University of Canberra

Framing of Taiwan in the Elite Newspapers of Australia, Singapore and China

by

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Abstract

This study investigates how three selected Taiwan issues – the "two-state theory" proposed by former President Lee, the 2000 Presidential Election and Inauguration, and China's 2005 "Anti-Secession Law" against Taiwan – were reported and framed in the elite newspapers of China, Singapore, and Australia. The newspapers included: the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, the *Straits Times*, and the *People's Daily.*

The research first examines normative media system theory and the extensive research literature on international news flow as approaches to predicting coverage of the Taiwanese events in the selected newspapers. The limitations of these approaches are analysed. The foundations of news framing analysis are then examined and the limitations of traditional quantitative content-analytic methods of identifying and measuring the frequency of news frames are discussed. A qualitative model of examining news discourse is adopted for the study to investigate how the three events were portrayed or depicted in the selected newspapers.

Across the three selected Taiwanese events, nine characteristic news frames and corresponding counter-frames were identified: the politician's portrayal frame, nation's status frame, political system frame, KMT's party-image frame, post-election frame, Taiwan identity frame, law frame, military frame, and the motherland frame. It is argued that not only can qualitative analyses reveal the range of meanings inherent in news discourse, but it can also inform our understandings of international news flow by focussing on what characteristic or dominant meanings are signalled to newspaper readers, and the devices used by newspapers to support this choice of news frames.

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Introduction

Taiwan is an island country almost half the size of Tasmania with a population of about 23 million. Taiwan was Australia's 7th largest merchandise export market and 10th largest trading partner in 2005 and the markets continue to grow.

As a Taiwanese overseas student studying in Australia for the last ten years, as well as a former staff member of the Australian Commerce and Industry Office at Taipei, I believe there is still insufficient mutual understanding between Taiwan and Australia. Clearly, one aspect of the relationship between the two countries that has not been systematically studied is that of media images of each other. There is little research that investigates what Australians know of Taiwan through their print media. My motives in beginning this research began with this observation and the observation that there is not much news coverage of Taiwan in the Australian press.

A similar situation can be observed in Singaporean media. Singapore established the earliest official relations with Taiwan among all the Southeast Asian countries (or ASEAN) since 1973 when Taiwan helped Singapore to set up its Air Force. Singapore is Taiwan's largest export source in Southeast Asia and takes 35 percent of Taiwan's total exports to the region (Chen, 2002, p.136). But studies of the reporting and portrayal of Taiwan in the Singaporean press are rarely conducted.

For these reasons – a lack of systematic research – this project examines the reporting and portrayal of Taiwan in selected Australian and Singaporean newspapers.

The People's Republic of China has the strongest and closest relations with Taiwan geographically, economically, historically and politically. The national status of Taiwan always remains controversial across the Taiwan Strait. The *People's Daily,* which is the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, was also included in the project's dataset. The newspaper provides a contrast between Australian newspapers (ostensibly, newspapers free from government constraint) and Singaporean newspapers (where some government constraints on journalistic practice is evident). I have chosen not to include newspapers from the United States of America in the project, primarily because

there are studies examining the reporting of Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the USA and later chapters draw on this work. The reporting and portrayal of Taiwan is thus investigated in the newspapers in three different press systems – in Australian, in Singapore, and in the People's Republic of China.

The study's approach

The principal theoretical and methodological approach underpinning this research is news framing analysis. News framing analysis elaborates how journalists and their editors 'package' information for audience reception and how that information is represented or portrayed. As Entman (1993) showed, news texts contain frames which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences. These attributes provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements (pp.52-53). Gitlin (1980, p.7) theorized that:

> Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences. Thus, for organizational reasons alone, frames are unavoidable, and journalism is organized to regulate their production.

Further, Entman (1993) observed, words like frame, framing, and framework are common in ordinary public discourse and their connotations are roughly equivalent in their usage in much academic discourse. He defined (1993, p.52) a news frame by highlighting journalistic decision-making to select and emphasize some aspects of reality.

> Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

But the research literature does not contain one definition that is universally accepted by media researchers. In this research, I follow Reese's (2001, p.11) definition of a news frame – what he terms as a 'working definition' – and theorising of framing as my theoretical position. He proposes that news frames are

> *organizing principles* that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world (author's emphasis).

