FRAMING MEDIA DISCOURSE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CHINESE WEIBO POSTS ON CHINESE TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

Yang Han

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ABSTRACT

This study considers framing differences among three types of media outlets on Weibo, China's most popular microblog. The author examines Weibo content for China's state-owned media, China's commercial media, and foreign media on the subject of two of China's ongoing territorial disputes. Using content analysis techniques, this work compares framing styles across the three types of media. Findings show significant differences among them. Specifically, Chinese state-owned media outlets, such as People's Daily and Xinhua News, are more likely to employ episodic framing, meaning their content is more event-oriented and focused on public issues. Meanwhile, foreign media such as The Wall Street Journal and Financial Times are more likely to employ thematic framing, suggesting that they pay more attention to more abstract issues and the presentation of facts in a broader context.
INTRODUCTION

Social media is playing an ever more important role in the Chinese media environment. As the world’s most populated country, China exerts influence on the media environment in addition to its influence economic, political and other fronts. Accompanying this growing influence is China’s continued transition from “rule taker to rule maker” (Kennedy, 2012), implying further exertion of influence in a variety of global contexts. All this suggests the need for a better understanding of the Chinese media environment, especially online.

Recent studies show that the phenomenon of “two opinion fields” or “dual discourse universes” has been at play in China’s media for some time. The two-opinion field theory implies the existence of separate universes among different media outlets. In the Chinese context, one discourse universe consists of official messages, particular that associated with state-owned or Chinese Communist Party-controlled mass media, while the other discourse university consists of content and commentary coming from the public via the Internet or the Short Message Service (SMS) (He, 2008).

Dual discourse universes are not only observed between mass media and the public, the Internet and SMS; they also exist in newer media such as micro-blogs (Nan, 2003). The work presented here argues that different opinion fields or discourse universes exist on Weibo, China's most widely used microblog. Specifically, this study seeks to confirm the existence of different discourse universes on Weibo by comparing the content of three different categories of media outlets that operate on
Weibo, including state-owned media, Chinese commercial media and foreign media outlets.

One of the objectives of this study is to demonstrate that different “discourse universes” display their differences in a variety of ways. Of course, the participants in each set of discussions may be different, and their agendas might also differ. However, another way to distinguish discourse universes is to research the ways in which they “tell the story;” in other words, how each topic of discussion is framed. Framing analysis is therefore central to this study.

This study focuses only on the frames used for certain topics within each of the three aforementioned discourse universes. The subjects of democracy in China and issues related to the Chinese policy environment were not selected for study, because those topics are relatively sensitive and lead to censorship and deletion by Chinese authorities, thus potentially affecting the results of work focused on those issues. (Zhu.T & Phipps. D. 2013). Therefore, the topic of China’s various border disputes was selected since online discussions on this matter are subject to less media control and fewer post deletions. For the Chinese government, these topics are “uncontroversial” (Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 1980), therefore leading to fewer high profile discussions and fewer deleted posts. China’s ongoing dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu islands is one of the subjects examined here, as is China’s continuing dispute with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal.

Believing social media can influence public opinion the Chinese government has
become a “savvy user of the Internet” (Chen, 2012). This study examines nine different media outlets’ official (verified) Weibo accounts. The Weibo accounts of three different types of media are considered here: Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media, and foreign media.

This study seeks to demonstrate the existence of dual discourse universes by comparing framing differences evident in the three different types of media outlets. Framing categories were derived from Iyengar’s *Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues* (1993) and Semetko & Valkenburg’s “Framing European politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Results presented here suggest the existence of different discourse universes among the three types of media outlets considered.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Foreign Policy

Researchers have examined how the public learns about foreign policy, that is to say, from the media (Donald & Benjamin, 1992). In past decades, TV news became a dominant factor in shaping foreign policy opinions. People largely believed “the information of the statements from commentators, the speech from nonpartisan experts and party leaders” (Donald & Benjamin, 1992). Furthermore, mass media plays a critical role alongside the public and elites “in shaping the public’s attitudes about, and influence on, foreign policy” (Baum & Potter, 2008. p39). However, by taking advantage of the new technology, and the more “abundant, diverse and partisan” broadcasters, both the focus and substance of debates on global issues has changed (Price, 2009).

At the Academic Share Research Annual Conference in 2011, Carlo Vaccari, an Italian researcher, made a presentation “Web 2.0: what are they, how to use them and why they are important.” He believed that people demanded a revolutionary media to give them a “better, diverse, comprehensive understanding of global issues.” Over the last few years, the Internet has been “raised as the largest change to give birth to social media” (Vaccari, 2013).

Social media is a broad term and every commentator has their own distinct definitions of this term (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010. p. 61). However, by using the Internet and other technologies, the core element of social media shifts from a traditional one-to-many model, like TV and radio, to the new, revolutionary
many-to-many model, such as Facebook (Morgan, 2012).

Although it is hard to define social media, recognizing social media is much easier. In the past few years, this user-generated media has been heavily involved in political affairs all over the world. Series of issues were triggered or escalated through social media such as the protests of the Iranian election in 2009 (Hollyfield, 2009). Though researchers still dispute whether it was appropriate to say “freedom of the Internet” or “freedom via the Internet” during Arab Spring (Fontaine & Rogers, 2011), which was a wave of demonstrations and protests in 2010 in the Middle East, a safer conclusion can be made that social media plays an important role in facilitating this revolution (Huang, 2010).

This study discusses how Chinese State-Owned media, as part of the Chinese government, puts an emphasis and focus on social media when making connection with the public, and also compares it to other media outlets such as Chinese Commercial Media and Foreign Media. However, from the perspective of the policy maker, China is not the only country in which the government has realized the importance of foreign media and used it to connect the public as well as to shape policy. Other governments already realized the power of social media and began to adopt it as one of their foreign policy strategies.

For example, researchers interpreted the use of social media in terms of foreign policy as “Diplomacy 2.0.” From the U.S perspective, in order to help the government “to win hearts and minds abroad,” the new social media is “cutting edge, nimble, constantly changing, and interactive on a personal level” (Dale, 2009). The
government has the potential to “establish a National Communications Strategy and a Corporation for Foreign Opinion Analysis to monitor the effectiveness — and security risks — of launching Public Diplomacy 2.0” (Dale, 2009). Furthermore, Phillips Seib also argued that social media “accelerated” diplomacy processing. New media made the policy makers “speed up” the response to the events. He referred to it as “Real-time Diplomacy,” which means it must be “developed with full recognition of such new realities” (Seib, 2013).

Although the impacts and influences may vary based on different countries, social media is generally heavily involved and has become one of the key factors during the processions of foreign policy. As the topic of this paper is China, a further discussion about Chinese media needs to be given.

**Social media in China: An Evolution of Dual Discourse Universes**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Discourse Universe” means “an inclusive class of entities that is tacitly implied or explicitly delineated as the subject of a statement, discourse, or theory” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). As a sociological term, “discourse universe” was first used by the English philosopher George Boole in his book *The Law of Thought* (Boole, 1854, p229), and refers to “the collection of objects being discussed in a specific discourse.” Other literature examples offer a similar definition: “field,” proposed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, he defines “field” as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions,” which refers to the similar pattern with the
discourse universe (Bourdieu, 1992. p95).

