European Union in the Chinese Eyes. An empirical Study on Chinese Online News Content

EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CHINESE EYES. AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON CHINESE ONLINE NEWS CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the portrayals of European Union and its member countries depicted by the Chinese media. It aims to explore the news content from a different angle by shifting the usual western perspective to a Chinese approach. The use of quantitative content analysis method enables the researchers to observe and compare how the Chinese official information network XinhuaNet has treated news on issues related to different member countries in the European Union and their citizens.

Key words: China, content analysis, European Union, framing, internet, online news.

ABSTRACT

El presente estudio analiza las noticias online emitidas por Xinhuanet, diario de información del gobierno Chino, a fin de examinar cómo la prensa oficial percibe a sus éteros europeos. Para ello, se toman como referencia teorías de framing combinadas con una aproximación al entendimiento intercultural para comprender la comunicación en la escena internacional. Los métodos inductivo (cualitativo) y deductivo (cuantitativo), han sido empleados para analizar el tratamiento de una muestra de 675 noticias sobre los miembros de la Unión Europea en el flujo informativo dentro del contexto socio-cultural chino, para la comunidad del habla china por todo el mundo.

Key words: Agencia informativa, análisis de contenido, China, framing, Unión Europea.

1. Introduction

The media have been accused of disseminating negative, crisis salient, inaccurate information with a strong western biased orientation in their coverage of foreign countries, in particular, those nations they considered to belong to the third world order (De Beer, 2004; Merrill, 2004). Some critics put their finger on these media for constructing a negative stereotypical other, usually violent, bizarre and troublemaking, of many developing and (post-) communist countries (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1984). Ethnocentrism in journalistical practice (Gans, 1979) means routinely using binary oppositions when describing foreign contexts, that essentialize the complex and contradictory reality into core attributes of a nation

and history to construct a reductive ideological contrast between us and them (Lee et al., 2002). The home audiences are shone under positive light at the expense of a seemingly incomprehensible or immoral other (Oehlkers & College, 2000). Moreover, the western press is said to give scarce positive news coverage to communists and others on the 'far left' (Demers, 2002). This theory posits that corporate media produce content that facilitates not only processes of social control but also processes that enhance social change. Among other influential figures, Edward Said (1979) uses the "orientalism" arguments to show how the 'West' constructs an image of orient as other to strengthen its identity and as rationale for political oppression. This inclination, aggregated with a global news flow imbalance, can lead to improper conclusions and assumptions about people of a different culture or country (De Burgh, 2005), and obstruct international understanding and cooperation. At times, this can cause international (and national) friction and animosity (Lau, 2004).

A negative statement made about a group of people is usually regarded as a stereotype. Stereotypes emerge when one perception is applied to an entire group. To support these arguments, Leung and Huang (2007) quote some studies from a critical perspective by authors who contend that western media, influenced by their ideological position and/or national interest considerations, would use their hegemonic power systematically to construct negative images (i.e. violent and conflictive) and media representations of underprivileged others - usually the less-developed countries (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1984).

Nevertheless, representations can also appear by using positive stereotypes. Unlike negative ones, positive stereotypes are rarely seen as harmful, more over, people, in general, tend to assume gracefully these benevolent attributes tagged on them as truly their own without objection. The problem with positive stereotypes is, they also paint only a partial picture of the people we are dealing with, and they may not be accurate. Positive stereotypes certainly do not describe all Chinese, Vietnamese or all Europeans than negative stereotypes would apply to them. An analogy to representations or stereotypes of a nation may lies in the various concepts of "face". Face is defined as "something that is diffusedly located in the flow of events" by Goffman in 1955 (Gudykunst et al.,

1988: 84). Another definition for face is "a psychological image that can be granted or lost and fought for and presented as a gift" (Yutang, 1968, in Ting-Toomey & Chua, 1988: 84), or Bown & Levinson's "the public self-image that every member of a society wants to claim for himself / herself" (in Ting-Toomey & Chua, 1988: p. 84). "Facework" is a ubiquitous concept that occurs in all cultures and, in essence, face is an identity that is defined conjointly by the participants in a setting, namely, communication.

Today while the world of journalism faces a challenging new communication environment with lots more knowledgeable world audiences capable of interacting with technology to acquire contested independent information, journalists are increasingly perceived as untrustworthy, out of touch, dishonest or biased, questions of quality and standards of journalism practice come to the forefront (Leung & Huang, 2007). However, journalists themselves would argue that they are neutral, objective, fair and non-ideological. A study by Liang (2002) claims that US international correspondents in China were "mostly fair" in their reporting of China, despite "being extremely critical" of the Chinese system. After the recent overwhelming Olympic Game celebrations, China is definitely perceived as a political-economic giant by the world community. In this context, there is a need to go beyond just political and economic processes in the country's transition to a market economy. It is important to focus on how Chinese media help to interconnect between cultural, historical and philosophical dimensions with its view on the Western world, which define the complexities and often contradictory nature of China's attempts to balance its global thinking - expanded commercialization, and its local performance - protectionism of Chinese political integrity and social cohesion (Weber & Lu, 2007).

2. Frameworks

2.1. Intercultural Communication Perspectives

Definitions of communication in Chinese culture context

To the Chinese, communication is a borrowed foreign concept. While there is not a single Chinese term that corresponds to the word "communication", there

are several possible translations for the concept (Gao, Ting-Toomey & Gudykunst, 1996). The three most commonly used translations include jiāoliú 交流 (to exchange), chuánbō 傳播 (to disseminate, propagate or spread) and gōutōng 溝通 (to connect and to make flow). Then, the second translation chuánbō 傳播 is commonly used after the word dàzhòng 大眾 (meaning the broad masses, the people or the public) when it refers to the study of mass communication - dàzhòng chuánbō 大眾傳播. Therefore, the concept conveyed by the term dàzhòng chuánbō 大眾傳播, unmistakably, indicates the Chinese idea of "the public dissemination" in mandarin. This idea, in fact, seems to reflect the Chinese governmental information agency's main role.

Since China signed the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement in November 2001, it has opened its doors to foreign investments assuring that its inner economic structure would achieve more transparency, openness, and access to information. This has led Chinese government to an ideological contradiction, as its internet development has been built around the broader socialist-markets economy principles of political control on one hand and, on the other, of global economic progress. The government is facing a contradiction between wanting desperately an open, modern and efficient economy, including a state-of the-art communication and information infrastructure, in parallel, wanting to control of the flow of information, including news and public opinion, particularly, citizen dissent (Weber & Lu, 2007). There are documented strategies that China uses in order to exert effectively some overt control of information, such as censorship, increase in monitoring and limiting access to the internet. Chinese authorities have engaged with new media technologies in different ways "to guide" China's media modernization, diversification and commercialization with frameworks of subtler control modalities.

In the context of new structures under softer authoritarian surveillance, Wong (2001) suggests that the State continues to exert the most influence over the media in quasi-market economies. In fact, the success of commodification of culture in China is seen by the government as a way of magnifying the types of positive social relations that are not only beneficial but essential for nation-building, or the bringing together of peoples by adopting common values and

culture practices (Weber & Lu, 2004).

