

# Contextualizing Mediated Public Diplomacy: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese and U.S. TV News Coverage of Trump's State Visit to China

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**Abstract.** U.S. President Donald Trump paid his first state visit to China in November 2017. Despite the two countries' rugged relations, political elites from both sides had to reach expedient political congeniality for this high-stake diplomatic event. The state visit represented the best-case scenario in which the two adversarial countries could mutually conduct mediated public diplomacy. This article critically examines and compares Chinese and U.S. TV news discourse on the state visit in the supra-textual, verbal-textual, and visual modes. Conventional research suggests that external-relational factors, such as power hierarchy, cultural and political difference between countries affect mediated public diplomacy most. However, this article finds that China and the U.S.' domestic political-economic and societal-intuitional logics behind news production have a more definitive influence on the actualization of mediated public diplomacy. These distinct domestic logics defy the governments' foreign policy and lead to asymmetrical and futile public diplomacy results even in the best-case scenario.

**Keywords.** public diplomacy, U.S.-China relations, critical discourse analysis, international communication, multimodal discourse analysis, comparative media study

## Introduction

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IS 'AN INTERNATIONAL ACTOR'S ATTEMPT to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public,' (Cull 2009: 12) and its long-term aim is to cultivate favourable public opinion in target countries in order to facilitate the execution of a country's foreign policy. Due to mass media's influence on public opinion (Semetko *et al.* 1992;

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Wanta *et al.* 2004), international broadcasting is seen as one of the core components of public diplomacy (Cull 2008). Although international broadcasting is used as a public diplomacy tool, its effect is hardly substantiated. For instance, international broadcasting originating in the U.S. is censored and blocked in China. Foreign-derived international news broadcasting such as Al Jazeera America often suffers from low viewership in the U.S. due to the lack of access, relevance and credibility (Youmans 2017). A more advanced way for a country to influence foreign public opinion is to sway domestic news coverage in foreign countries.

The organized attempts by a head of state and his/her foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of his or her country's policy in foreign media is defined as 'mediated public diplomacy' by Entman (2008). Research from an agenda-setting perspective suggests that to enter the domestic news cycle, a foreign news story must fulfil a set of newsworthiness determinants, which include normative deviance between the two countries on an issue, the relevance of the issue to the country, the cultural affinity between the two countries, and the countries' relative positions in the global power hierarchy (Hester 1973; Chang *et al.* 1987; Chang, 1998). From the framing perspective, Entman's cascade activation model (2008) posits that once a foreign news story is picked up by domestic news media, whether the news will be framed in line with the stance of a foreign government further depends on two major factors: the degree of cultural congruence between the two countries such that a foreign frame can fit into the habitual schemata of domestic political elites and of the public; the degree of political elite and state control over the media system in each country such that the frame agreed upon by the two countries' elite can be disseminated with little contestation. (2008: 95)

Although it is informative, the previous literature has not fully explained the challenges of mediated public diplomacy. The determinants of newsworthiness in international news coverage proposed by agenda-setting scholars concern mainly external-relational heterogeneity between countries. These determinants only have a certain explanatory and predictive power on the incommunicability and miscommunication among countries. The external-relational perspective tends to address the international communication conundrum in its current state instead of taking issue with the inherent societal-institutional problems within a country that complicate external relations. The cultural congruence concept proposed by Entman (2008) is ambiguous. It can sometimes mean civilizational and ideological similarity; at other times, it can mean conditional policy agreement. (2008: 94) This concept becomes even more blurry when two countries with distinct political cultures reach expedient alliance on certain issues. Focus on cultural affinity and congruence also lacks practical meaning. Understandably, value and political proximity lead to perspective

homophily and framing parity regarding major international issues (Sheafer *et al.* 2014). However, mediated public diplomacy is needed most between culturally and ideologically different countries. Cultural incongruence is more important to research.

To further the study of mediated diplomacy, this article uses multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine the U.S. and Chinese domestic news media coverage of U.S. President Donald Trump's state visit to China and to contextualize the operationalization of mediated public diplomacy with each country's societal-institutional and political-economic logics. Trump's state visit to China is an ideal case to study mediated public diplomacy in action because the meeting of two countries' top leaders has a cross-cutting effect that threads normative deviance, relevance, cultural affinity, and hierarchical relations between the countries and achieves newsworthiness for both countries' media; therefore, external-relational factors are naturally controlled, and internal factors can be more clearly observed. China and the U.S. share little cultural congruence and media system similarity, but a state visit is an important diplomatic event in which the two countries share a common interest in ensuring its success. Both countries' political leaders want to use the opportunity to project favourable images to each other's publics. The mediated public diplomacy effort is simultaneous and mutual. Therefore, the state visit provides a unique opportunity to examine how mediated public diplomacy works contingently under cultural incongruence and media system disparity.