In mass media research, although few researchers proposed the term “discourse universes” in their papers, series of publications have been made relating to the comparison between two “discourses,” such as deliberative political talk versus opinion expression in a hostile public opinion climate (Scheufele, 1999); public (e.g., opinion expression) versus non-public participation (e.g., voting) (Scheufele & Eveland, 2000), and electoral political participation (e.g., voting) versus governmental political participation (e.g., contacting representatives and the media) (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

The definition “discourse universe” was first used by researcher He Zhou, who has observed the “Dualistic Discourse System” in China for many years. Zhou mentioned “Discourse Universe” in the book Political Communication in Asia when discussing China’s media system. He proposed that the Dual Discourse Universe is an “official universe supported by the Party/state-controlled media, and the private universe is carried by communication channels such as SMS (Short Message Service), the Internet or word of mouth” (He, 2009).

Zhou’s paper “SMS in China: A Major Carrier of the Nonofficial Discourse Universe” used SMS as an example to illustrate the difference between the Chinese official universe and the private universe, arguing that the SMS system helped to expand “the nonofficial discourse universe, facilitated political involvement,” and gave users “not only semiotic power but also a true sense of being equal participants in political discourse” (He, 2008. p44).
Do the discourse universes affect each other? Although theoretically Bourdieu believed that there is no “trans-historical law” of the relations between fields, and “the question of the interrelation of different fields is an extremely complex one,” he still said it “must investigate each historical case separately” (Bourdieu, 1992, p106). The comparison of the discourse universes plays a key role in relation to this study, as the main objective is to evaluate the relationship between the media outlets’ discourses, and to examine the two existing in the cases studied here.

Since the Government of the People’s Republic of China was founded, media was always controlled by the Communist Party, which was known as the “mouthpiece” (CMP, 2007). According to a report from Freedom House, a U.S. non-government organization that conducts research and advocate on “democracy, political freedom, and human rights,” China’s media is described as “owned, though not directly operated by, the Chinese Communist Party or state” (Freedom House, 2013). Traditional Chinese media performs the functions to both “maintain the correct direction of public opinion” and “supervise the public opinion” (Sun, 2010). All content of Chinese newspapers, broadcasts and television needed to be censored by the government. This trend continued until late 1970s when China’s “Opening-up Reform” policy began, which was a series of national economic reforms. During this reform, Metro-newspapers, broadcast and local television stations lost or partially started to lose financial support from the central government. However, almost all the media was still mandatorily censored by the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People’s Republic of China (Chu, 2010).
Through years of the government’s efforts, the reputation of the Chinese state-owned media has been improved in the eyes of the Chinese public (Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1994). Research shows that in the 1990s, traditional news media such as CCTV News (China Central Television National) and People’s Daily formed people’s “baseline knowledge needed, the forced consensus and the basis of Communist rule and legitimacy in China” (Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1994).

More dramatic changes happened in 2003, when the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) incident had an impact on the Chinese media as the Chinese government used it to hide the real extent of casualties of this severe infectious disease. Series of “Open information systems” and “Emergency Response Law” were established, which involved more on-time updating of responsibilities for the media and the government (Chen, 2008).

According to the CIA World Factbook, today’s Chinese media is described as “more autonomous and diverse, within limits” than it previously was (CIA, 2013). As the “Opening-up” policy proceeded, Western democratic news values have impacted the Chinese media system as well: more liberal newspapers and magazine are being founded. More close and various contact with the West “appears to be increasingly influencing educated urban opinion in China on concepts such as a free press, freedom of speech, and political pluralism” (CIA, 2013). However, party-controlled media is not the only voice in China; Metropolis newspapers and magazines have more free spaces, although as Redl and Simons said, “one channel, two systems” (Red. & Simons, 2002), which means the commercialized media industry is still under the
control of the state council. In regards to Chinese media tradition, this was nevertheless a huge progress.

In addition, by taking advantage of new technology, the public has more room to speak out than ever before. The Internet has created a representative public sphere, from chat rooms, BBS, and blogs to Micro-blog, the media platform has evolved to fit political participation (Han, 2010).

According to a 2012 CNNIC report (China Internet Network Information Center), China has 564 million Netizens (Net Citizens) and surpasses the U.S. in becoming the biggest Internet market in the world. Over 309 million people have Micro-blog accounts (this is the number of combined Microblog users from different developers such as SINA, Tencent and other commercial corporations), meaning more than 60% of Chinese “Netizens” have access to Micro-blogs (CNNIC, 2012).

Although the world’s largest social media, Facebook, is still blocked in China as well as in three other countries (North Korea, Cuba, and Iran) (Li, 2013), this new revolution in Chinese social media cannot be stopped. The popularity of Weibo, introduced by the Chinese commercial corporation SINA, has replaced Facebook, becoming the largest widely used social media in China. Since Weibo was introduced, it has been an effective tool for ordinary people to publish their concerns, politically and democratically (Han, 2010).

In a case study of social media in China, Tang and Sapson said that “via the expression of public opinion on the internet ordinary people are able to collectively shape and even direct conventional news agendas. In China, where the role of the
media is to ‘direct’ public opinion rather than to reflect it, this suggests that the interaction between the two forms of communication serves to challenge state control over the traditional media” (Tang & Sapson, 2012, p. 457).

In another comparison study of Chinese online public discourse and traditional media, researchers examined “To what extent do frame-building and frame-setting processes manifest themselves in the interplay between online public discourses and traditional (offline) media discourses” (Zhou & Moy, 2007, p.79). By employing a content analysis of 206 online posts and 114 news reports regarding a sociopolitical incident in China, researchers tested the associations and causal relationships between the salience of opinion frames and media frames. The results show that online public opinion plays an important role in transforming the original local event into a nationally prominent issue. It also exerts a significant frame-building impact on subsequent media reports, but only in the early stage of coverage.

In fact, even the Chinese officials who are responsible for the party’s propaganda have realized and publicly acknowledged the existence of the two different opinion universes. As early as 2004, Nan Zhenzhong, the chief editor of Xinhua News Agency, as one of the officials in the official Chinese press agency, had issued an article “To closely tie the relationship between news reporting and the people” (Nan, 2004. p.1). In the article he stressed the hazard of losing the connection with the public with official media. In the seminar that followed the article’s release, he said that there are “Two universes of public opinion: the media universe and the oral universe” and that the media will risk losing their influence on public opinion if the two universes do not
correspond to each other (Nan, 2004. p1). To the government/policy makers, Weibo is functioning as an alternative to the state-owned media universe. However, this study argues that the Chinese official media maintains its state-owned message in the online universe but other media outlets provide an alternative one.

According to the People’s Online Public Monitoring Office (人民网舆情监测室), an increasing number of Government Weibo accounts have been launched to make their voices heard. “The Chinese government and all its myriad bodies and institutions are likewise getting in on the act, not just by means of regulation or censorship but by active participation” (Wyk, Danwei, 2012. p.1). This means that the Chinese government and the Chinese state-owned media were actively involved in the new media, contributing to the argument that the study of Chinese media outlets on Weibo as well as the comparison with other media’s Weibo outlets is meaningful and useful.

State owned media constituted the first group to join in this evolving social media trend. According to the SINA Weibo statistic report, People’s daily, Global Times and other Party controlled media together have more than 150 million followers on Weibo, embodying one of the largest Micro-blogs developed by SINA. Meanwhile, series of Chinese commercial media also occupy the high ranks on Micro-blogs such as Caijing (No.1 on Media rank on Weibo), Southern Weekly (20 million followers) and Phoenix TV (15 million followers), though some of them (Caijing and Southern Weekly) are still part of the Party-controlled media (Weibo, 2012).