Chinese media agency

Chinese news environment is characterized by the communist theory of the press (Beaudoin, 2007). Based on Marxist ideology, this theory holds that the press is ostensibly owned by the people, and it serves the purpose of contributing to the success and continuance of the Communist system and Party. In fact, the government controls the press, forbidding any criticism of the Party's intentions, aims, and actions. The mass media are expected to protect stability and economic growth of China. Although economic reforms have brought about a certain degree of improvement in the information flow in China, yet the press freedom level remains low (No. 181 in world ranking of 196 countries by the Freedom House at <http://www.freedomhouse.org> in 2010) because the government still exercises strong control over the news media. The using of media processes by the government to reinforce the uniqueness of Chinese values and practices illustrates how the government is challenging the negative aspects of the globalization discourse upon local political and social structures. Scholars argue that, by supporting a value system that continually evokes the uniqueness of the Chinese race, Confucianism and socialist values, domestic media groups reinforce the notion of an 'imagined Chinese community' linked only economically to the global world, but separated politically and culturally from it. Such attempts to reconcile modernity with traditional culture and values limit the influence of western culture upon Chinese society (Weber, 2003).

Culture and communication, communication and culture

In the context of media communication, culture is seen as a learned system of meaning framing that fosters a particular sense of share identity and of community in the audiences as group members. It is a complex frame of references, which consisting of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meaning that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community (Ting-Toomey, 1999a). Hall (1956) stated culture

affects communication and communication affects culture in the sense that it is through certain particular communication fashions and types of content that culture is learned, modified, and passed down from one generation to the next. It is argued that "inter-group" communication occurs when cultural and/or sociological data are used to make predictions. Thus, intercultural communication takes place when cultural factors of one group affect the process in the communication with communities of different cultures at intended or unintended level. Cultural differences can have a deep-reach level such as beliefs and motivation values (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Intercultural communication scholars suggest two approaches to examining communication in a culture: etic and emic (Gao et al., 1996). Analysis based on etic perspective would involve a comparison of Chinese communication with communication in other culture, in which universal constructs are used, whereas, analysis using an emic perspective would involve examination of culture specific aspects of communication in a given society. In the case of China and from the emic approach, the core to understanding the Chinese communication is the self. Traditionally, the Chinese self is defined by one's relations with others, because the self would be incomplete if it were separated from others (Gao et al., 1996). The relational aspect of the self influences all spheres of Chinese communication, which, in turn, serves affective and relational purposes.

The self in most collectivistic cultures is maintained and coded through the active negotiation of facework, whereas in more individualistic cultures such as some European countries like United States, Canada, Australia, the self is often defined as an intra-psychic phenomenon (Gudykunst et al., 1988: 85). Therefore, ideally, the "public face" should correspond to individuals' internal states. This means that providing "face support" to another person is lending support and confirmation to his or her "idealized sense of self", which in turn, should be ideally consistent with his or her core "authentic self". From a collectivistic perspective, the self is never free. It is bounded by mutual role obligations and duties and structured by a patterned process of reciprocal giving-and-taking facework negotiations. Theory on culture and facework (Ting-Toomey, 1988) postures that, in some western cultures (individualistic cultures)

such as Germany, Scandinavia, Australia and the United States, maintaining consistency between the private-self and public-self image is of paramount importance. In other cultures (i.e. collectivistic cultures) such as China, Korea and Japan, the "self" is a situational and rationally based concept. In the Chinese cultural context, the self is defined through an intersecting web of social and personal relationships.

Faceworking in this collectivistic culture context focuses on lending role support for others' face at the same time safeguarding one's own face. The latter becomes even more important than the former. Based on this conception, facework in the Chinese context of mass media communication milieu plays an important role on covering news information of foreign countries, which are others' self after all. This is done by emphasizing the preservation of one's own autonomy, territory, and one's own space while, simultaneously, showing respect for the others space. However, face becomes more noticeable when it is rendered problematic or is threatened in vulnerable situations (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Generally, communicators can use either low-context or high-context verbal and nonverbal strategies in communication process to maintain face, to defend one's own face and/ or to upgrade and honour other's face. Individualistic culture that associates with low context communication emphasizes the importance of explicit verbal messages to convey information. Collectivistic culture that prefers high contextual style stresses the importance of multilayered context that frames the communication.

The concept of "face movement" cluster (Ting-Toomey, 2005: 76), adopted in the present work, refers to the option Chinese journalists take to decide whether to maintain, defend, and/or upgrade national self face vs. the face of "European others" when covering news information about Europe. Face maintenance, as a neutral starting point, is the "civilized front" with which we present ourselves to others via everyday politeness ritual (Goffman, 1959, in Ting-Toomey, 2005: 76). Just as face or interaction balance is sustained through taken-for-granted everyday human communication, so when journalists cover news on foreign countries, they may take these face moves conscious or unconsciously to present the countries they write or speak about apart from setting news agenda.

2.2. Media Attention: From agenda setting to framing

Agenda- setting

The agenda-setting model in journalism studies has posited that media attention is a prerequisite to the public's awareness of issues. The basic concept of the agenda-setting model is that topics that the news media highlight in their coverage subsequently assume prominent positions on the public agenda (McCombs and Estrada, 1997). However, while the agenda-setting concept has been successful in explicating the roles of news media in the formation of the public agenda, it also has raised the question of how the media agenda is set. Some authors suggest a conceptual linkage between the perspectives of news treatment analysis with new revision theory on agenda setting, the so-called second level (McCombs & Estrada, 1997; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar & Rey, 1997; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar & Llamas, 2000; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). In their revision theory, McCombs & Reynolds postulate that the second level of agenda setting refers to the process of selecting some social objects and emphasizing their attributes. This is how attribute salience makes public definition of issues/ events/ news stories or definition of public personages possible. In fact, in the latest few years, news frame analysis has developed into an independent research field separated from agenda setting (Entman, 1993; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Kosicki, 1993; Maher, 2001; Scheufele, 1999; 2000).

Framing theory

The origins of frame concept lie in the fields of cognitive psychology and anthropology. They were developed by Bartlett in 1932 and Bateson in 1955 respectively (Van Gorp, 2007). Later on, ideas stemmed from it have been adopted as research theories and used as design devices in empirical or experimental studies by other disciplines such as sociology, economics, linguistics, ecological-environmental movement research (Snow & Benford, 1992; Hansen, 1993; Eder, 1996) and research on policy (Schön & Rein, 1994). In the filed of media studies, framing theory has been applied to communication science (Tuchman, 1978), political communication (Giltlin, 1980), health

communication (Rothman & Salovey, 1999 in Van Gorp, 2007; Igartua, Cheng & Lopes, 2003) and public relations research (Hallahan, 1999, in Van Gorp, 2007). Usually, this is done not without a shift in meaning.

In the light of this phenomenon of meaning multiplication of the words "frame" and "framing", when the latter comes to suggesting the action of frame networking, some authors (van Gorp, 2007; Entman, 2004) argue that in certain instances the term "frames" can be replaced by script or labels such as representation, argument or genre. In the concept of McQuail (2005) and Tuchman (1978), "framing" refers to the typical manner in which journalists shape news content within familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning on the one hand and, on the other hand, to the audience who adopts these frames and sees the world in a similar way as the journalists do. Van Gorp (2007) stresses on how cultural phenomenon functions as a central theme or as an archetype within frame packages. From a cultural phenomenon perspective, the author maintains, each frame that a journalist has applied in a text can be represented as a "frame package". It is a cluster of logical organized devices that function as an identity kit for a frame. Thus, a principal part of a frame analysis is the reconstruction of these frame packages. Essentially, a frame package can be broken into three parts, defined as: the manifest framing devices (agenda), the manifest or latent reasoning devices (attributions) and an implicit cultural phenomenon mentioned previously.

