

Framing Diplomatic Relations: A Comparative Analysis of Malaysian and Chinese Newspapers Coverage of Najib's Visit to China

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ABSTRACT

News media play an important role in diplomacy. Hence, when dealing with diplomatic relations, a question of how these media portray the messages of their countries' leaders is the major concerns of this study. The news coverage of Najib's visit to China is examined comparatively across Malaysian and Chinese newspapers. By employing framing as the theoretical framework and content analysis as the research method, this study examined the framing process undertaken by the newspapers in reporting diplomatic relations. The results revealed that, although the state visit was characterized by a positive tone towards Malaysia and China that described bilateral relations, economic consequences frame was most highlighted by Malaysian newspaper, while Chinese newspaper emphasized the responsibility frame. Notably, this study found that these two newspapers were inclined to favorably portray their respective governments. The dissimilar coverage of a same issue by Malaysian and Chinese newspaper denoted a certain degree of cross-national bias reflecting its host cultural, ideological and political perspectives.

Keywords: Malaysia-China relations, framing theory, diplomacy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's six-day official visit to China from May 27 to June 1 in 2014 was a significant event for Malaysia-China relations as it symbolically marked the 40th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Malaysia and China have been enjoying friendly relations with each other since Kuala Lumpur normalized ties with Beijing in 1974. Incidentally, this effort was led by Najib's father, the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Malaysia was the first Southeast Asian country to establish diplomatic relations with China, and as such has in many ways set the pace and scope for ASEAN's cooperation with China (Liow, 2000). Although Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia did not agree to establish diplomatic and political relations with China due to the communist internal threat to Malaya, the second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussien reversed the non-recognition policy in 1974. Subsequently, economic pragmatism became the backbone of Malaysia's China policy, as evidenced by the Malaysian leader's high-level visits to China, which have always been accompanied by large business delegations that resulted in many joint-venture projects (Kuik, 2014). It is also seen that Malaysia and China have established the most cordial and productive relationships in the Asia-Pacific throughout the post-Cold War era, one with implications beyond their bilateral relations (Kuik, 2014).

However, the ties between Malaysia and China were tested in the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 in March 2014, where two thirds of its 239 passengers were Chinese citizens. The bilateral tension was

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created by the excessive media coverage of the missing flight MH370, especially when the Chinese media started to lay the blame on Malaysian authorities, and consequently led to massive criticism and anger from Chinese relatives against Malaysia (Kuik, 2014).

2.0 OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Najib's visit to China was set against the backdrop of 40th anniversary of Malaysia-China bilateral relations, as well as the MH370 incident. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how the Malaysian and Chinese newspapers portrayed the bilateral relations of the two countries. The following research questions were raised for the purpose of this study:

RQ1: How extensively was Najib's visit to China covered by the newspapers?

RQ2: What was the news source used by the newspapers in their coverage of Najib's visit to China?

RQ3: What was the news frame used by the newspapers in their coverage of Najib's visit to China?

RQ4: What was the slant of the articles published by the newspapers in their coverage of Najib's visit to China?

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study drew upon framing theory as the theoretical framework. Framing and frame analysis have emerged as one of the most important areas of theory and research on mass media (Brewer, Graf and Willnat, 2003). Erving Goffman was responsible for advancing the development of frame analysis in the 1960-70s. He discussed how frames are learned and applied in daily life. It was argued that frames are implicit and underlie all types of social activity. Goffman extended his theory to mass media content, where he speculated about the social consequences of the way that women were routinely presented in magazine advertisements (Denis, 2006). After Goffman's work, framing theory began to gradually gain interest and acceptance in the 1980s and 1990. Early examples of framing research applied to journalism can be found in the work of two sociologists Gaye Tuchman (1978) and Todd Gitlin (1980). These two scholars used the concept of framing as a tool to understand news as a social construction and social resource (Zhou, 2008).

From a theoretical standpoint, framing connects to the theory of agenda-setting because it emerges from the assumption that the news that is communicated is purposefully selected through the process of selection and salience (de Vreese, 2004). The most frequently cited definition of framing comes from Entman (1993):

To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993, pp. 52)

In addition, Griffin (2003) regarded framing as "the process of calling attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, which might lead to different reactions." Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) described framing as "the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion in the media agenda when a particular object is discussed."

McCombs, Shaw and Weaver suggested that not only agenda-setting and framing effects are related, framing is, in fact, an extension of agenda-setting (as cited in Scheufele, 1999). From the standpoint of framing theory, the news contributions do not just give the people *what* they are supposed to think about, but at the same time *in what manner* they should evaluate the presented material (Hurtikova, 2013). After a long period of four decades, Bernard Cohen (1963) presented his idea by saying: "Press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about". Framing can therefore, in addition to priming theory, be incorporated into the category of media effects, which the term *second-level agenda-setting* is coined to describe the impact of the salience of characteristics of media coverage on audiences' interpretation of the news stories (Scheufele, 1999).

