

The representation of British and Chinese political leaders in news propaganda: Theresa May's official visit to China

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Abstract : *This article explores how Chinese and British political leaders are represented in news propaganda. In particular, it focuses on how the Chinese and British news media has reported on the meeting between Theresa May and Jinping Xi in Beijing on Feb 2nd 2018 and Theresa May's visit to Wuhan and Shanghai from Jan 31 to Feb 1st 2018. Following this, the article discusses how "propaganda" and "public interest" news agendas have influenced news content. The difference of agenda-setting in China and the UK has given rise to different news stories on Theresa May and Jinping Xi in the two countries. The study compares the differences of two official newspapers in the two states and draws the conclusion that "propaganda" and "public interest" news models significantly influence the representation of politicians. The paper analyses how these "labels" are represented within news media and how this "celebrification" influences news coverage. The analysis uses a mixed-method approach including discourse studies and statistical analysis to investigate how meaning and significance is constructed through public image. Through this, it identifies how the dynamics of celebrity as a cultural force influences journalism and how the brand of political celebrity is a powerful tool for understanding political images.*

Keywords: *authenticity, authority, celebrification, propaganda, public interest, professionalism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the literature about the relations between journalism and politicians, celebrity culture is an important area for study has received considerable attention (Turner & Marshall, 2000). The status of a political celebrity renders their discursive power or voice unable to be neglected. Some scholars referred to "celebrification" as "the changes at the personal level and the process of ordinary people or public figures becoming celebrities" Street (2004). As the news media explore the personal life of politicians, the public has gained a greater understanding of the "real" life of a public figure. Meanwhile, authenticity and authority in political marketing contribute to building the personal image of political leaders so that they function effectively. Since the stories of politicians are filtered by the news media, a focus on establishing the "authenticity" of the politician's message is critical. "Celebrification" is a political strategy employed to gain the public's attention, while more substantial matters relevant to the benefits of the population will be neglected. As Chomsky & Barsamian (2015) argue, stances of the news are "clearly hooked into wider social discourses and ideologies or are contextualized in important ways by them".

This research is organized to address three core questions:

1. How have "propaganda" and "public interest" news model influenced news content on the Prime Minister Theresa May during her official visit to China in 2018.
2. How has the British Prime Minister Theresa May been represented in British and Chinese news media?
3. How does the "celebrification" of Theresa May influence Chinese news coverage?

Here, I show how the interaction of Theresa May and Jinping Xi during May's official visit to China was used to demonstrate identification in a different way by Chinese and British news media. I examine the news coverage of the event and compare the similarities and differences of these news. My findings show that: (i) the reason why the leaders of the two states reflect different images in different contexts is due to the different ways in which the media, the audience, and the political models work in both China and the UK. With

this in mind, the point of agenda setting is to create a network of interest within mass media, which places emphasis in certain events and ideas, until they become the principal agenda which the audience focuses their attention on. The analysis shows that Chinese news has taken a dim view on presenting politically sensitive, unpublicized information, choosing to focus on the more straightforward, popular public image of their leaders. Conversely, the British media focuses more on the public interests, social and political struggles, and is actively working towards a more open debate. (ii) through the comparison between the Chinese and British news databases, this study finds that the portrayal of a political leader is quite different depending on how the internal policies operate in each country and what type of news is considered important, significant, and relevant. By reaching out to the public, and reacting to its feedback and behaviour, public figures in politics can organise and develop better strategies for better leading a nation (Bertot 2012: 39). On this point, the Chinese media portrays President Xi in a positive way, giving him full credit for his political abilities, while the British press has expressed concerns about Theresa May's future in her role as Prime Minister, and even whether she is likely to run in the next election. Thus, the media affects the creation and development of politician's public personas, affecting also people's impression on their possible candidates' images. This research contributes to explore the images of political leaders in the context of the transnational media and how different countries' journalism service for the political agenda. It also provides a basis for how politicians construct their brand during state visits.

1. News, propaganda and the representation of politicians

This study explains how the media, and its platforms, are affected and influenced by government and institutions' interests. One example is the mainstream media outlets in China, which are mainly state controlled. Those platforms create, share, and broadcast news mainly depicting the government in a positive view and present the interests of the state as public common sense. Herman & Chomsky (2010) put forward a concept in the field of political economy in order to explain how propaganda functions in corporate news media. Their model seeks to show how works by means of this propaganda consent in the public mind and how populations are manipulated. Thus, "agenda setting theory" (McCombs & Rey, 1997) described the capacity of news and media to influence public perception and interest, by placing more resources into one story at the expense of other events. Gianpietro & Winfried Schulz (1999) showed how the media is integrated into the political domain and he expresses concern that the functions of political institutions in the liberal state will be usurped by the mass media. Similarly, Stockmann & Gallagher (2011) analyse how agenda-setting theory has had an influence on mass media and explored what people think about this. The power of the state media has a powerful and well-documented influence on setting national agendas and focusing public attention on key public issues.

