The National Image of China in Prominent Malaysian English Newspapers

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Abstract

China's image in the Western mainstream media has been quite negative in the last decades. On the other hand, its image in developing countries have become more dynamic and complicated, despite their reliance on Western news agencies for international news. This study applies Framing Theory to examine China's image in Prominent Malaysian English newspapers. More specifically, it looks into the news sources, news topics, news actors, and news valence. Research samples are drawn from the official websites of the Star and the New Straits Times (NST). The number of China-related reports was 685 and 390 respectively. By way of quantitative content analysis, results showed that news topics, news actors, and news sources all have an impact on the news valence of China-related stories. Among all these factors, news sources have greatest impact. Additionally, it was found that news stories sourced from Chinese media are most positive, while those from Western media are most negative. Meanwhile, news stories sourced from Malaysia and other Asian media are neutral. In essence, this study shows the importance of news sourcing particularly pertaining to international news. Different choice of international news source will lead to different image presentation of a country.

Keywords: *National Image, International News Flow, News Coverage, China*

Introduction

What is national image? Nimmo and Savage (1976) defined image as a human construct imposed on a number of perceived attributes projected by an object, a person or an event. Every object, person or country has its own image. For a country, the image has many perspectives, such as economics, politics, and culture. Kunczik (1997) believed that national image is what a person believes to be true toward a country and its people. Wang (2008) believed that national image is related with the collective opinion upon a country by the foreign public. In spite of the variation in definitions, they all agreed that national image at least contains two dimensions: the cognitive (the perception) and the affective (emotion or feeling).

The studies of national image is important, for national image have a variety of political, economic, and cultural effects for the country's global competition (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). Manheim and Albritton (1984) identified two dimensions of national image, visibility and valence, through the portal of a country in the media. Visibility refers to the amount of media coverage a country receives, while news valence means the degree of favorable or unfavorable content about that country. Favorable references include the mention of strength, stability, progress in economic, technological and social development. Unfavorable references

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include the mention of instability, unreliability, inefficiency or weakness of a country. This study will examine image of China in Malaysian newspaper through these two dimensions: valence and visibility.

Over the past 50 years, studies on image of China, mostly focusing on mainstream Western media, have proliferated, claiming that image of China in international media is negative in general. (Isaacs, 1980; Mosher, 1990; Shambaugh, 2003; Peng, 2004). Meanwhile, a country's media image is regionally-specific, different from areas to areas. Therefore, the image studies of China are quite incomplete without involving studies of news valence in specific developing countries like Malaysia.

As an rising economy, China's impact has been deepening in the last decades in Southeast Asian countries. On 1974, China and Malaysia officially established diplomatic relations. Since then,there has been sound development in the political, economic and cultural fields. Political, economic, social, and geographic characteristics of nations are all the determiners of news coverage one country receives in another country's news media (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Golan & Himelboim, 2016). On the other hand, the visibility of certain topics and actors is also a reflection of a country's impact on certain field. Therefore, it is a need to more fully comprehend China's image in Malaysian mainstream media through visibility of topics and actors. Since media image can be a reflection of a country's soft power, the study of news topics and news actors can help us to map the geopolitical power of China in Malaysia.

Besides that, English newspaper in Malaysia source not only from dominant western news agencies, but also English news organization from China or other Asian countries. Many countries have established their own English-language media to compete for voice in the international events. Therefore, image of China in Malaysian English newspapers is not shaped only by Malaysian media. It is actually the result of joint effects by English media of different countries or areas. The distribution of news sources of China-related stories in Malaysian newspaper is what we need to examine.

The relationship between valence and news frames have been widely studies (e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003a; Wanta et al., 2004; Wekesa, 2013b). News valence matters in the media effects of international news, for negative news coverage of a country is highly associated with its negative perceptions (Wanta et al., 2004). To help fill the gap in the research literature, this study will examine the impact of news topics, news actors, and news sources on news valence in China-related news in Malaysian English newspapers and test the specific difference in each factors

Literature Review

Framing Theory and Valence of Framing

Frames are devices that help journalists as well as readers to organize huge amounts of information effectively. According to Entman (1993), framing involves two essential features: selection and salience, as he mentions "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and makes 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" (p.52). In this definition, frames are abstractions that organize message meaning by highlighting some aspects of reality while excluding other elements, leading to the difference in the issues interpretation.