Framing theory assumes that the news media plays a decisive role in the process of political preferences forming of the citizens. It helps to clarify how the citizens perceive and understand the political events which are presented to them by the media in the framework of the process of political communication and in what manner they are influenced by the significance of the production of news that is communicated and the choice of their opinions (Hurtikova, 2013). Soukup (2014) defined framing as the ways in which politicians or the news media present issues to the frame of reference in which they present ideas.

Framing analysis allows researchers to examine the role of media in the development of foreign policy and diplomatic relations. Tortajada and Pobre (2011) found that the news media coverage in both countries serve from the main view points of the national interest on bilateral issues, which played both an informative and a constructive role, with positive images of cooperation frame in the news. However, the news media defined as a vehicle of communication for interested groups other than officials when the media started to portray a favorable impression towards their respective country based on its national interests, which gradually portray a negative slant in both countries that caused the framing of the issues differed.

According to Bonomi and Pan (2013), the diplomatic relationship between two countries was characterized by either positive or neutral tone, which was framing as friendly relations by including positive comments from the opposition leaders in the news. The frame changed to a negative tone when the media started to focus on the government sources from its own country, declarations and the bilateral differences were published that consolidated a negative concept of the diplomatic relationship. This demonstrated the importance of sources selecting process undertaken by the news media in framing an issue.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 *Media and Diplomacy*

Diplomacy is better explained in relation to two major perspectives that can be labelled as 'macro' (the big picture) and 'micro' (the small picture). As White (2005) described, 'macro' perspective of diplomacy in world politics refers to a communications process between international actors that seeks through negotiation to resolve conflict short of war. This process has been refined, institutionalized, and professionalized over many centuries. From the 'micro' perspective, diplomacy in foreign policy refers to the use of diplomacy as a policy instrument possibly in association with other instruments such as economic or military force to enable an international actor to achieve its policy objectives.

Significantly, face-to-face diplomacy or commonly referred to as "personal diplomacy" has long been the lynchpin of international relations. Many leaders and diplomats throughout the modern era have described the merits of meeting physically with a counterpart that facilitate greater understanding and cooperation between two countries (Holmes, 2013). Political leaders, especially who have made it to the highest office such as Presidents and Prime Ministers, are increasingly performing diplomatic roles on the international stage to have bilateral or multilateral meetings with their counterparts abroad (Melissen, 2003). These high-level meetings between two countries are generally facilitated through state visits by a head of state travel to another country, at the invitation of that country's head of state (Nitsch, 2007).

Besides, the meetings involving representatives of the highest level of states, government or international organizations are also called as summits. In contemporary society, summits greatly affect the international context (Caramerli, 2012). As Melissen (2003) considered these high-level meetings as a form of summit diplomacy in which the head of a state achieves the state's diplomatic objectives by focusing all national capabilities in view of the state's vision and philosophy. State visit is the highest form of diplomatic contact between two countries that usually mark the further development in bilateral relations, but it varies enormously in purpose and focus may be on political issues, human rights, environmental protection, cultural contact or other motives (Nitsch, 2007).

Traditional diplomacy was highly formal, institutional, interpersonal, slow and organized on a bilateral basis and usually protected by secrecy. Diplomats kept both negotiations and agreements secret and revealed them to public only as implementation or violations required (Gilboa, 2001). However, the end of the Cold War represented a dramatic change in the international agenda that led contemporary diplomacy to a globalized, complicated and fragmented activity (White, 2005). Due to the development of contemporary means of communication, heads of state and governments, as well as international affairs ministries increasingly involved in activities that were once linked exclusively to diplomats' skills (Iucu, 2010). Direct and unmediated conduct of negotiations by politicians and high-ranking officials, including heads of states and ministers has created a 'new diplomacy' associated with the exposure of diplomacy to the media and public opinion (Gilboa, 2001) with new rules, new techniques and immense implications for policymakers, diplomats, journalists and the public (White, 2005). Today, the transnational and digital media landscape has transformed diplomacy from being closed to open. The process of diplomatic negotiations is shared not only through traditional diplomatic means, but also nations' online news systems that can reach both governments and citizens.

The media is regarded as a crucial role in international diplomatic negotiation. Davison (1974) stated almost four decades ago, "the press serves as the eyes and ears of diplomacy" (p. 177). He further suggested that media could be an important role in ensuring intra-governmental coordination and connects government with interested publics as it provides supplementary communication channels for diplomacy through reporting and highlighting on the issues under negotiation. Within political communication literature, there has been a growing realization that the media have an impact on the practice of diplomacy (Archetti, 2012). For instance, among the most elaborate on analyses of media effects on diplomatic activity, Gilboa (2001) distinguished three conceptual models of uses and effects about the way media are used as a tool of foreign policy and international negotiation: 'public diplomacy', where state and non-state actors use the media to influence public opinion abroad; 'media diplomacy', where officials use the media to communicate with actors and promote conflict resolution; and 'media-broker diplomacy', where journalists serve as temporary mediators in international negotiations.