1.1 The Chinese propaganda model of news

The whole Chinese news media structure and the media platforms were designed to strengthen the ruling party's ability to shape public opinion and to promote the state's mentality as common sense (Mittler, 2004). Traditionally, Chinese Central Television (CCTV) has served as an important national conduit, while The People's Daily works as the main outlet for print propaganda. Through those two spaces, the government explores their reach and promotes their own political activities, which then would be followed by other newspapers in the country, such as The Global Times. In China, the mainstream news media work under the control of the Communist Party of China (CPC), this dictates how they present and expose news within the country. The Chinese Government largely determines what can and will show up in news reports, and news platforms most of the time focus on promoting and supporting the party's propaganda messages; those that do not follow the state's position, experience censorship and surveillance (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011).

Gramsci (1971) took the ideas further and addressed them through the notions of "hegemony" and the "manufacture of consent". He argued that hegemony relies on "voluntary" coercion and "crisis of authority". Politically, hegemonism is a geopolitical means of indirect imperial rule. Hegemony (leading state) intervenes in threats rather than direct military force, namely aggression, occupation and annexation. Journalists keep the news aligned with the interests of the government through control of the ideological domain to develop news.

1.2 The UK public interest model of news

By contrast, journalism in the UK tends to adhere to a democratic model of communication (Allan 2005: 47). In 1695, freedom of the press was established in Britain. Milton (1868: 45) argued that the individual should have unlimited access to ideas in "a free and open encounter". Lippmann (1982: 83) argued that citizens should look at politics from an independent attitude, and if they do not, journalism will be received with widespread scepticism from the citizens. The "freedom of expression" element of democracy has been driven by the political news media. This is a system of communication which contributes to a more inclusive, democratic

governance, which is different from the role played by Chinese news media platforms. According to Habermas (1989: 83), the theory of the public sphere explains how citizens should have a safe space to express their ideas, free from the state's regulation. The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) of the UK code defines the public interest as an interest in public freedom of expression and speech and involves the disclosure of serious misconduct (Franklin 2005: 74).

Notwithstanding that the precise meaning of the public interest can be disputed, public interest is considered by Bimber (2003: 34) to be essential to the welfare of population. In particular, the competition between political parties for support via democratic elections needs a continual flow of information in the public arena. For people to be able to actively participate in political life then this depends on communication amongst citizens. For this to happen, critical views of government have to exist, along with proposals for new ideas in terms of policy. In order to ensure these conditions, regulation may be needed by the public. If connection and trust is lost between the public and the news media, this will have negative consequences for both citizens and journalists. For citizens, the news media are an important gateway connecting them to their government. For journalists, they need the public even more than the public needs journalism because the public is essentially the supervisor of the news (Iggers, 2018: 83).

II. Methodology

In order to answer the key research problems, various mixed methods including discourse analysis and statistical collection methods are applied in this research. The methodologies are used to investigate how meaning and significance is constructed through the broadcast of public image, in different formats.

This research bases its main discussion on the data collected from newspapers and other communication media in both China and the UK and look at the perception and behaviour of those media platforms towards the heads-of-state in both countries. Moreover, the data collected offers a background for a comparison between two distinct systems of government, and how mainstream and alternative media behaves and communicates the state's agendas through their main platforms. The Guardian and The Independent (in the UK), and The People's Daily and the Global Times (in China), are the main sources of information and data. Van Dijk (2013) points out that "the main purpose of discourse analysis is to provide a clear and systematic description of the linguistic units", and that will be the basis of this research (Van Dijk 2013). The discourse analysis attempts to understand how the communication outlets dealt with Theresa May's visit to Wuhan China on January 31st, 2018, and the meeting with China's president, Jinping Xi, on February 1st, 2018.

In order to properly analyse the perspectives and views of the news outlets during Theresa May's official visit to China, this study will look at a number of relevant news stories from January 31st to February 2nd, 2018, and search for the differences in the reactions of each of the platforms on the event. The data collected was coded by tone, type, and source, from the four aforementioned newspapers.

III. Analysis of News models, politicised celebrity and celebritised politics

This section of the study focuses on the relationship and connections between political bodies and media platforms. Politicians and the media have developed a symbiotic relationship in both the Chinese and British journalism industry, and many of the political strategies involve producing and broadcasting a positive image of the representatives of the people. The idea of agenda setting, a major mechanism used to develop public image, involves using the news to influence what the public see as being important or relevant, and changing the way the public relates to those who play a role in the government (McCombs & Shaw 1972: 64). When presented to the public, news in China involving political celebrities normally tends to avoid any negativity against the government. By contrast, journalism in the UK finds factual stories to serve the public interest (Kim & McCombs 2007: 300). This research looks at how the tendency of "celebrification" affects the perception of the government through news media and how celebrity politicians make use of the techniques of marketing to sell their stories.

