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# A cross-national comparison of news coverage of Michelle Obama's visit to China in American and Chinese media

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**A cross-national comparison of news coverage of Michelle Obama's visit to China in  
American and Chinese media**

by

**Shuo Li**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

The First Lady is not only a celebrity, the president's wife, the public face of the White House, but also a representative of modern American women. The First Lady traveled to China from March 19 to March 26, 2014. She visited Beijing, Xi'an and Chengdu. The theme of the trip is the importance of education. This comparative study investigates American and Chinese news coverage of Michelle Obama's visit to China from March 19, 2014 to March 26, 2014. This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze a total 292 paragraphs from American media and 82 paragraphs from Chinese media. By systematically comparing the issue agenda and attribute agenda in American and Chinese media coverage, this study identified differences and similarities in both levels of agenda in the two countries' media coverage. The findings showed that there were some significant differences in the issues covered between the Chinese and US press. The data suggested that diplomacy, foreign policy, freedom, human rights, race, and culture, (six out of these eleven) issues revealed significant differences between American and Chinese media. However, American and Chinese media seemed to employ similar attributes of the First Lady, which reflected certain gender stereotypes. Dominant ideology, glocalization and four theories of press were discussed to explain the differences of issue agenda between two countries.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The First Lady is not only the president's wife and a public face of the White House; she is a representative of modern American women. As Lewis L. Gould says in his book, "These women offer a significant perspective on how their fellow citizens regard marriage, child rearing, women in society, and gender relations within the United States . . . . Americans have sensed that the wife of the president of the United States says something meaningful about the way the nation has chosen to organize its private and public affairs" (2001, p. xiii). The First Lady without a doubt has attracted much attention due to her unique position. Previous studies analyzing the U.S. First Lady have investigated topics such as what political role the First Lady plays (Watson, 2000), media coverage of the First Lady (Scharrer & Bissell, 2000; Benz, 1990), and the First Lady and public opinion (Burrell, 2001).

It is well known that the president of a nation is the "number one news maker and influence [of] the focus of news coverage" (McCombs, 2014, pp. 99–100). As the spouse of the president, everything the First Lady does is also considered newsworthy. As illustrated by Lippmann, media is the bridge that connects the real world and the pictures in our minds, especially since the daily occurrences in the political world are removed from the average citizen (Lippmann, 1946). Therefore, we have to obtain news about First Lady from media. While there are a number of books and articles about the portrayal of American First Ladies in the US media, very few studies compare American media coverage and foreign media coverage of the U.S. First Lady. Michelle Obama's Chinese trip offers an opportunity to examine this under-researched area.



This study examines the relationship between the First Lady's agenda and how the media in two different countries reported on her Chinese visit, using her well known Peking University speech as a baseline for comparison.

This study has several purposes. Firstly, this trip, Michelle Obama's first visit to China alone and also the first time a Chinese political leader's wife invited a U.S. First Lady for an official visit to China alone, was a remarkable event and a milestone in the relationship between the United States and China. An examination of the First Lady's use of "soft diplomacy" has the potential to add new insights about the changing relationship between the U.S. and China. Secondly, this study aims to shed light on a cross-national comparison of the salience of issues and attributes in media content in different media and political systems. Since agenda setting has been studied for more than 40 years, this theory has a long history; this study will contribute to and expand the geographic boundaries of agenda-setting research. Thirdly, the media chosen in this study are English-language Chinese media targeted for overseas audiences. This study is expected to see whether these media present the same agendas as Chinese mainland media influenced by self-censorship and ideology. Thus, the present study adds to the body of research in the area of cross-national comparative agenda setting.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Agenda Setting

The main purpose of this study is to explore the differences between American and Chinese media coverage of the U.S First Lady's visit China from March 19, 2014 to March 26, 2014. Agenda setting theory is used in the present study to probe which issues are covered in the news in both countries during the First Lady's visit, and what, if any, differences are observed in the news coverage.

Agenda setting theory is a well-established mass communication theory. When determining how agenda setting occurs, we need to return to Walter Lippmann's classic work in 1922. Lippmann implied that we live in a pseudo-environment, which is not the real world, but the world we imagine. Mass media serves as a bridge between the real world and the pictures in our head (Lippmann, 1922). Shimizu (1951) extended Lippmann's study that people rely on the *copy* of reality from media to know the outside environment. It is notable that the understanding of agenda-setting theory help to dispel unwitting bias in educated readers/viewers. Lang and Lang (1955, 1984) pointed out in their studies that the same image may lead to different perceptions among individuals, because of different audience interpretations.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, the mainstream communication paradigm was the concept of persuasive communication (Takeshita, 1997). This paradigm shifted in the 1970s. Chaffe and Hochheimer (1985) concluded that the media's role changed from persuasion to information delivery. Agenda setting articulates the cognitive process of how issues at the top of media coverage (the media agenda) become salient for people (the public agenda).

Bernard Cohen (1963) conducted a classic summary of agenda setting. He demonstrated that the media not only tell us *what to think*, but also *what to think about*. Hundreds of studies have expanded the conceptual underpinnings of agenda setting theory. McCombs and Shaw (1972) tested the agenda setting hypothesis during the 1968 presidential election. In their seminal study, they concluded that in the political arena, voters' perceptions of the importance of an issue were shaped by the amount of information presented on the issue by, and its position in, the news (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). From this point on, hundreds of studies examined media's role as an agenda setter and showed a significant correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Rogers & Dearing, 1988; Wanta, 1997; Wanta, & Lee, 2004). This study follows the agenda setting model to examine the salient issues used in media coverage of the First Lady's visit to China in March 2014 in both Chinese and American media.

### Agenda Building

Traditional agenda setting studies delineate the correlation between media agenda and public agenda, and determine how strongly the public agenda is influenced by the media agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Kinder & Iyengar, 1987; Dearing, & Rogers, 1996). One of the subareas of agenda setting research explores the question of who sets the media agenda (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, Weaver & Barkin, 2013) and has been called "agenda building" (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980). These studies try to probe what factors influence the media agenda. McCombs (2013) concluded there were three main influences: news resources, other news media, and news norms.

Later studies added several more layers of influence, including political systems, media systems, cross-national differences in news “framing” and political culture (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2013). This study specifically takes into account how news sources, media systems, and cultural differences influence the news reporting of the same event.

One of the significant news sources in the media reporting cycle in any country is the U.S. president. The present study is based on the assumption that the First Lady, who is the president’s wife, a public face of the White House, and, as some have argued, a representative of modern American women, received significant attention in the media coverage in both countries during her visit to China, and thus determined issue coverage, at least to some extent. This has certainly been true in media coverage of top political leaders, as discussed below.

In a study of President Reagan’s 1982 and 1985 State of the Union addresses, for example, Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, and McCombs (1989) found that the president’s agenda can set the media agenda, and vice versa. One comparative study between the 1984 U.S. presidential election and 1983 British general election by Semetko and colleagues (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, Weaver, & Barkin, 2013) examined the election coverage on television and print in both countries. The results indicated that British politicians’ agenda had a stronger correlation with the country’s media agenda, compared with corresponding agendas in the U.S. Furthermore, the researchers found that U.S. journalists were more objective in covering campaign news than British journalists. These differences corresponded to the considerable cultural differences and journalists’ evaluation of election news (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981).

In another agenda-setting study, Roberts and McCombs (1994) analyzed the coverage of the 1990 Texas gubernatorial election and found a significant correlation between candidates' campaign agendas and the agendas of the local newspaper and the local television stations, even when other factors were taken into consideration.

More recent studies have reexamined the agenda building hypothesis in the era of new technologies. Dunn (2009), for instance, examined four major newspapers during the 2005 Virginia Gubernatorial election and demonstrated that the newspapers and the two candidates shared a similar agenda during the election. Some studies focused on politicians' speeches. A weak correlation was found between politicians' speech topics and the media agenda during the 1996 New Hampshire presidential primary in 1996 (Lichter & Smith, 1996). The authors explained that was because journalists didn't want politicians to set the media agenda. A study of the summer 2000 national convention acceptance speeches of presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore also supports previous findings (Mentzer, 2001). The correlation between the politicians' agenda and media coverage agenda were found +0.31 for Al Gore and +0.48 for George W. Bush. Similarly, the current study uses First Lady Michelle Obama's speech during her 2014 Chinese trip as a benchmark and tries to determine whether the issues mentioned in her speech appear in media coverage.