Meanwhile, foreign media used Weibo as their platform as well to increase their
influence. Although the Chinese government Internet censors have intervened to block access to Western media outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, their Weibo feeds are still available to China's Internet users.

Since this paper focuses the discourse differences on Chinese territorial disputes, therefore, it is also necessary to provide an introduction to the two territorial disputes (Diaoyu Island and Scarborough Shoal) at the center of this study of media outlets on Weibo.

**The Diaoyu Island Dispute and the Scarborough Shoal Dispute**

**The Diaoyu Island Dispute**

The Diaoyu Islands, also known as the Senkaku Islands, are a group of islands consisting of five uninhabited islets and three barren rocks. This island group is located approximately 120 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, 200 nautical miles east of the Chinese mainland and 200 nautical miles southwest of the Japanese island of Okinawa (UC Berkley, 2010).

The Diaoyu Island dispute between China and Japan has lasted for more than a century. Each country claims that the island was its territory and has attempted to establish sovereignty over the other side. Furthermore, each country tries to establish a claim or title over a disputed piece of territory by referring to “historical reference (discovery), continuous occupation and effective authority” (Chung, 2004).

The islands have “strategic importance in terms of security and economy” (Han, 2010) because they are located roughly midway between the island of Taiwan and the
Japanese Ryukyu Islands, which is important for both Chinese and Japanese national defense.

Records of these islands date back to as early as the 15th century. Series of Chinese literature such as *Voyage with a Tail Wind* and the Record of the Imperial Envoy's Visit to Ryūkyū referred the island group (Louis, 2003). Adopted by the Chinese Ming Dynasty, the island group was also marked on the map of the South China Sea Territory (Liang, 2000).

In 1895, the Japanese government signed the Treaty of Maguan with the Chinese Qing Dynasty, ending the first Sino-Japanese War. It was stated that “China cedes to Japan in perpetuity and full sovereignty of the Penghu group, Taiwan and the eastern portion of the bay of Liaodong Peninsula together with all fortifications, arsenals and public property. (Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895)” On January 14th, 1895, the Japanese central government formally annexed the islands, naming them Senkaku, although the Chinese considered this as “stealing” the islands. The Japanese then began enterprises on the islands, but business failed in 1940 and the islands have remained deserted ever since (Maya, 2010).

In 1943, the Treaty of Maguan was abolished due to the signing of the Cairo Declaration, which stated that “Japan shall be stripped of all islands she has seized or occupied in the Pacific since the beginning of World War I in 1914...All the territories Japan has taken from China such as Manchuria (Dongbei), Formosa (Taiwan), and the Pescadores (Penghu), shall be restored to the Republic of China” (Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895).
In 1945, the islands fell under the control of the United States government after the surrender of Japan in World War II. In 1969, the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) “identified potential oil and gas reserves in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands” (Global Security, 2010). The United States government returned the islands to Japan in 1971 due to the Okinawa Reversion Treaty between these two countries. However, both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China (otherwise known as Taiwan) announced ownership of the island in 1972 and contested the legitimacy of the treaty between the U.S. and Japan (Kyodo, 2012).

A long lasting dispute was triggered after this first incident in 1972. Tensions have since “spiked periodically among Japan, China, and Taiwan” over the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu/Diaoyutai) islands (Manyin, 2013. p1). In April 2012, the Japanese government proposed an agreement, stating that it was willing to purchase the disputing island group comprised of Diaoyu Island from the family that claimed to own “three of the five islands in the Senkaku chain” (Gupta, 2013. p1). The official announcement was released in July of 2012, and the government reached the agreement in September of 2012, claiming that the Senkaku islands would be purchased for the nation (Weaver, 2012).

In general, China focused more on the “evidence” in term of the Diaoyu dispute, claiming that Diaoyu has been part of Chinese territory since Ming Dynasty six-hundred years ago. However, the Japanese government attempted to build legitimacy that Japan has sovereignty of the islands under modern international law.
A previous study shows that the difference of Chinese and Japanese claims is revealed in the different periods upon which they focus: China focuses more on evidence that date back before 1900, whereas Japan uses evidence after 1900 to prove sovereignty (Liao, 2013), as 1900 was around the last year of the first Sino-Japan War.

In short, this dispute represents a long-lasting challenge between the Chinese government and Japanese government. However, no one can break the political deadlock in the current situation and the dispute remains a sensitive border issue. For this paper, this political dilemma offers an ideal research case concerning framing comparison in regards to a Chinese territorial dispute.

**The Scarborough Shoal Dispute**

Scarborough Shoal is a shoal located between the Macclesfield Bank and Luzon Island of the Philippines in the South China Sea. It is more correctly described as “a group of rocks or very small islands plus reefs in an atoll shape, rather than as a shoal” (Chen, 2012).

Scarborough Shoal is a disputed territory between the People’s Republic of China and the Philippines. Both countries claim sovereignty of the island. The tension escalated when the Scarborough Shoal standoff took place in April of 2012 (Inquirer, 2012).

On April 10, 2012, a Philippine Navy surveillance plane spotted eight Chinese fishing vessels around Scarborough Shoal. Then the Philippine plane tried to arrest the Chinese fishermen because after an inspection they found “illegally collected
corals, giant clams and sharks” inside the first vessel boarded by the team (Santos, 2012. p1.). This incident was caught by Chinese surveillance ships, which blocked the attempted arrest of the Chinese fishermen. Since then, tensions have continued between these two countries. Boycotts of the Chinese goods and series of protests of China took place in the Philippines. In response, China suspended the importation of fruit from the Philippines, tours to the Philippines were restricted, and public protests occurred in Beijing and Hong Kong for the arrest of the Chinese fishermen. In May of 2012, China imposed a fishing ban in the South China Sea for its fishermen, where the Scarborough Shoal lies, lasting from May 16th to August 1st (Inquirer, 2012).

Although not high profile like Diaoyu Island case, the dispute between China and Philippine was one of the famous Chinese territorial disputes in recently years. In this study, it is a good example along with the Diaoyu Island case to show the framing differences between different media outlets.

**Framing theory**

This study uses framing differences as independent variables to make the argument that dual discourse universes exist and can be observed. Therefore, a summary of framing studies is pertinent to the development of this study.

For the past few decades, framing study has been one of the more popular research topics, not only in communication research, but also other social sciences such as politics, history and economics. The concept of “framing” was first introduced by social scientists Goffman and Bateson in 1974, meaning individuals or groups “to
locate, perceive, identify, and label events and occurrences, thus rendering meaning, organizing experiences, and guiding actions” (Goffman & Bateson, 1974. p. 21). Since then, this concept was widely used among different fields of scholars.

Schramm claimed that news is “an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework” of an event or issue (Schramm, 1949 p. 288), thus, news can be viewed from different perspectives using different “framings.” This is “the major premise that framing theory is based on” (Chong & Druckman, 2007 p. 103). Although when applied to communication research there is no short definition of what a “news frame” is, the many that have been employed “point up similar characteristics” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000 p. 94). Semetko and Valkenburg believe that framing can be defined as the way in which news media coverage shapes mass opinion. It refers to “behavioral or attitudinal outcomes that are due to how a given piece of information is being framed in public discourse” (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011 p. 4).

As Tewksbury and Scheufele concluded, framing studies can be broadly approached in two groups: studies of framing as a dependent variable, and studies of framing as an independent variable. The former usually deal with “framing building” (how frames create societal discourse about an issue and how different frames are adopted by journalists), while the latter focuses on “framing setting” (how media framing influences an audience) (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009 p. 3).