On the other hand, based on the models, some researchers (i.e. Scheufele, 1999; de Vreese, 2005; Zhou & Moy, 2007) reorganize the extensive literature on framing into two groups: one that focuses on the "frame-building" process and the other that centre on the "frame-setting" process. The first, framing-building refers to the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames. They are factors internal to journalism that determine how journalists and news organizations frame issues. This process takes place between journalists and elites (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978) and social movements (Snow & Benford, 1992). The outcomes of framing-building process are the manifest frames in the text. The second, framing-setting, refers to the interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions. From this approach, frames in the news may affect learning,

interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events. It is from this perspective that framing is conceived as a process, where frames can be both independent and dependent variables (de Vreese 2005). When studied as dependent variables (DV), frames refer to the outcomes of the production process such as organizational pressures, journalistic routines and elite discourse; when studied as independent variables (IV), they are considered the antecedents of audience's interpretations of information. The study concerns about news framing focus on two levels: social consequences and individual consequences. Studies on social level consequences draw attention on how frames contribute to shaping political socialization, decision making and collective actions of a society. Research on framing consequences at individual level examines how exposure to certain frames may alter attitude about an issue.

On news frame building/ setting in China

To a significant extent, the Chinese government can influence news framing in the media. Researchers have shown that for various topics, the handover of Hong Kong, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO), air strikes on Kosovo (Yang, 2003) and the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (Leung & Huang, 2007), Chinese journalists and their counterparts in Western systems tell significantly different stories. Such findings suggest that in China, external pressure coming from the Party (ideology) and the government (national interest) may play a greater role than internal beliefs of journalistic professionalism in news framing. In particular, the government may exert its influences in two ways. An indirect way is through journalists' mouthpiece role in building media frames. As a result, external pressure from the government is internalized in routine journalistic work. At the same time, the government can directly interrupt or even end the frame-building and frame-setting processes by blocking related news coverage and online discussions (Zhou & Moy, 2007).

Evaluative tone and importance

Two general groups of attributes at the second level: cognitive (or substantive) attributes and affective attributes are presented by McCombs (McCombs, et al.,

1997; McCombs, et al., 2000; McCombs & Ghanem, 2003; McCombs, 2004). Cognitive attributes deal with the definition of issues (topics or objects in general) in the media, whereas affective attributes deal with the tone of media presentation, with evaluation of issues (i.e. positive, negative or neutral). In most agenda-setting and frame-setting studies, the public's evaluation of issue importance, which is the dependent variable, is influenced by the issue saliency in the news and by the evaluative tone of media coverage (positive, negative or neutral). This evaluative tone or affective attribute attached to the issue is part of the second-level agenda setting. Second, these affective attributes that people attach to issues further play an important role in the process of priming, on which they have both indirect and direct impacts. Priming, therefore, carries with it an affective component: It is a combination of message strength and direction. Third, the political judgments of individuals are also directly influenced by media-affective attributes.

Sheafer (2007) also argues that there are at least two sound explanations for the influence of affective attributes, and specifically of negative affective attributes, on perceived issue importance. The first is a theoretical explanation: Information about negative developments captures audience's attention far more than information about positive developments. This hypothesis is quite extensively discussed and supported in other fields of research (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Kahaneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Lau, 1985; Marcus, Neuman, & Makuen, 2000; Mutz, 1998; Schul & Schiff, 1993). A negative object attribute is, therefore, expected to increase object importance and accessibility on the public agenda. A positive tone, on the other hand, is not expected to have such an effect. In fact, Schoenbach and Semetko (1992) found that the positive tone with which a certain issue was covered in the news (i.e., positive attribute) reduced the salience of that issue on the public agenda.

All of these arguments are supported by the empirical analyses. Their implication considered for reference in this study is that both models include an affective component. They combine the weight and direction of a message.

2.3. Study Objectives

The "new China" with its increasing self esteem and self confidence encouraged by its successful economic measures is welcomed by its European counterparts. This study aims to analyze how China, being self-aware of its hard gained status as a not-to-be-ignored significant player in the international scenery, portrays its European co-players.

Although European countries like to be in good terms with China, on the other side, they would like to see more openness for actual democratization and more respect for human rights brought into this country. From time to time, opinion elites in EU countries will use their criticism as a cane to poke where it hurts, the well-known forbidden Three "Ts": Tiananmen massacre, suppress of Tibet independence and banning Taiwan's WHO membership (and other organizations of United Nations) as a sovereign nation. All these issues are unpopular to most EU citizens.

Chinese government faces a contradiction between wanting desperately an open, modern and efficient economy and wanting to control of the flow of information, news and public opinion, particularly, citizen dissent. In this context, this study purposes to explore how its government controlled official online news agent Xinhuanet will make up its image of a great nation fully engaged in peaceful rising and its harmonious relationship with its European others. Some hypotheses are proposed:

▪ Hypothesis 1: The Chinese geopolitical view of European Union will be similar to the perception of the image that it makes of itself – a power centralized regime.

Any discussion of Chinese behaviour must begin with the pervasive influence of the pragmatic social philosophy attributed to Confucian. Confucian paternalist hierarchy oriented concepts of "unity" and "harmony" are based on respect for power distance which is employed both in an analytical, abstract philosophic sense and as useful heuristic for describing the professed values of Chinese people (Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996). These ideas and ideals are wielded in numerous ways to explain not only the social behaviour of individuals and small groups but also political structures and macroeconomic trends.

The Chinese official online news agent Xinhuanet probably will depict EU more like an ideal Confucian hierarchy-oriented yet harmonious super conglomerate rather than a group of culturally different, linguistically diversified, democratically free-associated independent sovereign individual states, with unavoidable conflicting or contesting interests. Therefore, individual EU member countries will be portrayed distinctively according to Chinese perception of their respective organizational importance, hierarchic status, economy merits in stead of being treated as equal.

▪ Hypothesis 2: Unlike the widely criticized construction of a negative stereotypical other of developing and (post-) communist countries as most usual professional practice in western journalisms, Xinhuanet will avoid using negative attributes in its attempt to bring in "social harmony" and to reinforce its own peaceful self image.

▪ Hypothesis 3: Management of self face-defending/ upgrading and others' face-honouring will take place actively in Xinhuanet's coverage of news information on relations between Chinese us and European others during the communication process.

3. Methods

3.1. Sampling

A sample of 675 online news articles in Mandarin about Europe was collected from the website of Chinese official information agent Xinhuanet. Sampling was developed on everyday (from 10:00 to 13:00 in EU time zone) viewing basis during the period of May, June and July in 2008. Timing for sampling was decided on the purpose of avoiding the Chinese news information agency's overreaction to the conflictive issues of Tibet and the unpleasant encounters that Beijing's Olympic torch faced during its world tour. These news articles were collected, downloaded and printed out and reviewed. After reviewing, 87 variables were created to identify elements in the news for content analysis.

Xinhua is considered by international communication scholars to be one of the most influential news outlets in China (Beaudoin, 2007). Moreover, scholars view the words Xin-Hua 新華 and "official propaganda" as synonymous. This

official state-run news agency prides itself with presentation on its website that says:

Xinhuanet was launched in 1997 as the online news service of Xinhua News Agency. … It releases important news about China and the world…by relying on the agency's worldwide information-gathering network. Xinhuanet has three domain names: <xinhuanet.com>, <xinhua.org> and <news.cn>. Its provides news services in six languages - Chinese, English, Spanish, French, Russian and Arabic - to netizens in more than 200 countries and regions, garnering 800 million hits and 80 million page views per day. Xinhuanet is the top news website in China, and one of the most influential sites in the world. According to Alexa, a U.S. website-ranking service, Xinhuanet at present ranks around 160th on its list of 108 million global websites. Its ranking places Xinhuanet third among the world's news websites, narrowly trailing BBC and CNN, but far ahead of Reuters, The Associated Press and AFP (Agence France Presse). Xinhuanet has set as its task to "publicize China and report the world"…is an important window to Chin…pursues timely, accurate, credible and fair news coverage….