### Second-level Agenda Setting

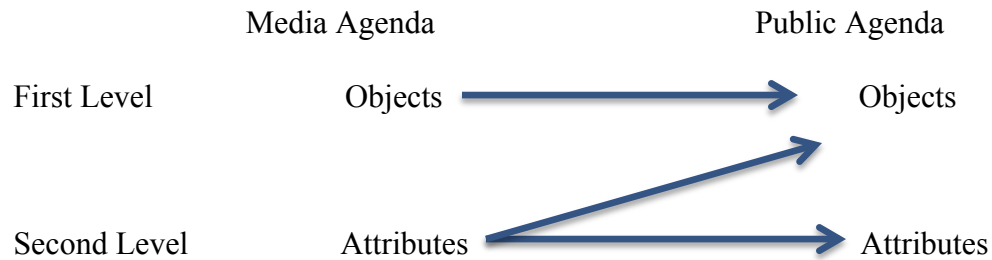
The first level of agenda setting deals with issues or topic agendas, while the second-level of agenda setting emphasizes the attributes of an issue (McCombs & Evatt, 1995). When explaining the concept of attributes, Ghanem (1997) states, "Every agenda consists of a set of objects. In turn, each of these objects possesses a set of attributes" (1997, p. 8).

Several studies were conducted to test the second-level agenda setting premise. For example, Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981) investigated the attribute agendas of newspapers and those of voters during the 1976 U.S. presidential campaign. They observed a correlation between voters' perceptions of candidates' images and media coverage of the candidates. In this case, "candidate image" was defined as "an array of perceived attributes with varying saliency" (p. 12). When it comes to the operational definition of candidate image, Sigel (1964) pointed out that candidate image encompasses *job-crucial candidate attributes* and *personal attributes*. Besides candidates' images, Schoenbach and Semetko (1992) found that tone and frequency of reports had influence on the first dimension: issue-agenda setting.

This current study focuses on both the first level of agenda setting and the second level of agenda setting, as defined above (McCombs, 1994). The First Lady's speech at Peking University can be positioned as an independent variable. The U.S. media agenda and Chinese media agendas examined in the study serve as dependent variables. Therefore, transmission of issue salience and attribute salience from the First Lady's speech to the news media will be probed.

#### Cross-national Comparative Agenda Setting Research

Since agenda setting is one of the dominant theories in mass communication, it has been studied extensively, from different perspectives, and in different countries. Figure 1 below, developed by Ghanem (1997), illustrates the direction of influence in the second-level agenda setting model. The figure shows that issue attributes can influence the salience of the news for the public and also what the public thinks about the issues in terms of issue attributes.



**Figure. 1 Two levels of agenda setting (based on Ghanem,1997)**

Second-level agenda setting studies have been conducted in Germany, Italy, Spain, Israel, Japan, and elsewhere. For example, in 1995, Takeshita and Milami (1995) used content analysis exploring both levels of agenda setting in Japanese media. The results showed that the salient issue at that time was political reform. Follow-up surveys supported previous results and also discovered ethics to be the most common attribute of the issues. In Taiwan, King (1997) showed how newspapers' portrayal of three political candidates influenced voters' perception of the candidates' images. The results demonstrated that media portrayal had a stronger influence on voters' perceptions of candidates' features, compared with the voters' cognitive evaluation.

Few studies, however, have examined agenda setting theory in a cross-national perspective. This is because this kind of study needs international cooperation, as well as multilingual fluency and cultural competency skills. In addition to practical barriers, and the complexities of different media systems, there are several additional factors, including news resources, news media, and news norms (McCombs, 2013). Later agenda-setting studies have added several more layers of influence to the media agenda, including political systems, media systems, cross-national differences in news "framing," and political culture (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2013).

This study takes into account how media systems and cross-national differences influence news reporting of the same event.

#### Research on First Ladies

James David Barber developed a “presidential character” model that Watson later used to define the different types of First Ladies. Based on the presidential character model, Watson used active/passive and positive/negative as baselines and came up with the following four character types: *active-positive*, *active-negative*, *passive-positive*, and *passive-negative*, to categorize First Ladies. The first type, *active-positive* refers to those who actively accomplish their goals and enjoy their work. The second type, according to this model, is *active-negative*; this type is aggressive and ambitious, but anxious and stressed about her work. The third type, *passive-positive*, is agreeable and cooperative, and displays optimistic attitudes. The last type, *passive-negative*, lacks the experience or skills of what is considered a “good” political figure, like Social Awareness, interperson influence and networking,, and treats political activities as an obligation (Watson, 2000, p 157). Figure 2 show the First Ladies classifications according to the First Lady Character Model. It is notable that Watson believes Michelle Obama exhibits the *active-positive* character type.



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**Active/ Positive (Dolley Madison)**

Ellen Wilson, Lou Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford,  
Michelle Obama

**Active/Negative (Abigail Adams) <sup>a</sup>**

Helen Taft, Edith Wilson, Florence Harding, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Hillary  
Clinton

**Passive/Positive (Martha Jefferson)**

Grace Coolidge, Mamie Eisenhower, Laura Bush

**Passive/Negative (Martha Washington)**

Bess Truman, Jackie Kennedy, Pat Nixon, Barbara Bush

---

*Notes:* a. Martha Jefferson died prior to her husband's presidency.

b. Part of Pat Nixon's passive/negative character and approach to the first ladyship appears to be a result of her husband limiting her roles and influence.

c. Barbara Bush displayed a mixture of passive/positive and passive/negative character traits.

**Figure 2. First Lady Character Model**

Source: Watson, R. P. (2000). *The presidents' wives: Reassessing the office of first lady*.

In 1996, Watson developed the following five types of First Lady: *the full partner*, *the partial partner*, *the behind-the-scenes partner*, *the partner in marriage*, and *the nonpartner*. He also pointed out that these five types are not mutually exclusive.

Figure 3 below outlines in detail these classifications. In the present study, Michelle Obama is the First Lady of interest. Watson's study classifies Michelle Obama as a *partial partner* First Lady. Compared with Hillary Clinton, who is a typical representative of the full partner female politician, Michelle Obama may be considered a more soft and traditional partner. She didn't run a political campaign herself; media exposure has been less about her career but more about her family.

She also expressed in public that she “[wants] to serve as a role model, to provide good messages, to be a supportive mate to the President and to make sure that my girls are solid” (Michelle Obama, 2009, p. 3). Nevertheless, Ms. Obama has demonstrated her abilities as an accomplished and professional woman. She graduated from Princeton University and Harvard Law School and had a job in law firm before becoming First Lady. Michelle Obama has chosen to use her role to highlight several specific issues, including health care, children issues, and education (Swarns, 2009; Sebelius, Donovan & Solis, 2010), and to focus on her family’s well-being. From Kahl’s study (2009), several iterations were used to illustrate how she focuses on family. Firstly, Michelle Obama often speaks about her daughters in public. Secondly, her first post-inaugural advocacy trip was to visit military families, as she promised during her husband’s campaign. Thirdly, she tries to accomplish the work-family balance. Finally, she pays attention to the family engaged with racial issues.

---

**Full Partners**

Abigail Adams, Sarah Polk, Helen Taft, Florence Harding, Eleanor Roosevelt,  
Rosalynn Carter, Hillary Clinton

**Partial Partners**

Dolley Madison, Julia Tyler, Mary Lincoln, Frances Cleveland, Caroline Harrison,  
Ellen Wilson, Edith Wilson, Lou Hoover, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Michelle  
Obama

**Behind-the-Scenes Partners**

Martha Washington, Louisa Adams, Abigail Fillmore, Eliza Johnson, Lucy Hayes,  
Lucretia Garfield, Ida McKinley, Edith Roosevelt, Bess Truman, Jackie Kennedy,  
Nancy Reagan

**Partners in Marriage**

Elizabeth Monroe, Ann Harrison, Margaret Taylor, Julia Grant, Grace Coolidge

**Figure 3. Watson's Classification of First Ladies as Presidential Partners**
**Partners in Marriage continued (Figure 3 continued)**

Mamie Eisenhower, Pat Nixon, Barbara Bush, Laura Bush

**Nonpartners**

Letitia Tyler, Jane Pierce

---

*Note:* Martha Jefferson, Rachel Jackson, Hannah Van Buren, and Ellen Arthur died prior to their husbands' presidencies. Harriet Lane was not a first lady.

