Images of China: A Comparative Framing Analysis of Australian Current Affairs Programming

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Abstract: Research into China's image in Australia is helpful to promote the mutual understanding and the bilateral relations between the two countries. Informed by national image theory and media framing theory, this study uses content analysis and framing analysis to explore the prestigious current affairs programs: *Foreign Correspondent* produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and *Dateline* by Special Broadcasting Service. It examines both the frames and the framing patterns used by the two programs in their coverage of China in the past ten years. The study looks into the structures of theme, syntax, script and rhetoric of the episodes. The results show that both programs represent China negatively in a political sense, but neutrally in economic and environmental terms. However, *Foreign Correspondent* portrays China favourably regarding the cultural aspect. Framing devices are evident, including presentation format, animal images, ideological words, the public memory of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The analysis argues that *Foreign Correspondent* and *Dateline* serve the mission to build the Australian national identity as well as attempt to present a balanced picture of China, as stronger economic ties are developed and frequent cultural exchanges are encouraged. Framing techniques, however, have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by historical stereotypes and the conventional fear of communism expressed during the past two centuries.

Keywords: National image, framing, the ABC and SBS, current affairs

1. Introduction

China's emergence has increasingly enhanced its media exposure in the world. A country's image abroad can significantly influence its economic, political and cultural associations with other countries, and the media greatly shape a country's reputation abroad and international affairs. The significance of media images warrants a study of bilateral relations between China and Australia. Significant political and economic changes prompt the re-examination of media representation of China in Australia in the twenty-first century.

2. National Image, Media Framing and the Australian Imagery of China

National image plays a significant role in international relations. It is defined as the cognitive perceptions that an individual holds of a given country towards its people and the state (Kunczik, 1997). In the words of Alexander and Levin (2005), the perceptions that a

nation has of another define the views of other nations, which can be ally, enemy, dependent, barbarian, or imperialist. This, in turn, leads to potential relations: cooperation, attack/conflict, control/exploitation, potential invader, or sabotage.

Media framing theory informs the significance of studies on a country's media image. Framing or frames stored in people's minds affect our interpretation of the world. 'Frame' as a noun involves a set of lenses through which information is selected. As a verb, it refers to the process of creating frames (Kaufman, Elliott & Shmueli, 2003). Choi (2006) identifies media framing as a fundamental meaning-making activity in the production of media products. In practice, events or stories are reframed by media practitioners knowingly or unknowingly to highlight their different attributes or stages (Entman, 1993). This, as a result, influences our understandings of things and people to a different degree. In terms of international affairs, exposure to media reports may have a double-edged effect. It helps to enhance public understanding of foreign countries, but can cause misperceptions through unbalanced or biased reports (Saleem, 2007).

Importantly, the study of national image is related to historical stereotypes of that country (Kunczik, 1997). The threat conception of China penetrated Australians' view of China from the 19th century through to most of the 20th century. According to Strahan (1996), China was perceived as the Yellow Peril in the mid-nineteenth century. From the 1930s to the 1960s, China was primarily identified as the Red Menace, indicating Australians' fear of Chinese communism. Chinese communists were degraded as bandits and outlaws, with the enemy image and threat myth saturating Australians' perceptions of China in the 1950s and the 1960s (Strahan, 1996). In the 1980s, China's economic reform brought about great economic opportunities to Australia, and as a result Canberra viewed China as an economic opportunity. This positive image, however, was shattered by the Tiananmen Square Tragedy in 1989. Consequently, the old stereotypes of China and the anti-communism ideology were revived (Mackerras, 1990). In the 1990s, China's rapid economic growth and rising international status interested Australia. The majority of Australians viewed China in terms of tourism, a vital export market and an emerging political power, but failed to acknowledge its contribution to global knowledge and progress (White, 1999). Strahan (1996) summarised that Australian media continued to identify China as cruel, alien and authoritarian.