According to De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2003), frames have inherent valence by suggesting positive or negative aspects, solutions, or treatments of news events. In spite of the existence of both positive and negative news coverage, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) believed that one determinants of international news coverage was the negative in nature of the event or topic. After these formative studies, the relationship between valence and news frame have been widely studied.(e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003a; Wanta et al., 2004; Wekesa, 2013b). News valence matters in the media effects of international news, for negative news coverage of a country is highly associated with its negative perceptions (Wanta et al., 2004).

As there are different definition of news frame, there is little consensus as how to identify frames in the news, since most studies gave operational definitions frames for the specific study. The framing of news consists of two categories: issue-specific which refer to frames about specific topics or events, and generic frame which can be identified in different topics or cultural contexts (De Vreese, 2005) The current study adopts the issue-specific approach to explore news frames on a specific topic — news coverage of China in Malaysia.

News Valence, News Source, News Topic and News Actor

News valence refers to the degree of favorable or unfavorable content about a country (Manheim and Albritton, 1984). Favorable references include the mention of strength, stability, progress in economic, technological and social development in news stories, while unfavorable references include the mention of instability, unreliability, inefficiency or weakness of a country. News valence could be influenced by many factors.

News sourcing from international news agencies might be a crucial factor which influences the news valence of China-related news reports in Malaysia. Malaysian newspapers have depended heavily on international agencies for foreign news (Nain, 2018). According to Rafeeq and Jiang (2018), 90% of the international news coverage on NST's online website comes from Reuters, AP, and AFP, However, the reliance on traditional news agencies like Reuters, AP, and AFP have been shifted to more diversified news sources. In Malaysian media, China-related stories not only comes from western news agencies, but also English news organizations from China as well as other Asian countries, which have established their own English-language media for the competition of voice in international discourse. Therefore, the choice of different news agencies might lead to a difference in the overall news valence of China-related news reports.

In addition to news sources, news topic is also a factor which might influence the value of news valence. Various research has been conducted to form this conclusion. For instance, Peng (2004) compared the news tone of political, ideological, and economic framing in China-related reports and found that the economic frame had the most positive news tone, while ideology was found to be reported in more negative tones. Xiang (2013) found that China's economic and cultural topics are more likely to receive favorable coverage. Aukia et al. (2017) also found that economic topics had the most positive tone, followed by cultural topics, while political images were comparatively negative.

News actor is another factor in determining news Valence, The actors that get to speak in the news are often studied in the context of content diversity. Studies have already shown that a larger variety of actors in the news are positively correlated with a greater variety of opinions or views (e.g. Gans, 2011; Masini et al., 2017). Therefore, who gets a voice in the news is of great importance, for actors with regular access to the news media receive the power to help

shape the interpretation and meaning of events (Carlson, 2009; Lawrence, 2000). Numerous studies demonstrate that the news is typically dominated by elite actors or politicians. (e.g. Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 1999; Tiffen et al., 2014).

National Image and China's News Coverage

China is a large country with a population of more than 1.3 billion people. Since China began its economic reform in 1978, it developed very fast with a GDP growth over 9 percent a year. Up to the last decades, China has developed into a global economic superpower as the world's second largest economy and the largest exporter by value, exerting growing impact on other countries through trade, investment, and ideas. Despite its increase in hard power through economic growth and domestic social development, the symbolic power of China has not kept up. Wang concluded that China still "doesn't command the appeal and respect of other nations among foreign publics" based on analysis of the U.S. media coverage and public opinion polling questions (Wang, 2011: 5).