4.2 Overview of Media in Malaysia

State control of mass media is a central part of the political system in Malaysia based on two major mechanisms: legal restriction and ownership control. Freedom of the press was increasingly restricted by the Government under a number of laws such as the Printing Presses and Publication Act (PPPA), Internal Security Act (ISA), Official Secret Act (OSA) and Sedition Act (SA) (Mohd Azizuddin, 2008). These legal legislations are enforced in the name of protecting and promoting law and order, internal security as well as national development (Mustafa, 2005). The acts allow the government to impose prior restraints on publication, post-publication punishments and penalties for the acquisition of official information (George, 2006). Additionally, media ownership by political parties is another feature of challenges to press freedom in Malaysia. The media including television stations, radio networks and newspapers in Malaysia is either controlled or owned by the Government or Government-linked individuals, various partners of the ruling coalition and also of their economic elites (Mustafa, 2005).

The result is that press freedom of mainstream media industry remained restricted in Malaysia, where the government has absolute authority over the media and control the alternative or opposition media to strength its power and dominate the public sphere of the media (Mohd Azizuddin, 2008). In 2015, Malaysia's press freedom index is ranked 147 out in 180 countries in World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). The Malaysian political cultural context facilitates the power of ownership to influence behavior in Malaysian democracy system which require framing 'telling people what to think about' – to influence the beliefs of the political elites, media and also public, which later could shape their behavior. The potential slanted news framing with the Prime Minister himself who is able to manipulate the media according to his political needs by disseminating his political policies and messages towards the political elites, media and also public (Yuslinda and Hasmah, 2012).

4.3 Overview of Media in China

The People's Republic of China's media environment has arguably one of the most restrictive media systems in the world (Nhan, 2008). Reporters Without Borders' 2015 World Press Freedom Index places China at 176 out in 180 countries. In China, mass media is tightly controlled and governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through one of its internal divisions, called the Central Propaganda Department. Founded in 1977, the department has overseen the Propaganda and Education system by monitoring, instructing and censoring all of the country's mass media such as newspapers and magazines, film, television and radio broadcasting, the Internet, the publishing industry, and all aspects of cultural and information production over the whole of Chinese society in the current era (Brady, 2006). Described as a 'command' system, the CCP exerts strict ideological control on mass media at all levels where politics are greatly involved in the running and daily operation of Chinese media (Liu and Han, 2012). As described by Liu (1971), media messages in China are treated as "political propaganda", rather than simple information dissemination for the receivers.

The role of the media is viewed by the CCP as the mouthpiece of the Party to shape "values and perspective of the entire population". The media is part of a powerful state propaganda tool that is governed by the "Party principle", which comprises of three basic components: news media must reflect the Party's guiding ideology; news media must disseminate the Party's programs, policies and directives; and news media must accept the Party's leadership and subscribe to the Party's organizational principles and press policies (Nhan, 2008). Liu Yunshan, the head of the Central Propaganda Department revealed journalists' role is to make the people loyal to the public by propagating positive national images (Brady, 2006). 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 (Leshuo and Chitty, 2012).

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was used as the research method for this study. The newspapers chosen were *The Star*, an English-language daily newspaper in Malaysia; and *People's Daily*, a daily newspaper in China with its main edition in Chinese-language and sub-editions available in multiple languages including English. This study examined the English-language edition of *People's Daily*. *The Star* has long been enjoying the highest circulation within the English language stream dailies in Malaysia. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, the 2015 average daily circulation of *The Star* was 272,507 (www.abcm.org.my). In addition, *People's Daily* is also one of the leading newspapers in China. According to the Statistics Portal (2012), it was ranked second in the country with a circulation of 2.52 million (www.statista.com).

The sample of this study was drawn from May 20 to June 8, 2014 as it represented the peak period of Najib's visit to China. The unit of analysis was the articles, which included straight news, editorials, columns and letters. The articles were pulled from the respective newspaper's online database by using "Najib's visit to China" as the keywords.

The articles qualified for analyses were given an identification number and they were then coded according to the categories in the code book (refer Appendix A). The extent of coverage was studied from three angles: (1) number of articles; (2) type of news articles; and (3) size of news articles (measured by word count). This study employed the inductive or emergent coding approach, whereby the researchers outlined the coding categories after a preliminary examination of the data. The categories for news sources used in this study were: (1) Malaysian Prime Minister; (2) Chinese President; (3) Officials from Malaysia; (4) Officials from China; and (5) others.

Five categories of news frames were identified in this study: (1) Bilateral relations; (2) Economic consequences; (3) Responsibility; (4) Domestic Politics; and (5) Others. The following are the operational definitions for the news frames:

- (1) Bilateral relations – emphasizes the event, issue or problem related to the diplomatic relations or friendship among and between individuals, groups, parties, institutions or countries.
- (2) Economic consequences – reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country.
- (3) Responsibility – highlights the government's (or an individual's or a group's) responsibility and ability in solving the particular problem.
- (4) Domestic politics – focuses on the political impact of the event, issue or problem towards individuals, groups, parties, institutions or countries.
- (5) Others – any other frames that do not fit into the abovementioned categories.