In the 21st century, the bilateral relations between China and Australia have become more dynamic. On the one hand, Canberra regards the emergence of China as a great opportunity for Australia, on the other hand, as a challenge (Australian Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 2005). In 2007, the Labor Party won the election and the Mandarin-speaking party leader, Kevin Rudd, became the Australian Prime Minister. This produced an optimistic expectation of China-Australian relations. The global financial crisis beginning in 2008 has intensified Australia's economic reliance on China, and China has become the biggest stimulus for Australia's economic development for the next few decades (Stutchbury, 2009). However, the bilateral relations have been strained by a series of matters in 2009, such as the detention of Australian Rio Tinto executive, Stern Hu, by Chinese authorities, Canberra's acceptance of Rebiya Kadeer, the exiled leader of China's ethnic Uighurs, to visit Australia, and the defense white paper issued on May 2009, which suggests China as Australia's biggest strategic threat (Shutterstock/AFP, 2009). On the 24th June 2010, Julia Gillard replaced Kevin Rudd and has

become Australia's first female Prime Minister. The shift of the Australian leadership may generate uncertainties in the bilateral relations. Therefore, the significance of a national image study and the dynamic relations between the two countries will advance current understanding of China's media image in Australia in the 21st century.

3. Propaganda Model and Hegemony Theory

Media workers make their news judgments on the basis of news values. These practices, however, are limited by ideological, political, economic and cultural factors. The propaganda model illustrates the ways power relations and organizational interests play their roles in the news-making process. Herman and Chomsky (2002, p. 1) define the propaganda model as:

> The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda.

They note that this model generates its effect through five filters: "the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and 'experts'; 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media[1]; 'anticommunism' as a control mechanism of Western ideology to create an enemy" (p. 2). Raw material, before becoming news, will go through these filters, which are operated by elite groups and media practitioners with regard to news worthiness and news objectivity. Hegemony theory also explains the ways routine procedures in journalism serve the ideology of dominant groups in a society. By referring to Gramsci, Giltin (2003, p. 253) writes that:

> Hegemony is a ruling class's (or alliance's) domination of subordinate classes and groups through the elaboration and penetration of ideology (ideas and assumptions) into their common sense and everyday practice; it is the systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order.

According to Giltin, the hegemonic sense of the world penetrates our social knowledge and passes on to future generations. It seeps into media consumers' daily life and media practitioners' routines during socialization. Giltin asserts cultural industries in liberal societies are in the hands of dominant business giants, political elites and influential individuals. They attempt to strengthen their social and ideological worlds in alliance with the ruling coalitions by engaging in the conduct of hegemonic ideology and relying on "writers and journalists, producers and teachers, bureaucrats and artists" (p. 254).

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[1] 'Flak' means 'negative responses to a media statement or program' (Herman & Chomsky (2002, p. 26).

4. The ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* and SBS's *Dateline*

Several broadcast services are provided in Australia: national television services (covering Australia), commercial television services (broadcast regionally), community television services (running primarily in indigenous communities), and subscription television services (available to subscribers). The free-to-air national television services provided by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) reach the majority of Australians. Most viewers are the educated classes, essentially, the middle class (Jacka, 2002; Field, 2001). Both of the national public broadcasters aim at achieving the following objectives: to fill the void of market failure by supplying fair and efficient services across the country; to serve political and social purposes by enhancing Australians' educational and cultural levels; and to contribute to Australian nation building (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007). However, they serve the mission of building the Australian national identity with different approaches. The ABC provides outsiders a window to perceive Australia, by aiming to:

> transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs… (ABC Act, 1983).

ABC historically acts as 'a forum for discussion and controversy' for politicians to reach their constituents that is not controlled by commercial interests (Davis, 1987). In contrast, SBS is famous for its contribution to the maintenance of Australia's cultural diversity. Based on its Charter provided in SBS Act (1991), SBS aims at reflecting Australia's multicultural society, communicating ethnic communities' voices, and enhancing the awareness of the importance of the diversified cultures in the Australian society. Consequently, multilingual and multicultural radio and television services have become the central service for ethnic minorities in Australia.

In addition, the two broadcasters are the leading producers of high-quality domestic and international news and current affairs coverage in Australia. *Foreign Correspondent* broadcast by the ABC, "has been Australia's leading international current affairs program since 1992."[2] It specializes in covering major international issues and investigating stories that foreign governments dislike. The program has reported stories from 160 countries. Similarly, *Dateline*, set up in 1984 by SBS, is the longest-running international current affairs program in Australia. Its reporters are considered pioneers in video-journalism[3]. Both programs have won many international and Australian awards. They are not only shown worldwide, but explore new media techniques to expand their social network. Importantly, the two programs fall into the genre of current affairs, which provides researchers rich information. This genre adopts conventions of news value in filtering topics and institutional structures of reporters and editors (Bignell, 2004). It not only presents 'what has happened,' but discusses 'how and why it has

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[2] http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/about.htm
[3] http://www.sbs.com.au/dateline/about/theshow

happened like that.' Thus, journalists are allowed to present an analysis of events and take positions (Davis, 2004).