**Figure 3. Watson's Classification of First Ladies as Presidential Partners**

Source: Watson, R. P. (2000). *The presidents' wives: Reassessing the office of first lady*.

### The U.S. First Lady and the Media

The First Lady and the media have an interdependent relationship. As part of the presidential family, everything related to the First Lady becomes newsworthy in the eyes of the public. Burns (2008) points out that media coverage of First Ladies covered in the media began with Martha Washington. In the twentieth century, there has been a boom of news coverage of First Ladies. The media coverage of First Ladies included everything from fashion sense to political activities (Burns, 2008).

Media coverage contributes tremendously to shaping the First Lady's image. Winfield (1997) summarized this by stating, "the First Lady has become a collective image, undefined when the country was founded, but framed by the media" (p. 178).

Burns (2008) also concludes that several factors influence how the news media portrays the First Lady, including "the dispositions of the individual women holding the position, the social norms governing women's publicity, the marketability of women's news, and institutional structures regulating journalists' access to first ladies" (Burns, 2008, p 4)

First Ladies receive different types of coverage when they perform various public and private roles. Benze (1990, p. 778) points out:

Historically, the First Lady has been expected to fulfill a variety of functions, ranging from national hostess to advocate for the disabled...this creates many expectations for the First Lady.

Previous studies of presidential candidates' wives illustrated that the coverage of presidential wives was roughly one-eighth of a percentage more likely to be focused on their image rather than on political issues (Bystrom, McKinnon, & Chaney, 1999). Winfield and Friedman (2003) identified several themes commonly attributed to the First Lady, including an escort for her husband, a protocol leader, a fashion trend-setter, a possible policy advocate, and a supporter of charitable works. Later studies added two "nontraditional" frames, policy maker and political adviser, into these historical frames (Winfield, 1997). Mayo (1993) conducted a critical evaluation of First Ladies who become more politically involved. Those First Ladies, comprised at that time of Nellie Taft, Florence Harding, and Edith Bolling Wilson, are viewed as non-traditional First Ladies.

Furthermore, a study conducted by O'Connor and colleagues (O'Connor, Nye & Van Assendelft, 1996) discussed 38 First Ladies in the U.S. and found that “at least 31 first ladies discussed politics with their husbands; twenty-six could be considered confidantes or advisers. That role often included not only discussing politics, but also screening correspondence, highlighting news articles, and editing speeches” (p. 846). Scharrer and Bissell (2000) analyzed print coverage of several recent First Ladies (Hillary Clinton, Barbara Bush, and Nancy Reagan) and suggested that the more political activities First Ladies participate in, the more negative the tone of media reports.

According to Devitt’s 1999 study, US media tend to focus more on appearance, personalities and personal lives when it comes to coverage of women. Also, Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) found that female politicians in general receive less coverage on their issue positions than their viability.

In general, people prefer that the media focuses largely on traditional roles of the First Ladies (Waston, 1992). Watson (1992) conducted a poll on First Ladies in public life. The results revealed that 25.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and 31.4% agreed that the media should focus largely on the traditional roles of First Ladies. Only 14.3% respondents disagreed and 1.4% of strongly disagreed with First Lady media coverage focusing largely on traditional roles.

To sum up, the image of the First Lady is influenced by various factors, including the First Lady’s personality, the history and traditions of the position, how First Ladies perform, interpretations of the First Lady’s role, and media and public expectations of the position (Truman, 1996, p. 18). The cultural expectations of what a First Lady should be or do are likely to be reflected in the media coverage of the First

Lady and may vary between different cultures, but may not be free from a bias towards traditional roles.

### Comparing Media Systems

This study used the Four Theories of the Press to compare these two distinct media systems; however, the original Four Theories are too simple and idealistic for both media systems. The dominant character of the U.S. media system is highly commercialized (Bennett, 2003), because the majority of media organizations are privately owned (Croteau and Hoynes 2001). Hachten (1981) tried to use a Western media model to describe the U.S. media system. In his study, *Western* denotes a combination of libertarian and social-responsibility models. McChesney (2004) pointed out that the U.S. media system was driven by large profits. It is hard to conclude the U.S. media system is a solely libertarian model, because of some factors, including increasingly concentrated ownership, diverse ideas of subordination, and different profit sources (Akhavan-Majid & Wolf, 1991, p. 139). Akhavan-Majid and Wolf also suggested an elite power group model for U.S. media, which they describe as concentrated in outlets with controlling business and government interests.

China has a truly singular media system, which has been significantly influenced by both the country's Communist political system and its ongoing economic reforms. After the 1978 economic reform, China started participating in international capital markets. Although the Chinese media system didn't undergo fundamental changes in terms of media ownership and government control, the new economic system brought some new interesting and unique features into the Chinese media system. According to Akhavan-Majid (2004), the Chinese mass media has become more multifaceted and complex over time. Initially, the Chinese press comprised only two sorts of

newspapers: one type were essentially CCP mouthpieces, owned and controlled by the government; the other were non-party publications, but these were still under the oversight of China's party organizations. One of the significant effects of the Chinese media transition is the increasing openness and proliferation of foreign-language newspapers. As one of the leading national English-language newspapers, the *China Daily* has a print circulation of 800,000. *China Daily* was founded on Jun, 1, 1981 and headquartered in Beijing, China. As mentioned by Stevenson (1994), the *China Daily*, which presents Chinese news to international audiences, operates under supervision of an international English-language newspaper consortium partly owned by the government (p. 156). *China Daily's* goal is building a platform to spread the voice of China to the world, and to exchange China-oriented news with global mainstream media. Currently the *China Daily* has five editions: mainland China, the U.S., Europe, Asia, and Hong Kong. Stevenson also argues that *China Daily* operates "under the same rules as the local language press and allows outsiders a glimpse of the country and its perspective on the world" (p. 156). Thus, *China Daily* plays an official organ role for the government. At the same time, it needs to be a good representative of Chinese media for international audiences. So when *China Daily* covers some sensitive topics, the tone will be softer; the paper will try to balance government interests and international audience attitudes. *China Daily's* unique position provides a highly valuable angle for this study. *Xinhua Daily News Service* as a newspaper has an exclusive status in China. From Xin's study, Xinhua's role and relationship with Party press organs and metropolitan newspapers, along with the development of market in news.

Suggested from findings, after the foundation of CPR in 1949, *Xinhua* transferred “through political bi-directional dependency with the newspapers, to an agency-client relationship” (p. 61). *Global Times* was founded in April 2009 and is headquartered in Beijing, China. It is an English-language international newspaper under the supervision of the *People’s Daily*. But the English-language version of *Global Times* was described as “taking a less strident approach” by one of the editors (Liu, 2009). When talking about the control of the Internet, *Global Times* published articles standing up to the *People’s Daily*. The target audiences of *Global Times* are ambassadors, business leaders, politicians, and intellectuals in both China and foreign countries.

There are large differences between China and United States in many political, economic, and social arenas. Those differences, in conjunction with varying expectations of female political figures, may influence how the media portray the U.S. First Lady’s visit to China.

#### Research Questions

This study focuses on two main research questions:

Research Question 1: Will the agendas of the mainstream American news media be different from the agendas of the mainstream English-language Chinese media when examining coverage of First Lady Michelle Obama’s March 2014 China visit?

Research Question 2: Will the attributes of First Lady Michelle Obama in the mainstream American news media coverage be different from those of the mainstream English-language Chinese news media coverage?



## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### Content Analysis

In order to illustrate and compare the differences in news coverage of First Lady Michelle Obama's trip to China, content analysis was found to be the most appropriate method, since it relies on objective and systematic analysis of media coverage (Berelson, 1952). The definition of content analysis is "the use of [a] replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source" (Krippendorff 1969, p. 103).