Slant of the articles refer to the attitude expressed towards any individual, group, party or institution by its user (Baumgartner and Wirth, 2012; Feeley and Frederick, 2007). The categories for slant of this study were divided into:

- (1) Supportive towards Malaysia – conveyed a favorable impression of Malaysia. The coverage either supported or one-sidedly emphasized the role of Malaysia in the bilateral relations and contained quotes by individuals who commended Malaysia.
- (2) Supportive towards China – conveyed a favorable impression of China. The coverage either supported or one-sidedly emphasized the role of China in the bilateral relations and contained quotes by individuals who commended China.
- (3) Neutral – conveyed a favorable impression of Malaysia and China. The coverage equally emphasized the role of both countries in the bilateral relations and contained quotes by individuals who commended Malaysia-China relations.

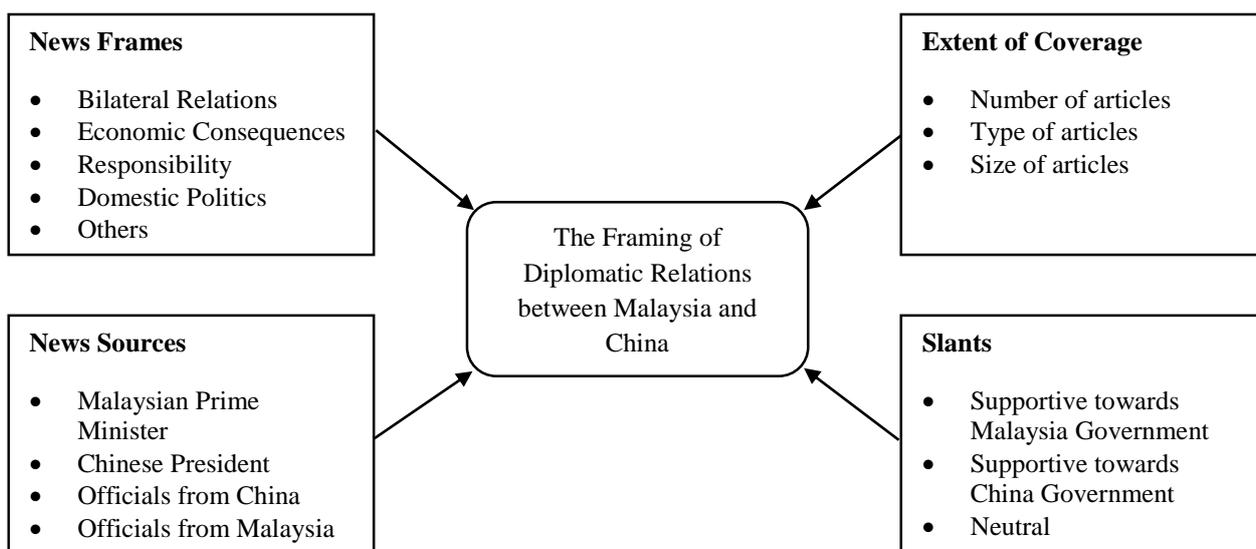


Figure 1 demonstrates the research framework of this study:

The 53 articles collected from the two newspapers were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentage. The first author was the first coder, while the second author was the second coder. During the training session, the authors coded 10 articles that were chosen randomly from the sample of this study.

Disagreements were analyzed and some additional explanations were included to the coding instruction in the code book. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Holsti's formula (cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). It was found that the inter-coder reliability for news frames was 0.95 and for slant, 0.99.

6.0 FINDINGS

6.1 Extent of Coverage

The Star published larger amount of coverage on Najib's visit to China (35 articles), and with higher average number of words (416 words) compared to *People's Daily*, which had 18 articles with average length of 314 words. As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the articles from both newspapers were straight news. A finding of interest was that the two newspapers devoted no space for opinions and letters on the visit. Nonetheless, both *The Star* and *People's Daily* published column articles, which were 5.71% and 11.11% respectively. *The Star* also published editorials (2.86%), while *People's Daily* had none.

	<i>The Star</i> (n = 35)%	<i>People's Daily</i> (n = 18)%
Type:		
Straight news	88.57	88.89
Editorials	2.86	0
Columns	5.71	11.11
Letters	0	0
Opinions	0	0
Videos	2.86	0
Size (mean):	416 words	314 words

Table 1: Extent of Coverage

	<i>The Star</i> (n = 35)%	<i>People's Daily</i> (n = 18)%
Malaysian Prime Minister	47.92	36.67
China President	2.08	6.67
Officials of Malaysia	22.92	0
Officials of China	14.58	46.67
Others	12.50	10.00

Table 2: News Sources

6.2 News Sources

The results in Table 2 demonstrate that Malaysian Prime Minister (47.92%) appeared to be the most dominant news source for *The Star*. Similarly, *People's Daily* also obtained most of their information from the Malaysian Prime Minister (36.67%). In stark contrast, *People's Daily* turned to the officials from China (46.67%) as its most important news sources, whereas *The Star* relied heavier on the officials from Malaysia (22.92%) than the officials from China (14.58%). In addition, others were also attributed as their news sources where *The Star* made up 12.50% and *People's Daily* made up 10.00%. It is noteworthy that none of the Malaysia's officials were used in *People's Daily* as its news sources.