However, the two public broadcasters are hardly independent from state engagement. Budget cuts by the Government influence their programming (Posetti, 2001-02; Field, 2001). The two channels have a statutory body run by a board of directors, who report to the Parliament with consideration of government policies and the organizations' strategic changes. Interference from the Government has occurred through the appointment of board members. SBS's non-executive directors are hand picked by the Government, and so SBS is very responsive to government policy on multiculturalism (Field, 2001). The Howard government sympathizers used to fill the ABC Board and senior management ranks (Posetti, 2001-02). Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 270) note that "the more closely media are connected to other elites, the more media content will be consistent with those elite ideological viewpoints." Therefore, the programs produced by the two broadcasters can show traces of elite opinions about China in Australia.

5. Research Questions

Based on the discussion outlined above, I chose the public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, rather than commercial broadcasters to study the media frames of China in Australia. I expected that the projections of China produced by the two broadcasters would show more resemblances than differences. This is due to the shared mission of Australian national identity building and the historical prejudices towards China. To examine this assumption, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What was the visibility of the frames of China projected by the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* and SBS's *Dateline* in the 21st century?

RQ2: What was the favourability of the frames of China projected by the two programs in the 21st century?

RQ3: Did the framing pattern of China adopted by *Foreign Correspondent* differ from that by *Dateline*?

6. Method

Based on a convenience sampling approach, dependent on available material (Krippendorff, 2004), the research timeline was set from 2005 to 2008. All available episodes engaged with China during this period were used to formulate the sample population (Appendix). This study was considered as a case study, looking for theoretical significance rather than statistical significance.

Qualitative content analysis was employed. A previous study by the present author shows that research on China's media image in Australia contains five dimensions: military, economic, cultural, political and environmental (Li, 2009). The sampled items, thus, were structured into these dimensions in accordance with the explicit theme revealed in the episodes. For instance, the cultural frame meant that the theme of the episode explicitly rather than implicitly embodied

cultural topics; and economic frame meant that the theme of the episode explicitly rather than implicitly embodied economic topics. This approach was also applied to the frames of military, political and environmental topics. Frequency counts of the number of stories pertaining to the five frames were calculated to assess the visibility of the frames. In accordance with Peng (2004), favourability of a story was defined as follows:

> A positive story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story that suggest political, social and economic stability/strength, and progress and improvement, which tend to contribute to a favourable image of China;
> A negative story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story that suggest political, social and economic instability/weakness, conflicts and human rights, religious and other problems, which tend to contribute to an unfavourable image of China;
> A neutral story referred to the overall tone or prevailing elements in the story being either a balance of negative or positive, or mixed.

Peng (2004) rated favourability on a five-point Likert-type scale, and I used a three-point Likert-type scale. I reduced the five levels of measurement to the three nominal levels from 1 (negative), 2 (neutral) to 3 (positive). Two independent coders were trained to do the coding work. Each episode was a research unit. The results were tested with the Holsti reliability formula (Holsti, 1969; Neuendorf, 2002). Regarding the items broadcast by *Foreign Correspondent*, the reliability coefficient was found to be approximately 0.85 overall, with 0.96 for the public frames categories, and 0.74 for the favourability rating. For items shown by *Dateline*, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.92 overall, with 0.92 for the frames categories and 0.92 for the favourability rating. In cases of disagreement, the two coders discussed and enhanced the agreements. Finally, framing analysis suggests four structures to examine media text: thematic, syntactical, script and rhetorical (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Therefore, the framing patterns were examined on the basis of these structures.