Although recent framing studies have identified the significance of certain types of news framings within the public’s opinion and interpretation of issues or events (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), there is not yet a “standard set” with which to
measure the news frames and their effects. However, Semetko and Valkenburg suggested two possible approaches to the content analyzing of frames in the news: inductive and deductive. Since the inductive approach involves an “open view to reveal the array of possible frames,” this approach can “detect many possible ways in which an issue can be framed,” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). However, this method is very labor intensive, it is often based on small samples and is hard to replicate. The deductive approach, on the other hand, involves “predefining certain frames as content analytics variables to verify the extent to which these frames occurred in the news” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 94). This approach utilizes large samples but can be replicated easily, because clear types of frames are made before coding. More important, using the coding result, this approach can easily detect “differences in framing between media and within media” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000. p. 96), and this is also the goal of this paper. That is to say, this study seeks to compare the differences of discourse universes by comparing the differences of the framing they use.

Regarding the type of frames, earlier studies have made categories of frames in mass communication research. Russell Neuman classified types of framing as “Economic,” “Conflict,” “Powerlessness,” “Human Impact,” and “Morality” in his book *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (1992) written with Marion Just and Ann Crigler. Another classification was developed by Semetko and Valkenburg in 2000, in a content analysis study about framing in the European Political Meeting in 1997. These kinds of frames were identified as
“attribution of responsibility,” “human interest,” “conflict,” “morality,” and “economic consequences.”

Before conducting content coding, more context or explanation of these five framings might need here. The responsibility frame “presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group”; the conflict frame “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest”; the human interest frame “brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem”; the economic consequences frame “reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual group, institution, region, or country”; and the morality frame “puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000 p. 94).

Prior to the results of Semetko and Valkenburg, Shanto Iyengar (1991) found that framing can be viewed as either episodic or thematic in terms of attribution of responsibility. The episodic news frame “depicts issues in terms of specific instances” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 8), for example, coverage of a terrorist bombing, a homeless person, or a case of illegal drug usage. Episodic reports are “essentially illustrations of issues” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 10); the thematic frame, by contrast, “depicts political issues more broadly and abstractly by placing them in some appropriate context---historical, geographical, or otherwise” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 12). He made an example that “a thematic report on poverty might present information about recent trends in the rate of
poverty.” The thematic frame, however, may “take the form of a backgrounder report featuring a series of people talking” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 62). The clear recognition of the difference between “Episodic” and “Thematic” framing can be extremely useful because these are two of the vital factors that lead to the difference between discourse universes, thus justifying the process employed in this study.

**Framing Comparison**

Researchers have often noticed that framing varies by different media. Since user-generated content has become increasingly popular on the Internet (Agichtein et al., 2008), these differences have been observed between traditional media and digital media, or even within certain types of media (different types of framing within traditional media or online media).

A comparison study was conducted by Han (2011), who found framing differences in covering the 2011 Diaoyu dispute in China between Renren, a Chinese social network, and People’s Daily, a traditional newspaper. These two platforms apply different framings in terms of “Attribution of responsibility,” “Conflict,” and “Human Interest.” Moreover, Renren uses more “episodic” framing than People’s Daily (Han, 2011).

Similar findings were found in another country’s study by Song (2007) when content analysis of the media coverage of a hit-and-run by the U.S. military in South Korea in 2002 showed clear differences between online news services and the mainstream conservative newspapers’ coverage in terms of the number of articles, the
composition of news sources, and the frames used to make sense of the issues. The online media played an important role in “escalating reactions to the deaths of the two schoolgirls into a broader anti-U.S. sentiment” (Song, 2007 p. 72).

Additionally, framing varies even within the same type of media. For example, a content analysis study of the U.S. media coverage about the Jena Six controversy conducted by Holt and Major (2010) shows that local newspapers more frequently put a “human face on the issue,” whereas national newspapers more frequently framed it as “morally wrong” (Holt & Major, 2010 p. 583).

This paper, however, focuses on the framing differences of the three different types of media outlets on Weibo (all in Chinese language) about China’s border disputes. It must be made clear that the formal reporting from the media is not the target of this study. Instead, the official media’s Weibo posts will be examined. Nine representative media were picked to examine their Weibo account content, since they come from different backgrounds (Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media and foreign media). The following research questions asked are:

**Research Question 1: How does the use of frames vary among different media outlets?**

As previously discussed, if different discourse universes exist, and framing caused by different discourses also exists, then what kinds of framing are those discourses creating? What are the differences between these discourses? Who constructs the discourses? This paper seeks to determine whether the three categories of media have the same framing, and what they are. Furthermore, the study seeks to
determine whether or not different framing exists between these three, and if so, what framing makes them different.

Research Question 2: Do the three categories of media outlets appear to comprise three separate/distinct discourse universes?

In other words, the first research question considers each of the nine media outlets as independent units, while the second question considers differences with three groups of media outlets, which means Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media and foreign media.
METHOD

As China’s most popular social media outlet, Weibo has become a prominent tool to connect people and to transmit messages. It was launched by the SINA Corporation on August 14th, 2009. By December 2012, there were 500 million Weibo users (Wee, 2013), although many of the users are fake or unverified, it still means that most Chinese Internet users (out of 538 million) were involved in this hybrid of Twitter and Facebook (Rapoza, 2011).

Meanwhile, Weibo is not only used by the Chinese public for their communication in daily life, but also by the media as another platform to distribute their content (Chen, 2012). News organizations seized this chance and launched their Weibo accounts, including Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media, and foreign media. In this study, two collections of Weibo posts related to cases of Chinese diplomacy are selected and examined: The Diaoyu (Senkaku in Japanese) island dispute and the Scarborough Shoal dispute.

Three categories of media outlets were examined in this paper: Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media and foreign media. Although the differences between these three groups have been discussed above, and the standard for categorizing media outlets can be varied, the reason these three groups were chosen need to be stated: these three groups of media outlets have different backgrounds and origins (State-owned media outlets, commercial media outlets and foreign media outlets). To study these authentic media outlets, a better understanding of the way in which they narrate or “frame,” identify and categorize them can be
achieved through framing comparison, thus a clear relationship can be made among these media outlets. For targeting and sampling, the Weibo search engine was used to collect the outlets’ posts throughout the study.

In line with the goal of comparing the different framing between Chinese media and foreign media, as well as the opinion field (discourse universe) interaction, nine representative media outlets were selected for this study: People’s Daily (人民日报), Global Times (环球时报), Xinhua View (新华视点) as the representatives of the Chinese state-owned media group; Southern Weekly (南方周末) Phoenix TV (凤凰卫视) and Caijing (财经网) representing the Chinese commercial media group; and Wall Street Journal China (华尔街日报中文网), a U.S. commercial newspaper organization; Financial Times (FT 中文网), a U.K. newspaper organization and AsahiChinese (朝日新闻中文网), a Japanese newspaper organization were selected as the foreign media examples.

All of the media outlets were verified and recognized as genuine news organizations on the Weibo Verified list, which means all of the media outlets were authentic and are directly controlled by the respective media. They all rank within the top five most-welcomed positions in regards to their different categories through Weibo’s media ranking: “Central media,” “Commercial media,” and “other” (Weibo, 2012).

When processing the contents, results varied based on different cases. The Diaoyu Island dispute impacted a heated discussion on Weibo, especially after the Japanese government announced its “nationalize Senkaku Island” proposal in early
September 2012, when a rapid increase was observed in both worldwide news coverage and Chinese Weibo.