(http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-08 /31/content_6637522.htm)

Unit of Analysis

An article is considered European-related if the following conditions are met: carrying a title, an introductory heading, a subtitle or a lead-in that indicates clearly it tackles European Unión and/ or member countries as main topic or European Union's citizens as main roles in the news information. Also, if the article mentions any action performed by people in their EU citizens' condition or any action performed over them (Cheng, et al., 2008).

3.2. Codebook and Coding Chart

A code book was developed to standardise the coding process; it consisted of five general parts for recording information about the following variables:

I. Basic data identification: Each analysis unit was identified by: a) the number

given to each unit. b) The date when the news article appeared online and was immediately collected and downloaded, dd/mm/yyyy. c) The weekday when the news appeared was coded with 1-7 = Monday to Sunday. d) News sources whose information was supplied to Xinhuanet were coded as 1 = Xinhuanet's own home page; 2 = News supplied to Xinhuanet by other Chinese printing newspapers; 3 = News supplied to Xinhuanet by other Chinese online news Web site; 4 = news translated from foreign printing newspapers; 5 = news translated from online foreign newspaper Web sites; 6 = others. e) EU member countries or groups where the news event took place were coded as: 1 = "Germany"; 2 = "Austria"; 3 = "Belgium"; 4 = "Bulgaria"; 5 = "Czech Republic" ; 6 = "Cyprus"; 7 = "Denmark"; 8 = "Slovakia"; 9 = "Spain"; 10 = "Estonia"; 11 = "Finland"; 12 = "France"; 13 = "Great Britain"; 14 = "Greece"; 15 = "Holland"; 16 = "Hungary"; 17 = "Ireland"; 18 = "Italy"; 19 = "Latonia"; 20 = "Lithuania"; 21 = "Luxemburg"; 22 = "Malta"; 23 = "Poland"; 24 = "Portugal"; 25 = "Rumania"; 26 = "Slovenia"; 27 = "Sweden"; 28 = "EU", when European Union was mentioned as a whole; 29 = "more than one member nation" mentioned; 30 = "interest group or pressure front" formed by certain member countries.

II. Index of news importance on the Web was built with the following scales, where a) each news story was assessed by the length it appeared on Web page and was coded as: 1 = "less than one-half Web page"; 2 = "between one-half and three-quarter Web page"; 3 = "between three-quarter and one Web page"; 4 = "between one and two Web pages"; 5 = "longer than two Web pages". b) The number of clickable hyperlinks appeared with the news story for further information reading on topics mentioned was coded as: 0 = "none"; 1 = "one to two" links; 2 = "between three and five" links; 3 = "more than six" links. c) Clickable link placing was coded as: 1 = "after" the news story; 2 = "in the beginning" of the news storey body; 3 = links appeared "before and after" the news store body. d) A scale with three scores ranging from "0" to "2" was constructed by summing two categories: Presence of still picture, clickable image or pop-up window (0 = "no"; 1 = "yes") and presence of streaming video or animated image (0 = "no"; 1 = "yes") in the online news story. After summing up all these items, a scale of "importance" with total 13 points was created. Based on the values on this scale, a theoretical range of three importance categories were defined and recorded as: 1

= little important ("0-3" points); 2 = quite important ("4-8" points) and 3 = very important ("9-13" points).

III. -Evaluative tone of the news message. The main events, topics or roles described in the news stories were evaluated with three categories of journalistic tone from the Chinese news media's perspective, coded as: 1 = "negative" tone, a news message was considered negative when it described plan setback, project failure, physical or psychological suffering, or any situation worsening. 2 = "neutral or balanced" tone, when a news story was described objectively provided with factual information rather than good or bad judgment, or if the information alluded both negative and positive sides of a story. 3 = "positive" tone was considered when a news reported information involved with any achievement, improvement, recovering, development, learning, new, modernization, progressing or social harmony.

IV. Issue frames. At the initial stage of analysis, an inductive method was used with dichotomous coding, 0 = "no" and 1= "yes", to search and identify words or phrases that referred to the topics or issues in the news stories (Matthes & Kohring, 2008, Igartua, Cheng & Muñiz, 2005, Cheng, Igartua et al., 2008):

a) On European Union: -Does the news suggest EU Constitution, legislation, directives, laws, norms, rules? -Does the news mention control of EU borders or immigrant entries? -Any common policy or measure on finance or economy of European Union? -Employments or labour conditions in EU? -Health care in EU? -Military of EU? -Diplomacy of EU?

b) On member nations' home policies: -Does the news refer to individual member countries' parliament activities? -Parliament members of member countries? -Debate on individual member countries' political issues? -Internal policies of member countries? -Relationships between political parties or members? -Individual member countries' home legislation? -Legal measures? -Debate on implantation of new laws?

c) On ecological and environmental issues: -Does the news suggest nature in general such as parks, natural reservations? -Wetlands? -Fauna and flora? -Any protection measures? -Any reference to rivers, lakes, aquifers or water shores? -Consideration of the air as an environmental factor? –Mention of environmental deterioration? -Any ecologist organization or ecological impacts?

d) On energetic shortage issues: -Does the news bring up topics on oil crisis? - Fuel or electricity price regulation? -Reactions to this crisis from social groups: farmers, fishermen, transportation drivers and consumers? -Measures to cope with energy crisis?

e) On Scientific breakthrough, knowledge advances, engineering, medicine, biotechnology or pharmacology: - Does it inform about recent scientific work of researchers of member countries or joint projects? -Scientific or academic conferences? -Publications on scientific work?

f) On computer or communication technology: -Does the news report on computer or innovation on communication technology? -Benefits to society from technological advances in citizen communication and improvements for administrative tasks in government departments, banking institutions, justice system, etc.? -Uses of technology for pastime, leisure or entertainment?

g) On racial or xenophobic violence, abuse, crime, delinquency or law & order enforcement: -Dos the news mention European citizens as aggressor, abuser or delinquent involved in any criminal behaviour or act? -Xenophobic performances or threatening graffiti against "non-European" citizens? -Police control enforcement or legal process against crimes.

h) On stock markets or monetary system in EURO zones. - Does the news comment on present situations of stock markets? -Monetary policies that safeguard members using EURO as national currency? -Price control against inflation of individual member countries in EURO zones? -Measures to protect and strengthen EURO currency?

i) On economies in individual member countries. -Does the news make reference to the situation of employment in any individual member country? -Business activities or investments in any individual member country? -Cost of products and consumption price in any individual member country? -Production sectors: fishing, farming, agriculture, constructions, commerce, service, tourism, etc. in any member country?

j) On European creativity: -Does the news mention any European city holding museum exposition, concerts, film festival, and scenic art performance? -European creation of fine arts or plastic arts, i.e.: painting, photograph,

sculpture or other plastic arts? -Any European architect, architecture design, any architect's project or work? -European literature creation, novel, poetry, etc.? -Any European composer, musical composition, orchestra, music group? -Any European fashion designer, fashion design, hair styling or cosmetic?

k) On cultural exchange activities. Does it mention any Chinese cultural institution branch office in European cities? -Activities held by Chinese embassy, consulate or cultural bureau and supported by any European local or municipal institution? -Chinese language learning course for European citizens? -Exhibitions of cultural products to European citizens, i.e., Chinese antiques, porcelains, paintings, handcrafts, etc.?

l) On European Education system: -Does the news mention educational or schooling situations in any member country of European Union? -Scholarships or financing supports for European youth's education or vocational training? -Number of enrolled university students and tuition fees? -Ministry of Education, educational institutions, schools? -Educational policies, laws, measures or reforms?

m) On leisure or sports activities: - Does the news describe sports activities or sportsmen /sportswomen in EU member countries? -Citizen or institutional participation in sports activities or events? –Participation of European Unión member countries in Beijing Olympic Games?

n) On happenings, social events, scandals, sensations or suspense. Does the news refers to natural disasters, i.e.: earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, fires, tsunamis, floods, typhoons, avalanches, etc.? –Human caused disasters like accidents? -Scandals of public personages or politicians, i.e. corruptions or affairs? – Any surprising, sensational or uncommon story?

o) Other topics referring to European Royal families or members.