The National Image of China in Western Media. China's media image in Western media has been a popular topic among international scholars (Armony et al., 2019; Goodman, 1999; Lams, 2016; Peng, 2004; Wang, 2021). Studies from the 90s till date consistently show that China's image in the press is negative. For example, Goodman (1999) found that severe crises, conflicts, and violence are prominent in China-related news stories in the Washington Post and the New York Times. Peng (2004) claimed that the overall tendency of China-related reports is negative, with political and ideological frames dominating American media coverage of China.

Even for similar news events, Western media and Chinese media usually have different stances on the news reports. (Liu & Li, 2017; Zhang & Wu, 2017). One of the popular China topic in Western media is China's environmental pollution. Liu and Li (2017) conducted a corpus-assisted comparative study of the news coverage China's smog between Chinese and US newspapers to examine to what extent they differ in the representation of the smog issue. It is revealed that in the report on haze in China, Chinese newspapers simultaneously portray the smog as a weather phenomenon and construct a positive and responsible Chinese government, while British and American newspapers describe it as a disaster caused by the Chinese government. Different image of China in the same issue can be contributed to the influences of different socio-political factors and interests.

Similarly, image of China is also different in the news reports of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. The One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative is a global infrastructure development strategy proposed by the Chinese government in 2013 to promote China's integration with the global economy. "One Belt" refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt, which emphasize on the infrastructure development such as railways, roads, and gas pipelines through landlocked Central Asia, while "One Road" is short for the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, referring to the Indo-Pacific sea routes through Southeast Asia to South Asia, the Middle East and Africa along which sea ports and maritime facilities will be built. In news reports about 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, China Daily portrayed China as a peace-loving international collaborator, an emerging economy, and a responsible power. However, the image of China in the Financial Times was a country with 'potential threat' to the world (Zhang & Wu, 2017). `

The National Image of China in Regional Media. Although people have access to media of any nation through internet, the news media are mainly organized into national media systems (Tunstall, 2007), which means that people still rely on their own country's media to retrieve information on international affairs and foreign countries. Therefore, China's

country image in regional news media is not fully explored, but in recent years, the relevant studies focused on more diversified regional news media rather than the mainstream Western media. Overall,

China's media image became more diverse and pluralistic in developing countries or areas, including both positive and negative elements (Afzaal et al., 2019; Benabdallah, 2015; Olorunnisola & Ma, 2013; Ospina, 2017). For example, China is mainly regarded as 'brotherhood' and 'ironic bond' in Pakistani press (Afzaal et al.,2019), a 'favorable partner' in Latin American Media (Ospina, 2017). However, news like pollution, human rights, and trade inequality creates a negative impact (Ospina, 2017). As for Malaysian media, news valence on China seems to range from neutral to positive in different news events (Fong & Ponnan, 2019; Fong, 2020).

Bilateral Relation between China and Malaysia

Malaysia enjoys excellent relations with China. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China in 1974, bilateral relations have been on an upward momentum. Bilateral relations between Malaysia and the People's Republic of China have progressed substantially over the years.

Malaysia and China have strong connections. The two countries' bilateral relations have been improving ever since Malaysia and China established diplomatic ties in 1974. For now and for the foreseeable future, China is undoubtedly one of Malaysia's most important economic partners. Statistics show that Malaysia's total trade with China reached a significant milestone in 2021, reaching a record high of USD176.8 billion, or 18.9% of Malaysia's total trade that year. With sound development of economic cooperation between the two countries, mutual investment has also kept increasing.

Politically, Chinese fishing boats in disputed South China Sea seas were a problem for China and Malaysia, reflecting Malaysian anxiety over China's excessive maritime claims. Malaysia also remained wary about China's proposal for developing oil/gas blocks through bilateral cooperation in the South China Sea, for it might lend legitimacy to Chinese claims.

Cultural exchange is also frequent between Malaysia and China. Part of the reason is that Chinese-Malaysians have natural links to the TV programme, Chinese superstars, or other entertainment activities. The Chinese Embassy in Malaysia has one of the busiest consular sections among all of China's overseas posts, due to a high rate of visa issuance for Chinese tourists as well as Chinese oversea students. In 2021, there were approximately 28.59 thousand international students from China studying in Malaysia.

