. government, four prestige newspapers were chosen for the content analysis. These four newspapers are undoubtedly among the most influential prestige newspapers in the United States, and their performance certainly reflects, to some extent, the characters of the U.S. news media in general. However, these newspapers were not randomly chosen, and therefore it is not appropriate to generalize the results to all U.S. newspapers. It is also important to note that news media in other forms, such as radio, television, and newsmagazines, are playing a more and more important role in today's political communication, in terms of readership, viewership, and listenership. Since these types of news media were excluded from the content analysis pool, it is not appropriate to generalize the results to these types of media either.

Second, in measuring the importance and prominence of the news coverage, three indicators, space (number of news stories), placement, and use of illustrations, were used. The reader must be cautioned in the use of space as an indicator of prominence and importance. The relationship between news space and news prominence is not always linear, due to the fact that there is a limited size news hole in each issue of a newspaper, and there are often competing news events to fill the hole. What is significant about this is that, when there are competing domestic or international news events, these events are certainly in the competition for more space, and the allocation of space to any one story will be limited. When there is no competing event, the event at issue may be able to get more news space. For example, a simultaneously held Olympic Games may divert news coverage of a political event, in terms of space allocation.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Research is a process of solving problems and, in most cases, discovering more problems. In this study, we chose framing analysis and media hegemony as the theoretical frameworks. These theoretical concepts were appropriate in this study, and they provided fundamental guidance in every step of the study, including literature review, research question formulation, establishing hypotheses, and hypothesis testing. However, framing analysis and media hegemony should not be considered monolithic in this situation. Other theories, such as the gatekeeping and agenda-setting theories, might fit well in this study. Studying the U.S. news coverage of these two visits from a gatekeeping perspective can help us understand how newsmen on every level of news production, including news sourcing, news beat assigning, news writing, and news editing function as gatekeepers in the process of news production. Similarly, approaching this problem from an agenda-setting perspective might as well provide us a picture of how the U.S. government and its high officials set the media agenda for the newspapers, in terms of what to report, what to emphasize, and what to trivialize. Of course, different perspectives will require different ways of looking at this problem, hence, different research designs. The results, however, could be equally interesting.

It has often been said that one picture is worth a thousand words. This study has demonstrated that not only is a picture important, but how the picture is framed and presented is also very important. The study has shown that although news framing analysis and the media hegemony perspective are not a cure-all recipe for all studies, looking at the “pictures” presented by the news media through a news framing and media hegemony perspective is very important in helping us understand the reporting of major news events. We learned that even supposedly independent U.S. prestige newspapers seemed to follow the U.S. diplomatic “party line.”

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