## Background

From November 8 to 10, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump paid a state visit to China. His Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping, received him with exceptional courtesy. This diplomatic exchange between the U.S. and China at the highest level had great symbolic and substantive importance for both administrations. On the U.S. side, the trip marked the anniversary of Trump's presidential election victory and his first official visit to China. Positive reviews of his foreign affairs performance would serve to showcase his diplomatic skills and to balance the sliding public support for Trump due to contentious partisan politics and cabinet intrigue. On the Chinese side, 20 days before the visit, Xi Jinping had been re-elected to the highest position in China's ruling party in the 19<sup>th</sup> Chinese Communist Party Congress. Trump's visit was Xi's first diplomatic event since his re-election. Respectful and congratulatory recognition by the leader of a powerful foreign country would strengthen Xi's legitimacy among domestic political elites and citizens.

Trump's state visit to China also had substantive ramifications for U.S.-China bilateral relations and regional security. Trump's presidency added new uncertainties to U.S.-China relations. One of the earmarks of Trump's foreign policy rhetoric was to accuse China of 'raping' and 'ripping off' the U.S. on trade and of stalling U.S. efforts to neutralize North Korea's nuclear threat. Despite this bumpy start, the Chinese government has managed its relations with the Trump administration with prudent rhetoric and refrained from retaliatory actions that would fundamentally upset bilateral relations. Therefore, Trump's state visit could have served as an indicator of the future development of the U.S.-China relations. Both sides had great interest in ensuring the success of the visit and garnering public support for cooperative bilateral relations.

## Mediated Public Diplomacy and News Discourse

A state visit is, first of all, a form of elite diplomacy through which heads of state and their aides and staff can establish working relations and personal rapport through face-to-face contact. However, another important function of a state visit is public diplomacy. A state visit is a bilateral political event of the highest diplomatic protocol and is characterized by official public ceremonies. Every aspect of a state visit is choreographed by technocrats from both the visiting and host countries. The aim is not only to demonstrate goodwill between the heads of states in person but also, more importantly, to symbolically mediate bilateral relations in the eyes of the public through these leaders' personal contact. Therefore, a state visit often becomes a political spectacle and constitutes top-down and elite-to-public diplomatic signalling.

During a state visit, diplomatic efforts aimed at the general public are seldom conducted through direct public engagement by the heads of states; instead, they are conducted mostly through the mediation of the news media of the visiting and host countries. The news media's presentation and interpretation of a high-level diplomatic event between two countries have dual functions: domestically, they lead the public's perception of the bilateral relations; internationally, a country's news coverage is closely monitored and frequently cited by foreign politicians and journalists as representative public or official opinions upon which reaction can be based. To some extent, international relations are mediated and understood through this intertextual production and symbolic dialogue through the news media (Frederick 1993; Oehlkers 2000).

News can be seen as 'a discursive composition of received and collected pieces of information which consist primarily of actors' discourse' (Pietilä 1992: 45). A news event and newsmakers' behaviour and words in response to the

event are often evaluated, interpreted, and presented according to certain social, cultural, political, and economic logics through news production. This discursive composition and encoding-decoding process is actually institution-societal relations at play through the mode of language (Hall 1973). In this sense, mediated public diplomacy can be considered a political-elite-initiated competition of discursive composition in which two countries' political actors and media systems negotiate with each other internally and externally in the production of foreign affairs news. Previous research on mediated diplomacy has focused mostly on agenda setting, framing and media effects rather than news discourse (Sheafer and Gabay 2009; Fahmy *et al.* 2012). However, media agenda building is a discursive composition process, and news frames are ideative patterns constructed and understood through a society's conventional discourse. News discourse has an irreplaceable place in our understanding of mediated public diplomacy.

To understand how mediated public diplomacy works through news discourse, research must take a critical approach. Fairclough (1995) defines critical discourse analysis as

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. (1995: 132-133)

Analysing international news through comparative and critical lenses can reveal not only the power relations between the countries but also the societal-institutional and political-economic logics behind news production. Research on mediated public diplomacy focuses mostly on print media or the verbal text mode of news broadcasting (Wang and Chang 2004; Grincheva and Lu 2016). As mentioned previously, a high-level diplomatic event such as a state visit is often a political spectacle of which visuals are an inherent component. Therefore, television is an optimal medium in which to fully observe the diplomatic signalling. To analyse TV news discourse, the multimodality of TV news' discursive composition must be examined. Scholars in the field of social semiotics have increasingly stressed the multimodality of media discourse because a set of semiotic resources, options and choices is created to articulate and interpret meanings with language, images and sound (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). To evaluate TV news discourse, research must consider not only the verbal text mode but also the supra-textual mode, such as airtime and rundown placement, and the visual mode, such as video footage and sound bites. In each mode, discursive composition uses different means to manage information value, salience and framing (Van Leeuwen 2003). TV news discourse is

conveyed and understood as a composite of the discourses composed in each mode. A multimodal critical discourse analysis can offer a comprehensive and in-depth view of how certain ideologies, political interests and social relations permeate each mode and are presented coherently to the audience in a package (Machin and Mayr 2012).