Based on the the literature review mentioned above, the following research questions are put forward as follows:

Q1: *What is the news valence of China's news stories in Malaysia?*

Q2: *What are the prominent aspects of China's news coverage in terms of news topics, news actors, and news sources?*

Q3: *Do news sources, topics and actors have impact on news valence in China-related news stories?*

Q4: *What are the differences between news sources, topics and actors in terms of valence?*

Research Methodology

The research method employed in this study is a quantitative content analysis, which is regarded as an objective, systematic, and quantitative approach to manifesting communicative content (Berelson, 1952). Therefore, it is used to examine news coverage of China in The Star and NST in 2020, including the number of news stories, news topics, news valence, news actors, and news sources.

Sampling

This study concentrates on studying China's media image in two English Malaysian newspapers, namely, the Star and the New Straits Times (NST). Among dozens of English newspapers, these two newspapers were chosen due to the language used and their prominence and influence. Founded in 1845, NST is one of the oldest English newspapers, while The Star is presently the English language newspaper with the most significant circulation in Malaysia (Kee et al., 2017). With English as the language of publication, both newspapers are greatly influenced by international agenda, and they at the same time exert great impact on international as well as Malaysian audiences. Therefore, The Star and NST are excellent samples for this study. A total sample of 1,075 China-related news stories were collected, with 685 from The Star and 390 from NST.

Data Collection and Procedure

In this article, the authors have used "China" and "Chinese" as keywords to collect the news articles in 2020 from the official website of The Star (https://www.thestar.com.my) and NST (https://www.nst.com.my). After eliminating the reports that did not actually relate to China manually, the coder copied and saved all related news articles in an Excel form.

Before the coding process, several coder training sessions were held to ensure that the coders had similar understanding on the coding instructions. Two English major postgraduate students were recruited for the coding process. After 6 hours of training, an inter coder reliability test was conducted on 10% of the compiled news stories (n = 100) . The intercoder reliability rest applied Holsti's reliability formula was used to evaluate the outcomes (Holsti, 1969). The reliability coefficient for this study was found to be 0.88 for news source, 0.78 for news topic, 0.81 for news subject, and 0.76 for news valence. As the results were of acceptable levels, the coding process continued.

After coding, descriptive analysis was employed to demonstrate the descriptive statistics on news source, news topic, news actors, and news valence. Besides that, ANOVA and the Post Hoc Test were done to assess the referential relationship between independent factors (news source, news topic, news actors) and dependent factors (news valence).

Research Instrument

A codebook was developed as the research instrument of this study. There were two sections in the codebook. Section 1 provided information on how to extract news stories from the official websites of two English newspapers. Section 2 provided instructions on extracting information on news sources, news topics, news actors, and news valence. The unit of analysis for coding was set at the article level, where the entire news story must be taken into consideration when coding.

News sources in this research refer to the news agencies or newspapers that the news stories originate from. News sources were categorized into four groups by area affiliation of the news organizations: Western countries, Asian countries, China, and Malaysia. The self-published articles from TS and NST belong to the Malaysia group. Only its original source is recorded when an article is transferred twice or more. News topics were first coded using the topical index (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006) to determine a single topic that best describes the article and then grouped into five categories: political, economic, social, cultural, and scientific topics.

News actors refers to the article's individual or organization who is involved in the news story. There can be several actors in the news story, but the leading subject was identified through title or news lead. If there is more than one leading subject in an article, a mixed code is produced. The classification of news actors was adapted based on categorization by Beckers and Aelst (2018), including five categories: the government, professionals and experts, companies, ordinary citizens, and mixed.

With reference to the study of Wanta, Golan, and Lee's (2004) news valence , were coded into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Positive news refers to news that involves positive information about a country's progress, growth, prosperity, strength, stability, security, and credibility. Negative news refers to news that involves negative information about a country's untrustworthiness, unreliability, insecurity, danger, weakness, and inefficiency. Neutral news refers to news that contains neither positive nor negative information, or both positive and negative information. News valence had a value ranging from 1 (negative) to 3 (positive); neutral tendency had a value of 2 (neutral).