7. Results

RQ1 addressed the visibility of the frames. The findings showed that *Foreign Correspondent* and *Dateline* increased their reporting of China from 2005 to 2008. Both programs broadcast stories presented in economic, political and environmental frames. All of the episodes included in the analysis are listed in the Appendix. The analysis revealed that the political aspect of China was the focus of the two programs, especially in the year 2008. Meanwhile, *Foreign Correspondent* broadcast more stories on China than *Dateline*, with 23 and 14 respectively, and its coverage of China was more diversified than *Dateline*. For instance, *Foreign Correspondent* included both cultural and military dimensions. These results are presented in Figure 1.

Broadcasters	Year	Cultural	Economic	Political	Military	Environmental
ABC	2005	3	0	1	1	0
	2006	2	1	0	0	0
	2007	1	1	1	0	2
	2008	2	1	5	0	2
	Total	23				
SBS	2005	0	0	1	0	0
	2007	0	3	2	0	1
	2008	0	2	5	0	0
	Total	14				

Figure 1. Visibility of Frames

RQ2 was concerned with the favourability of the frames. The overall attitude of the two programs towards China was inclined to be negative. Specifically, all the stories in a political frame were presented negatively by both programs, but stories with an economic or environmental frame had a variety of tones, namely positive, negative or neutral. *Foreign Correspondent*, however, tended more often to approach the cultural frame in a positive light. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the details. The numbers in the figures indicate the numbers of the stories.

Favourability and Visibility		Format	
		Postcard	Feature Story
Negative	Cultural	0	2
	Economic	0	1
	Political	0	7
	Environmental	0	1
	Total	0	11
Neutral	Cultural	1	0
	Military	0	1
	Environmental	0	1
	Total	1	2
Positive	Cultural	3	2
	Economic	2	0
	Environmental	0	2
	Total	5	4

Figure 2. Visibility, Format, and Favorability: the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent*

Favourability	Visibility			Total
	Economic	Political	Environmental	
Negative	1	7	1	9
Neutral	1	0	0	1
Positive	2	1	1	4
Total	4	8	2	14

Figure 3. Visibility and Favorability: SBS's *Dateline*

RQ3 examined the framing patterns used by *Foreign Correspondent* and *Dateline*, with the outcomes described below.

7.1 Thematic Structure

Thematic structures are the themes and the sub-themes constructed within the frames. This phase of research looked into the thematic structure of the political, economic and environmental frames, presented by the two programs. With regard to the political frame, both programs paid attention to China's human rights abuses, freedom of expression, the rising nationalism of the youth, China's international role, its political differences with the West and the disputes over Tibet. All were portrayed in a negative light. In terms of the economic frame, the positive side of economic achievement, such as the improvement of Chinese living standards, was exemplified in *China's Media Mogul*. Nevertheless, the threat concept was embedded by both programs. For instances, *China's African Takeover* and *Will Hutton Interview* discussed the growing economic capabilities of China that enabled it to exert sustained political and military influence on regional and global areas. This further revealed the conventional fear of China's rise, a view currently held by international analysts. This fear is concentrated on whether Beijing supports or overturns the dominant norms of the international order; whether Beijing is a responsible power; and whether its rising power has generated new tensions in the international arena (Foot, 2001). Regarding the environmental dimension, the two programs displayed a balanced picture. The general message is: Though the environment is deteriorating, the Government is making efforts to improve it.

When it was in the interests of Australia, the reports would get a favourable light and prominent coverage. *Another Sun* dealt with the lives of Australians in China. *The Sun King* focused on Zhengrong Shi, an Australian-Chinese, who operates a solar-power company in China. It was implied that Mr. Shi's success was due in part to being in Australia for his education. Both episodes were related to Australians' successful experiences in China, and were positive feature stories. Importantly, Chinese political institutions were usually portrayed negatively, but where Australia's business interests were concerned the reports would show Chinese politicians in a favourable light. *China's Winds of Change* presented the Roaring Forties, an Australian company, running a wind farm business successfully in partnership with Datang Corporation, one of the biggest power companies in China. The Government initiated a sustainable development strategy by seeking for renewable energy sources and

foreign cooperation. The Chinese officials were given time and space to air their views in the show. Lu Shaowei, the Chinese official, and Wang Guangqun, the Chairman of Guanghua Resourceful Wind Power Generation Company, both expressed their determination to protect the environment and a keen interest in exploring environmentally-friendly projects with foreign companies. They were described as being highly efficient at work and determined to achieve cooperation with foreign organizations. The prominence of the story was exemplified by being presented in a feature story format.