## Data and Analysis

During Trump's state visit to China on November 8 and 9, 2017, prime-time evening news broadcasts – the U.S.'s ABC's *World News Tonight* and China Central Television (CCTV)'s *News Simulcast* or *Xin Wen Lian Bo* – were recorded and transcribed. The transcription of CCTV's *News Simulcast* was also translated from Chinese into English by the author. These two programs were chosen because ABC's *World News Tonight* is the highest-rated evening public news broadcasting program in the U.S. (Battaglio 2017). And CCTV's *News Simulcast* is the most watched and widely syndicated evening news broadcasting program in China.

This article takes an approach largely informed by multimodal critical discourse analysis (Machin and Mayr 2012). Williams (2003) highlights four points that differentiate TV news from news in print media: sequence, priorities, presentation, and visualization. The discursive composition and practice of TV news operate in at least three modes: 1) the supra-textual mode, which manages the prominence of news items about Trump's state visit through newscast rundown placement and airtime length, among other means; 2) the verbal-textual mode, including the narrative structure and rhetorical devices used to compose the story of the state visit; and 3) the visual mode, which refers to the symbolic and functional meaning of the choice and editing of video footage and the relation between visual and textual modes. This study analysed coverage of Trump's visit within these three modes. Special attention was paid to societal-institutional and political-economic logics that contribute to the discourse formation in each mode and how these logics concertedly produce a coherent message to the audience.

### *News Discourse in the Supra-Textual Mode*

The supra-textual mode creates meaning by managing the sequence and priority of news items. In print media such as newspapers, the sequence and priority of news are loosely managed by linear and mosaic presentations in terms of page number order, page layout and column inches. Readers have high autonomy to break the sequence and priority of the news according to their own

interests. The sequence and priority of news on real-time TV viewing is totally linear, and the audience does not have the autonomy to rearrange stories. An important news item is placed at the top of the newscast rundown and is given a longer airtime to allow more detailed coverage. Although the meaning-making of this mode is not literal, it gives priority and weight to a news item and is the first mode of TV media discourse that the audience encounters.

In ABC's *World News Tonight*, Trump's visit is not included in the headline overview at the beginning of the news program, so its importance is not emphasized. For instance, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, the program's first story is about a new sexual assault allegation against actor Kevin Spacey, followed by a story on a prison break in Tennessee and a mass shooting incident at a church in Texas. Trump's visit is placed fourth in the program, which features eight news items in total. In terms of airtime length, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, the news item about Trump's China visit runs for two minutes and seven seconds. In *World News Tonight*'s 30-minute running time, the actual airtime for news content is only about 18 minutes, excluding commercial breaks. Therefore, stories on Trump's China visit account for approximately 10 percent of the airtime for news content and approximately six percent of the entire program.

In contrast, CCTV's *News Simulcast* gives Trump's state visit story the utmost prominence. In the November 8<sup>th</sup> program, the first item in the headline overview features President Xi receiving President Trump at the Forbidden City; this item is also the first story on the newscast rundown, which contains 17 news items in total. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, *News Simulcast* carries four different news items related to Trump's visit. The first and most important item, which runs for seven minutes and 13 seconds, is Xi and Trump's meeting at the Forbidden City. The other related news items include an on-air announcement about the live broadcast of the welcome ceremony for President Trump at the Great Hall of the People on November 9<sup>th</sup>, the official talk between Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, and a synthesis of interviews with U.S.-China relations experts. These segments run for three minutes and 14 seconds. The total airtime for the coverage of Trump's visit amounts to 10 minutes and 27 seconds. Given that this program is 30 minutes long and has no commercial break, the news about Trump's visit occupies over 30 percent of the airtime.

From the perspective of the sociology of news production and critical discourse analysis, the sequence and priority of a news story in a program can be seen as the product of an aggregated force of different social, economic, and political logics. First, media ownership dictates the logic of news production. ABC is an American commercial news broadcaster, and viewership ratings orient ABC toward the domestic audience's interests. ABC's programming has America-centric and sensationalistic trends that prioritize domestic social and political issues,

including crimes, political disputes, and celebrity scandals. Although the U.S. President is often the focus of U.S. news media, his prominence on the media agenda often appears in the context of partisan politics and national crises. The president's diplomatic activities that have no direct impact on domestic politics are considered to be of little interest to the U.S. audience. Furthermore, the commercial news media's programming format dedicates a substantial portion of airtime to commercials, limiting the time for in-depth news reports on prime-time television news. For this reason, the short airtime of stories on Trump's China visit has an economic logic. Additionally, the treatment of the story of Trump's China visit also has political and institutional logics. The independent relations between the government and the media that are secured by the U.S. Constitution allow a commercial media to pursue its own agenda, free from government control. Even though Trump's activities in China were at the top of the administration's agenda from November 8<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. media did not have to follow suit. In U.S. commercial news media, economic and social factors exert a major influence on the supra-textual mode of TV news discourse.