"content analysis of the news related stories on The People's Daily and The Global Time"

Date	Title	Source	Tone
Jan 31	Theresa May's official visit to China: building an enhanced version of the golden age between China and the UK	The People's Daily	Positive

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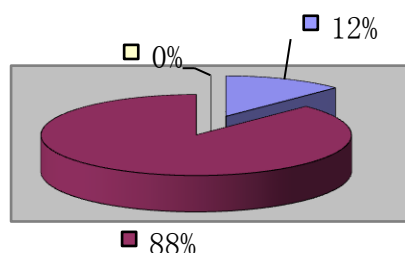
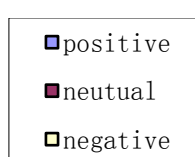
Feb 1	Sino-British relations have never left an ideology despite Theresa May's visit to China	The Global Times	Positive
Feb 1	Theresa May gave China's President Xi Jinping Blue Planet 2 box set	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 1	Theresa May is here. Where have all the British prime ministers visited in China?	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 1	What is the meaning behind the selection of Wuhan as the first stop of Theresa May's visit to China?	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 1	Theresa May's New Chinese Nickname "Auntie May"	The People's Daily	Positive
Feb 1	UK businesses seek opportunities in China after Brexit	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 1	May's Visit Shows Why Britain Needs a More Strategic China Policy	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 2	Theresa May: what I see in China is confidence	The People's Daily	Positive
Feb 1	Mr Xi was asked to speak to the Prime Minister Theresa May	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 1	Is Theresa May late for China?	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 2	What are the "golden" results of Theresa May's first visit to China?	The People's Daily	Positive
Feb 2	The fashion of the political supermodel	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 2	The nickname "Aunty May" disturbed the British press	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 2	British Prime Minister Theresa May has arrived in Wuhan for a visit to China	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 2	Theresa May's first visit to China: Is China the hope for the UK after Brexit?	The Global Times	Neutral
Feb 2	President Xi Jinping meets with British Prime Minister Theresa May	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 2	British Prime Minister gives a speech in China on January 31 st , 2018	The People's Daily	Neutral
Feb 2	British Prime Minister Theresa May visited the Palace Museum with her husband Philip May on the second day of her visit to China	The People's Daily	Neutral

“content analysis of the news related stories on The Guardian and The Independent”

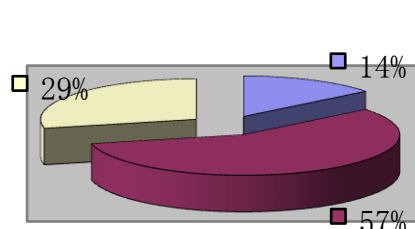
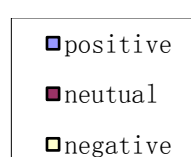
Date	Title	Resource	Tone
Jan 31	How China really perceives 'Auntie May'	The Guardian	neutral

Jan 31	Theresa May launches £500m education programmes with China	The Independent	neutral
Jan 31	Theresa May pledges to raise Hong Kong human rights violations in China	The Independent	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May's timing for a trip to China couldn't have been worse – her critics are circling, and with good reason	The Independent	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May flies to China in major bid to secure post-Brexit trade	The Independent	positive
Feb 2	Theresa May to give China's President Xi Jinping Blue Planet 2 box set	The Independent	neutral
Feb 2	Theresa May to warn China against steel dumping	The Independent	negative
Feb 2	The Guardian view on May in China: the 'golden era' has lost its lustre	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May's China visit offers little to silence critics at home	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May sidesteps backing \$900bn Silk Road project of China	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	May hoping to kick start faltering China relations with trade visit	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	UK and China won't always see eye to eye, says May before trade trip	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	I'm not a quitter': Theresa May insists she will fight next election <i>On visit to China PM faces down critics but admits she needs to communicate better with MPs and public</i>	The Guardian	neutral
Feb 2	What John Major said in China – and what Theresa May did not <i>Major travelled to Beijing as British PM in 1991 and held forth in public about human rights</i>	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May's vision of a global Britain is just a Brexit fantasy <i>The prime minister's speech in China shows Britain is great – at self-deceit. We must wake up to our real place in the world</i>	The Guardian	negative
Feb 2	Theresa May pledges to raise Hong Kong and human rights with China <i>Prime minister says she believes her relationship with Xi Jinping will allow her to talk thorny issues but defenders doubt her will</i>	The Guardian	negative

	or influence		
Feb 2	Blue Planet gift from Theresa May to remind Beijing of plastic waste	The Guardian	neutral
Feb 2	What do Chinese see in 'aunty' Theresa May that Britons don't?	The Independent	neutral
Feb 2	Theresa May in China	The Independent	neutral
Feb 2	China's boasts about May's avoidance of rights issues miss the point	The Guardian	neutral
Feb 2	Is the Belt and Road Anti-Democratic?	The Guardian	negative