Further, the cultural frame, which was associated with a positive attribute, was occasionally laden with negative political subthemes. For instance, the sub-topics of human rights issues, freedom of expression and party corruption were hidden in the cultural episode entitled *Beijing's Heritage*. The tape concentrated on how forceful and illegal actions by some political authorities and new developers were performed to obtain land, and how a couple of ordinary Chinese, Ning Jinglun and Ding Ai, fight against the authorities to preserve their homes. The show recalled the persecution of Ning's family during the Cultural Revolution, which indicated the cruel side of the Party from a historical perspective. The direct commentary voiced by the journalist (Taylor, 2005) formulated the political image of China: "In China there's no democracy, no freedom of speech, no rule of law and no impartial and independent courts..." Finally, the episode was a negative feature story, which lasted nearly 30 minutes, implying the prominence of this story.

7.2 Syntactical Structure and Script Structure

A presenter-led style and a Question and Answer (Q&A) format were used in the presentation of both programs' storylines. *Foreign Correspondent* primarily adopted the presenter-led style, which demonstrated a clear structure: a headline, a beginning sequence, body sequences, and an ending sequence. Reporters participated in the whole process of unfolding the story. The reports featured actual footage and location reporting. Just one item, *Interview with Jan Wong*, took the form of Q&A. On the contrary, half of the stories produced by *Dateline* were organized in the Q&A style.

Foreign Correspondent used an indirect framing mechanism to project China: the presentation format, which consisted of postcard and feature story. The format a story was presented in suggested the degree of its prominence. Postcard stories were soft and entertaining. They had a duration of less than ten minutes, and were placed at the end of the episode. In contrast, feature stories were inclined to be hard and contain investigative journalism. On average, the whole storyline lasted around twenty minutes and was composed of about three sub-stories. A feature story format was scheduled at the beginning of the program, which signified its importance. The analysis disclosed that negative stories were all presented in a feature story format, while positive stories tended to be postcards. Even more, political stories were all negative feature stories. Positive cultural and economic stories tended to take the form of a postcard. All details are specified in Figure 2 above.

7.3 Rhetorical Structure

The analysis at this stage found a set of framing techniques used in the sampled episodes.

These consisted of employing animal images, revisiting the public memory of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, as well as the use of ideological words. In the words of McQuail (1992), one form of bias is ideology, which is unintended and hidden, and 'is embedded' in texts. These framing tactics, whether used unknowingly or knowingly, revealed a bias against China.

7.3.1 Animal Images

An image of several live scorpions arranged on wooden skewers was photographed in *Foul Play*. This frame ran for five seconds. It was shot next to the scene of Ms. Cao, the interviewee, who documented the plight of her husband and family, and labelled the Chinese communists as "bandits". The voice overstated that "On the surface Beijing looks like a peaceful, contented city, but every year millions of angry Chinese come here from the provinces to complain about local officials…" Shot as a full screen close-up, stressed with five-second duration and accompanied by dreary music, the scorpion frame was visually shocking. In addition to the voice-over and the vox-pop, these arrangements made the scorpion image appear to be a contrived image. In the Bible, scorpions are perceived as dangerous creatures, and later symbols of deception and fraud (Ferber, 2007). Hence, the scorpions in this episode were used as a metaphor for the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). The symbolism of the scorpions was imparted to the attributes of the CCP: repressive and authoritarian. Another scenario was shown on *Xinran Xue Interview*. The presenter, George Negus, identified China as a "strange animal" with "a communist head and a capitalist body".

7.3.2 Public Memory

In the light of *Interview with Jan Wong*, Jan related the story of a young university student who was sent for hard labour during the Cultural Revolution. She stressed the "cultural amnesia" of contemporary China, which dictates people's responses to the Revolution:

> If they were a victimiser, they don't want to talk about how they beat people up or caused people terrible hardship. And if they were a victim, they don't want to talk about what they went through either because it's so difficult for them.

Shown in another story named *Beijing's Heritage* (2005), Ning Jinglun, the interviewee, recalled the misery of his family during the Revolution:

> During the Great Cultural Revolution, my family was searched and our properties were confiscated. My family members were criticised and denounced in public. My father died in front of me – he was beaten to death. My elder brother was also beaten to death. I was knocked unconscious at the gate.