Content analysis remains one of the most commonly used research methodologies in social science and was born for communication research (Krippendorff, 1989). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis were used. Berelson (1952) defined quantitative content analysis as "a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). To examine issue frequency, issues mentioned in news coverage are observed, tracked, and reported. This method works well as a test for many of our hypotheses. Mayring (2004) argues that qualitative content analysis can add a more qualitative explanation while maintaining the merits of quantitative content analysis. The definition of qualitative content analysis is "an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification" (Mayring, 2004, p. 69). In this study, a qualitative content analysis is used to interpret the attributes of First Lady Michelle Obama mentioned in news coverage.

The typical steps of content analysis include the five elements mentioned below:

(1) *Design*. In this stage, the researcher defines *context*—what categories or variables we need to know and can't test directly (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989; Krippendorff, 1989). In this study, two national contexts allows us to explore the issues reported and attributes of the First Lady mentioned in both American and Chinese media. The First Lady Michelle Obama delivered a speech at Peking University's Stanford Center on March 22<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The transcript of this speech, which was considered to set the tone for Ms. Obama's visit to China, was examined by the author and coded for a total of twelve issues mentioned in Chinese and American news coverage, as follows: education, diplomacy, technology, foreign policy, science, diversity, economics, freedom, human rights, fashion, race, and culture.

(2) *Sampling*. Sampling involves drawing a sample from the larger population and choosing a sampling unit and a coding unit; in this study, each paragraph was treated as the unit of analysis. This sampling unit makes it possible to run statistical tests.

(3) *Coding*. In this step, the author trains the coder and finishes coding with the agreement of context understanding. Details on the coding procedure are provided later in this chapter.

(4) *Validity*. Testing the validity and reliability of coding is an important fourth step in traditional content analysis.

(5) *Results*. Finally, researchers report their findings and relate their results to proposed research questions or hypotheses.

## Sampling

The LexisNexis Academic database was used to search for newspaper coverage of the First Lady's trip to China. This present study examined six news outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, *China Daily*, *Global Times*, and *Xinhua General News Service*. The sampling procedure consisted of three steps. Initially, the search keywords "Michelle Obama" were inserted in the database. The search period was set to include the dates of Michelle Obama's visit—from 03/22/2014 to 04/15/2014. Because Michelle Obama delivered the speech in China on March 22, we decided to extend the search to three weeks after the trip, in order to cover any and all follow-up news stories. All available relevant newspaper coverage among the selected news outlets was gathered; a total of 121 reports were found from American media, and a total of 47 reports were retrieved from the Chinese media studied here. The next step was to identify appropriate articles; the identified 168 articles were read by the coder to determine relevance to the key event. Those reports containing only key words but otherwise irrelevant to Obama's visit were eliminated. A total of 16 newspaper articles from Chinese media and 19 reports from American media were found. Analysis materials include news, feature articles and editorials. In step three, all selected articles were read carefully the main idea of each paragraph was summarized by researcher. If the main idea of the paragraph was not about First Lady Michelle Obama's trip to China, this paragraph was removed from analysis. For example, here is one paragraph from an article, coded No.18, "First Lady wraps up visit to China" published in *The Washington Post* on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

For example,

China has used its pandas as a symbolic way of connecting with the world since at least 1941, said Henry Nicholls, author of "The Way of the Panda: The Curious History of China's Political Animal." During World War II, China's ascendant nationalist party gave pandas as a gift to the Bronx Zoo in recognition of U.S. assistance during the war. (Thompson, 27 March 2014)

This paragraph is not about First Lady Michelle Obama, so this paragraph was eliminated. Based on this selection process, the final sample from American media included 292 paragraphs and the final sample from Chinese media consisted of 82 paragraphs. The summary of the sample can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of sample**

	U.S.			China		
	NYT	WP	The Associated Press	China Daily	Global Times	XH
News	98	104	77	47	9	24
Features	0	0	0	0	2	0
Editorials	0	13	0	0	0	0
Article total	5	9	5	9	4	3
Paragraph total	98	117	77	47	11	24

### Coding

After the sample was selected, top issues were coded quantitatively by counting the frequency of use per paragraph; the attributes were coded qualitatively by investigating the deeper interpretations and meaning of the textual content. A code book (see Appendix A) was developed by the author to gather results by answering a number of specific questions related to the research questions. The codebook also served as a guideline for all coders. As shown in the appendix, the codebook includes issues and attributes in two separate sections. There are a total of 12 issues and each issue has several sub-issues.

Each paragraph was coded for 62 sub-issues and 27 attributes. To address both top issues and attributes, the frequency of the variable of interest was recorded. The second coding rule stated that for each paragraph, the same issue could only be coded once in one sentence, even if it was mentioned several times in the same sentence.

### Intercoder Reliability

The author was the main coder; a classmate from the graduate Journalism and Mass Communication program served as the second coder. A training session encompassed explanation of the codebook categories and substantive examination and discussion of pertinent examples prior to coding. After that coders separately coded two articles from American and Chinese media, respectively. Then further discussion and codebook modification took place. In order to ensure intercoder reliability, 32% of the samples (10 articles or 119 paragraphs) were coded separately by the two coders. Initial average intercoder reliability was computed using Krippendorff's alpha<sup>1</sup> and reported as 0.90 overall. However, intercoder reliability scores for four variables were unacceptable, namely, individual Internet usage, diversity, egalitarianism, race, and honesty attribute. Further explanation and clarification were offered. The two coders re-coded these 4 variables in the selected 10 articles/119 paragraphs a second time and Krippendorff's alpha was calculated as 0.93 (see Appendix B Table 2).

### Data Analysis

For the first research question, frequencies were observed and reported. Comparison of mean frequency of each issue mentioned in both American and Chinese media was illustrated by a t-test table.

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<sup>1</sup> KALPHA judges =  $\text{judgelist}/\text{level} = \text{lev}/\text{detail} = \text{det}/\text{boot} = z.$

To test for statistically significant differences in the use of salient issues per country, an independent sample t-test was used. For the qualitative investigation of the second research questions the use of attributes was recoded and summarized in a table.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

### Quantitative Analysis

The unit of analysis was the individual paragraph. The American media had a total of 292 paragraphs and Chinese media had 82 paragraphs. All 374 paragraphs from the American and Chinese media outlets were analyzed in this content analysis. The breakdown was 26.2% from *The New York Times*, 31.3% from *The Washington Post*, 20.6% from the *Associated Press*, 12.6% from *China Daily*, 2.9% from *Global Times*, and 6.4% from *Xinhua*.

In order to get the results for Research Question 1, the issue agenda of the mainstream American media news coverage was compared to the issue agenda of the English-language Chinese media news coverage using a t-test. Frequency and percentage of issues mentioned are displayed in Table 2. The data show that the most salient issues in American and Chinese media are noticeably different. The *freedom issue* (mentioned 101 times) was the most salient issue in American media reports; perhaps unsurprisingly, this issue was never mentioned by the Chinese media (mentioned 0 times). Independent t-tests show that this difference is statistically significant (see Table 3). Comparing the means between the two countries, the results show that American news reports had significantly higher coverage of the freedom issue ( $M= 0.35$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) than did those of Chinese news articles ( $M= 0$ ),  $t(290) = -8.52$ ,  $p=.00$ . It is interesting to note that the speech delivered by Michelle Obama when she visited Beijing mentioned freedom as an issue only twice:

“And that’s why it’s so important for information and ideas to flow freely over the Internet and through the media, because that’s how we discover the truth. That’s how we learn what’s really happening in our communities and

our country and our world. And that's how we decide which values and ideas we think are best –by questioning and debating them vigorously, by listening to all sides of an argument, and by judging for ourselves.”

and

“...but when it comes to expressing yourself freely and worshipping as you choose and having open access to information, we believe those universal rights—they are universal rights that are the birthright of every person on this planet...”

Interestingly, the discussion of freedom in Michelle Obama's speech accounts for 115 words out of a total 2019 words. Yet the American media examined her mention of the freedom issue 101 times, and this became the most salient issue in U.S. coverage. In contrast, the Chinese media coverage chosen in this study did not mention freedom issues at all.

The coverage of human rights issues follows a similar pattern. Comparing the means between the two countries, the results show that American news reports had significantly higher coverage of human right issues ( $M= 0.21$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) than Chinese news articles ( $t(291) = 7.28$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In the present study, human rights include, among others, minority rights, women rights, egalitarianism, and a free state for Tibet. In Michelle Obama's benchmark speech, she referenced only African-Americans' protests against discrimination and their struggle to obtain equal rights.