V. Variables of "self" and "other" identity. It consisted of two variables: a) A news story was regarded as about "self identity concern" depending on whether ideas of "Zhōngguó 中國" -Nation of China, "wǒguó 我國" -our country, "Zhōnghuá Mínzú 中華民族" -Chinese races, "yuānyuán lìshǐ 淵源歷史" -deep long historical origin, "wǔqiānniǎn wénhuà jīnghuá 五千年 文化 精華" -five

thousand year culture essence, "tóngbāo 同胞" -compatriot, "zǔguó 祖國" - homeland, etc. were referred or not. This self identity variable was coded as: 0 = "no"; 1 = "yes". b) A news story was regarded as about "other identity concern" depending on whether concepts of European others were stressed, i.e. "German made"; "an Australian father"; the "British Royal family"; a "Finnish research team", the "French president", etc. or any of these colloquial terms referring "western foreigners" such as lǎowài 老外; wàiguórěn 外國人; yángrěn 洋人, etc. was used. This variable was coded as 0 = "no" and 1 = "yes".

VI. Variables of face moves. These variables consisted of: a) Self-face defensive moves -high concern for self-face by speaking good of own self, seeing flawless in self's performances and actions, or being incapable of self criticism. b) Other-face upgrading moves -high concern for other's face by appreciating others' strength or giving positive assessment. c) Low concern for self-face -expressing one self with humbleness or being critical with one's own shortcoming. d) Low concern for other-face -attacking or criticizing others' performances or actions with negative comments or stress on negative assessments. They were coded as 0 = "no" and 1 = "yes"

3.3. Coding Process

1. Coder Training. The research team in this study was composed by bilingual and trilingual researchers. Apart from difference in generation, they varied in research experience and level of familiarity with European academic environment. For this reason, a previous coding training was needed for coders to work out fundamental consensus on coding criteria. For this purpose, thirty trail analysis units were used and coded in a collective way with open discussion sessions whenever the definition of a variable or its identification was found problematic for the coders' common understanding.

2. Intercoder reliability. After the coding process and initial data were gathered, in order to assess the intercoding reliability, using SPSS a computer operated random selection drew 10 % of the sample. This operation resulted in 74 units which were distributed between the coders for a second round reviewing and coding, making sure that the coders had not coded the same units before.

Results obtained from cross-tab analysis showed that intercoder agreement coefficients on the considered variables ranged from 0. 45 to 1.0 and an average of intercorder reliability resulted in Scott's pi = 0.53.

Tool for analysis

SPSS version.17 for Windows was used for this research study.

4. Results

4.1. General Characteristics of European Union in Chinese Xinhuanet Online News Coverage

A descriptive study presented the news source profiles of the analysed units as following: The majority, 81.6 % (n = 551), of the analysed news articles on EU reported by Xinhuanet came from the official Chinese News Agency Xinhua, while 10.1 % (n = 68) was based on other Chinese printing newspapers; 7.1% (n = 48) was from other Chinese online news Web sites; 0.6 % (n = 4) was translation of digital news stories published on western news Web site, another 0.3 % (n = 2) news articles were translated from western printing newspapers and the rest 0.3 % (n = 2) articles were from unidentifiable sources, giving N = 675; X^2 (5) = 2085.47; p < .001. These data indicate that most news coverage on EU and on its member nations or citizens that Chinese netizens read on Xinhuanet news website was supplied by Chinese Communist party's official information agency.

4.2. Representation of EU Member Nations on Chinese Xinhuanet

Results drawn from descriptive analysis of the distribution of news coverage on the EU present a hierarchic picture of the composition of member nations in the EU (Figure 1). These outcomes seem to indicate that the denomination "European Union" (13.33%), in spite of being a widely known term in international milieu, may be rather abstract in concept compared to Chinese notion of a strong huge unified political body. It is suggested that Chinese news agency Xinhua might perceive a sort of "axis of power" in Europe, formed by

Great Britain (28.44%), France (15.41%) and Germany (9.19%), giving the most salient coverage on them. Apart from this dominant axis, according to a hierarchy concerned culture like China, there were member countries that should be considered to belong to a second division category -grouped by Spain, Italy, Holland, Greece, Sweden and Austria-, whose information coverage in Xinhuanet was scarce while, on the other hand, member states like Estonia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxemburg or Malta just disappeared completely from the Chinese map of EU. This media hierarchical representation of EU member countries was observed to be statistically significant, X^2 (24) = 1656.6; $p < .001$.

Figure 1:

Distribution of news coverage on European Union by Chinese Information Agency Xinhuanet
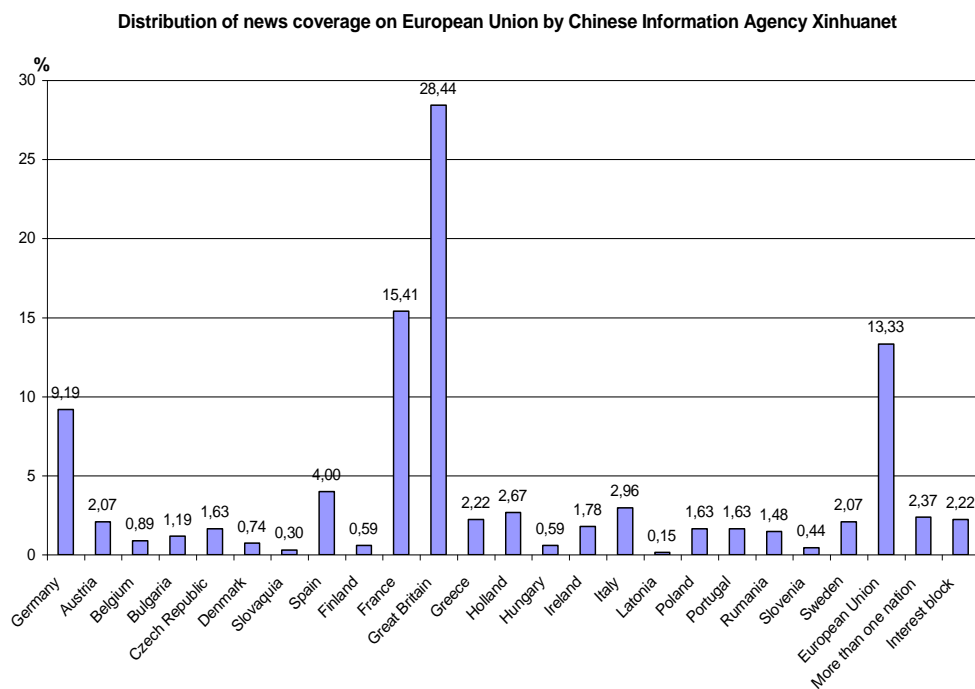
N = 675