“Tone of Chinese newspaper”



“Tone of British newspaper”

From Chinese newspapers, it was found that, from all the news articles, 87% told positive stories and 13% neutral stories on the topic of the visit of the British politicians to China. Contrarily, British newspapers were somewhat stricter towards the meeting, with 57% providing a negative report, 29% giving neutral reports, and only 14% having a positive report on the same topic. In terms of genre, Chinese newspapers tend to adopt a more objective message and positive comments, which has been conducive in shaping an environment of positive public opinion. Meanwhile, the views of the British news media reflect the situation from a more objective and neutral perspective.

3.1 Agenda setting and politicians news

Since China and the UK have different news models, Chinese and British media platforms reflect different views and attitudes when reporting Theresa May's visit to China and the events around it. In terms of the topics, scope and depth of the issues the Chinese media covered it in far less depth than the British news. Chinese news stories mostly covered “the golden era of the Sino-British relationship”, “Theresa May and Xi Jinping's meeting”, “Theresa May visits China”, and “the image of Theresa May in personal life”, amongst other less controversial topics. On this point, the idealist world order promoted by *The People's Daily* contrasts sharply with the realism portrayed by its subsidiary *The Global Times*. The former reflects official pragmatic foreign policies while the latter expresses popular nationalistic feelings (Pan 2000: 269). In the Chinese context, these views are considered to have a negative impact on the relationship between the UK and China. Meanwhile, the news covered by British outlets includes themes such as “predicting the results of Theresa May's visit to China”, “the Chinese human rights issue”, and “the Chinese One Belt and One Road Initiative”.

The Guardian and *The Independent* consider these issues to be an inevitable concern in Sino-UK relations. Alan Rusbridger (2015), editor of *The Guardian*, argues that *The Independent's* emphasis is on views instead of news, resulting in it losing impact on the front page once more editor does that the news media. On this point, *The Independent* (2018) reported from an objective position, as it described itself of every newspaper as free from party political bias, free from proprietary influence. Moreover, regarding Theresa May's gift to President Xi Jinping, the news coverage on both sides shared the same interpretation. The gift, a DVD box set of the British environmental TV show *Blue Planet 2*, was seen as a reminder of the problems with the environment, waste and pollution and seen as a symbol to urge the Chinese Government to take a different attitude towards those environmental issues. The Chinese news media reported the gift with the tone of cooperation, suggesting that "both sides are working together to protect the environment" (*The Global Times*, 2018).

Theresa May's attitude towards the *One Belt and One Road* proved to be the most controversial topic for the British press. The Chinese news coverage on May's attitude to *One Belt and One Road* was mainly positive and accepting, even though she did not mention any details of the actual planning of the initiative in her speech. In contrast, the main British media platforms critically pointed out that Theresa May has not publicly expressed support for this initiative (*The Independent*, 2018). Unlike her predecessors who visited China, Theresa May's first stop was Wuhan province, and not Beijing. This move has been explained as a sign towards cooperation between the two countries (*The Global Times*, 2018). Christians & White (2009) consider the kind of image created for a political situation to depend on how key actors want the public to react to the situation. Barilleaux & Rozell (2018) stated that this is Theresa May's second appearance on the multilateral diplomatic stage since the G20 Hangzhou Summit, and she is attempting to show China that the UK is not a troubled market (*The Independent*, 2018).

In addition to the scheduled official visit, Theresa May delivered both official and unofficial speeches in Beijing and Wuhan province. Several of the following quotes are interesting: "after I was elected British Prime Minister, the first country I visited outside the European Union was China", "I see a country that is confident, forward-looking and playing an increasingly important role on the world stage" (*The Independent*, 2018). While the British news media focused on the meanings behind the words, Chinese platforms tended to search for a more clear-cut and direct meaning. When it comes to the issue of bilateral trade, Jinping Xi mentioned that China "is a self-sufficient country", which was interpreted by the British media as a hierarchical positioning of the country, and "exaggerates China's advantage in trade" (*The Independent*, 2018). Thus, the British media appeared to be working towards the hot topic style of presentation, delivering what audiences want to read, rather than the news reportage referring to the actual intent of the quote, as the Chinese media appears to do. Moreover, *The People's Daily* (2018), a relatively serious and professional newspaper used more lively words such as "youthful" and "active" to describe aspects of the British Prime Minister's visit. In terms of *The People's Daily* (2018) reported, Theresa May's passionate speech for primary and secondary school students in Wuhan No.49 middle school, was described as a "positive interaction with the Chinese youth generation" (*The Independent*, 2018). In the words of Theresa May herself, "the new generation in China has shown the great hope and there will be more cooperation projects between China and the UK in the field of education."