When searching “Diaoyu” or “Senkaku” in Google Trends, a Google statistic tool that displays news coverage trends, the results show that coverage of both events increased rapidly from July 2012 to October 2012 (see Figure 1).

Moreover, there is a statistical tool in SINA Weibo called “Wei-Data” (微指数), which shows trends that correlate similarly with the results of Google Trends, despite the fact that the data can be only tracked back to half year (see Figure 2).

To limit the coding content, this paper used September 7, 2012 to October 7, 2012 as the time period to research trends in coverage of the Diaoyu Island dispute. Weibo’s search engine was used as the main tool to conduct the research. The results are categorized as “Date,” “Source of the posts,” and “Topic.”

The collected posts show that the Scarborough Shoal dispute has far fewer posts when compared to the Diaoyu Island case. Nevertheless, all of the Weibo posts were coded as in the Diaoyu Island case. The Scarborough Shoal affair escalated in April 2012 when the Philippine patrol ship attempted to arrest the Chinese fisherman and induced a series of political and media influence. Therefore, the time framing for the Scarborough Shoal case was focused on the time period from April 1st, 2012 to the start of this study (March 17th, 2013).

After conducting the search, 819 Weibo posts were selected in the “Diaoyu Island” case, and 307 were selected in the “Scarborough Shoal” case. The sample of search engine results is displayed below:
Inter-coder Reliability

Inter-coder reliability refers to the levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument. The two independent coders were both journalism graduate students from China since the coding content is mostly in Chinese. After two training sessions, inter-coder reliability calculated for 10% of the dataset was computed. The Cohen’s Kappa coefficient value (0–1) was used as one of the common statistical measures of inter-rater agreement for quantitative items. The results show that all of the demographic information (mean date, source of the posts, number of share and comments) resulted in 1/1 and all of the other content coding result was above 80%.
RESULTS

Episodic vs. Thematic

Research Question 1 examined whether framing various among the nine media outlets. In terms of episodic/thematic framing models in the Diaoyu Island dispute case, the results show a significant difference between certain media. Table 3 shows that a high percentage of episodic framing can be estimated within media outlets such as People’s Daily, Global Times and Xinhua News, and a relatively lower percentage of thematic framing can be found in these media outlets. However, it also shows a higher percentage of thematic framing in media such as Wall Street Journal Chinese, Financial Times Chinese and Asahi Chinese on Weibo, yet a lower percentage of episodic framing in those media outlets.

Although the critique of the “episodic” and “thematic” framing has been stated, specific example need to be provided here for illumination. For instance, the posts of “China sent surveillance ship to protect Chinese fishing boat,” “the speaker of The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently criticized Japanese government in terms of Diaoyu island issue,” “China added Diaoyu island in national weather forecast” and “China sent its surveillance ship around Diaoyu island to show sovereignty” can be seen as “episodic” framing. Accordingly, People’s Daily, Global Times and Xinhua News have more percentages of this type of posts.

The “thematic” framing, on the other hand, has broader and abstractly context in the Weibo posts. Typical example can be seen in Southern Weekly, Wall Street Journal Chinese and Financial Times Chinese, such as “What Diaoyu island means to

For the Chinese State-owned media outlets and foreign media outlets, numbers show that 79.34% of the Weibo posts of *People’s daily* are framed as “episodic,” whereas the percentage in *Wall Street Journal Chinese* of the “episodic” framing is only 35.71%. A similar pattern was observed between *Global Times* and *Financial Times Chinese*: 72.2% of the posts of *Global Times* are “episodic,” while only 27.7% of the posts from *Financial Times Chinese* code as “episodic.”

Furthermore, in the Chinese commercial media outlets, various framing differences were found. *Southern Weekly* had 44.4% episodic framing. However, high percentages of episodic framing were observed in *Phoenix TV* and *Caijing*, which had 71.05% and 82.26% of episodic framing posts, respectively.

Moreover, a high percentage of “episodic” framing was found in posts about the Scarborough Shoal dispute case as well with *People’s Daily*, *Global Times* and *Xinhua News* on Weibo. The percentages of episodic framing posts in these outlets were 96.43%, 91.23%, and 89.36%, respectively. On the other hand, lower percentages (50%-60%) were observed with posts from *Southern Weekly*, *Phoenix TV* and *Caijing*. Due to insufficient samples of posts about the Scarborough Shoal dispute, only *Wall Street Journal Chinese* and *Financial Times Chinese* was counted in the
foreign media group (the *Financial Times* had only one post), and the *Wall Street Journal*’s percentage of episodic framing posts was 52.38%.

Contrastingly, analysis shows that the situation was relatively opposite in terms of thematic framing, regardless of whether the posts were concerned with the Diaoyu Islands or Scarborough Shoal disputes. A low percentage of thematic framing was observed with media such as *People’s Daily*, *Global Times* and *Xinhua News* on Weibo accounts. In the Diaoyu dispute case, the percentage of thematic posts from *People’s Daily* was only 20.19%, and the percentage of thematic posts on the Scarborough Shoal dispute was as low as 5.36%. Both *Global Times* and *Xinhua News* showed similar results in terms of these two cases (in the *Global Times*, 27.8% of posts on the Diaoyu dispute and 12.28% on the Scarborough Shoal dispute were thematic, and for Xinhua News, 26.6% on the Diaoyu dispute and 10.64% on Scarborough Shoal dispute where thematic).

Respectively, series of media showed high percentages of thematic framing, in posts about the Diaoyu case, *Financial Times Chinese* had 72.22% of “thematic” framing posts, with *Wall Street Journal* having 64.29% and *Asahi Chinese* having 62.50%; *Southern Weekly* also showed 66.70% of posts that had “thematic” framing. In contrast some media outlets such as *People’s Daily*, *Global Times*, and *Xinhua News* had remarkably low percentages of “thematic” framing examples: 20.19%, 27.80 and 26.60% of posts, respectively. In the Scarborough Shoal case, *Southern Weekly* had 71.43% of “thematic” framing posts, while Phoenix TV and Cajing had 38.89% and 39.58% respectively. *Wall Street Journal Chinese* had 47.62% of
thematic posts, and all of them have higher percentages of thematic posts than *People’s Daily, Global Times* and *Xinhua News* (5.36%, 12.28% and 10.64%, respectively. See Table 4).

Furthermore, to measure the difference between each single media outlet, five Chi-Square tests were performed for these media in terms of episodic/thematic framing concerning posts about the Diaoyu dispute.

The Chi-square test is a statistical test which is commonly used to observe the data which is expecting to obtain a specific hypothesis. By testing the Chi-squared distribution, a Chi-square value can be measured to show the difference between two groups of data. After the Chi-square test is performed, the researcher is able to judge whether the null hypothesis can be or supported or not. In this study, the null hypothesis means there is no relationship between two given media outlets or media groups and episodic/thematic framings. Similar methods were used in a framing comparison study of Chinese traditional media and social media (Han, 2011) and a study comparing national media outlets and online media outlets in Korea (Song, 2007).