In contrast, the logic of politics dominates news production in China. CCTV is a state-run national public television broadcaster. To some extent, CCTV can be seen as an extension of the government organ for political and ideological campaigning. Government funding allows CCTV to mind less about viewership than U.S. commercial news media do. *News Simulcast*, the prime-time news program broadcasts what the government wants to say rather than what the audience wants to know. Government funding also makes profit-making less a concern and affords a 30-minute news program without commercial breaks. This makes more airtime for in-depth, long reports and more news items possible.

In China's state-run media, not only does the government agenda dictate the media agenda, but news programming also reflects the domestic political hierarchy. For example, as mentioned above, November 8<sup>th</sup>'s *News Simulcast* runs four news items about Trump's visit. The first two items are related to President Xi's presence. The other two, despite having the same topic, are dispersed throughout the program. The meeting between Vice Premier Wang Yang and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross was a part of the working meeting of Trump's delegation. The news items presented before this item focus on a journalist conference supervised by Wang Huning, Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party's Secretariat, and a national economy briefing hosted by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. Both Wang Huning and Li Keqiang are ranked higher than Wang Yang in the Chinese government leadership. The other news item about Trump's visit includes a synthesis of remarks by U.S. political and business leaders and is placed 14<sup>th</sup> on the newscast rundown, close to the end of the program. The domestic political relevance of the interviewees featured in this news item is tenuous. It is safe to say that the supra-textual discourse composition in

CCTV's *News Simulcast* is aligned with China's domestic political power hierarchy structure and represents a part of the social reproduction process. Political logic overrules the norm of news programming that clusters news stories according to topical proximity.

## *News Discourse in the Verbal-Textual Mode*

News discourse in the verbal-textual mode is related to how a news story is composed and presented to the audience textually and verbally. The overarching discourse element in the verbal-textual mode is the narrative form. The two most common narrative forms in news are chronological presentation and an 'inverted pyramid.' The former uses a developmental narrative structure in which pieces of information are presented chronologically or logically in a cause-event-consequence order (Lewis 1985: 228); the latter truncates the time sequence of information and arranges pieces of information according to an order of perceived relevance and importance according to journalistic discretion. An 'inverted pyramid' begins with a lead containing the most important questions of who, when, where, what, and why and then elaborates on the lead with supporting information, a detailed background and key quotes. The least important information is included at the end of the news story. The use of different news narrative forms is not a matter of mere journalistic technical choice but instead reflects journalists' role in social and political systems. Schudson (1982) finds that from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. political news experienced a gradual transition of narrative form from chronological presentation to the inverted pyramid. This transition reflects that a journalist is 'no longer merely the relayer of documents and messages,' but 'has become the interpreter of the news,' who sees himself or herself as an expert analyst of the political world. (1982: 99, 104).

In ABC's *World News Tonight*, the story of Trump's state visit is organized in an 'inverted pyramid' form. For instance, the lead narrated by the news anchor David Muir summarizes the story as such:

President Trump in China tonight. He's there to talk trade and the North Korean nuclear threat. He needs China's help. The president said to North Korea, 'do not underestimate us and do not try us.' But in a major address overnight, he also plugged one of his golf courses. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 8, 2017*)

The first sentence introduces the newsmaker, President Trump, and his whereabouts – China. The second and third sentences depict the agenda of Trump's visit – trade talk with China and courting China for help in dealing with the North Korea nuclear issue; the fourth sentence reiterates President Trump's stance on North Korea. The last sentence describes a vignette in which Trump

inappropriately uses a diplomatic event to promote his private business. The lead basically outlines the structure of the following TV news package. The voiceover of ABC News Chief White House Correspondent Jonathan Karl continues.