3.2 Authenticity: the 'celebrification' of Theresa May

The perception of Theresa May by the Chinese people is mainly connected with her personality and personal life. Marshall (1997) pointed out, the textual dimension of public and private self-presentation provides a template for the development of political celebrities. Because of that, *The People's Daily* (2018) reports that Theresa May's official visit caused a major reaction in China and its media platforms, and have produced a number of interesting behaviours in both traditional and new media outlets. As Gamson & Sasson (1992) argue, that digital news platforms are also important mechanisms for political aims that take shape in institutionalized contexts. In this case, digital media users, or so-called *netizens*, affectionately called Theresa May "*Auntie May*" (Zhang, 2018). The Chinese news coverage has been heavily reporting on Theresa May's nickname, arguably in an attempt to create a friendly atmosphere for bilateral relations. Moreover, the Chinese news media showed affection towards her husband, whom they referred to as "*The first sir*", calling him a "handsome gentleman" and describing their marriage as "very loving". According to Gamson (1992), politicians are not only the discussion focus of the public and media, but they are also the main topic of interest for ordinary people. The personal image of a politician is as important, if not more so, as his or her political stances for a large percentage of the population, which looks to engage with and relate to those political personalities.

On this point, *The People's Daily* (2018) stated that in a "*political supermodel's fashion*", Theresa May is a political leader who actively uses fashion to develop her image; her clothing choices have attracted much

media attention. In the same discussion, Theresa May was deemed to be very aware of her image. She adopted the signature “power-dressing” style of the new generation and created a personal style to project political values. May followed trends to match her dressing style to emphasise her “conservative values” (Snook, 2011: 38). With this concept of “power dressing”, she can easily use her image and engage with the persona of a career woman and add to her reputation as a fierce leader. To reach the approval of a more personality audience, she realised that by wearing clothes that would ‘soften’ her image, she could engage with a larger, more diverse audience than before. The British media has, however, considered her personal image an unimportant issue, and one that is not necessarily politically relevant. A bow shirt reflects a conservative femininity, but it is a symbol of the past. Although conservatism did not necessarily embrace women in positions of power, Theresa May tries to embody conservative values while also trying to assert her rights as a woman. As Snook (2011) argues, people cannot ignore the fact that clothing and its symbolism are used to wage political wars because it is such a powerful marker of social values.

Chinese newspapers scrutinised May’s fashion sense with reference to her ‘strong and bold personality’, comparing her fashion taste to that of Margaret Thatcher (Stone 2018). As fashion editor Elgot (2018) commented, “I was surprised by every time the media mentioned her shoes rather than her actions. I can’t help imagine that a woman can be interested in both fashion and politics (*The Independent*, 2018)”. When Theresa May visited the University of Wuhan, the outdoor air temperature was only 4°C to 5°C. According to Chinese media reports, Theresa May wore a long dark coat with red scarf and a pair of knee-high boots in such cold weather. *The People’s Daily* (2018) considered that it is standard British style and considered it to be elegant. At the same time, The Chinese netizens joked in the digital platform of Chinese newspaper that it may be too cold for her if she does not wear leggings in winter.

The People’s Daily (2018) published an article entitled “Prime Minister’s visit on the second day accompanying her husband to visit the Forbidden City”, with pictures and images showing both the Prime Minister and her husband Philip, visiting the Forbidden City. In the picture, the couple were smiling, standing in front of the Chinese Palace Museum. The main idea through this move is to show the head of state in a “real life” situation, where she is not regarded as a political figure, but a person that Chinese people can relate to (*The Global Times*, 2018). Official social accounts of heads of state are promoted and controlled by the Chinese government. It is through mainstream media that an image of political public images is created and presented in a more engaging and relatable fashion.

3.3 Authority: the professional image of Theresa May

Theresa May has been the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the Leader of the British Conservative Party from 2016 to 2019. *The People’s Daily*, (2018) reported that “ideologically, she identifies herself as a one-nation, Conservative”, showing how the Chinese media tends to put her and her party in the centre right of the political spectrum. By this logic, it is less a symbol of political principle, and more a ‘brand’, a device for identifying the party. Since Theresa May took office, the policies she has put forward have drawn attention from the Chinese news media, especially about the meaning behind her visit to China. According to *The Guardian* (2018), Theresa May set the theme of her trip to Wuhan as an educational and cultural exchange. Mrs. May has carefully cultivated an affable personality in front of the public during the visit. Her behaviour during the official visit has been described as “soft diplomacy” in Chinese news media. In particular, close contact with the Chinese population is considered to be a pro-people action. The students in the University of Wuhan described Theresa May as ‘a very nice person’. One student reported that she said “nice to meet you” to the students as soon as she arrived and shook hands with them.