Through reviving the public memory of the Cultural Revolution, the cruel nature of the state was disclosed. Both programs replayed the image of Tiananmen to further exhibit this

nature. A gloomy frame of the place near Tiananmen Square catches the viewers' attention in *Foul Play*. A low-angle shot placed the Square in a dominant position. The quick and unstable camera movement decorated with cinematic grey lighting created visual tension. In addition to the glum music, the voice-over stated that "In Tiananmen Square we must speak softly, undercover police are listening." This frame could be designed to instil the feeling of uneasiness and remind the viewers of the Tiananmen Square tragedy. The episode *Who's Afraid of Wei Jingsheng* used this event to explicitly criticise China's human rights record. In another episode, *Will Hutton Interview*, the commentator, Will Hutton stated that the inflation in 1988 led to the Tiananmen Square protests, and that the one-party ruling system could result in economic and political instabilities. These scenarios reactivate the Tiananmen myth: following the 1989 Student Movement, the Square was used by Western media to symbolize "China's poor human rights record", "the display of 'sinister power' of the Chinese Communist regime", and "the alleged outrageous abuses of human rights" (Li, 2005, p.120).

7.4 Ideological Words

Foreign Correspondent and *Dateline* employed ideological terms, such as 'communist', to differentiate the ideological beliefs in mainland China from the West. In the discussion by Cobb and Elder (as cited in Chang, 1988, p. 320), the word 'communist', implies "oppression, totalitarianism, or other negative terms.'"'Communist' was repeated ten times in *Foul Play* to emphasize how the Government led by the CCP treated its dissidents. This term was mentioned five times in *Dire Strait*. The reporter (Campbell, 2005) stressed that Taiwan "bears little resemblance to the communist-ruled mainland" when referring to the political system. He hailed Chen, the former Taiwan president, as a democratic hero, fighting for independence and democracy for Taiwan against mainland China.

Dateline kept questioning the contradiction of the political and economic systems in China. The presenter, George Negus, asked Wang Zhongjun, a famous Chinese movie producer, "Can you be a communist and a capitalist at the same time?" He questioned Will Hutton: "How much of the problem is this mad mix between having a Communist political system on the one hand and a part capitalist economy on the other?" He also asked the question to Xinran Xue: "How can it be even vaguely like a democracy while the Communist Party still has as much influence and sway over the country and people's lives as it does?" The details were discussed on *China's Media Mogul*, *Will Hutton Interview* and *Xinran Xue Interview*.

8. Discussion

This study examined the coverage of China in Australia by comparing episodes broadcast by the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* and SBS's *Dateline*. The qualitative content analysis revealed several findings. Firstly, both programs increased their reporting on China over time, and treated aspects of the economy and environment neutrally. The cultural frame, which was only presented by *Foreign Correspondent*, was evaluated positively. This is attributed to stronger economic ties, frequent cultural exchange and interpersonal contact between China and Australia in the last twenty years. Observers note that a "pragmatic and commercialized" but "constructive and

friendly" relationship (White, 1999, pp. 74-75), and Australian multiculturalism, can contribute to favourable perceptions of China in Australia (Kendall, 2005).

Secondly, both programs focused critically on the political dimension of China within their chosen range of topics. Negative political sub-topics were embedded in the cultural frame. This partly stems from the Fourth Estate values of Western media, which require a free press to perform a 'watchdog role.' The Australian media follows this tradition and therefore tends to scrutinize governments and authorities in other countries. Thirdly, significant bias based upon the framing tactics, such as animal images, ideological wordings, as well as the reactivation of the public memory of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, was found. This is suggestive of the bias against China in the shows. Media framing theory points out that the ways media workers, such as editors, reporters and photographers, frame issues are consciously or unconsciously influenced by historical-cultural-economic-political factors. Based upon the episodes sampled, the scorpion image, which appeared once, and the remaining devices, which were used a few times, can be knowingly or unknowingly stored in the minds of just one member, or several members of the production teams.