In China, a lavish red-carpet welcome for President Trump complete with the honor guards; on the motorcade route, excited schoolchildren waving American and Chinese flags. With President Xi and his wife as their guides, the first couple toured the Forbidden City looking almost like old friends. [A sound bite of Trump reminding Xi not to trip on stairs.] Of course, Donald Trump hasn't always been so friendly towards China. [A sound bite of Trump criticizing China] (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 8, 2017*)

This part corresponds to the first sentence of the lead, providing more details about the warm welcome extended to Trump by China and Trump's amiable personal interaction with his Chinese counterpart, which is set as a foundation to highlight the change in Trump's attitude towards China. The next part of the voiceover corresponds to the second and third sentences of the lead:

Beyond today's smiles, though, challenges on trade, of course, and North Korea. The president demanding that China cut off Kim Jong Un unless he gives up his nuclear program. Earlier in Seoul, no talk of fire and fury, no taunting of Little Rocket Man; instead, a sober warning. [A sound bite of Trump speaking to the South Korea Parliament and warning North Korea] (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 8, 2017*)

This verbal-textual passage provides more details about the visit's political agenda, especially regarding the issue of the North Korean nuclear threat. Again, the report highlights Trump's change in tone with regard to North Korea, from belittling humiliation to solemn exhortation. In addition, the voiceover continues with a vignette of the previous leg of Trump's visit in South Korea. When Trump addressed the South Korean Parliament, he took the opportunity to congratulate the South Korea women's golf team for winning a tournament on one of his properties.

And Trump being Trump. Amid the talk of a nuclear nightmare, a plug for one of the president's favorite golf courses. [A sound bite of Trump praising the South Korean women's golf team for winning a prize on his golf course in New Jersey] (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 8, 2017*)

This vignette is least relevant to the trip's official agenda and is therefore placed at the end of the news package. In addition, this part also establishes a sharp contrast between Trump's odd behaviour of promoting his private business and the seriousness of 'talk of a nuclear nightmare.'

*ABC World News Tonight's* 'inverted pyramid' narrative form disrupts the chronological order of the event for the purposes of interpretation. The news is less about the proceedings of the event and more about how the event fits into

the journalist's interpretative framework. The Trump administration has had bitter relations with U.S. mainstream media. The media's critical tone against Trump is pervasive. The 'inverted pyramid' narrative form is used to present the news in an argumentative way to criticize Trump's policy inconsistency and the instability of his personality. When introducing the detailed itinerary, the reporter brushes aside China's reception of Trump with one word, 'lavish', which has an undertone of unnecessary extravaganza. In depicting Trump reminding Xi not to trip on the stairs in the Forbidden City, the reporter emphasizes the irony of the seeming friendship with the phrase, 'looking almost like old friends.' These innuendos hint at the hypocrisy of the sharp contrast between the performativity of the state visit to China and Trump's vicious previous remarks on China. The news also sheds light on Trump's change in attitude toward North Korea and how he unprofessionally brags about his private business in front of the South Korean Parliament.

Although ABC's news questions Trump's leadership, it does not scorn the U.S. government's foreign policy agenda entirely. [Bennett et al \(2007\)](#) suggest that U.S. news coverage is 'indexed' with the division or unison of domestic partisan politics. On foreign and military affairs, there is little partisan disparity, and the media becomes a state apparatus that conducts mass persuasion and policy advocacy. In the White House Press Briefing for November 2, the then-National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, defined three goals of Trump's trip:

- First, strengthening international resolve to denuclearize North Korea.
- Second, promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
- Third, advance American prosperity through fair and reciprocal trade and economic practices. ([White House 2017](#))

ABC's *World News Tonight* follows this cue and lists the North Korea nuclear crisis and trade as the top issues to be addressed on Trump's visit. This action demonstrates a selective state-media 'indexing' dynamic in the Trump era. On one hand, the media still rely on government sources to set the news agenda on foreign affairs; on the other hand, partisan disagreement on Trump's suitability for presidency encourages the news coverage to focus on pessimistic evaluation of Trump's diplomatic performance. China's mediated public diplomacy toward the U.S. is collaterally compromised by the U.S. domestic political dynamic. China's effort to court Trump and its friendly diplomatic signalling through exceptional diplomatic protocol is not only unappreciated by U.S. media but also presented to the U.S. domestic audience as an odd form of flattery.

CCTV's *News Simulcast* uses the narrative form of chronological presentation to tell the story of Trump's state visit. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, the news anchor begins the news segment by narrating the lead:

On the 8th, President Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan accompanied U.S. President Donald Trump and Madame Melania Trump, who are paying a state visit to China, touring the Forbidden City. The two heads of states and their spouses had a tea break in the Treasure Charm Pavilion, visited the three front palaces of the Forbidden City, observed cultural relics restoration and an exhibition of rare collections. They also watched a Peking Opera performance. (*CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

The lead summarizes the story only by highlighting the activities of the heads of state and their spouses in the Forbidden City. The political agenda of the visit is not mentioned. The news script is constructed according to the spatial and temporal changes during the Forbidden City tour:

#### **Excerpt 1**

In the Autumn season, the red wall and yellow roof tiles of the Forbidden City reflect hue and glamor. Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan received Donald Trump and Madame Melania Trump at Treasure Charm Pavilion of the Forbidden Palace. They cordially greeted each other and stepped into the pavilion for a tea break talk. (*CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