Across the two newspapers, the most frequently cited sources from China's officials were Li Keqiang, who was the Chinese Premier, followed by Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Qin Gang; Chinese Vice Premier, Wang Yang; Chinese ambassadors to Malaysia, Huang Huikang; Former Chinese ambassadors to Malaysia, Chaixi and Wang Chungui; Chinese Legislator Zhang Dejiang; official from Chinese Consulate; Governor of Shaanxi Province, Lou Qinjian; the Great Mosque's management committee deputy director, Lin Mingzhi; and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU)'s President, Peng Long.

Malaysia officials' voice was shared by Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)'s President, Liow Tiong Lai; Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board director-general, Datuk Mirza Mohammad Taiyab; Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz; Youth and Sport Minister Khairy Jamaluddin; Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) secretary-general Prof Dr Sim Hui Kian; Malaysian Government Official; Malaysian ambassador to China, Datuk Iskandar Sarudin; Prime Minister's office spokesman; Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein; and former Gerakan president, Koh Tsu Koon. The category of "others" included the Chinese family representatives' committee; the Joint Communiqué; Sango Taxi Association president, Yamane Shigetaka; PosNiaga chief operating officer Bahaman Kamaruzzaman; and several newspapers.

6.3 News Frames

Table 3 below indicates the percentages for the different news frames found in the newspapers. As demonstrated in Table 3, bilateral relations frame was appeared to be the most salient frame in both newspapers, *The Star* (40.43%) and *People's Daily* (43.48%). In stark contrast, the economic consequences frame was the second dominant frame in *The Star* (36.17%), whereas *People's Daily* demonstrated a strong tendency on emphasizing the responsibility frame (34.78%) in the coverage of Najib's visit to China.

	<i>The Star</i> (n = 35)%	<i>People's Daily</i> (n = 18)%
Bilateral Relations	40.43	43.48
Economic Consequences	36.17	8.70
Domestic Politics	8.51	13.04
Responsibility	8.51	34.78
Others	6.38	0

Table 3: News Frames

6.4 Bilateral Relations Frame

Under the bilateral relations frame, both newspapers highlighted the friendly relations and long-term cooperation between Malaysia and China. It was the dominant frame reported in the newspapers that Najib's visit to China is important in strengthening the diplomatic ties between the two nations in conjunction of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of China-Malaysia relations on May 31, 2014.

In *People's Daily's* bilateral relations frame, most voices were shared by Chinese officials. For example, the Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang was quoted as saying that China attaches great importance to developing the Sino-Malaysian relationship, and will continue to work with Malaysia during a routine press briefing. Qin also praised the bilateral ties between Malaysia and China that witnessed healthy and stable development in relationship, expanding practical cooperation and sound coordination and cooperation in global and regional issues (*People's Daily*, 26 May 2014). In addition, Qin expected Najib's visit to have in depth and broad discussions on collaboration and coordination on regional issues and produce more consensus, more results and bring bilateral relations to a new high. Describing Najib's trip as "a very important visit in bilateral relations", Qin underscored China's commitment to developing ties with Malaysia. Qin also characterized Malaysia as an important partner in the ASEAN (*People's Daily*, 29 May 2014a). The coverage under bilateral relations frame mostly given equal emphasis on the role of both countries. Covering Najib's visit to China, *People's Daily* also translated and published an article written by Chaixi, the former Chinese ambassador to Malaysia that provided valuable insight into Malaysia-China relations. (*People's Daily*, 29 May 2014b).

On the other hand, *The Star* reflected the voices of Chinese President Xi Jinping that values Malaysia as a trustworthy friend and an important partner. He emphasized that China appreciated the friendly ties with Malaysia which began 40 years ago. *The Star* also used Najib's saying that although MH370 mystery has been "very painful and testing" for both nations, Malaysia and China remained trusting and patient friends (*The Star*, 31 May 2014a). In addition, a columnist of *The Star* talked about MH370 and Sino-Malaysian relations. He said that although the disappearance of the airliner raises questions on whether there will be a backlash of political consequences and fundamentally affected bilateral Sino-Malaysian relations, but China-Malaysia relations are remained well and good. He added that neither Malaysia nor the Chinese want to rock the boat due to a certain amount of goodwill developed between both sides for many years (*The Star*, 31 May 2014b). A finding of interest was that *The Star* published a special edition of analysis about Najib's visit to China. According to the article, the newspaper described Najib's visit as, "What the father began, the son is taking to the next level" meaning that Najib continues to strengthen the bilateral relations between Malaysia and China after his father, the late Tun Razak who established Malaysia-China relations in 1974 (*The Star*, 1 June 2014a).