But her references to minority rights as human rights in general were interpreted to relate to Tibetans and other ethnic minorities in U.S. media coverage. Ms. Obama's stop at a Tibetan restaurant in the Sichuan province is a good example of this transfer



of salience:

“...The last stop will be lunch at a Tibetan restaurant in Chengu, a choice that her staff readily acknowledged had been made not for the cuisine but as a political statement to show support for the rights and religious liberties of Tibetans in China...”(*The New York Times*)

For American media coverage, education also proved to be one of the most salient issues; it was mentioned 80 times and accounts for 22.26% of paragraphs in the US sample (see Table 2). The mean for the education issue shown in Table 3 demonstrates a similarity in the coverage of education in both American and Chinese media. The results of the t-test indicate no statistically significant difference between the two countries' coverage of the education issue, with Chinese news reports ( $M=0.27$ ,  $SD=0.60$ ) quite similar to American news reports ( $M=0.27$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ),  $t(372)=0.079$ ,  $p=0.94$ . This finding is not surprising, since the theme of Michelle Obama's trip focused on education and culture exchange. The First Lady's speech mentioned the key words “study” and “culture” 20 and 5 times, respectively. In sum, the education issue ranks third (22.26%) in American media coverage and the same (20.73%) in Chinese media coverage. This implies that both American media and Chinese media treated the education issue similarly, and both used Michelle Obama's speech as a benchmark for their coverage.

As mentioned before, culture was one of two themes of this trip and, as such, was covered frequently by both countries' media.

However, a statistically significant difference was detected when running the t-test, with American media coverage ( $M=0.29$ ,  $SD=0.75$ ) shown to be significantly lower than Chinese media coverage ( $M=0.72$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ),  $t(99.88)=-3.15$ ,  $p=0.002$  in their

use of the cultural issue. According to Table 3, cultural issue coverage was the most salient issue in Chinese media reporting, followed by diplomacy. Moreover, the interval between each hierarchical ranking mean of issues was much larger than the corresponding intervals measured for issue coverage in American media.

The reference to cultural issues in Chinese coverage was not difficult to observe. It was clear from the headlines of Chinese media reports including: “Obamas feed pandas in SW China”, “A sample of Beijing’s best bites”, “U.S. first family continues China tour with visit to Xi’an”, “Obamas climb Great Wall after lunch of trout.” A total of eight headlines in Chinese reports made reference to culture-related issues. This may not be surprising and may be related to the phenomenon of localization, discussed in the net thesis chapter.

Another salient issue in Chinese media coverage was diplomacy. As shown in Table 3, Chinese news reports had significantly higher coverage of the diplomacy issue ( $M= 0.38$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) than American news articles ( $M= 0.10$ ,  $SD= 0.33$ ),  $t(91.74) = -3.56$ ,  $p = .001$ . Furthermore, Chinese news reports also had higher coverage of the foreign policy issue ( $M= 0.04$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ) than American news articles,  $t(81) = -1.76$ ,  $p < 0.1$ . Additionally, American news reports had higher coverage of the race issue ( $M= 0.06$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) than Chinese news articles,  $t(372) = 0.87$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

In the present study, a total of 12 issues were analyzed. Since neither Chinese nor American media mentioned the science issue in the coverage, this issue will be eliminated.

In summary, there were statistically significant differences in issue coverage between American and Chinese media with regards to diplomacy, foreign policy, freedom, human rights, race, and culture. Six out of these eleven issues, when analyzed,

revealed significant differences between American and Chinese media. Based on these results, there is moderate support for significantly different coverage of the Michelle Obama March 2014 China visit in the Chinese and US press.

**Table 2. Distribution of Media Coverage of Issues in Chinese and U.S. Media**

	U.S. Media		Chinese Media	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Education	80	22.26	22	20.73
Diplomacy	30	9.60	31	26.83
Technology	12	4.11	5	4.88
Foreign Policy	0	0	3	3.66
Science	0	0	0	0
Diversity	2	0.68	0	0
Economics	1	0.34	1	1.23
Freedom	101	24.40	0	0
Human Rights	60	17.12	0	0
Fashion	16	3.77	7	6.10
Race	17	4.28	0	0
Culture	84	18.15	59	41.46

*Note:* The percentage is calculated as (Total paragraphs – paragraphs do not contain the specific issue)/ Total paragraphs \*100%

**Table 3. Differences in Issue Coverage between Chinese and U.S. Media**

	U.S. Media		Chinese Media		t	df
	M	SD	M	SD		
Education	0.27	0.56	0.27	0.61	0.08	372
Diplomacy***	0.10	0.33	0.38	0.68	-3.56	91.74
Technology	0.04	0.20	0.06	0.29	-0.72	372
Foreign Policy*	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.19	-1.754	81
Science	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diversity	0.01	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.75	372
Economics	0.00	0.06	0.01	0.11	-0.69	94.11
Freedom***	0.35	0.69	0.00	0.00	8.52	290
Human Rights***	0.21	0.48	0.00	0.00	7.28	291
Fashion	0.05	0.32	0.09	0.37	-0.075	372
Race**	0.06	0.53	0.00	0.00	0.87	372
Culture**	0.29	0.75	0.72	1.18	-3.15	99.88

*Note:* \*p < 0.1, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.0

### Qualitative Analysis

In addition to the issue agenda, attributes are also of interest in this study (Research Question 2). To answer Research Question 2, qualitative analysis was used.

Michelle Obama: The first attribute to describe Michelle Obama is *warm/friendly*. This attribute refers to her being nice and friendly during her visit, as well as her cooperative participation in traditional Chinese cultural activities.

This paragraph from the Associated Press is a good example of using such an attribute to describe the First Lady:

"She is very warm and frank, and when she is talking to people she conscientiously listens to what they have to say," said Wu Qing, a retired professor of Beijing Foreign Studies University who met Mrs. Obama on Sunday. (*The Associated Press*, 23 March 2014)

This attribute is also employed by the Chinese media, as cited in the *Global Times*:

The First Lady then joined a group of children to jump rope, the scenic spot of Xi'an City Wall said [sic] on its official Sina Weibo account. Photo posted on the account also showed that Obama also did yangge dance, a traditional Chinese folk dance that celebrates the harvest in rural areas, using red silk ribbons. The account said that the first lady learned the moves quickly and showed her wisdom and friendliness. (*Global Times*, 25 March 2014)

Michelle Obama's appearance and stylish manner was praised twice in American media:

She has won compliments for her elegant clothing and her interactions with

ordinary people in a country where it is rare to see leaders' spouses or children in public.

Online comments have also praised Mrs. Obama and her fashion choices as elegant, and a red lace gown she wore at her meeting with Xi on Friday evening has been particularly popular. (*The Associated Press*, 23 March 2014)

Ms. Obama's style and fashion choices invite not only domestic, but international, attention. A Chinese media article includes the opinion of a souvenir vendor who interacted with Michelle Obama and compliments her appearance, as cited in *China Daily*:

US first lady Michelle Obama visited the Great Wall's Mutianyu section on Sunday and became a heroine, if an old Chinese saying is to be believed. "You're no hero until you reach the Great Wall," said Li Lin, a souvenir vendor, repeating the saying. "She looks more fabulous than on TV," Li said of Obama. (*China Daily*, 24 March 2014)

American media also portray Michelle Obama as tough, by saying that she made a strong statement regarding censored topics:

Mrs. Obama has largely avoided thorny, political issues on her China trip, although she made a strong statement on behalf of free expression, choice of religion and unfettered access to information as "universal rights," during a speech Saturday at the Stanford Center at Peking University in Beijing. (*The Associated Press*, 25 March 2014)

American media also portray her as a good partner of her husband who may help her husband's political success:

Mrs. Obama has used her position as first lady to champion issues that complement her husband's agenda without making waves: fighting childhood obesity, supporting veterans and military families, pushing the importance of education. (*The Associated Press*, 27 March 2014)

and

Obama is an accomplished woman traveling on a state visit to represent the United States and support her husband as chief executive. (*The Washington Post*, 29 May 2014)

American media compared Michelle Obama with Hillary Clinton and concluded that she is less extreme:

Although her remarks have been less thunderous than the call for women's rights delivered by Hillary Rodham Clinton as first lady in Beijing in 1995, Mrs. Obama has been more intimate in bringing her own personal story to China. (*The International New York Times*, 27 March 2014)

American media also portray her as a charming person:

It turned out to be a somewhat more substantive swing through this massive country than expected, displaying Obama's deft ability to mix diplomacy with her personal narrative. Before flying home late Wednesday afternoon, she had raised the issues of minority rights, Internet access and religious freedom, all while charming the Chinese public by skipping rope, practicing tai chi with high school students and declaring herself awed by the nation's ancient tourist sites. (*The Washington Post*, 28 March 2014)

Although Michelle Obama didn't make any actual political moves, her visit may have had some influence on political decisions. From Chinese coverage, *China Daily*

mentioned her political influence twice:

The uniqueness of the role of first ladies is its soft touch and freedom from the knottiness and even ugliness of hard politics. Although it would be naive to expect the first lady's visit to iron out all differences between China and the US, it is safe to say that a successful visit by Michelle will infuse fresh vigor into the development of bilateral relations. (*China Daily*, 24 March 2014)

And:

Moreover, a strengthened personal bond between the first families of China and the US will naturally help generate better understanding and more common ground between Beijing and Washington. Of particular significance is Michelle's rich interaction with Chinese students, which will help boost friendship between the younger generations of the two nations, who shoulder the future of bilateral relations. (*China Daily*, 24 March 2014)

Table 4 summarizes the comparison between American and Chinese media attributes.

**Table 4. Press attributes of Michelle Obama**

<i>American Media</i>	<i>Chinese Media</i>
Warm/friendly demeanor	Warm/friendly demeanor
Tough	
Personal appearance	Personal appearance
Supportive spouse	Political influence
Approachable (compared with Hillary Clinton)	



## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

### Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine the similarities and differences between the American media and Chinese media issue agendas and attribute agendas associated with the First Lady Michelle Obama's visit to China in March 2014. The results showed some significant differences in the two countries' media issue agendas, although this was not the case for all issues. Specifically, diplomacy, foreign policy, freedom, human rights, race, and culture had significantly different media coverage in the U.S. and China.

American media had a higher concentration of coverage on the issues of freedom, human rights and race than the Chinese media. This is not very surprising, since U.S. culture values media freedom and human rights, and often commends diversity. All three issues resonate with American audiences. In contrast, these are considered taboo issues in China. This finding can be explained by the ideologies of dominant, elite and the journalists who shaped the agenda of the newspaper coverage. In Kobland, Du, and Kwan's (1992) study, they employed thematic analysis to make a comparative study of the media coverage of student demonstrations in China and South Korea. The study suggests that American media coverage of China has "almost entirely focused on the problems and failure of Marxist governments" (p. 66). This overemphasis on freedom and human rights issues was confirmed by findings in Wu's (2006) study, which stated that American journalists tend to focus on conflict and abnormality. The general anti-communist perspective may lead to a focus on negative issues in Communist China (Wu, 2006), including the suppression of human rights and media freedom.

This also leads to the finding that American media issue agendas are more pluralistic than those of the Chinese media in their coverage of the First Lady's visit.

In addition to dominant cultural values, these differences may also be explained by glocalization. In the media arena, glocalization means that the news media provide local audiences with a familiar lens to interpret global events in order to make them easily comprehensible. In another words, from a macro level the event is similar, and from the micro level the local interpretations are different (Geertz, 1986). Difference in the coverage of race provides a strong example of glocalization. Since there is no race conflict issue in China, it is not surprising that American media had more coverage on this issue. This fits with the argument that local culture and media consumption are closely tied at the local level (Robertson, 1995).

In contrast, three issues received higher coverage in Chinese media: diplomacy, foreign policy, and culture. The potential reason for this difference is that Chinese media coverage was shaped by the government and party—although not directly. The media issue agenda reveals the Chinese government policy and official attitude, as reflected by the Chinese press. Peng (2004) concluded that social reality and historical context should be taken into consideration when analyzing each country's media system. Since the Chinese media operates under the local political and economic system, it is necessary to take the climate of the media system into consideration. Siebert et al. (1956) proposed the Four Theories of the Press (Authoritarian, Communist, Libertarian and Social responsibility models) to classify media systems around the world. Since the Chinese media has undergone significant changes including economic reforms and re-shaping of the media landscape, it is difficult to classify according to the old four theories model.

The Chinese media today exhibits a few characteristics of the Communist theory of the press – for example, the media are owned by the party and government, and are charged with a responsibility of contributing to the unity of the country (Nerone, 1995). However, along with other cultural developments arising from economic reform, Chinese media continues to evolve and develop according to commercial and political needs (Winfield & Peng, 2005).

As the official purpose of Ms. Obama's trip was cultural and education issues, those two issues were frequently mentioned in both countries' media. This similarity and correspondence confirms the first level of agenda setting. However, there seems to be some political nuance beneath this cultural- and education-themed trip. Because of the potential reasons indicated before, American and Chinese media interpreted the political purposes differently. Recalling the means of issue coverage (see Table 3), besides "education" and "cultural" issues, the dominant issues for American media were "freedom" and "human rights"; whereas, for Chinese media, the dominant issues are "diplomacy" and "foreign policy." These results seem to confirm that China is increasingly conscious of public diplomacy, especially "soft diplomacy." Looking back in history, "panda diplomacy" has been used as a unique type of soft diplomacy for China to build relationships with other countries, change cross-cultural misunderstandings, and shape its global image. In 1957, successful panda diplomacy between China and Russia was regarded as a symbol of friendship (Chen, 2012). The ping-pong game between Washington and Peking were treated as a symbol of "people to people" exchanges (Firth, 2011, p. 19). These can both be viewed as examples of Chinese soft diplomacy to improve China's global image and increase support in international public opinion.

China also takes advantage of media to promote soft diplomacy, as summarized in two objectives, which are “one is to let more people know us. The other is to let people like us” (Hang, 2002). Wang’s study confirms that media diplomacy was used to strengthen its enduring and effective public diplomacy strategy. Wang (2008) stated that China uses various media agencies, including the *Xinhua News Agency*, *China Radio International (CRI)*, *Chinese Central TV’s English channel (CCTV-9)*, and *China Daily*, as well as other agencies, to engage in media diplomacy. In another words, these media are used to help foreigners to understand Chinese development, image, and government policy. This can explain the focus on diplomacy and foreign policy in Chinese media coverage.

The qualitative findings of this study also shed light on the attribute agenda findings that American and Chinese media construct similar attributes for the First Lady. As shown in Table 4, similar attributes appear in both American and Chinese media when they describe Ms. Obama, as follows: warm/friendly demeanor and appearance attribute. Thus, gender stereotypes did emerge in the coverage in both countries.

First Lady Michelle Obama is likely to be associated with feminine attributes such as being warm and friendly, a typical expectation of women in terms of gender roles. This also corroborates the findings from a previous study that Michelle Obama has often been associated with a motherly role or with children (Mandziuk 2008; Winfield 1997). Mortensen’s study (2015) looked at gender displays and visual framing and concluded that the White House would like to frame Michelle Obama as more feminine and traditional compared in the news media.

It is notable that some of the other attributes, like political influence, and being a supportive spouse, show the evolution of the First Lady's gendered role in international diplomacy. Before Rosalynn Carter, U.S. First Ladies experienced a large limitation in their roles (Smith, 1997). By contrast, now they have roles which include "bolstering the president's image and agenda, reinforcing vital alliances and relationships, and conferring prominence to human rights issues" (Erickson & Thomson, 2012, p. 239). These findings also confirmed the benefits of First Lady diplomacy from previous studies. First of all, First Lady diplomacy indicates a "feminist advancement that challenge gender stereotypes, expanding women's political spaces" (Parry-Giles & Blair, 2002, p. 567). A second benefit is that it works as a persuasive diplomacy and a more efficient means of bringing state "power to bear on matters engaging strategic interests" (Freeman, 1997, p. 11).

#### Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study is that the American and Chinese media agencies chosen have different target audiences. The Chinese media in this study consist of *China Daily*, *Global Times*, and the *Xinhua General News Service*. All of these outlets are English-language newspapers. Since English is not a native language to China, the majority of China's domestic audience does not choose any of these newspapers as their main news source. Because of this, the Chinese media selected in this study should be regarded as mainly international in focus and target audience.