#### **Excerpt 2**

When the sun set in the west and streetlights were lit, the two heads of states and their spouses stepped into Flowing Melody Pavilion. They observed the making of cloisonné pieces and gave final touches to the artifacts. They watched a Peking Opera performance, including scenes from *Peking Opera's Young Force, The Monkey King and The Drunken Royal Beauty*. The distinguished guests appreciated the performance with continuous applause. (*CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

The excerpts from the news script show that on CCTV, the news has the meticulousness and formality of an official chronicle. Each change of location and time proceeds with a scene-setting passage, followed by a detailed account of activities and dialogue. Instead of showing dialogue verbatim in sound bites, the words of the heads of state are summarized in the script and narrated by the news anchor. The leaders' personalities, which can usually be observed in verbal communication, are obscured by the formality of the news anchor's narration. Hence, little room is left for the evaluation of the political leaders.

The chronological form is coherent with China's political and media system. CCTV is a state-run news outlet, and its top journalists and producers hold government official titles and are on the government payroll. CCTV's *News Simulcast* is seen as an official conduit of the government's political signalling to the public. Official journalists are similar to historiographers; therefore, the function of the news about the head of state is to record and register, not to evaluate and interpret. In the U.S., the news media is not only a watchdog for the

government but also an important channel for democratic deliberation. Because of this designated function, U.S. political news is issue-oriented and focuses on government agendas and policy evaluation. In contrast, in China, the public media system is formulated to disseminate government-sanctioned information. Therefore, the chronological narrative form fits the Chinese media's function of notifying the public but does not invite public deliberation. CCTV's November 8<sup>th</sup> news program only vaguely hints at the political agenda of Trump's state visit in the last sentence of the news script:

During the Forbidden City tour, the two heads of state also exchanged views on issues of common concern, such as statecraft and China-U.S. bilateral relations. (Excerpt, *CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

### *News Discourse in the Visual Mode*

The visual mode of news discourse is produced by video editing that selects scenes of a political event and reconstructs the spectacle to fit a certain narrative. Visual elements in TV news do not stand alone; they exist only in relation to the verbal text of the news. The textual mode's narrative form dictates the composition of visual discourse. One way to observe and compare how visual elements are utilized to support different styles of news scripts is to note how a sound bite (sound-on-tape) is selected and used. A sound bite is 'a portion of recorded human speech that is presented as part of a broadcast news report' (Vos, 2008) and is also referred to as sound-on-tape, as a newsmaker's impromptu remarks are often recorded live on the scene and used for video-audio editing. A sound bite is a standout visual/audio unit to accentuate the actuality of an event, vivify the personality of a newsmaker and demonstrate the views of persons concerned. Due to the sound bite's duality in verbal-text meaning and visual meaning, its usage speaks volumes about news discourse styles.

As the previous section's analysis shows, the 'inverted pyramid' narrative form in the verbal-textual mode used by *ABC World News Tonight* emphasizes argument and interpretation. This imperative also bleeds into the discourse composition in the visual mode. Sound bites are chosen to serve as evidence to substantiate arguments. The main argument of ABC's report is that Trump's lack of consistency forebodes the failure of this diplomatic mission. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, ABC's news package on Trump's visit begins with the reporter's voiceover:

It is the very country that he repeatedly slammed as a threat to America. But today, President Trump had nothing but love for China and its leader. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

Then, a sound bite of Trump praising his friendship with his Chinese counterpart is quoted to support this opening commentary:

It's a very good chemistry between the two of us. Believe me. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

The voiceover continues to articulate Trump's inconsistencies:

It's a far cry from candidate Trump. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

To prove this point, an archival sound bite from Trump's presidential election campaign is used:

We can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they're doing. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

However, the voiceover makes another contrasting twist:

But today... (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

A sound bite of Trump vindicating China on the bilateral trade imbalance follows:

I don't blame China. After all, who can blame a country for being able to take advantage of another country for the benefit of its citizens? I give China great credit. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

Clearly, in ABC's news segment, sound bites are an integral component of the news script composition and the logic flow. If the sound bites were removed, the news script would be incomplete. These components are intertwined in a claim-evidence relation to demonstrate Trump's reversal in attitudes. Here, the primary function of a sound bite is to provide evidence for an argument. The function of visual illustration becomes secondary. A sound bite is chosen because of the meaningfulness of the verbal text within it, not because of the visual. To the audience, there is no open interpretation of the meaning of a sound bite; the meaning is explicit and strictly controlled by the reporter. To serve the argument centred on Trump's character, however, excessive video editing depletes the richness of the visual. The diplomatic signalling woven into the design of the symbolic performance and political spectacle has largely been filtered. For example, the 16-minute official welcome ceremony is abridged to an 8-second visual sketch, with a voiceover commentary:

For the president who loves a military parade, a lavish welcome. (*ABC World News Tonight Nov. 9, 2017*)

The diplomatic signalling of the spectacle has been minimalized, and China's hospitality is again interpreted as flattery catered to Trump, who particularly likes vanity.