These framing mechanisms may arise from the conventional fear of Chinese communism and the historical prejudices about China. The threat concept displayed in the economic frame not only shows evidence of the traditional fear of Chinese communism, but the contemporary fear of China's emergence, which poses a multi-faceted threat to the world through the Chinese economy, culture, environment, military and politics. Additionally, feature stories were used to highlight the negative political aspect, while postcards served to make the cultural contribution of China to the world salient. In the light of the propaganda model, news-making processes serve the societal purpose which requires national media to present "a tolerably realistic portrayal of the world" by protecting the advantages of 'the sellers, the buyers, and the governmental and private institutions" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 303). The hegemony framework, which influences the routine procedures in journalism, notes that media serve to maintain the ongoing political-economic system (Giltin, 2003). Accordingly, China, a nominally communist state (Zhao, 2005-2006), though practising a market economy, has different ideological values to Australia. By presenting China negatively in a political sense, the two programs achieve their mission to build the Australian national identity, and help to consolidate the governance of capitalism in Australia and the West. This conclusion is reinforced by the notion that framing is a significant social force to formulate public ideology (Gitlin, 2003).

9. Summary and Conclusions

Image theory and the dynamics of the Sino-Australian relationship inform the significance of the study on China's images in the Australian media. Media framing theory provides a methodological approach for this study. By looking into the structures of theme, syntax, script and rhetoric of the episodes broadcast on the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* and SBS's *Dateline*, this study draws the conclusions that the two programs presented the political dimension of China negatively, the economic and environmental dimensions neutrally, and the cultural dimension positively; and the framing patterns employed to portray China were composed of presentation format, animal images, ideological words, and the reactivation of the public

memory of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The positive and neutral representations of China are attributed to stronger commercial links and frequent cultural exchange between China and Australia. The negative portrayal, however, results from historical stereotypes of China and conventional fear of communism in Australia. In accordance with the propaganda model and hegemony theory, the ways in which the two programs frame China serve the interests of Australia and help to build the Australian national identity. The significance of this research lies in the intensively studied cases of *Foreign Correspondent* and *Dateline*, which provide some causal relationships with a larger body of cases. The findings contribute to our understanding of the mainstream media image of China in Australia in the 21st century. Future research undertaken by researchers with different cultural backgrounds and research of programs produced by Australian commercial broadcasters is recommended.

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Appendices

Table 1. Episodes Reporting on China from 2005 to 2008 by the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent*

Title of Episodes	Year	Reporters
Taiwan - Dire Strait	2005	Eric Campbell
Taiwan - Pulling Power	2005	Eric Campbell
Beijing's Heritage	2005	John Taylor
One Child Policy	2005	John Taylor
The Great Wall Marathon	2005	John Taylor
Another Sun - China	2006	Michael Maher
Running Dogs	2006	John Taylor
Painting Village	2006	John Taylor

Cars Eating China	2006	John Taylor
Siberian Tigers	2007	Stephen McDonell
China Architecture	2007	Quentin Sommerville
China's African Takeover	2007	Aiden Hartley (Channel 4,UK)
China's Winds of Change	2007	Stephen McDonell
Taiwan - The President vs Ligi Li	2007	Eric Campbell
Racquet Town	2008	Stephen McDonell
The Great Firewall of China	2008	Stephen McDonell
Damming the Three Gorges	2008	Stephen McDonell
Interview with Jan Wong	2008	Mark Corcoran
The Day the Schools Fell Down	2008	Stephen McDonell
Foul Play	2008	Eric Campbell
Monkey Returns	2008	Stephen McDonell
Sex & the City	2008	Eric Campbell
After the Dalai Lama	2008	Eric Campbell

Table 2. Episodes Reporting on China from 2005 to 2008 by SBS's *Dateline*

Episode	Year	Reporter
Inside the Lao Gai	2005	Unknown
Will Hutton Interview	2007	George Negus
Xinran Xue Interview	2007	George Negus
Dalai Lama Interview	2007	George Negus
China's Pollution Busters	2007	Bronwyn Adcock
China's Struggle Street	2007	Chris Hammer
The Sun King	2007	Chris Hammer
Interview with Rebiya Kadeer	2008	George Negus
Update on Tibet	2008	George Negus
Who's Afraid of Wei Jingsheng?	2008	David O'Shea
China's Cyber Warriors	2008	Nick Lazaredes
Ambassador Liu Guijin Interview	2008	George Negus
China's Media Mogul	2008	George Negus
Interview with Martin Walker	2008	George Negus