Some may also critique that the study sample is not sufficient. Sample misrepresentation may influence the findings. To counteract this possibility, the present research made use of qualitative as well as quantitative methods.

### Implications

Although the present study suffers from some limitations, extensive sampling, as well as both quantitative and qualitative research methods, were carefully employed to explore both issue and attribute agenda differences in American and Chinese media. Furthermore, this study offers a template of how to utilize quantitative and qualitative methods to study both levels of agenda setting.

As illustrated before, the present study reveals the partly contrasting issue agendas in American and Chinese media and explores the potential reasons for these differences. Further study may extend efforts on exploring the factors in the processes of news agenda.

As the present study only examined print media in both countries, this would appear to be a fruitful area for further studies to investigate whether these differences still exist in both countries to test for an inter-media agenda-setting effect. Because the Internet and new media have different ownership and roles, these may also be areas requiring further study.

Additionally, media in Mainland China are growing rapidly and becoming more commercialized. Because of Hong Kong media's unique position, in a society influenced by two distinct ideologies, it would be interesting to re-compare the media from Mainland China and Hong Kong and more closely explore the similarities and differences in their agenda setting. As Fung and Li (1995) suggested, both journalists' self-censorship and media ownership were changed since the social system changed in Hong Kong. Do all or some of these factors above influence news coverage, and to what extent?

To summarize, the findings of this study provide a meaningful example to support agenda setting theory when media agendas serve as dependent variables. Furthermore, it also expanded comparative studies between American and Chinese media and attempted to offer potential reasons based on its results.

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include profiles of the first lady or interview related to the visit.

A editorial is an essay which express the editor/writer's opinion, in order to promote this point of view.)

**Issue Topic** (This refers to the topics talked about in the articles. Each article maybe discussed more than one topic and each topic maybe discussed more than once. Code as the times mentioned. Each issue in one sentence just code once. Please code here for Michelle Obama's speech first and then code the reports successively.)

**Education:**

\_\_\_\_\_ (8) Education \_\_\_\_\_ (9) Education cost \_\_\_\_\_ (10) Study abroad  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (11) Scholarship \_\_\_\_\_ (12) Online courses  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (13) School uniform \_\_\_\_\_ (14) Other education

**Diplomacy**

\_\_\_\_\_ (15) Soft diplomacy/public diplomacy \_\_\_\_\_ (16) Citizen diplomacy  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (17) Official diplomacy \_\_\_\_\_ (18) Child diplomacy  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (19) Panda diplomacy \_\_\_\_\_ (20) Sister-city-state  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (21) U.S. Chinese partnership \_\_\_\_\_ (22) Other diplomacy

**Technology**

\_\_\_\_\_ (23) Technology \_\_\_\_\_ (24) Individual Internet usage \_\_\_\_\_ (25) Electronics use  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (26) Other technology

**Foreign policy**

\_\_\_\_\_ (27) International student policy \_\_\_\_\_ (28) Environment improvement policy  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (29) Nuclear weapons policy \_\_\_\_\_ (30) Other policy

**Science**

\_\_\_\_\_ (31) Science \_\_\_\_\_ (32) Academic Research cooperation \_\_\_\_\_ (33)  
 Other science

**Diversity**

\_\_\_\_\_ (34) Diversity \_\_\_\_\_ (35) Socioeconomic classes \_\_\_\_\_ (36) Other diversity

**Economics**

\_\_\_\_\_ (37) Economic struggle \_\_\_\_\_ (38) Foreign investment \_\_\_\_\_ (39) E-commerce  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (40) Economic brand  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (41) Economic Development \_\_\_\_\_ (42) Other economic

**Freedom**

\_\_\_\_(43) Internet freedom/ Internet censorship/ Freedom of speech \_\_\_\_ (44) Open expression \_\_\_\_ (45) Media censorship \_\_\_\_ (46) Religious freedom \_\_\_\_ (47) Other freedom

### **Human Rights**

\_\_\_\_(48) Minority rights \_\_\_\_ (49) Women rights \_\_\_\_ (50) Egalitarianism \_\_\_\_ (51) Tibet issue \_\_\_\_ (52) Other human rights

### **Fashion**

\_\_\_\_ (53) Dress \_\_\_\_ (54) Hair cut \_\_\_\_ (55) Make-up \_\_\_\_ (56) Other fashion

### \_\_\_\_ (57)Race

### **Culture**

\_\_\_\_(58) Cultural Exchange \_\_\_\_ (59) Chinese Food \_\_\_\_ (60) Panda \_\_\_\_ (61) Tai Chi \_\_\_\_ (62) Chinese calligraphy \_\_\_\_ (63) Great Wall \_\_\_\_ (64) Terracotta Warriors \_\_\_\_ (65) Jumping rope \_\_\_\_ (66) Learn Chinese \_\_\_\_ (67) Tourism \_\_\_\_ (68)Other culture

### **U.S. First Lady Attributes**

#### **Images**

\_\_\_\_ (69) Appearance (hair\dress\facial expression)  
 \_\_\_\_ (70) Daughter mentioned \_\_\_\_ (71) Mother mentioned  
 \_\_\_\_ (72) Spouse mentioned \_\_\_\_ (73) Gender mentioned  
 \_\_\_\_ (74) Healthy eating \_\_\_\_ (75) Fit  
 \_\_\_\_ (76) Honesty/integrity \_\_\_\_ (77) Dishonesty  
 \_\_\_\_ (78) Intelligent \_\_\_\_ (79) is not intelligent  
 \_\_\_\_ (80) Competency \_\_\_\_ (81) Performance/success  
 \_\_\_\_ (82) Energetic \_\_\_\_ (83) Passive  
 \_\_\_\_ (84) Compassionate \_\_\_\_ (85)is not compassionate  
 \_\_\_\_ (86) Tough \_\_\_\_ (87) Weak  
 \_\_\_\_ (88) Political influence \_\_\_\_ (89)Warm/friendly  
 \_\_\_\_ (90)Other Image

#### **Political leaders/celebrity mentioned**

\_\_\_\_ (91) Hillary Clinton \_\_\_\_ (92) Barack Obama \_\_\_\_ (93) Xi Jianping  
 \_\_\_\_ (94) Peng Liyuan \_\_\_\_ (95) Other politics



## APPENDIX B

## INTERCODER RELIABILITY RESULTS

Variables	Krippendorff's alpha reliability=	
	1 <sup>st</sup> coding	2 <sup>nd</sup> coding
Education	0.898	0.898
Education Cost	0.6595	0.6595
Study Abroad	0.9503	0.9503
Soft Diplomacy	0.8964	0.8964
Citizen Diplomacy	0.7966	0.7966
Child Diplomacy	1	1
Panda Diplomacy	1	1
Other Diplomacy	1	1
Technology	1	1
Individual Internet Usage	0.4936	0.796
Diversity	0	1
Internet freedom	0.8177	0.8177
Freedom of speech	0.9172	0.9172
Media censorship	0.7153	0.7153
Religious freedom	1	1
Minority rights	0.7569	0.7569
Women rights	1	1
Egalitarianism	0.0042	0.6638
Tibet issue	1	1
Other human rights	0.7424	0.7424
Race	1	1
CultureExchange	1	1
Chinese food	1	1
Panda	1	1
Tai Chi	1	1
Chinese calligraphy	1	1
Great Wall	1	1
Terracotta Wattiors	1	1
Jumping rope	1	1
Toursm	0.8489	0.8489
Appearance	1	1
Daughter mentioned	1	1
Mother	1	1
Health eating	1	1
Fit	1	1
Honesty	1	1
Intelligent	0.6638	0.6638
Success	0.6638	0.6638
Warm	0.8965	0.8965
Other Image	1	1

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Hillary	1	1
Obama	1	1
Xi	1	1
Peng	1	1
Other politics	1	1
Average	0.902253095	0.926101949

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APPENDIX C  
COMPLETE TEXT OF MICHELLE OBAMA'S SPEECH 3/22/2014

**Remarks by the First Lady at Stanford Center at Peking University**

**Beijing, China**

MRS. OBAMA: (Applause.) Thank you. Well, ni-hao. (Laughter.) It is such a pleasure and an honor to be here with all of you at this great university, so thank you so much for having me.