Additionally, Theresa May has used public speaking opportunities to build a positive personal and political image, and that has been especially successful with the Chinese audience. Her inaugural speech was seen by many in China as unpretentious and direct, but it delivered the kind of government commitment that the public crave most, managing to get people’s trust and support at the quite complicated context of Brexit (Kynge, 2018). This is the strategy proposed by David Marshall (1997), who believed that the “irrationality” of politics should be incorporated into politics to stimulate political life. Marshall pointed out there is an “irrational” relationship between celebrities and their audiences in entertainment circles. Political parties and politicians are not just tools, they need to provide channels as well as ideas and feelings. Marshall (1997) argued that in politics, a leader must somehow reflect the feelings of the party, the people and the country. Marshall believed that the two missions came from similar resources in the field of politics and entertainment. This connection is provided by the fact that both groups of relationships (politicians, celebrities and viewers) are based on “emotional functioning”. The effect of “Emotional functioning” particularly showed in Theresa May’s speech, she saw the young Chinese students is an ‘example of confidence and desire to take their country forward’.

Theresa May's performance aimed to construct a political persona that embodied feelings of engagement with the electorate, the party, and the state (Corner and Pels, 2003), and her discourse was aimed at bonding the real-life concerns of micro electorates to their own political authority.

3.4 Authority: the professional image of Jinping Xi

The image of Jinping Xi presented by *The Independent* is that of a self-confident, calm, and self-assured leader, with a bright personality potential. Mackay (2016) argues that a public figure's identity needs to be solid and real, especially to create an engaging image towards their audience. He also highlights that "how a person is" and "how they are thought of" is different to some extent. This shows that *The Independent* stands most of the time in relative harmony with the British government, keeping an independent and objective tone. Meanwhile, Britain's reports on President Xi Jinping were related to issues regarding human rights, the Sino-British golden era relationship, and the controversial One Belt One Road plan, creating a unstable perception and image of the authority of Jinping Xi's policies (The Guardian, 2018). Since China is a one-party state and that the China Communist Party (CCP) holds sway over everything, the state media is part and parcel of the image of the president and his image is a representation of the image of the nation. This shows that the politicians and his or her marketing team needs to perceive the benefits of news propaganda, since it enables the public to see the authentic person behind the celebrity image (Turner & Marshall 2000: 47). According to Mancini and Swanson (1996), the breakdown of traditional social structures under the strains of modernisation has created the need for such a form of political communication. In such a world, the focus shifts on to individual politicians; politics is "personalised".

Expanding these discussions to political leadership highlights an authoritative voice outweighing an authentic one. This has been accompanied by a resurgence in patriotic feeling and nationalism encouraged and fostered by the state-controlled media, with a particular focus on President Xi as China's strong leader. Jinping Xi became the president of People's Republic of China in 2013 and has proven himself as a "strong and charismatic leader" (Shan, 2018). President Xi noticed that to continue China's rise on the global stage, he would need to push ahead bravely, and at the same time develop a friendly and open foreign policy, stating that "China's development will not pose a threat to any other country" (The Guardian, 2018). In doing so, President Xi initiated the program called One Belt and One Road Initiative, hoping to get support from the international powers around the world. The Independent suggested that "the country has become more assertive on the global stage" (The Independent, January 31st, 2018). However, The Guardian (2018) considered, the action of President Xi as being motivated to show he is a powerful leader and looking for options to expand his country abroad. Political public personas in news media straddle the line between the authority of public figures and an authentic portrayal for the public. The relationship between political leaders and audiences, arguing that threads of authenticity and authority weave together, but an authoritative voice is paramount in influencing public choice. Goffman (1956) argued that no public figure is ever really authentic in the public eye, this is governed by political rules.

3.5 Assertiveness and authoritarianism of Jinping Xi

As the Independent (2018) suggested, Jinping Xi has been front and centre of China's push to cement its position as an international superpower. In this case, the business of political communication is about turning politicians into celebrities and represents the sentiments. Many Western mainstream media platforms argue that the policies regarding human rights in China are still not regarded on the same level as other nations, which is symptomatic of the high pressure from the outside on internal Chinese affairs (The Guardian, 2018). However, President Xi Jinping insisted that his country is heading towards the future on its own path and recommended that other countries give credence to "Chinese wisdom" and follow "a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind" (The Global Times, 2018). Such arguments bring to mind the disagreement between journalists and politicians. Audiences find that they get perspective on the spin and the staged aspects of news media. As explained by the indexing model of the news, journalists often have trouble introducing evidence independently unless other officials contest the spurious claims (Lilleker, 2006). The missing reality elements make it possible for political events to point out politicians offer fake news instead of serious news. This confusion of power and credibility can lead some politicians to take considerable liberties with the truth in pursuit of political vision. This speech has been questioned by other global politicians as noted by The Guardian (2018) which argued that it has not been since Chairman Mao that a Chinese leader so directly suggested that others should emulate his country's model. Although politics still attracts many people of goodwill, many come blinded by strong convictions that block out the reality of other views (Goffman, 1959).