Results

General Image of China

The general image of China is reported through descriptive statistics of news valence (Table 1) and the visibility of specific topics, news actors, and news sources (Table 2-4). These descriptive statistics work together to give us a general picture of China's image in Malaysian media.

Table 1: News Valence of China.

	N	Mean	SD
The Star	685	2.19	.71
NST	390	1.76	.75
Total	1075	2.03	.75

Note: Two-tail independent t-tests on news valence by newspapers show significant results, $p<0.05$.

As shown in Table 1, the overall China-related stories in these two newspapers are slightly positive (Mean=2.03, SD=.75), with a neutral mean index of 2. Meanwhile, news valence of China-related stories is positive in the star (Mean = 2.19, SD = .71), while news valence of China-related stories in NST are comparatively negative (Mean = 1.76, SD = .75). There is a significant difference between The Star and NST in the overall news valence in the two-tail independent t-test. Therefore, it is hard to draw the conclusion that the news valence of China-related news reports is positive in Malaysian newspapers.

Table 2: Visibility of News Topics.

Categories	N	Percent
Politics	305	28.4
Economy	323	30
Social	295	27.4
Culture	125	11.6
Science	27	2.5
Total	1075	100

Among all news topics (Table 2), economy is the most prominent topic with a number of 323 stories, comprising 30% of all China-related news stories, followed by 305 political topics (28.4%) and 295 social topics (27.5%). Cultural topics and scientific topics are much less visible in the news coverage, containing only 11.6% and 2.5% respectively. Therefore, it is concluded that media image of China in Malaysia focused mainly on economic, political, and social topics. Cultural and scientific news stories of China has gain much less attention in Malaysian media.

Table 3: Visibility of News Actors.

Categories	N	Percent
Government	486	45.2
Professionals and Expert	139	12.9
Companies	228	21.2
Citizens	153	14.2
Mixed	69	6.4
Total	1075	100

Table 3 illustrates the visibility of news actors in the news coverage of China-related stories. As shown in the table, government have the highest rank as news subject in news stories, with a significantly higher number of 486 news (45.2%). This means that most of reported Chines-related news in Malaysia are government-led. Besides government, companies are the second active actor with 139 stories, containing 12.9% of the total number, which is quite aligned with China's economic focus in Malaysia. Comparatively speaking, citizens and professionals appear less frequently with 14.2% and 12.9% respectively. Chinese individual as news actors are less prominent than government and companies.

Table 4: Visibility of News Sources by Country Affiliation.

Categories	N	Percent
China	152	14.1
Malaysia	398	37
Western Countries	401	37.3
Asian Countries	124	11.5
Total	1075	100

As shown in Table 4, there are only a small number (n=152) of China-related news stories come from Chinese news organization, covering 14.1% of the news coverage. Much more China-related stories come from Western news organization (37%) or written by Malaysian media (37%). Sporadic news stories are sourced from other Asian countries like Indonesia or Vietnam, whose news organizations jointly contribute to 11.5% of the overall news coverage. According to the statistics here, Chinese news organization do not contribute a lot in China-related news stories, which means that the impact of Chinese news organization is week and media image of China is shaped mainly by news organization of other countries.

To sum up, the overall image of China in Malaysian English newspaper is as follows: The overall news valence is slightly positive. Topics of China-related stories focused more on economy, politics, and social issue. Chinese government and companies are comparatively more active actor in the news report. China-related stories in Malaysia are mainly provided by news organization from Western countries or created by Malaysian media, rather than Chinese news organization.