Now, before I get started today, on behalf of myself and my husband, I just want to say a few very brief words about Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. As my husband has said, the United States is offering as many resources as possible to assist in the search. And please know that we are keeping all of the families and loved ones of those on this flight in our thoughts and prayers at this very difficult time.

Now with that, I want to start by recognizing our new Ambassador to China, Ambassador Baucus; President Wang; Chairman Zhu; Vice President Li; Director Cueller; Professor Oi, and the Stanford Center; President Sexton from New York University, which is an excellent study abroad program in Shanghai; and John Thornton, Director of the Global Leadership Program at Tsinghua University. Thank you all for joining us.

But most of all, I want to thank all of the students who are here today. And I particularly want to thank Eric Schaefer and Zhu Xuanhao for that extraordinary English and Chinese introduction. That was a powerful symbol of everything that I want to talk with you about today.

See, by learning each other's languages, and by showing such curiosity and respect for each other's cultures, Mr. Schafer and Ms. Zhu and all of you are building bridges of understanding that will lead to so much more. And I'm here today because I know that our future depends on connections like these among young people like you across

the globe.

That's why when my husband and I travel abroad, we don't just visit palaces and parliaments and meet with heads of state. We also come to schools like this one to meet with students like you, because we believe that relationships between nations aren't just about relationships between governments or leaders—they're about relationships between people, particularly young people. So we view study abroad programs not just as an educational opportunity for students, but also as a vital part of America's foreign policy.

Through the wonders of modern technology, our world is more connected than ever before. Ideas can cross oceans with the click of a button. Companies can do business and compete with companies across the globe. And we can text, email, Skype with people on every continent.

So studying abroad isn't just a fun way to spend a semester; it is quickly becoming the key to success in our global economy. Because getting ahead in today's workplaces isn't just about getting good grades or test scores in school, which are important. It's also about having real experience with the world beyond your borders—experience with languages, cultures and societies very different from your own. Or, as the Chinese saying goes: “It is better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books.”

But let's be clear, studying abroad is about so much more than improving your own future. It's also about shaping the future of your countries and of the world we all share. Because when it comes to the defining challenges of our time—whether it's climate change or economic opportunity or the spread of nuclear weapons—these are shared challenges. And no one country can confront them alone. The only way forward is together.

That's why it is so important for young people like you to live and study in each other's countries, because that's how you develop that habit of cooperation. You do it by immersing yourself in one another's culture, by learning each other's stories, by getting past the stereotypes and misconceptions that too often divide us.

That's how you come to understand how much we all share. That's how you realize that we all have a stake in each other's success—that cures discovered here in Beijing could save lives in America, that clean energy technologies from Silicon Valley in California could improve the environment here in China, that the architecture of an ancient temple in Xi'an could inspire the design of new buildings in Dallas or Detroit.

And that's when the connections you make as classmates or labmates can blossom into something more. That's what happened when Abigail Coplin became an American Fulbright Scholar here at Peking University. She and her colleagues published papers together in top science journals, and they built research partnerships that lasted long after they returned to their home countries. And Professor Niu Ke from Peking University was a Fulbright Scholarship—Scholar in the U.S. last year, and he reported—and this is a quote from him—he said, “The most memorable experiences were with my American friends.”

These lasting bonds represent the true value of studying abroad. And I am thrilled that more and more students are getting this opportunity. As you've heard, China is currently the fifth most popular destination for Americans studying abroad, and today, the highest number of exchange students in the U.S. are from China.

But still, too many students never have this chance, and some that do are hesitant to take it. They may feel like studying abroad is only for wealthy students or students from certain kinds of universities. Or they may think to themselves, well, that sounds

fun but how will it be useful in my life? And believe me, I understand where these young people are coming from because I felt the same way back when I was in college.

See, I came from a working-class family, and it never occurred to me to study abroad—never. My parents didn't get a chance to attend college, so I was focused on getting into a university, earning my degree so that I could get a good job to support myself and help my family. And I know for a lot of young people like me who are struggling to afford a regular semester of school, paying for plane tickets or living expenses halfway around the world just isn't possible. And that's not acceptable, because study abroad shouldn't just be for students from certain backgrounds.

Our hope is to build connections between people of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, because it is that diversity that truly will change the face of our relationships. So we believe that diversity makes our country vibrant and strong. And our study abroad programs should reflect the true spirit of America to the world.

And that's why when my husband visited China back in 2009, he announced the 100,000 Strong initiative to increase the number and diversity of American students studying in China. And this year, as we mark the 35th anniversary of the normalization of relationships between our two countries, the U.S. government actually supports more American students in China than in any other country in the world.

We are sending high school, college and graduate students here to study Chinese. We're inviting teachers from China to teach Mandarin in American schools. We're providing free online advising for students in China who want to study in the U.S. And the U.S.–China Fulbright program is still going strong with

more than 3,000 alumni.

And the private sector is stepping up as well. For example, Steve Schwarzman, who is the head of an American company called Blackstone, is funding a new program at Tsinghua University modeled on the Rhodes Scholarship. And today, students from all kinds of backgrounds are studying here in China.

Take the example of Royale Nicholson, who's from Cleveland, Ohio. She attends New York University's program in Shanghai. Now, like me, Royale is a first-generation college student. And her mother worked two full-time jobs while her father worked nights to support their family. And of her experience in Shanghai, Royale said—and this is her quote—she said, “This city oozes persistence and inspires me to accomplish all that I can.” And happy birthday, Royale. It was her birthday yesterday. (Laughter.)

And then there's Philmon Haile from the University of Washington, whose family came to the U.S. as refugees from Eritrea when he was a child. And of his experience studying in China, he said, “Study abroad is a powerful vehicle for people-to-people exchange as we move into a new era of citizen diplomacy.”

“A new era of citizen diplomacy.” I could not have said it better myself, because that's really what I'm talking about. I am talking about ordinary citizens reaching out to the world. And as I always tell young people back in America, you don't need to get on a plane to be a citizen diplomat. I tell them that if you have an Internet connection in your home, school, or library, within seconds you can be transported anywhere in the world and meet people on every continent.

And that's why I'm posting a daily travel blog with videos and photos of my experiences here in China, because I want young people in America to be part of this visit. And that's really the power of technology—how it can open up the entire world

and expose us to ideas and innovations we never could have imagined.

And that's why it's so important for information and ideas to flow freely over the Internet and through the media, because that's how we discover the truth. That's how we learn what's really happening in our communities and our country and our world. And that's how we decide which values and ideas we think are best—by questioning and debating them vigorously, by listening to all sides of an argument, and by judging for ourselves.

And believe me, I know how this can be a messy and frustrating process. My husband and I are on the receiving end of plenty of questioning and criticism from our media and our fellow citizens. And it's not always easy, but we wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. Because time and again, we have seen that countries are stronger and more prosperous when the voices of and opinions of all their citizens can be heard.

And as my husband has said, we respect the uniqueness of other cultures and societies, but when it comes to expressing yourself freely and worshipping as you choose and having open access to information, we believe those universal rights—they are universal rights that are the birthright of every person on this planet. We believe that all people deserve the opportunity to fulfill their highest potential as I was able to do in the United States.

And as you learn about new cultures and form new friendships during your time here in China and in the United States, all of you are the living, breathing embodiment of those values. So I guarantee you that in studying abroad, you're not just changing your own life, you are changing the lives of everyone you meet.

And as the great American President John F. Kennedy once said about foreign students studying in the U.S., he said "I think they teach more than they learn." And



that is just as true of young Americans who study abroad. All of you are America's best face, and China's best face, to the world—you truly are.

Every day, you show the world your countries' energy and creativity and optimism and unwavering belief in the future. And every day, you remind us—and me in particular—of just how much we can achieve if we reach across borders, and learn to see ourselves in each other, and confront our shared challenges with shared resolve.

So I hope you all will keep seeking these kinds of experiences. And I hope you'll keep teaching each other, and learning from each other, and building bonds of friendship that will enrich your lives and enrich our world for decades to come.

You all have so much to offer, and I cannot wait to see all that you achieve together in the years ahead.

Thank you so much. Xie-Xie. (Applause.)

END            11:48 A.M. CST