Results shown in Table 5 displayed a significant difference between *People’s Daily* and *Wall Street Journal Chinese* in terms of episodic framing ($X^2=24.5$, $p<0.001$, df=1) and thematic framing ($X^2=25.3$, $p<0.001$, df=1). However, no significant difference was observed between *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* in terms of episodic framing (see Table 6) ($X^2=2.9$, $p=0.087$, df=1) and thematic framing ($X^2=3.4$, $p=0.067$, df=1), nor between *Wall Street Journal Chinese* and *Financial
*Times Chinese* of episodic framing ($X^2=0.314$, $p=0.575$, df=1), as well as of thematic framing (see Table 7) ($X^2=0.314$, $p=0.575$, df=1).

In the Scarborough Shoal case, a significant difference was measured between *People's Daily* and *Wall Street Journal Chinese* in terms of episodic framing ($X^2=19.44$, $p<0.001$, df=1) and thematic framing (see Table 8) ($X^2=19.44$, $p<0.001$, df=1). However, no significant difference was observed between *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* in episodic framing ($X^2=1.475$, $p=0.478$, df=2), or in thematic framing ($X^2=2.653$, $p=0.265$, df=2), (see Table 9).

Research Question 2 asked whether certain types of media have the same framing setting, and therefore can form together as a “discourse universe.” Although coded as groups, the framing coding questions for each group were exactly the same as coded to single media outlets. Thus, rather than coded separately, the result of the groups were just “combined” each media outlets. For example, the group of Chinese State-owned media was the result of the combination of three media outlets, *People’s Daily*, *Global Times* and *Xinhua News*; the same methods applied to Chinese commercial media and foreign media.

Since there was a high correlation between *People’s Daily*, *Global Times*, and *Xinhua News*, and there was the same correlation between *Wall Street Journal Chinese*, *Financial Times Chinese*, and *Asahi Chinese*, similar Chi-Square tests were made to test these media as groups. In the Diaoyu dispute case, results show a significant difference between the Chinese state-owned media (*People’s Daily*, *Global Times* and *Xinhua News* as a group) and foreign media (*Wall Street Journal Chinese*, *Financial Times Chinese* and *Asahi Chinese*).
Chinese, Financial Times Chinese and Asahi Chinese as a group) in terms of episodic framing ($X^2=49.798, p<0.001, df=1$) and thematic framing ($X^2=50.425, p<0.001, df=1$) (see Table 10). Similar results were obtained when comparing the Chinese commercial media (Southern Weekly, Phoenix TV and Caijing as a group) and foreign media (Wall Street Journal Chinese, Financial Times Chinese and Asahi Chinese as a group); they also have a significant difference between episodic framing ($X^2=41.770, p<0.001, df=1$) and thematic framing ($X^2=38.940, p<0.001, df=1$), (see Table 11).

However, no significant difference was measured when comparing the Chinese state-owned media (People’s Daily, Global Times and Xinhua News as a group) and the Chinese commercial media (Southern Weekly, Phoenix TV and Caijing as a group) in either episodic framing ($X^2=0.793, p=0.373, df=1$) and thematic framing ($X^2=0.260, p=0.610, df=1$), see (Table 12).

**Other Framings**

In Chart 2 and Chart 3, clear observations can be made that framing of “attribution of responsibility” and “conflict” has more percentages than the other three framings, regardless of the case. Similar to the clarification of “episodic” and “thematic,” a short statement of “attribution of responsibility” and “conflict” must be given. Nevertheless, the detailed explanations of these two along with other three framings “human interest,” “morality,” and “economic consequence” can be found in Appendix I.

In the coding process, all of the posts refer to “who is responsible for the affair” or “who can provide the solution of the issue” can be seen as “attribution of
responsibility.” Specific example in this paper’s cases can be found, such as “Chinese
government speaker said Japanese government should responsible for this Diaoyu
island dispute because of the island purchase proposal,” “Experts urge to solve the
Scarborough Shoal dispute through international law between China and Philippines,”
and “Japanese government proposed solving dispute by U.S. intervention.” The
framing of “conflict” can be seen as the disagreement between two or more sides, if
two or more different opinions or viewpoints showed in a post, coders need to code it
as “conflict.” For example, posts like “Water war between Japan and China, also
attended the Taiwan,” “Tension between Taiwan surveillance ship and Japanese
surveillance ship,” “Wild public protest in China against Japan for Diaoyu island” can
be seen as “conflict.”

Compared to these five framings, statistics analysis shows that the difference is
not so absolute, but still noticeable through a One-Way ANOVA test, which is a
statistical test used to compare the means of two or more samples. A similar method
was used in comparing the framings of national and local newspapers in the Jena Six
Controversy study (Holt & Major, 2010).

In the Diaoyu island case, results show that regardless of the type of media, the
mean number of the “attribution of responsibility” framing scored 0.56/1 (p<0.001),
the mean of the “conflict” framing scored 0.39/1 (p<0.001), whereas the other three
framings’ means were 0.20/1, 0.02/1 and 0.05/1 (p<0.001), respectively (see Table
13). That is to say, the “attribution of responsibility” framing and “conflict” framing
are the two most commonly used framings throughout those media in posts
concerning the Diaoyu dispute case across all of the three group outlets.

Similar results were found when conducting the One-way ANOVA test with the Scarborough Shoal posts: higher means of “attribution of responsibility” framing (0.62/1) and “conflict” framing (0.60) and relatively lower means of the other three framings (0.19/1, 0.05/1 and 0.04/1) were observed across all of the three group outlets (see Table 14).

**Limitations**

This study only focuses on the episodic/thematic framing theorized by Shanto Iyengar (Iyengar, 1991) and the other five framings proposed by Holli Semetko and Patti Valkenburg (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), however, other framing effects and models were not contained in this study. Moreover, although attempts were made to build the relationship between frames and public interest (number of shares/comments, which refers to the popularity of the post), none of them proved to be significantly valid. Further studies can focus more on what frames affect, lead, direct, or influence public interest. Future research could also investigate what type of frame attracts more public attention.

Furthermore, due to limited time and resources, research of the Weibo respondents was not involved in this study. More compelling findings are expected if framing effects build between Weibo posts and the response of the followers. Additionally, this study did not include any official reporting from traditional outlets (newspaper coverage, broadcasts, or TV programs). Instead, the Weibo posts were
selected as a sample to compare the framing differences. More research of framing comparisons can be made through traditional outlets.

Nonetheless, one of the valuable parts in this study observed that on Chinese Weibo, significant episodic/thematic framing differences exist between discourse universes, which means the different groups of media outlets (Chinese state-owned media, Chinese commercial media, foreign media). Evidence of various media perspectives and news values may be implied with these findings. Future research can focus on relating discourse universes and media strategy, or more detailed framing studies as well.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

**Framing**

The purpose of this study was to take a close look at media outlets with Chinese language on Weibo, see how different media outlets with different characteristics frame the similar two issues. Results show that episodic and thematic framing varied based on the media’s Weibo posts: a high percentage of thematic framing was found in foreign media such as *Wall Street Journal Chinese, Financial Times Chinese* and *Asahi Chinese* in terms of the Diaoyu dispute and the Scarborough Shoal dispute cases, whereas a high percentage of episodic framing was observed in Chinese state-owned media such as *People’s Daily, Global Times* and *Xinhua News*. On the other hand, as Chinese commercial media outlets, high levels of both thematic and episodic framing were measured within *Southern Weekly, Phoenix TV* and *Caijing* in
terms of the Diaoyu Island dispute and the Scarborough Shoal dispute (see Table 3).