New Valence of Different Topics, Actors, and Sources

A one-way ANOVA test was applied to ascertain the impact of news sources, news actors, and news topics on news valence. All three factors significantly differed in the news valence of China-related news stories in 2020 (Table 5). The rule of thumb interpreting the effect size of Eta Squared ($\eta2$) is .01 as a small effect size, .06 as a medium effect size, and .14 or higher as a large effect size. The statistical test on news sources observed a medium effect size at the test result of $F_{(3,1075)} = 47.435$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .117$. The statistical test on news topics and news actors both fell into the category of small effect size, with the test result of $F_{(4,1075)} = 15.951$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .056$ for news topics, and $F_{(4,1075)} = 6.897$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .025$ for news actors. Hence, news sources have a greater effect than news topics and news actors on news valence.

Table 5: ANOVA's Table on the Difference in News Valence.

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig	η^2
News Source	71.243	3	23.748	47.435	.000	.117
News Actor	15.256	4	3.814	6.897	.000	.025
News Topic	34.155	4	8.539	15.951	.000	.056

To further explore the specific difference of each factor on news valence, a post hoc test was conducted. News sources and news topics could be split into three groups, as presented in Table 6 and Table 8, respectively. News actors could be split into two groups, as presented in Table 7.

Table 6: A Post Hoc Test on the News Valence by News Topics (Turkey HSD).

News Topic	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Political	1.84		
Social	1.95	1.95	
Cultural	2.10	2.10	
Economic		2.21	
Scientific			2.63

Note: The Values Represent the Mean Score of the News Valence.

From Table 6, it is found that scientific, economic and cultural topics have got positive news valence with a neutral mean index of 2, while political and social topics have got negative news valence. Among the positive topics, scientific topic ranks first with a mean value of 2.63, followed by economic topic (Mean=2.21), and cultural topic (Mean=2.10). Political topics have got the most negative news valence, with a mean value of 1.84, and social topics have a slightly negative news valence of 1.95.

The post hoc test divides the five topic categories into three separate groups. There was a significant difference between social, cultural, and economic news in group 2 and political news in group 1. Additionally, scientific news also established a significant difference from all other

news topics, with the highest mean value of 2.63. In spite of its low news coverage, science reports about China are the most positive of all topics, while political news stories about China are the most negative.

Table 7: A Post Hoc Test on the News Valence by News Actors (Turkey HSD).

News Subject(s)	Group 1	Group 2
Citizens	1.77	
Mixed		2.03
Government		2.04
Professionals and Experts		2.06
Companies		2.18

Note: The Values Represent the Mean Score of the News Valence.

Table 7 shows that two groups had been set apart in the Post Hoc test on news valence by news actors. China-related news stories with citizens as the main news actors were identified as group 1, which significantly differs from group 2. The mean value of citizen news stories was only 1.77, which had the lowest valence value among all actors. The other actors were identified as group 2, among which company news stories ranked the top in news valence, followed by professionals and government. The mean value indicated the favorability of related news stories; therefore, companies are the most favorable news actors in China-related stories. Experts or professionals come second, while the Chinese government comes third as news actors influencing news favorability.

It is found that there were three separate groups of news actors among the whole sample, as demonstrated in Table 8. Western countries as news sources were placed at the lowest position (Mean = 1.75), establishing significant difference with other groups. There was also a significant difference between China and other groups, with China having the highest value of news valence (Mean = 2.53) as the news source's country affiliation. News stories created by Malaysian media (Mean = 2.12) or those from news organizations of Asian countries (Mean = 2.06) stood in the middle group without significant difference.

Table 8: A Post Hoc Test on the News Valence by News Sources (Turkey HSD).

News Sources	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Western Countries	1.75		
Asian Countries		2.06	
Malaysia		2.12	
China			2.53

Note: The Values Represent the Mean Score of the News Valence.

Discussion

This study examined the news image of China in two mainstream English-language Malaysian newspapers in terms of the news valence, news topics, news actors, and news sources and compare their difference in news valence. The results yielded several important findings. The image of China in Malaysian media is quite good since overall news valence of China-related news stories is slightly positive, and all three factors, including new topics, news actors, and news sources, have significant differences in the news valence of China-related news stories. Comparatively speaking, news sources have the most substantial impact.