4.3. Issue Frames of European Union on Chinese Xinhuanet Online News Website

Factorial analysis

As it was explained in a previous section that news issues were initially coded from an inductive approach, this means that words found and identified to refer

to a similar topic or issue were group into one variable. In this process, fifteen issue variables were established. Next step, for sake of data reduction, a rotated Varimax principal component factorial analysis was carried out with these fifteen issue variables, which were regrouped into seven issue dimensions with 64.1% total variance and renamed as: Factor 1 "Sensational social event" - identified uncommon happenings, unexpected nature disasters, human caused accidents, and royal family members' public performances or private behaviour. This dimension explained 10.63% of total variance. Factor 2 "Economy" – this dimension identified issues related to energies, business and finance. It explained 10.46 % of the total variance. Factor 3 "Education and Cultural exchange" was formed by topics related to cultural exchange activities such as mandarin learning, opening of "Confucian Institutes" or mandarin speech contests for Europeans learners and other educational system management or reforms that explained 9.57% of the total variance. Factor 4 "Politics" identified variables "European Union politics" and "member nations' home policies" that explained 8.65% of the total variance. Factor 5 "Science and Technology" dimension identified variables "Scientific breakthrough, knowledge advances, engineering, medicine, biotechnology or pharmacology" and "Computer and communication technology". This dimension explained 8.39% of the total variance. Factor 6 "Creativity and leisure" that identified variables such as "European creativity" and "leisure or sports activities" explained 8.32% of the total variance. Factor 7) One last dimension, "Crime and environment", grouped two variables "ecological and environmental issues" (.72) and "racial or xenophobic violence, abuse, crime, delinquency or law and order enforcement" (-.66) in a negative direction, though it explained 8.04% of the total variance.

Given the negative result in last dimension in factorial analysis, these two negatively related variables were considered to be two separate topics or issues and used as two issue variables, "Environment" and "Crime", in the following analyses, apart from the other six dimensions descript above for further analyses.

4.4. News Issue Dimensions

Once established EU news issues dimensions, a descriptive analysis of issue

frame setting was developed. The distribution results showed that issues on "politics" (45.3%, n = 306), "economy" (40.6%, n = 274); and "sensational social events" (25.8%, n = 174) were the most mentioned topics by Xinhuanet in their news information coverage on European Union. They were followed by "creativity" (13.9%, n = 94), "Science and technology" (12.1%, n= 82), "environment" (11.4 %, n = 77), "crime, law & order" (10.8%, n = 73) and "cultural exchange" (9.6%, n = 65) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Distribution of Xinhuanet's news issues coverage on EU
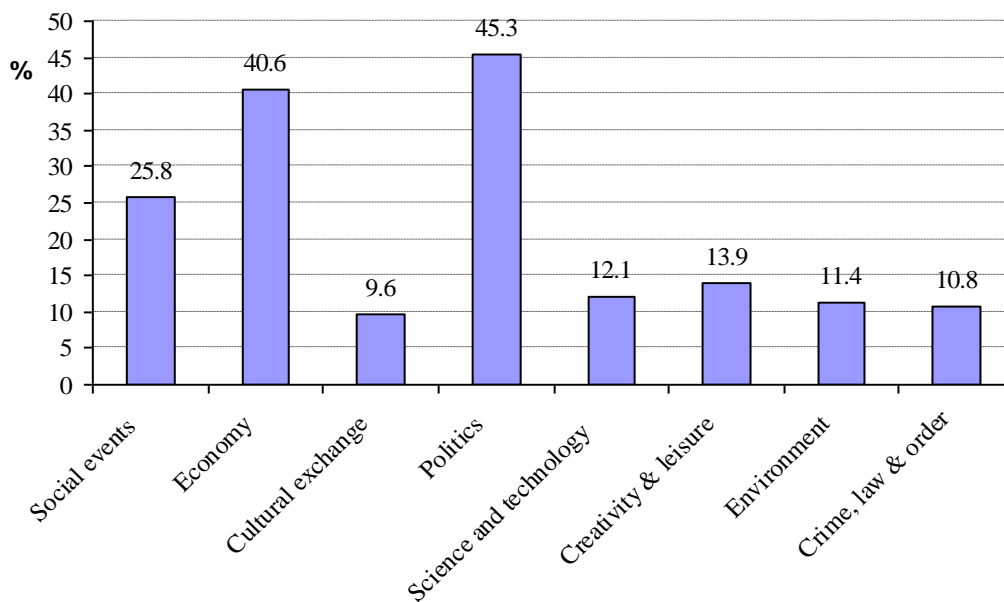
N = 675

Nevertheless, results in analysis of variance indicated that the dimension of sensational "social event" (M = .28, SD = .51) was more remarkable in news coverage on Denmark (.80), Greece (.80) and Poland (.64) at a statistical significant level, $F_{(1, 24)} = 3.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. In terms of the issue dimension "economy" (M = .83, SD = 1.26), higher scores were obtained when several member nations (2.0) were portrayed to be an interest lobby group or more than one member nation (1.81) was named, or when EU was mentioned as a cohesive community (1.64). This result was observed to be statistically significant, $F_{(1, 24)} = 5.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. But when it came to "education and cultural exchange" issue dimension (M = .14; SD = .50), "Belgium" (.67)

and "Rumania" (.50) were portrayed as the European countries involved most actively in this agenda, in comparison with "Poland" (.27), "Spain" (.26) and "Hungary" (.25) that were also involved in this issue although less actively. This result is observed to be significant statistically, $F (1, 24) = 3.0$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$ (Table 1).

As for the dimension "science and technology" (M = .17, SD = .52), the Finnish (.75), Swedish (.50) and Danish (.40) were regarded as more intellectual and science-oriented peoples than other European nationals at a statistical significant level, $F (1, 24) = 1.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$.

Table 1: Descriptions of European Union member nations' news agenda setting on Chinese Xinhuanet

	Social event	Economy	Cultural exchange	Politics	Science & tech.	Creativity & leisure	Environ-ment	Crime
				News issue dimensions				
Germany	.19	1.10	.10	.63	.19	.23	.13	.29
Austria	.29	.14	.07	.50	.14	.64	.21	.50
Belgium	.33	.17	.67	.50	0	.50	.17	.33
Bulgaria	.13	.50	0	.88	.13	.13	0	.25
Czech	.09	.09	.09	.91	0	.09	.09	.55
Denmark	.80	0	0	.20	.40	0	0	.20
Slovakia	0	0	0	2.0	0	.50	0	0
Spain	.44	.22	.26	.26	.37	.48	.07	.30
Finland	.25	.50	0	.25	.75	0	.75	.25
France	.19	.91	.07	.71	.09	.25	.13	.13
Great Britain	.43	.59	.21	.48	.28	.18	.13	.22
Greece	.80	.20	.07	.67	0	.33	.07	0
Holland	.22	.89	0	.61	.33	.06	.11	.17

Hungary	0	1.25	.25	1.50	0	0	.25	.25
Ireland	.17	.42	0	3.08	0	0	0	0
Italy	.35	.40	.15	1.20	0	.40	.05	.20
Latonia	0	0	0	4.0	0	0	0	0
Poland	.64	.18	.27	.55	0	.09	0	.36
Portugal	.09	.09	1.0	.36	.09	.73	.09	.09
Rumania	.40	.30	.50	.90	0	.20	0	.10
Slovenia	.33	0	0	1.67	0	0	.67	0
Sweden	.29	1.0	.21	.29	.50	.07	.21	0
EU as a whole	.10	1.64	.02	1.27	.09	.03	.13	.0
More than one nation	.06	1.81	0	1.0	0	0	.31	.13
Interest block or lobby group	0	2.0	0	.93	.20	0	.13	0
Total M	.28	.83	.14	.75	.17	.19	.13	.17
SD	.51	1.26	.50	1.03	.52	.55	.38	.53
F (1, 24)	3.55	5.19	3.0	6.81	1.87	2.27	1.26	1.5
P	.000	.000	.000	.000	008	.001	.164	.043
η^2	.12	.16	.10	.20	.06	.08	.05	.05

N = 675

The ANOVA results also showed that individual member countries such as Latonia (4.0), Ireland (3.08) and Slovakia (2.0) were described by Chinese Xinhuanet as the most active nations in "politic" issue dimension (M = .75, SD = 1.03) in European Union with a statistical significance, F (1, 24) = 6.81, p < .001, η^2 = .20.