The report on CCTV's *News Simulcast* uses chronological narrative form in the verbal-textual mode; therefore, in the visual mode a large amount of scene-

depicting video footage is needed to support the chronological narrative. The visual information's relationship with the verbal text is highly parallel and complementary. The footage is edited as a visual illustration of the script, and the script, in turn, is narrated like a live description of the footage. This textual-video relation generates a strong sense of presence and invites the audience to eyewitness and experience the diplomatic event.

Although long, unedited footage of the event is plentiful in CCTV's news segment, sound bites are seldom used. When sound bites are used, they are complementary, not integral, to the news script. For example, in one part of the news segment, the voiceover reads:

Along the axis of the Forbidden City, the two heads of state and their spouses visited the Palace of Supreme Peace, Palace of Central Peace and Palace of Preserving Peace, savoring the concept of peace and harmony in Chinese traditional culture. (*CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

The voiceover stops, followed by a 25-second distant shot and natural sound on tape showing the leaders and the entourage ascending the marble stairs of the Palace of Supreme Peace, with the continuous clicking of the press corps' camera shutters in the background. Then, the visual sequence shifts to a close-up shot and a sound bite of Xi pointing in the direction of the palace and speaking to Trump:

We are going to tour this palace. This is where emperors once held court and met the ministers to discuss national issues. (*CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017*)

If this sound bite were removed, it would not affect the wholeness of the news script. The sound bite is chosen less because of the meaningfulness of its verbal content and more because it is part of a larger visual presentation. The visuals are used as complementary materials to convey additional details that are not communicable in the verbal-textual mode. It intentionally invites the audience to observe the spectacle. However, it takes different lengths of time for verbal text and video to describe a scene. Textual description requires summarization and logic organization, creating briefness, while visual presentation is more linear and intuitive and emphasizes the exhibition of details, thus creating prolongation. This discrepancy in time length to achieve effective scene depiction in the verbal-textual and visual modes leads to the extensive use of visuals and natural sound on tape in CCTV's news segment, even after the script narration stops.

This special verbal text-video relation can also be observed in other segments. For example, in one part of the news item on November 8, the voiceover reads:

After touring the three front palaces, the two heads of state and their spouses visited the Relics Hospital of the Forbidden City. They observed

the cultural relics restoration technique for clocks; wooden, metal, ceramic and textile artifacts; and painting and calligraphic works. Together, they had a hands-on experience of painting and calligraphic works restoration... (CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017)

The voiceover pauses, and a sound bite follows, showing the heads of state and their spouses copying recovered ancient paintings through a rubbing technique and holding the copies they made for display. Trump flips the copy to examine it and looks excited. He extends a hand to Xi for a handshake to express gratitude. After the handshake, Xi smiles and says:

We made this successfully! (CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017)

The paused voiceover continues:

...and toured an exhibition of rare collections. (CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017)

Then, the voiceover pauses again, and another sound bite emerges. The first couples stand in front of a set of ancient gold chimes. The Curator of the Palace Museum says in the background that the thinner the layer of the cast, the lower the chime's sound, and that Trump can try to lift the chime to get a sense of the weight of it. Xi points to one of the chimes and reiterates to Trump:

You can have a try. It is made of pure gold. (CCTV News Simulcast Nov. 8, 2017)

Upon hearing the invitation from the interpreter, Trump is not sure if he understands it correctly. He makes a gesture to Xi as if he were holding a basketball in front of him, moving his hands up and down. Xi nods. Trump steps up and tries to lift a gold chime from the stand, but in vain. He grins in frustration and surprise.

Here, again, the voiceover pauses in the middle of the passage to allow for sound bites. The sound bites are separate from the news script, unlike the role of sound bites in relation to the news script on ABC. In the sound bites used by CCTV, the verbal text seems haphazard and only loosely connected to the adjacent verbal text of the news script. However, these sound bites' visual meaning is much richer and open to interpretation. The visuals of the leaders' collaboration in restoring ancient art pieces symbolically signify the cooperation between the two countries in preserving civilization. The special access granted to Trump to lift rare collections of ancient gold chimes symbolically signifies the exceptional courtesy and trust that the Chinese have extended to Trump. The engaging reactions of Trump during the tour signify the charm of the Chinese culture, Trump's lively personality and the optimistic atmosphere of this meeting.