6.5 Economic Consequences Frame

Through adopting the economic consequences frame, *The Star* devoted more space of the coverage to talk about funds, trade and investment agreements that have made between Malaysia and China. In this frame, *The Star* reported the negotiations and decisions made by the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib during his trip. On the second day of his visit to China, Najib has visited two key attractions – the Great Mosque of Xi'an and the Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses. After visiting the Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses in the capital of China's northwest Shaanxi province, Xi'an. Najib said that Malaysia has decided to set up the fourth

consulate office in Xi'an. The establishment of the consulate office would facilitate the issuance of visas and then help to increase the flow of visitors from this part of China to Malaysia (*The Star*, 28 May 2014a). In addition, Malaysian-owned XianDa Group also plans to invest RMB15bil (RM8bil) in partnership with Tianjin government to open the world's first integrated zero-liquid discharge desalination plant in Tianjin City. Again, Najib was quoted by *The Star* to give an explanation about the desalination project and its expected achievements (*The Star*, 29 May 2014; *The Star*, 30 May 2014).

The Star also gave voice to the MCA party through its economic consequences frame. In the newspaper, MCA president Liow Tiong Lai was cited by *The Star* in the discussion of some business-related issues. It was reported that MCA is positive to play a role in assisting Malaysian SMEs and entrepreneurs to expand to China. Liow said that the party could work together with the relevant government agencies and chambers of commerce in providing a platform for the businesses to venture into the biggest economy in the region (*The Star*, 1 June 2014b). As Najib's visit to China was significant to push for economic growth of the country, both countries have formed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for prosperity and growth, and have signed the Five-Year Development Programme for Economic and Trade Cooperation. Furthermore, Liow also lauded Najib's announcement to personally helm a special committee to strengthen a comprehensive strategic partnership between Malaysia and China. He also said that Chinese President Xi Jinping had agreed to the goal of increasing bilateral trade to US\$160bil (RM514bil) over the next five years (*The Star*, 2 June 2014).

While *The Star* devoted 36.17% of its coverage to the economic consequences frame, the same frame only accounted for 8.70% in *People's Daily*. A finding of interest was that one of the news articles published by *People's Daily* was written with majority of the statements made by Najib at the opening ceremony of China-Malaysia Economic Summit. Najib said the relationship between China and Malaysia will continue to thrive through economic success and true friendship by employing subtle wordplay about Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang's name – 'Wang' means money and 'Yang' means love in Malaysian language. In conjunction of the 40th anniversary of China-Malaysia relations, both sides have signed a joint communique to achieve a targeted trade volume of \$160 billion by 2017 in order to enhance their trade links. Additionally, Li concurred that Sino-Malaysian relations have grown into a towering tree over the four decades, and will blossom and bear fruit in the future (*People's Daily*, 1 June 2014).

6.6 Responsibility Frame

Through the responsibility frame, *People's Daily* took the opportunity to report on the duty of both state governments in dealing with the aftermath of MH370 disaster during Najib's visit to China. It was mainly reported that China called upon the Malaysian government to take further actions against the search for the missing flight. For example, *People's Daily* reflected the voices of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang that urged Malaysia to lead and coordinate with a new search plan for the missing flight as soon as possible and take the investigation seriously. Li on behalf of his people also urged Malaysia should respond to passengers' families' legitimate appeals and settle the issue properly (*People's Daily*, 29 May 2014c). On the other hand, *People's Daily* also reflected voices of Najib that said Malaysia will continue to conduct the search together with China, Australia and other countries, and stressed his commitment to finding solutions and answers for the disappearance of the flight (*People's Daily*, 30 May 2014). This provides a comprehensive coverage of how Malaysia and China government take responsibilities to settle this issue to the readers.

While *People's Daily* devoted 34.78% of its coverage to the responsibility frame, the same frame only accounted for 8.51% in *The Star*. It was reported that China will not let Malaysia to face the unprecedented disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 alone. Chinese ambassador to Malaysia, Huang Huikang was quoted by *The Star* saying that China was committed to help and trust Malaysia's efforts in handling the situation from the beginning (*The Star*, 22 May 2014). Instead, *The Star* emphasized the significance for Malaysia and China standing together to confront the tragedy.

6.7 Domestic Politics Frame

Under the domestic politics frame, *The Star* mentioned that Prime Minister Najib interrupted his China's trip to pay his last respects to the late Sultan of Perak by expressing condolences on the demise of Sultan Azlan Shah in Malaysia on the night of May 28 (*The Star*, 28 May 2014b). Besides, *The Star* also reported that Najib received the news from Malaysia regarding the Gerakan's Datuk Mah Siwe Keong's victory in the Teluk Intan by-election during his visit (*The Star*, 31 May 2014c).

6.8 Other Frame

Instead, *People's Daily* reported the freed of a Chinese female tourist who was abducted by a group of gunmen together with a Filipino staff member of the Singamata Reef Resort in Sabah, Malaysia on April 2, 2014. The news source was quoted through Najib's twitter account that the two women were being saved successfully due to the cooperation of the security forces of Malaysia and Philippines. In his trip to China, Najib also informed the Chinese side of the release and said the victim would be escorted back to China soon (*People's Daily*, 31 May 2014). Followed up the progress on this incident, *People's Daily* reported that the girl has returned home at Shanghai, China after she was rescued a week ago (*People's Daily*, 3 June 2014). It is significant to note that *The Star* was rather silent about these incidents during Najib's trip to China.