In reference with "creativities and leisure activities" dimension (M = 19, SD = 55), Chinese Xinhuanet described the Portuguese (0.73), Austrians (0.64), Belgians (0.50) and Slovakians (M = 0.50) as significantly more creative peoples and they cared more for leisure activities than their European neighbours at statistical level, $F (1, 24) = 2.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. The issue dimension "environment" (M = .13, SD = .38) appeared to be more prominent in Finland (.75), Slovenia (.67) or in several member nations (.31), though the result did not show statistical significance, $F (1, 24) = 1.26$, $p = .162$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

Lastly, the issue dimension "crime, law and order" (M = .17, SD = .53), Czech Republic (.55), Austria (.50) and Poland (.36), were considered to be in need of more law enforcement $F (1, 24) = 1.5$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

4.5. Issue Importance and Evaluation Tone

Analysis results of index of "issue importance" and "evaluation tone" indicated that 38.8% (n=262) of total news articles considered fell into "little important" category, while a majority, 46.8% (n=316), were classified as "quite important" and only 14.4% (n = 97) of them were considered "very important". This distribution was observed at a statistical level, $X^2 (2) = 115.71$, $p<.001$. In terms of analysis of "evaluation tone", 29.3% (n = 198) of analysed news were regarded as negative, 47% (n= 307) of them were framed as "neutral" and 23.7% (n = 160) received "positive" framing. Distribution in the descriptive analysis of "evaluation tone" presented a statistical significance outcome, $X^2 (2) = 59.64$, $p <.001$.

Table 2: Correlations between EU news issues and importance and evaluation on Xinhuanet

|	n	%	Importance r	Evaluation r
Sensations, social events	174	25.8	.21***	-.04
Economy	274	40.6	-.06	-.01
Cultural exchange	65	9.6	.09**	.11**
Politics	306	45.3	.01	.01
Science and technology	82	12.1	-.10**	.08*
Creativity and leisure	94	13.9	.09**	.10**
Environment	77	11.4	-.01	.07*
Crime or law and order	73	10.8	-.11**	-.18***

N = 675; ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Regardless of the most information frequencies in "politics" and "economy" issues, data obtained in correlation studies showed that Chinese Xinhuanet website prevailed more important treatment to "sensational social events" ($r = .20$, $p < .001$) by using more extensive webpage, providing more clickable links for further information and including still photographs, pop-up window or other clickable image to report the news articles. They were stories about European Royal family members, celebrities' scandals, natural disasters, unusual or uncommon happenings, men caused accidents. On the other side, issues related to "crimes or law and order" were reported the most negatively ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$), while issues referring to "cultural exchange" ($r = .11$, $p < .01$) and "creativities and leisure" ($r = .10$, $p < .01$) were assessed more positively (Table 2).

Based on associations between issues with both importance index and evaluation tone, axes "X" and "Y" were established to represent framing of EU issues performed by Chinese Xinhuanet (Figure 3). A four-grid division was created to map the framing concept so as to help interpret how Chinese

Xinhuanet covered information on European Union issues.

Figure 3: Two dimensional grids of EU issue importance and evaluation representation
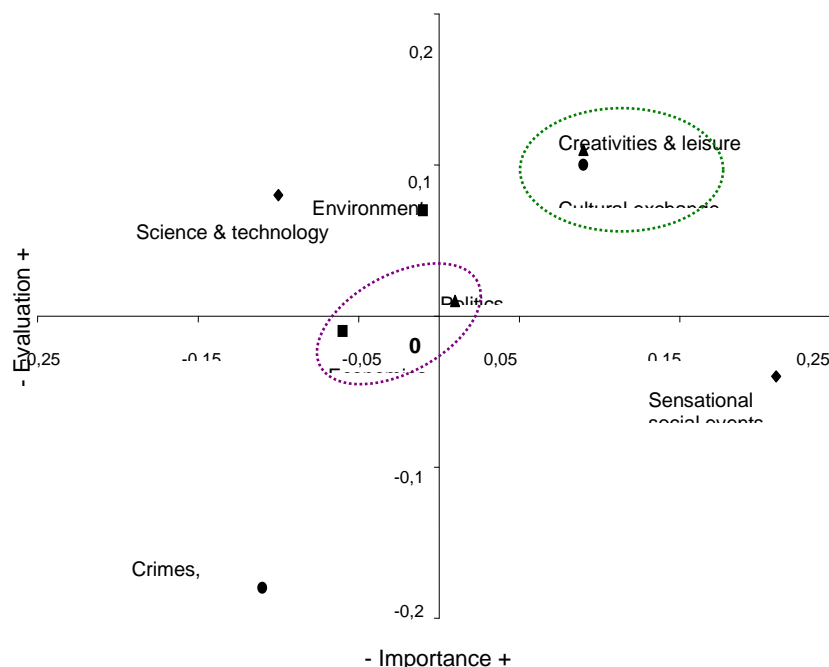
In this analysis, it was observed that Xinhuanet portrayed issues as important and positive were those articles that reported cultural exchanges prevailing in particular, Chinese cultural heritage expositions such as paintings, calligraphy, acrobat performances on one hand. On the other hand, it seemed that official Xinhuanet had a motive to be proud when informing about mandarin courses sprouting like yǔhòuchūnsǔn 雨後春筍 -bamboo shoots coming out after spring rains- all over European cities and towns. Moreover, there were mandarin speech contests for western citizens held by Chinese official cultural bureaus in the major European cities, or opening ceremony of new culture politics overseas branch offices and the so-called Confucius Institute, etc. Hence the silence of ethnic identity imbedded in these cultural characteristics was viewed as something to feel proud of. Or like Weber and Lu (2004) put it, the success of commodification of Chinese culture is seen by the government as a way of magnifying the types of positive social (in this case international) relations that are not only beneficial but essential for nation identity, or for the bringing together of peoples by adopting common values and practices.

Following this reasoning, it might make sense to interpret that relevant news for

the European others such as its "economy", "environment" or "science-technology research & development" should slip behind the importance index according to Chinese standpoint. And in terms of "evaluation", EU's cohesive politics and economy policies though important to native European people, should be viewed as "neutral" somehow by the Chinese media.

4.6. Face Moves on Xinhuanet Online News Communication Process

Linear multiple regression analysis was developed to test the message characteristics that associated to different face-move directions in which the Chinese official information website Xinhuanet inclined when covering news on European Union.