Clearly, the visuals of the state visit are much more important for CCTV's news production than for ABC's coverage. The scene footage and sound bites

not only correspond to the chronological narrative form but also make up an essential part of the symbolic construction of the political spectacle. This is the first time that a Chinese president has received a foreign head of state in the Forbidden City. This intricate itinerary design aimed to launch a charm offensive to another country's top leader and to demonstrate China's sophistication in addressing hard politics with soft power. However, much of the subtlety of this arrangement can only be communicated through visuals, not through text. Treasure Charm Pavilion is the only Western-style architecture in the Forbidden City. This architectural contrast is demonstrated through the aerial shot and panoramic view of the Forbidden City at the very beginning of the news segment. It visually connotes the peaceful coexistence between the East and the West. The Forbidden City is an ancient royal palace and now a history and culture museum. By panning through the palaces and plazas of the Forbidden City alongside with the two heads of states, the visuals invoke an historical imperial image of a Chinese emperor receiving foreign envoys at his palace. To the domestic audience, this historical imperial imagination and myth of prosperous ancient China are in line with Xi's political campaign to centralize his power and rejuvenate the Chinese nation. Given the supreme significance of the Forbidden City to Chinese culture and history, it is an ideal place to flaunt China's soft power in a diplomatic setting. All these meanings are subtly imbedded in the detailed visual presentation accompanying the chronological narrative. These meanings have not been stated explicitly in the news script, but they are implicitly open to the audience for further interpretation. The visuals on CCTV's news program amplify a sense of ritual and historical importance of this high-level diplomatic event; hence, they have a positive effect on mediated public diplomacy.

The nuanced difference between ABC's and CCTV's uses of visuals and these visuals' relations to the news scripts reflect the different roles of the news media in two different polities: in the U.S., the integral and evidential verbal text-video relation fits the news media's role in political critique and evaluation; in China, the parallel and complementary verbal text-video relation suits the news media's role as official chronicler. The difference in the discourse of the visual mode also demonstrates the cultural difference between the explicit argumentation preferred in the West and the active reading of subtext preferred in China.

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## Conclusions

Trump's state visit is a unique case to study mediated public diplomacy between China and the U.S. – two culturally and politically different countries. The governments and political elites of the U.S. and China achieved ad hoc political proximity and cultural congruence for diplomatic purposes. The external-

relational factors that impact mediated public diplomacy is, therefore, controlled and minimized; and each country's societal-institutional factors that affect news production can be observed more clearly. This article examined Chinese and U.S. TV news discourse about Trump's state visit to China in terms of supra-textual, verbal-textual, and visual modes and provides a perspective to assess mediated public diplomacy through the lenses of news discourse. The analysis shows although the mediated public diplomacy around the state visit is mutual and simultaneous, the outcome is not equal or reciprocal. In U.S. news media, news discourse focuses on articulating the inconsistency of Trump as a political leader. China's diplomatic courtesy is portrayed as a gesture of over-flattery targeting Trump's personality flaws. In contrast, in Chinese media, news discourse emphasizes the display of the exceptional political spectacle and ceremonial ritual of the state visit to highlight the event's strategic and historical significance. China's cultural charm is used as the backdrop against which the two heads of state show their amiable characters and friendly exchanges.

The critical examination of the news discourse shows that the root cause of this difference in communication – which makes mediated public diplomacy nonreciprocal – is not the international relations or relative cultural distance between the countries; rather, it is each country's specific political-economic and societal-institutional logics behind news production. The economic logic of the U.S. commercial news media limits the prominence of foreign affairs news, even when this news involves the president. Journalists' critical role in politics allows the media to contest the government's framing of an event. The specific bitter relations between Trump and U.S. media heightens media's critical tone questioning Trump's capability and degrades the significance of Trump's state visit to China. China's public diplomacy signalling toward U.S. public through Trump's activities in China is deflected. In this sense, the operationalization of mediated public diplomacy is also contingent on the specific relations between a politician and the media.

In China, official news media are funded and controlled by the government. There is a set of aligned political-economic and societal-institutional relations under the auspices of the government. If a foreign government and political elites can reach agreements with their Chinese counterparts expediently, China's domestic media can facilitate this country's mediated public diplomacy toward the Chinese public. On CCTV's news program, Trump appears to be a personable and courteous leader who is interested in Chinese culture and who is willing to work with Xi to cooperatively manage strategic bilateral relations and global issues. The news projects to the Chinese audience a positive image of the U.S. and an optimistic outlook of U.S.-China relations and is beneficial to U.S. public diplomacy toward China. The caveat of operationalizing mediated public diplomacy through the media in China, however, is that foreign-initiated diplomatic signalling is unlikely to match the Chinese government's self-serving and self-congratulatory political purposes. The mediated public diplomacy of

Trump's state visit was able to be conveyed to the Chinese public because the visit coincided with Xi's political agenda to exhibit his diplomatic grace and to strengthen his legitimacy in his new tenure. In this sense, the operationalization of mediated public diplomacy is contingent on the target country's domestic political condition and government policy strategy.

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