When observed as groups, Chinese state-owned media have a significant
difference in episodic/thematic framing issues with foreign media groups; the same
difference was measured between Chinese commercial media groups and foreign
media groups in terms of two island dispute cases. However, no significant difference
was found between Chinese state-owned media and Chinese commercial media as
groups (see Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12). This means that both Chinese
state-owned media and Chinese commercial media have different narratives with
foreign media, or in other words, they have different ways to “frame” or compare to
foreign media. Chinese state-owned media and commercial media prefer “episodic”
framing, although the degree is not same, whereas foreign media prefer “thematic”
framing when talking about Chinese territorial disputes.

In regards to the other five frames (attribution of responsibility, human interest,
conflict, morality, and economic consequence), high percentages of “attribution of
responsibility” framing and “conflict” framing were measured in terms of the Diaoyu
dispute and the Scarborough Shoal dispute. These effects can be seen in all of the nine
media outlets which were selected in this study. Meanwhile, low percentages of
framing such as “morality” and “economic consequence” were presented in this study
(see Table 13 and Table 14). This means all of the media outlets have the same
preference in spite of the episodic/thematic framings; they are “responsibility” and
“conflict” when Chinese territorial disputes are the topic of the discussion.

Furthermore, this study attempted to build other relationships such as correlation
with frames and the posts’ number of shares/comments. Unfortunately, after a series of T-tests and ANOVA tests between media frames and Weibo posts share/comment number were performed, no close evidence showed that such relationship can be found. The reasons that lead or influenced the public’s interest on Weibo still remain to be answered, and this may present an opportunity for future study along with agenda-setting.

It is safe to conclude that Chinese state-owned and foreign media are using different types of framing to narrate certain events. This study found that differences are significant in episodic/thematic framing. However, similar framing was also found within all of the media outlets: attribution of responsibility framing and conflict framing are found in high percentages, regardless of the category of media.

In general, the reason for the high percentage of responsibility and conflict framing across all of the media outlets in this study may be due to the specific events in this paper: border disputes. “Responsibility” of the issue and “conflict” between the two sides seems to be the main focus or the common concerns for the media outlets in this paper. In these Chinese territory disputes, media outlets paid more attention to analyzing “who is responsible for this event” by framing “attribution of responsibility” and showing the tension and disagreement between different sides by framing “conflict,” rather than focusing on other framings such as “human interest,” “morality,” and “economic consequence.”
Media Strategy: News value

Other questions that now arise are: Why does different episodic/thematic framing appear in different media outlets? And what does it mean?

Reasons can be analyzed as event-driven for different media perspectives: since a new series of controversy started from the Japanese government’s proposal to nationalize the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands in September 2012. Chinese state-owned media might believe this specific event would be an appropriate content to “trigger” the public interest against Japan, such as the Diaoyu-nationalized plan, tension between Chinese surveillance and Japanese surveillance, as well as the tension between Chinese fishermen and Japanese patrol vessels. Weibo as a short message system provided an ideal platform to frame special events or “episodes” for the public. In the collected posts, Chinese media (both state-owned media and commercial media) attempted to frame the nationalize-Diaoyu initiative as a “wrongdoing.” And “episodic” of “wrongdoing” messages were repeatedly sent by China’s Minister of Foreign Affair. On the other side, the tension between both sides’ surveillance and fishing boats make this “episodic” framing more relevant, because more events happen and more “episodes” need to be posted, thus inducing more public interest towards Japan.

Foreign media, on the other hand, did not see the Chinese island dispute as a regional issue but as an international conflict. These outlets tried to analyze the dispute in the context of the “big picture.” Foreign media used these cases as examples to analyze Chinese foreign policy, the country’s military power, and its
economic situation. Therefore, the disputes were interpreted with thematic framing. In the result, *Asahi Chinese*, as a Japanese media outlet, shows a similar episodic/thematic ratio to *Financial Times Chinese* and *Wall Street Journal Chinese*. This might be due to the fact that the outlet is using Chinese language and for the Chinese public, thus the content may be adjusted. A comparison between *Asahi Chinese* and *Asahi Japanese* might be worthwhile in future research.

In the Chinese commercial media outlets, more thematic framings can be seen compared to the state-owned media (see Table 3 and Table 4). This is probably because of the fact that as commercialized media organizations, Chinese commercial media outlets have more space to discuss the dispute than state-owned media outlets (He, 2008). Therefore, rather than follow the routine (Japan’s “wrongdoing,” “episodic” framing), the commercial media outlets tried to frame the dispute in another way (thematic framing), though the percentage is not significantly high because they are still directly or indirectly controlled by the Chinese state council.

In general, different media perspectives create the differences of the framings. Chinese media focus on Japan’s “wrongdoing” by evidencing “episodic” framing such as the island purchase plan and the tension between surveillance ships. On the contrary, foreign media relatively stands outside the incident and tries to analyze disputes between different sides, thus a “thematic” framing, which has broad and abstract context, fits their needs.
APPENDIX I

Codebook for Diaoyu Island Dispute, Scarborough Shoal Dispute

Coding

The coding sheet starts with objective characteristics of the articles: The date of the publication and source of each post, followed by the frames. The purpose of this study is to determine whether different frames about the Diaoyu Island dispute and the Scarborough Shoal dispute exist in different media, or different groups of media.

Search and Target for Two Cases

To access the relevant Weibo posts about the Diaoyu Island dispute, coders need to log in Weibo.com, then use the advanced search on Weibo’s search engine. The key words should be “钓鱼岛” (Diaoyu Island), then fill in the time period (September 7, 2012 – October 7, 2012). To search for posts by source, fill in the “昵称” (Name) as the one you want to code. For example, “人民网” (People’s Daily).

To access the relevant Weibo posts about the Scarborough Shoal dispute, coders need to log in Weibo.com, then use the advanced search on Weibo’s search engine. The key words should be “黄岩岛” (Scarborough Shoal), then fill in the time period (April 1, 2012 – March 7, 2013). To search posts by different source, fill in the “昵称” (Name) as the one you want to code. For example, “人民网” (People’s Daily).

General Information:
Frame:

Frames refer to the overarching frameworks journalists use to structure a story. The textual frames will be ascertained by analyzing the complete article and asking one to two specific questions for each frame. The five generic frames and most of the measurements were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) study, however, Shato Iyengar (1991) also explored the impact of episodic and thematic news frames on viewers’ attributions of responsibility for political issues. In this study, the publications on Weibo are examined by these two different types of frames.

Attribution of Responsibility

The responsibility frame focuses on the party/individual who should be responsible for the issue, and is measured by questions. If the post suggests that one or more party should responsible for this dispute, answer this question with “yes,” otherwise answer “no” if there is no party blamed for this “dispute.” If some parties
have the ability solve the problem or suggest that one or more parties can solve or alleviate the dispute, answer “yes,” otherwise answer “no.”

**Human Interest**

The Human Interest frame measures personal or private activity in the dispute. If the story mentions a person or several people’s name with action, if individuals or organizations are involved or effected, if the posts contain personal reactions such as protest, or if the post describes a phenomenon, code “yes,” otherwise code “no.”

**Conflict**

The Conflict frame is examined in this study by measuring the following question “10. Does the post mention two or more than two sides’ disagreement?” For example, if the posts mention the disputed territory between China and Japan, or the reaction of Chinese public after the Japanese government’s announcement, such content can be coded as “yes” in this question, otherwise code “no.”

**Morality**

Morality frames tests if the posts contain the social norm judgment. It is measured by one question “9. Does the story mention immorality of any party?” The immoralities can be inferred from keywords synonymous for “blame, fault, mistake, negligence.”