6.9 Slants

An analysis of the slant of the articles revealed that the most apparent stance of both newspapers were neutral in most of the articles on Najib's visit to China. By being neutral in reporting the issue, the coverage conveyed a favorable impression for both countries and equally emphasized the role of Malaysia and China in the bilateral relations. Although most of the articles were neutral, it is noteworthy that these two newspapers were found to have an inclination towards their own countries. *The Star* showed its supportiveness towards Malaysia (31.43%), whereas *People's Daily* was supportive to China (22.22%).

	<i>The Star</i> (n = 35)%	<i>People's Daily</i> (n = 18)%
Supportive towards Malaysia	31.43	5.56
Supportive towards China	5.71	22.22
Neutral	62.86	72.22

Table 4: Slants of the articles

7.0 DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the framing of Najib's visit to China by Malaysia's and China's newspaper differed from multiple dimensions. First of all, the differences in the number of articles and words published by the two newspapers indicated that they carried unequal weight of attention to the issue. A total of 53 articles were harvested from the two newspapers, with *The Star* scoring the higher number of articles and more average number of words than *People's Daily*. The data demonstrated that there was a wide gap between the number of articles published by these two newspapers. *The Star* had 35 articles, which almost as twice as the number of articles published by *People's Daily*, which was only 18 articles.

This study also found that the two newspapers presented straight news as their largest category and devoted very little space for opinion pieces. By devoting most of their articles to the straight news, the two mainstream newspapers performed surveillance instead of correlation function. When straight news dominates the coverage, it leaves little room for the creativeness of journalists, resulting in a top-down communication format (Van Dijk, 1988). In addition, only *The Star* published editorials on the issue, while *People's Daily* had none. Fahmy (2005) asserted that editorials are more than just another set of opinions circulating in the free market of ideas, but barometers of the thinking of the most powerful voices within the newspaper and corporate hierarchy. The findings demonstrated that *The Star* was more concerned with the issue by providing wider coverage of the issue in the category of hard news and editorials.

The term "source" is used to refer to the people who reporters turn to for their information. In the discussion of news framing process, Fahmy (2005) suggested the source of news stories determines the basic nature of the articles and influences the flow of information through the media. This study revealed that the news sources of *The Star* weighted towards the country's Prime Minister, Najib Razak and one of the most frequently cited sources from Malaysia's officials was MCA's President, Liow Tiong Lai. As written by Hermida, Lewis and Zamith (2012), sources considered authoritative, such as political elites or government officials that hold certain credentials and power are argued to be at the top of a hierarchy of credibility, and as a result are the primary definers who shape the news agenda and interpretative approach used by journalists. In fact, the heavy reliance on the sources from its own country led to a one-dimensional interpretation of the issue. *The Star's* inclination towards supporting the state's government can be attributed to the media ownership in the country, which is owned by BN component party, MCA through its official holding company, Huaren Holding Sdn. Bhd. In their research, Yang and Md. Sidin (2015) claimed that newspapers ownership had an impact on their gatekeeping decision that took place at the individual, routine, organizational as well as institutional levels. Thus, it is made clear *The Star's*

considerable gate-keeping function in sourcing Najib and Liow who were in China in order to determine both content and perspective of news stories.

Sourcing involves making decision on who is included or excluded as an actor in the media. The sources cited in the media do more than denote events and issues. They ascribe meaning to events, shaping public perception and understanding to the issues (Berkowitz, 2009). A closer examination of *People's Daily's* news sources revealed the voices of Malaysia's officials were shut out of the newspaper. The heavy reliance on their own country officials as news sources also indicated that the dominant political party in the country to act as opinion leaders in defining the issue. As a mouthpiece of CCP (due to the ownership), *People's Daily* did not give voice to any representatives from Malaysia except the Prime Minister Najib. This degree of bias in source selection made clear the newspaper's considerable gate-keeping function in determining both content and perspective of news stories.

Nitsch (2007) noted the historical tendency for state visits being the highest form of diplomatic contact between two countries to mark the further development in bilateral relations. The frame of bilateral relations in Najib's state visit was found to be equally important in both newspapers. *The Star* and *People's Daily* portrayed the friendly relations between Malaysia and China in most of the articles in order to achieve their international relations goal. These findings are in accordance to the comparative study conducted by Parsons and Xu (2001), which mentioned that the news frames were found to mutually beneficial of both countries' images in reporting an issue. Furthermore, Framing is the effects produced by stories that linked the foreign nations to issues through news frames (Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003). The main role of the media has been to publicize and inform the public from the viewpoints of the respective national interests, which is to be expected on bilateral issues (Tortajada & Pobre, 2011). Therefore, citizens from different countries who read the news stories about Najib's visit to China that conveyed friendly Malaysia-China relations should have been more likely to evaluate both countries positively.