Source of the China-related news stories in these two English newspapers is an interesting topic. This study revealed that all three factors, news sources have the most substantial impact. In the case of visibility of news sources, besides original stories produced by Malaysian reporters, China-related news stories sources more from Western news organizations than from Chinese news organizations in Malaysian English newspapers. There are also a small number of the China-related news stories are from neighboring Asian countries. News organizations' area affiliation significantly impacts the news valence. Among the four groups, China-related news stories from Chinese media are the most positive, while stories from Western media are the most negative. China-related stories from Malaysia and other Asian countries come in the middle. These findings corresponded with the results of previous studies (Liu & Li, 2017; Zhang & Wu, 2017) that Chinese media and Western media tend to report China differently, and mainstream news media tend to frame China with ideological biases (Goodman, 1999). It was also found that even in the China-related reports, news stories from Western countries dominate in the Malaysian media. This finding is quite line with previous studies that the media in Western countries dominate the dissemination of international news and Western ideology has spread from developed to developing countries through large international news agencies (Skurnik 1981, Boyd Barrett, 1997). In most developing countries, newspapers must depend on international news agencies on the reports of 'international affairs,' as few can afford to report through their correspondents for economic reasons. Those news stories are expected to be "unbiased." Nevertheless, this study revealed that news organizations in different areas could influence the news valence of a country. In that case, more diversified sourcing might bring a more balanced media environment for the reports of international events.

Among the topic categories, economic, political and social topics are the most salient, while cultural and scientific topics are less salient with much lower news coverage. The coverage of topics can in some way reflect the China-Malaysian relationship, which is quite friendly in general, focusing more on economic, political and social issues. The prominence of economic topics reflects China's growing global economic influence and the strengthening economic ties between China and Malaysia. This result also supports the conclusion of previous studies on other countries' news media that economic topic is salient in China-related stories (Wang et al., 2015; Turcsányi et al., 2019). Comparatively speaking, cultural topics or scientific development are reported less frequently since they are the less important field in China's international impact.

News valence of different topics are different in China-related news stories in Malaysian media. Among all topics, scientific topics are the most positive, significantly different from others. Economic topics rank second, which is significantly more positive than political news. Social and cultural topics come in the middle. Although these results do not agree with previous studies that economic topics are the most positive topics in China-related reports (Aukia et al., 2018; Peng, 2004; Xiang, 2013), it is significantly more positive than political topics. Combined with the previous data, economic topics of China-related news stories is both prominent and positive in Malaysian media.

Another factor found to have a significant difference in news valence is the news actors of China-related news stories. Government is the most covered news subject in China-related news stories in Malaysian newspaper, followed by companies.The prominence of government and companies as news actors echoes the prominence of political and economic topics mentioned above. Previous studies have suggested that news is dominated by government or institutional voices, and non-elite voices are usually muted (Davis, 2000; Doly, 2006). Comparatively speaking, professionals and citizen is less visible as news actors in China-related stories. As for the news valence,

citizens as news actors were the most negative, and significantly different from other news actors. This can be explained as both governments and organizations, as elite news actors, can effectively influence news content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), while ordinary citizens are more likely to be reported when it comes to some negative "newsworthy stories" such as crime or other extreme events.

Limitations and Implications

This study only sampled China-related stories from two Malaysian online English newspapers in 2020. Therefore, it might be limited from offering a more comprehensive picture of China's media image. With the limitation on specific news events and time periods, this study might not be representative of explaining the referential relationship between news topics, news sources, news actors, and news valence of international news. Also, in the coding process, the judgment of news valence is primarily the coders' subjective inference according to the contents. The possible cultural and personal biases are inevitable.

It is revealed that the overall media image of China is quite positive in Malaysian media. Among these three factors, news sources of English news stories have the strongest impact, which means international news organizations' area affiliation influence the news valence of new stories. More diversified sourcing would provide more angles for international affairs. Meanwhile, this study cannot explain whether difference in news valence of different sources are influenced more by international relationship or by cultural difference in journalism reports. This needs further studies for exploration and explanation.

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