Therefore, I employ Entman's (1993) weak social constructionist approach, which is the underlying epistemological approach to news framing analyses. I draw also on research that identifies 'thematic structure" using qualitative framing analysis, as adopted by Pan and Kosicki (1993). But it is important to map the extent (and, to some degree, the nature) of news coverage of Taiwan in Australian, Singaporean and the Chinese press. Thus, in addition to qualitative textual analyses I also conduct a traditional quantitative content analysis of selected newspapers.

In order to explore how Taiwan's issues were reported and framed in the elite newspapers in Australia, Singapore and China, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, the *Straits Times*, and the *People's Daily* were chosen for investigation. Three specific news events were chosen for analysis in each of the newspapers:

- the "two-state theory" by Taiwan's former President Lee Teng-hui in 1999;
- Taiwan's 2000 Presidential Election and Inauguration; and
- the passing of "Anti-secession Law" by Mainland China in 2005.

In an interview with German Deutsche Welle radio on July 9, 1999, Taiwan's former president Lee Teng-hui defined that the relations between Taiwan and China should be considered as a "special state to state relationship", which was also known as the "two-state theory". He also argued that Beijing has totally ignored historical and legal facts in labeling Taiwan a renegade province. Although Lee did not mention the word "independence", his statement was regarded as provocative by Beijing. The U.S Clinton Administration dispatched envoys to both Beijing and Taipei to urge restraint. However, Lee's statement was widely applauded by the majority of Taiwanese people.

The second event analysed occurred in March 2000 – Taiwan held its second direct presidential elections. Democratic Progressive Party candidate Chen Shui-bian won a stunning victory, making it the first time in Taiwan's history that an opposition party had won over the Kuomintang (KMT Party). Mr. Chen won 39.3 percent of the vote,

independent candidate James Soong 36.8 percent, while KMT candidate Lien Chan came in a distant third with 23.1 percent of the vote. On May 20, 2000, Chen's inaugural address was received enthusiastically in Taiwan. In the speech, the new president referred to himself as the president of the Republic of China, not the Republic of Taiwan as some feared he might. However, Chen also insisted that reunification with mainland China was only one of several options available to Taiwan. In other words, he would not completely give up Taiwan independence.

The third event analyzed attracted much attention from the international community and caused concern in Taiwan – China's National People's Congress passed the Anti-secession Law on March 14, 2005. The Law, aimed at Taiwan, authorizes the State Council and the Central Military Commission to decide and to use non-peaceful means and other necessary measures against any separatist movement by Taiwan. The Law states clearly that the Taiwan question is an internal affair – thus sending a clear message to the international community. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at a news conference reiterated China's assertion that the Taiwan question is an internal Chinese matter and warned outsiders not to get involved. On the morning of March 16, after two days of deliberation, President Chen Shui-bian issued a six-point statement declaring that the Chinese authorities were using a double-handed approach: offering favors on one hand, while passing the new law. Chen said the people of Taiwan would not be misled and he called for a million people to take to the streets in a March 26 parade to demonstrate to safeguard Taiwan's democracy and peace.

Aims and scope of the study – research questions

The study is designed to examine the following questions:

R1: What is the extent of elite newspaper reporting in Australia, Singapore and China of the three selected news events ("Two-State theory" in 1999, 2000 Presidential Election and Inauguration, and China's "Anti-secession Law" to Taiwan)?

R2. What were the main genres, news sources, key actors, and substantive topics of the three selected Taiwan's news events ("Two-State theory" in 1999, 2000 Presidential Election and Inauguration, and China's "Anti-secession Law" to Taiwan) in the elite newspapers of Australia, Singapore and China?

R3. What were the thematic news frames employed in the reporting of the three selected Taiwanese events in the elite newspapers of Australia, Singapore and China? How were the cross-Strait issues between Taiwan and China portrayed in the elite newspapers of Australia, Singapore and China?

R4. How did different media systems and systemic factors of international news flow influence the reporting of Taiwan? What were the tangible and intangible influences behind the news and newspapers?

R5: To what extent can news framing analyses inform understandings of news flow between countries?

Although Taiwan has positive political and economical relations with Australia and Singapore, little systematic research has investigated how news of Taiwan is reported and portrayed in the elite press of Australia, Singapore and China – countries with which Taiwan has significant trade relationships. Further, as this thesis will show, most studies of news flow between countries rely upon models of analysis that are severely constrained.