3.6 Comparison of Chinese and British news media on politicians

A search of both the Chinese and British databases of “Theresa May” and “Jinping Xi” gives results that include “the President, Prime Minister and Philip took tea this morning together”, “Xi homes meets with UK Prime Minister Theresa May”, “Theresa May to give China's President Xi Jinping Blue Planet 2 box set as a present.” The key words involve “One Belt One Road”, “human rights” and “new golden era”. The Chinese and British news media show the same information regarding topic of “taking tea together”. The report references Lapsang Souchong, a Chinese famous tea from Shanxi province. The Global Times (2018) added that Philip May quipped, “oh, we drink it in the UK too!” The disclosure of these details has been a hot topic for media coverage and attention, it is especially rare for the political leaders of the two countries to appear at the same time in informal situations and be recorded in photographs. As the news media explore the personal life of politicians during direct access, has gained a greater understanding of it is getting into the “real” life of a public figure. When Jinping Xi and Theresa May were drinking tea, they discussed the “elevated relationship” between China and the UK which will grow in future, and President Xi even quoted Shakespeare saying, “What's past is prologue”. The People's Daily (2018) quoted this sentence as a hint of good relations between China and the UK. Chomsky & Barsamian (2015: 84) argue that stances are “clearly hooked into wider social discourses and ideologies, or are contextualized in important ways by them”. The interactivity of Theresa May and Jinping Xi was used to demonstrate identification by news media rather than to engage in real dialogue and so the authority of the political leaders' voice dominated.

At the same time, the Chinese and British news media have different ways of constructing the images of their political statesperson's personas. In The People's Daily for instance, President Xi Jinping is perceived as a “more accessible” and “kind” leader, and a “popular” President. At the same time, he has his own personal traits, being also a “scholar”, a “farmer”, and a “good husband and father” (The People's Daily, 2018). The state-controlled media have tried to break down the social and political barrier between the President and the ordinary Chinese citizen. The Independent (2018) noted that Xi Jinping often uses simple, approachable, and colloquial unofficial language to address the people. The Guardian (2018) indicated that this shows the leader's position towards the population he is representing and makes the President more relatable to the common citizen. Another major change in the President's public image was his approach towards dress codes, since Mr. Xi first proposed that male leaders do not need to wear ties in non-government affairs.

In contrast, The Independent and The Guardian, two of the most influential newspapers in the UK, tend to create a more diversified and richer image of the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The flow of information is unimpeded in news platforms outside China, resulting in more and broader sets of information on President Xi, communicated, interpreted, and analysed within the mechanisms of a free press (Lippmann & Rossiter 1982: 23). The reports in British news coverage show an image of Jinping Xi as a leader full of “confidence and power” producing a more in-depth and politically engaged reflection in contrast to the Chinese coverage.

Similarly, differences in reacting and reflecting on political news and information broadcast are present in the public image of Theresa May. By searching a British database in Google, the most popular keywords related to the Prime Minister are “crisis”, “pressure”, and “promise”. Theresa May's image is closely related to her previous role as the leader of the UK Conservative Party and she has had to adapt to both a new role as the Prime Minister, and a new public image as the representative of the whole of the UK, following the UK elections of 2016. British news media platforms tend to focus on how Theresa May works towards her promises and how she will steer Britain through what are predicted to be difficult and uncertain economic and political times.

3.7 Celebrification: politicians as celebrities

A search of both the Chinese and British databases of “Theresa May” and “Jinping Xi”, shows results such as “the President, Prime Minister and Philip took tea this morning together”; “Xi homes meets with UK Prime Minister Theresa May” and “Theresa May to give China's President Xi Jinping Blue Planet 2 box set as a present.” The key words include “One Belt One Road”, “human rights” and “new golden era”. The Chinese and British news media show the same information regarding the topic of “taking tea together”. Theresa May and her husband Philip May chatted over tea with Chinese President Jinping Xi and his wife Liyuan Peng. The reports reference ‘Lapsang Souchong’, a famous Chinese tea from Shanxi province, which was drunk during the meeting. The Global Times added that, Philip May quipped, “oh, we drink it in the UK too!” The disclosure of these details has been a recent topic for media coverage and attention, especially as it is rare for the political leaders of the two countries to appear at the same time in informal situations and be recorded in photographs. The audiences, in following the established constructs during this direct access, have gained a greater understanding of the individuals through this glimpse into the “real” life of public figures. When Jinping Xi and Theresa May were drinking tea, they discussed the “elevated relationship” between China and the UK which