Table 3: Linear multiple regression analysis of face moves in EU news coverage on the website of Chinese official information agency Xinhuanet

Predicting variable	N	%	Upgrading self-face β	Honouring other-face β	Low concern for self-face β	Low concern for other-face β
Self-identity (us) insider-stressed	89	13.2	.85**	.18**	.37**	-.17**
Other-identity (them) outsider-stressed	673	99.7	-.02	.03	.03	.03
About three Ts taboo	10	1.5	.08**	-.15**	-.13***	.12*
			$F_{(3,671)}$ = 735.65	$F_{(3,671)}$ = 9.02	$F_{(3,671)}$ = 31.78	$F_{(3,671)}$ = 6.97
			p = .000	p = .000	p = .000	p =. 000
			$R^2_{adj.}$ = .77	$R^2_{adj.}$ =.03	$R^2_{adj.}$ = .12	$R^2_{adj.}$ =.03

N = 675, **p < .001, *p < .01

In this study, variables "stressed self-identity" (us), "stressed other-identify" (them) and "Three Ts" taboo came in as predicting independent variables while the four face-moves operated as dependent variables. First, it was found that 13.2% (n = 89) of the analysed EU news stories stressed on self-identity (us), while the almost all of them, 99.7% (n = 673), centred on the European other-identity (them). Only a very small proportion of news articles, 1.5% (n = 10), responded to the European's reaction to the "Three Ts" taboo.

Results obtained in the analysis showed (Table 3), when the self identity was highlighted in the news stories using patriotic terms, such as "Nation of China", "Chinese races", "our country", "deep long historical origin", "five thousand year culture essence", "compatriot" or "homeland", etc. it typically associated with speaking-good-of-own-self or "self-face upgrading" variable (β = .85, p <.001). This face move was also a characteristic when the news agency had to react to the EU's opinions on the taboo of "three Ts" (β = .08, p <.001). The results obtained in the other variables "other's face honouring" (β = .18, p <.001), "low concern for self-face" (β = .37, p <.001) and "low concern for other's face" (β = -.17, p <.001) may be interpreted as diplomatic politeness frames used to convey the Chinese idea of maintaining "harmonious" relationships with the European others.

However, it is interesting to observe that the most distributed predicting variable "stressed other-identity (them)" (99.7%, n = 673), did not turn out to be a significant characteristic to any face move variables in the analysis outcomes. Then, when a few news articles, 1.5% (n = 10), referred to the information context in which European human right activists sided with the three Ts' causes, which was operated as predicting independent variable in this analysis, this taboo characterized variables "self-face defensive move" (β = .08, p < .001), "low concern for other-face" (β = .12, p < .01) with significant positive associations, but negative associations with variables "low concern for self-face" (β = -. 15, p <. 001) and "honouring other-face move" (β = -. 13, p < .001). These outcomes seemed to show the Chinese information agency's disagreement with the European criticisms in the public eyes on tough issues they considered "domestic".

5. Discussion

It was foreseen that Chinese official information agency would portray the European Union with a perceived stronger internal leadership. Outcomes in this empirical study supported this statement that hypothesis-1 foresaw. In deed, the official Chinese information agent Xinhua, influenced by its own traditional hierarchy concept of great-nation-building ideal in Confucianism, it represented European Union as an economic-political body structured by an "axis of power" backed by Great Britain, France and Germany.

Hypothesis-2 predicted that Xinhua would evaluate EU news coverage more positively for the sake of conveying social harmony rather than using negative frame to describe otherness like the western media usually do. But, this hypothesis was not supported by our analysis. Outcomes showed that Xihuanet held a neutral position in most of analysed news (47%) it covered, and even 23.7% of the information was reported negatively. The reason was probably because the news sample used for content analysis was entirely in mandarin Chinese. Obviously, this kind of news information was produced with Chinese audiences in mind, that is, the in-group, no matter if they are Chinese nationals or members of other cultural Chinese communities who, in the sense, are supposed to share the same cultural heritage and values.

The notion of the in-group is of vital importance in collectivistic cultures such as Chinese. The Chinese make clear distinctions between insiders (selves) and outsiders (others), and this distinction between the two, in turn, helps the Chinese not only position themselves in different relation circles, but also provides them with specific rules of interaction in communication. Consequently, the system of communication in Chinese culture tends to be narrower. The insider effect (self) also influences many other aspect of communication in Chinese culture, creating a communication context in which outsiders (others) are excluded.

The nature of the relationship determines what is communicated and how information should be transmitted. Gao, Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst (1996, p. 288) point out one significant cultural expectation among Chinese that is, insiders (selves) and outsiders (others) should not be treated in the same way. A compliant style of communication between Chinese selves and western

others may not appear to be compatible with honest or truthful interaction. Only when it comes to communication among the insiders (Chinese netizens) on issues about outsiders (European others in this case), it may take a different style and may perform a more relaxed attitude in terms of harmony maintenance. It is also speculated that "neutral" evaluation framing might obey the well-known Confucian conservative "middle way" teaching –the less extreme action one takes the less mistake he/she will makes.

Findings in this study also supported that face management would take place actively in Chinese media news information coverage on Europe during the communication as predicted in hypothesis three. This was especially true when this process was being developed by the official information agency sensitive to any conflict or disorder that might arise in Chinese self's society (i.e. issues related to activists on Tibetan cause, Olympic torch world tour, social unrest and protest of victim association against government after earthquakes). Conflict management styles are linked closely to one party's concern for face. People in collectivistic cultures are more concerned with face than individualistic cultures. There are three face concerns, identified as self-face, other-face and mutual-face. Concern for self-face leads the communicators to use a type of frames to enforce and defend self-face. Concern for other-face often leads to a non-confrontation style of conflict managements such as avoiding, obliging and compromising.

Looking back in the Chinese contemporary history, the very same Confucian values of harmony were once considered corrupted, rotten and tagged as antirevolutionary, therefore, must be stricken and forbidden during Mao's Cultural Revolution in the late 60s and early 70s. In that period, Confucian doctrines were used in that period as instruments by young members of the Red Guard to carry out class struggling acts in campuses or public spaces. They would use them as criticism to condemn the conservative rightwing thinking. Nevertheless, in the context of 21st century, despite the above-mentioned historical fact, Confucianism is being revived with the government effort for politic-cultural design. Thanks to the recent economic success, China not only tries to make it attractive for foreign investors but also attempts to position itself as a leading player in the Asian Pacific area's security as well as a

significant international political partner. It has become one of the most important foreign policy agendas for the Chinese government to create a self image abroad of a harmonious society based on its citizens' respect for hierarchy-oriented structure and an entrepreneur-friendly atmosphere with top-down business organization.

Obviously, at this stage of investigation, we still cannot establish relationship between framing of EU by the Chinese media and the actual Chinese audience's perception of EU in terms of news impact. Among the many shortcomings found in this study such as the lack of comparative longitudinal studies, comparison between different news media, analyses of online images, pop-up windows or streaming video etc., the one that calls for more research concern is how to improve interceding reliability in intercultural study. In the present study the interceding reliability has not reached a desirable result (i.e. over .70 in Scott's pi, see Igartua, 2006, p. 221) despite having established previously a codebook with which coders were trained and expected to reach an optimal standardization of criteria on coding definitions and process. The discussion may turn to considering that the lower agreement rates in certain variables probably were a result of the difficulty that intercultural research involves, since the news reading process of this study was logically carried out in mandarin which is well known for its high context linguistic/culture characteristic, while coding book and coding chart were created and edited in a relatively lower context western language such as Spanish for methodological concerns. This question remains unanswered: Whether different culture backgrounds and communication styles of the coders influence on their process of decoding-encoding information message and, consequently, content analysis coding?

However, there is still a field open to develop international or intercultural media communication study. Researchers should be encouraged to find methods (rather than the use of hegemonic English only that may over simplify cultural layer of complexities, richness, sensitiveness or values of other) capable of overcoming linguistic barriers and, that could link production (by self or other) and effect (on other or self) of news framing. If this were achieved, there would be more authentic understanding of intercultural communication.

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