Previous studies on the international news flow comprehensively utilized quantitative methods and statistical testing including stepwise discriminant analysis (Chang, et al, 1987), cluster analysis and regression analysis (Kim & Barnett, 1996). However, as Wu (2000, p.115) pointed that the results of past studies were not entirely consistent probably because of different sampling methods, time frames, definitions, and other details of implementation that were hard to identify.

But, as I will examine, the thesis argues that qualitative methods are better suited to understanding the nature of international news flow and the dominant or characteristics ways in which news stories are framed for their audiences. The findings of this study will contribute to other research fields, such as international relations and diplomacy studies. The findings may also inform communication and media strategies employed by Taiwan's government designed to increase the visibility and mutual understanding between Taiwan and the three selected countries.

Significance of the study

The project first follows the traditional quantitative methodology of content analysis to map the extent and nature of the reporting and portrayal of three key events in Taiwan's contemporary history – former President Lee's "two-state theory'; the Presidential election in 2000, and China's "Anti-secession Law". Across the differing media systems of Australia, Singapore and China, four elite newspapers were chosen for this comparative case study analysis. Previous studies on international news flow mostly – if not exclusively – use quantitative methods and statistical testing to determine the volume (and direction) of news flow between countries. But such an approach does not reveal the nature of such news coverage. The thesis argues that such research is only a first step. Qualitative discourse analyses can add to our understanding of the nature of such coverage and the range of meanings available to newspaper readers in various countries. Investigations of the nature of news coverage can add to our understanding of international news flow.

Limitations of the study

The research project is focused on textual analyses of news texts that have been chosen to reflect differing national media systems and differing newspapers. As such, the findings and conclusions are limited to the three chosen events. On the one hand, the selection of specific events in Taiwan necessarily limits the study's conclusions to these events but, on the other hand, the importance of context in examining news is discussed. More importantly, the focus on news texts may not tell us much about audience reception. I do not imply that either alternative or consolidated newspaper meanings are necessarily adopted by actual readers. Readers are, of course, free to interpret, misinterpret, ignore, or even resist, meanings embedded in the news text. I do, however, offer theoretical suggestions about meaning production by focussing on newspapers' production and assemblage of words and images. Finally, the data used in this study is primarily retrieved from newspaper databases. Actual newspaper content is not analyzed and, as such, much contextual data (such as graphics, photographs, placement of headlines, etc.) surrounding a news story is lost.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The introduction includes a background to the study, and the research questions.

Chapter 1 offers historical background of the political and economic relations between Taiwan and China, as well as the triangular relations among Taiwan, China and the USA. The chapter is designed to provide context to the study and indicates how USA policy towards Taiwan influenced cross-Strait relations, and how it impacts on the three selected events in this study. In addition, Taiwan's links with Australia and Singapore are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 provides the background of the media systems and media environments in Australia, Singapore and China. The model of national media systems created by Ostini and Fung (2002) is employed to examine the media systems in the three selected countries. It explains how factors contained in this model influence the reporting of the four selected newspapers in this study.

Chapter 3 focuses on the conceptual – and often conflicting – claims of the news framing literature review. The typology of news framing, the functions and influences of framing devices, and the approaches in analysing news frames are discussed. In particular, several conceptual concerns explored by Carragee and Roefs (2004) are investigated and analysed. Additionally, the literature on news flow research is briefly examined and comment made on the underlying theoretical framework and epistemology. The limitations of this research program are discussed. The usefulness of news framing analyses in examining news flow between countries is then proposed.

Chapter 4, the methodology chapter, specifies details of the quantitative content analysis and the qualitative framing analyses used in this study. The strengths and weaknesses of both methods, and underlying theoretical issues, are discussed. The thematic structure approach of Pan and Kosicki (1993) is explored and elaborated in the context of this study. The research questions are stated and tied to the preceding literature review.

The research findings of the content analysis (extent of news coverage) and the news framing analyses (nature of the reporting and portrayal) of the three selected events are reported and discussed in **Chapters 5, 6 and 7**. The appropriateness of the research questions and the findings are then discussed.

Taiwan's three selected news events are in the **Chapters 5 to Chapter 7**. The various news frames explored in the same event are examined. The results of quantitative content analysis including tables and the influences of systemic factors are illustrated in the first part of the three findings chapters, followed by the results of qualitative framing analyses.

The conclusion (**Chapter 8**) draws together the findings of the previous chapters, examines the application of news framing analyses, and explores ways of informing the existing news flow research literature but focusing on news events in context using framing analysis. Suggestions for further study are presented.