was expected to grow in future, and President Xi even quoted Shakespeare saying, "What's past is prologue". The People's Daily (2018) reported this quote as a hint that good relations between China and the UK were being prophesied to follow. Chomsky & Barsamian (2015: 84) argue that stances are clearly hooked into wider social discourses and ideologies, or are contextualized in important ways by them.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, based on the discussion, the findings of the research are: (i) Chinese newspapers mainly adopted a neutral and positive reporting tone in their reports on Theresa May's official visit. In contrast, The Independent (2018) interpreted the stories in multiple ways, producing articles more prolifically than the Chinese news media. In terms of layout, the Chinese media placed all their news on the front-page, and in doing so, highlighted the position of political leaders straight away, offering an initial impartial view of the report. Meanwhile, British news coverage involves a great deal of personal opinions of both journalists and diplomatic professionals, and those comments were used as the main headline for the newspapers, making the writer's view the main idea that the reader would first encounter. This shows that both media structures have different agendas and interests, and more importantly, are managed in distinct ways, due to their political environments. (ii) The representation of Theresa May's official visit to China was different in the two respective countries' news media. The Chinese news media showed both Theresa May's professional identity as a British Prime Minister and her personal life as a political celebrity. From this perspective, her image is clear and comprehensive. The Global Times (2018) noted that this was her first visit to China since she took office in 2016, which attracted high attention from the Chinese news media. At the same time, Jinping Xi took office as Chinese president in 2013 and since then, his image has been shaped by Western news media. Therefore, in the context of Theresa May's official visit to China, there was less focus on the personal image of Xi, and more reports focused on his governing philosophy and his global policy. The reports have always been a highly constructed performance, however. Journalists have taken a role of arbitration, checking the authenticity and authority of the political leaders (Goffman). Street (2004) argues that political celebrity sets the rules of engagement for the news media. The fact is that political actors create public relationship people to suit their political ends. The persona of a politician is imbued with politics and attempts to convey "objective" images. The official goal is to gain support or influence vote outcomes and is devoted to the construction of the image of the public figure especially political figures.

In particular, China and UK had different expectations on the official meeting between Jinping Xi and Theresa May. As a consequence, the news coverages of the event are quite different between the two countries. In addition, these two countries have a different cultural and political background, so that the image of the head of State is shaped in different ways by the national media. This is the basic reason that explains the perception of the image of politicians in front of the public. However, the image of political celebrities should not be based only on positive or bad negative, but a diversified image should also be built in different contexts, especially the promotion of digital news platforms makes the news coverage can be quickly spread internationally. Therefore, the dynamics of a political celebrity does not only represent the image of a political leader but also the image of a country.

Because of the influence of 'celebrification' on news coverage, Theresa May's daily choice of clothing and itinerary (both of which are non-political factors) were part of the focus of Chinese's reports, which weakens the reporting framework of the official visit. This is because in China there has never been a female leader active in the political arena, and because of the novelty, it is perhaps understandable that Theresa May's portrayal is more positive than that in the UK media. However, Theresa May's image in the British news media does not appear to have been maintained, the appeal of her elaborate "political supermodel" public image has weakened, and her professionalism has been questioned. On the contrary, in Jinping Xi's five years in office, his global media image seems to be stable. He has been supported by the Chinese people since he took office in 2016. Even in the British media, it is difficult to find extremely negative news reports. British news reports have focused more on Xi's governing philosophy and ambitions on the global stage, however, this merely affirms his ability to govern in China. The portrayal of Teresa May's political celebrity image can help us to understand the portrayal of celebrity in different contexts through the window of Chinese and English media, and reveal that political celebrity is manipulated by the critical judgment of the media. A comparison between Theresa May and Xi Jinping in the context of Chinese and British news media provides insights into the pluralistic image of political leaders. In this regard, the author proved that there were some misreported facts by the British news media (which were due to a cultural background bias) and that the Chinese media exposed those inaccuracies. This gave Theresa May a chance to correct her self-image in front of the public.

In short, the process of 'image-building' of political celebrities should not always be based on a single stereotype in the national media, it should be understood in a global context and framed by differing cultural backgrounds. The image of Jinping Xi in Chinese media is over-positive, which gives rise to doubts over his

authenticity as a leader of China, thus affecting the authenticity and authority of his image. In addition, the purpose of reporting foreign affairs visits of political celebrities is to explore the possibility of cooperation or consultation between the countries. Because of the different cultural and political contexts of the two countries, reports from one countries is likely to encourage negative assumptions regarding the host countries. The attitudes towards cooperation or consultation between the two countries are clear to see from the ways China and UK shape the images of political celebrities. While news reports from the single perspective of one country can be incomplete, integrating countries' news reports in a bilateral manner can be more accurate. This is especially true when the two countries report overlapping information; this often indicates is nexus point of mutual interests or conflicts.

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