**Economic Consequences**

Economic consequences frames focus on whether the posts discuss the economic result if the dispute continues and the economic influence in the future. The question is asked with “10. Does the post mention the economic consequence of this dispute?”
Episodic/thematic frames

According to Shanto Iyengar, media frame issues primarily as either episodic or thematic. Furthermore, the impact of episodic and thematic news frames viewers' attributions of responsibility for political issues.

Episodic

The question will be asked by “11. Does the post primary use an episodic frame?”

Episodic frames deal chiefly with isolated incidents or individuals and dominant media coverage. Episodic reports are essentially illustrations of issues. The episodic news frame depicts issues in terms of specific instances — for example, a confrontation case between a Chinese patrol vessel and a Japanese patrol vessel, a speech by Chinese spokesman, or a protest by Chinese nationalists; these posts can be viewed as “episodic.”

Thematic

Question will be asked by “12. Does the post primary use thematic frame?”

Thematic frames deal more broadly with trends, groups of people, and the context of events. The thematic frame depicts political issues more broadly and abstractly by placing them in some appropriate context --- historical, geographical, or otherwise. A thematic report on poverty might present information about recent trends in the rate of poverty and the areas with the great concentration of poor people. In appearance, the thematic frame takes the form of a background report featuring a series of people talking. For example, an in-depth interview with an international affairs expert about
the China-Japan relationship or China-Philippine relationship can be viewed as a “Thematic” frame, as well as a discussion about Chinese foreign policy, a historical explanation about the Sino-Japanese War, the history of Scarborough Shoal, or even a talk about “recent trends.” Normally, such kind of posts will provide a link for further context.
APPENDIX II

Coding Sheet for Diaoyu Island Dispute, Scarborough Shoal Dispute

General Information
Name of Coder __________
Date of Publication _/ _/ _ _ _
Source of Publication _______
Number of Share _____
Number of Comment _____

Frame Question
Attribution of Responsibility
Does the posts suggest some party should responsible for this dispute? Or does the posts suggest some party can resolve or alleviate the problem?
Yes ___  No ___

Human Interest
Does the post involved personal or private lives during this dispute? Or does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?
Yes ___  No ___

Conflict
Does the post mention two or more than two sides’ disagreement?
Yes ___  No ___

Morality
Does the story mention immorality of any party?
Yes ___  No ___

Economic Consequences
Does the post mention the economic consequence of this dispute?
Yes ___  No ___

Episodic
Does the post primary use episodic frame?
Yes ___  No ___

Thematic
Does the post primary use episodic frame?
Yes ___  No ___
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FIGURES

Figure 1: Diaoyu Search Trend on Google Trends.

Figure 2: Diaoyu Search trend on Weibo
CHARTS

Chart 1: Episodic/Thematic Framing Comparison.

Chart 2: Five Framing Comparison on Diaoyu Dispute.

Chart 3: Five Framing Comparison in Scarborough Shoal Dispute.
### TABLES

**Table 1: Weibo Posts Sample Result of Diaoyu Dispute and Scarborough Shoal Dispute**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collect Date: March 24, 2013</th>
<th>Diaoyu Island Dispute</th>
<th>Scarborough Shoal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>人民网 (People's Daily)</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>环球时报 (Global Times)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>新华视点 (Xinhua News)</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>南方周末 (Southern Weekly)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>凤凰卫视 (Phoenix TV)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>财经网 (Caijing Online)</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td>Sum</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>华尔街日报中文网 (Wall Street Journal Chinese Online)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Sum</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>307</td>
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### Table 2: Intercoder reliability of Diaoyu Dispute and Scarborough Shoal Dispute

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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Intercoder Reliability (Cohen’s Kappa)</th>
<th>Degree of Similarity</th>
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<td>Date of Publication</td>
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<td>Number of Share</td>
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<td>Number of Comment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attribution of Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Episodic</td>
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<tr>
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### Table 3. Episodic/Thematic Framing Comparison in Diaoyu Dispute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Episodic Percentage</th>
<th>Thematic Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diaoyu Dispute</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>人民网 (People's Daily)</td>
<td>79.34%</td>
<td>20.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>环球时报（Global Times）</td>
<td>72.20%</td>
<td>27.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>新华视点（Xinhua News）</td>
<td>73.40%</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>南方周末（Southern Weekly）</td>
<td>44.40%</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>凤凰卫视（Phoenix TV）</td>
<td>71.05%</td>
<td>28.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>财经网（Caijing Online）</td>
<td>82.26%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>华尔街日报中文网 (WSJ Chinese)</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>64.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT 中文网 (FT Chinese)</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>朝日新闻中文网（Asahi Chinese）</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
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### Chart 4. Episodic/Thematic Framing Comparison in Scarborough Shoal Dispute

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<th>Thematic Percentage</th>
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</tr>
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<td>人民网 (People's Daily)</td>
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<td>5.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>环球时报（Global Times）</td>
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<td>12.28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>新华视点（Xinhua News）</td>
<td>89.36%</td>
<td>10.64%</td>
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<td>南方周末（Southern Weekly）</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
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<td>凤凰卫视（Phoenix TV）</td>
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<td>39.58%</td>
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<td>华尔街日报中文网 (WSJ Chinese)</td>
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<td>47.62%</td>
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<td>FT 中文网 (FT Chinese)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>朝日新闻中文网（Asahi Chinese）</td>
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### Table 5. Episodic/Thematic Framing on *People’s Daily* and *Wall Street Journal* on Diaoyu Dispute

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<th>Source</th>
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<th>Thematic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>within source</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>within source</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>within source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Daily</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>168</td>
<td>79.20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wall Street</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64.30%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.70%</td>
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
Table 6. Episodic/Thematic Framing on *People’s Daily* and *Global Times* on Diaoyu Dispute

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<th>Thematic</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>within</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
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<td>People's Daily</td>
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<td>source</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Global Times</td>
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<td>within</td>
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<td></td>
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
<table>
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<tr>
<td>People's Daily</td>
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<td>Wall Street</td>
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
Table 8. Episodic/Thematic Framing on *Wall Street Journal Chinese* and *Financial Times Chinese* on Scarborough Shoal Dispute

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<td>94.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
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<td>Financial Times</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>47.6%</td>
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
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<td>Global Times</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>% within source</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Chi-Square significant at ***>0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
Table 10. Episodic/Thematic Framing on Chinese *State Owned Media* and *Foreign Media* on Diaoyu Dispute.

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<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>State Owned Media</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>73.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Media</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Chi-Square significant at **<0.001, <0.05, <0.01**
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01
Table 12. Episodic/Thematic Framing on *Chinese State Owned Media* and *Chinese Commercial Media* on Diaoyu Dispute.

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<td>122</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Chinese Commercial Media</strong></td>
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</tr>
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Chi-Square significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01

Table 13. ANOVA Test of Five Framing in Diaoyu Dispute

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<th>Mean.</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std.Error</th>
<th>ANOVA Value</th>
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<td>0.496</td>
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<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.018</td>
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<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
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<td>0.224</td>
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ANOVA significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01

Table 14. ANOVA Test of Five Framing in Scarborough Shoal Dispute

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Mean.</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std.Error</th>
<th>ANOVA Value</th>
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<td>attribution</td>
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<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>1.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>754</td>
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<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>2.46**</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>1.39*</td>
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<td>754</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
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<td>economic</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.7*</td>
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ANOVA significant at ***<0.001, **<0.05, *<0.01