Although both newspapers focused on the bilateral relations as their dominant frame, the secondary frame highlighted by them were different. According to Nitsch (2007), the purpose of diplomatic visits by heads of state generally aimed to develop and enhance bilateral relations, but the focus varies between countries ranging on political issues, human rights, environmental protection, cultural contacts, trade and economics, or other themes. *The Star* emphasized more on the consequences of Najib's visit to China towards trade cooperation between Malaysia and China. Bennett (1990) indicated that the nature of international news coverage by news media is often consistent with the foreign policy of the nation. Since the establishment of Malaysia-China relations, the economic pragmatism became the backbone of Malaysia's China policy that is chiefly rooted in the BN elites' desire to further enhance the overall bilateral ties, and accordingly further maximize economic benefits from the proximate China's huge market (Kuik, 2015). Notably, China has emerged as Malaysia's biggest trading partner since the 1970's and Malaysia is China's largest trading partner among Southeast Asia countries (Lee, 2015). Kuik (2015) deemed that maximizing economic benefits from China and other major markets is a crucial domestic political matter for Malaysia.

On the other hand, *People's Daily* placed considerable emphasis on the responsibility in the search of missing Malaysian Airline flight MH370. It is important to note that Malaysia-China relations were tested enormously through this unprecedented crisis involving a Malaysian jet and mostly Chinese passengers onboard. Under the control of the Communist Party of China, Chinese media have exerted great influence on a wide range of political and social issues as powerful communication tools. It is expected that there would be tighter government control over media in reporting the political issues (Chen, 2003). In fact, the coverage produced by two news media organizations operating in two different political and economic contexts framed the meaning of the same issue in diverging ways (Miao, Brewer & Ley, 2012). According to Leshuo and Chitty (2012), news frames are largely influenced by political culture, which is very much shaped by political institutions, their policies and practices. As an emerging global power, China has had to create a new role for itself and define its responsibilities as an influential state both at regional and international levels (Keith, 2004).

The findings demonstrate that both newspapers were neutral in reporting the issue which constructed based on the bilateral relations frame. In the secondary frame of the two newspapers, the coverage came into being slanted towards its own country in reporting the issue. The political ideology and history are considered as the major factors that impact the overall bias of news coverage. This indicates the authors, editors and gatekeepers of a news story are likely to be inclined to follow their own political ideology on news framing (Chao, 2015). The findings showed that *People's Daily* included very few stories that were slanted as favorably towards China but most of them were neutral. Conversely, *The Star* included over half the number of the articles that were slanted favorably towards Malaysia. Under the system of Malaysian

media, news reporting was more likely to express the bias of pro-government, as propaganda tools to promote Malaysia's ruling party lines and policies during the ruling party leader Najib's visit to China.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This study found that the newspapers from China and Malaysia showed different perspectives of coverage through their frames. Through focusing on economic consequences frame, Malaysian newspaper coverage of diplomacy highlighted the economic policy issues, which mainly articulated its national interest. The dissimilar coverage of the same issue by Chinese newspaper denoted the varied points of view held by the country, which were rooted in the different contexts of their political cultures and ideological positions that contribute to an explanation of the differences in their news frames. In fact, China's newspaper and Malaysia's newspaper differed on the coverage of the state visit due to their respective media ownership, which were being controlled and guided according to the political agendas of their government or political elites. Therefore, the newspapers cover the diplomatic news based on their own perspective by sourcing the actors of their countries that were beneficial to the interests of the country.

This study is limited to only one of the newspapers from each country; therefore, the recommended number of the newspapers for future studies should be increased in order to obtain a more representative result. As for future research, in order to investigate the framing effects of diplomatic news on public's perception of a country, it would be interesting to juxtapose the findings of this study with public opinion data to measure one nation's citizens' perception towards other nation's. Specifically, a future study is recommended to examine the news framing effects of Najib's visit to China on the Chinese perception towards Malaysia and the Malaysian perception towards China.

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APENDIX A

SAMPLE OF CODE BOOK

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Article number | : | _____ |
| 2. | Type of newspaper | : | 1 = <i>The Star</i>
2 = <i>People's Daily</i> |
| 3. | Date | : | _____ |
| 4. | Day | : | 1 = Sunday
2 = Monday
3 = Tuesday
4 = Wednesday
5 = Thursday
6 = Friday
7 = Saturday |
| 5. | Type of news item | : | 1 = Straight news
2 = Editorial
3 = Column
4 = Opinion
5 = Letter
6 = Others |

6. Size of article : _____ words
7. Source of information : 1 = Malaysian Prime Minister
2 = Chinese President
3 = Officials from Malaysia
4 = Officials from China
5 = Others
8. News frame : 1 = Bilateral Relations
2 = Economic Consequences
3 = Responsibility
4 = Domestic Politics
5 = Others
9. Slant : 1 = Supportive towards Malaysia government
2 = Supportive towards China government
3 = Neutral

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