



A Critical Analysis of the Symbiotic Relationship between Sinophobia in Online News and United States' Foreign Policy on China

Jack Fong California State Polytechnic University

Abstract

My manuscript highlights how the American online news media acts as an instrument of United States foreign policy when pertaining to China. A content analysis of online news headlines ($n=201$) during a randomly selected two-year period from 2010 to 2011 between the range of 2001 and 2018 was undertaken by inputting headline text into *Wordle* text analytical software. The data reveal that 87% of historical and political themes about China ($n=175$) are negative. This randomly selected binary years is argued to reflect how Sinophobia has a long chronology that continues to the current time of this writing. The manuscript discusses how the online news media in our examination is thus complicit in assembling over time, a China that is a new diabolical entity of the East, contextualized in a new Cold War, thus doing the bidding of the current hawkish administration. By examining how the American population relates to online news, I forward the assertion that by harnessing online news to demonise China over time, apathy or Sinophobia will be instilled within the American population, one which will enable US foreign policy to engage in machination to set into motion some atavism of regime change in China. I note that by searching for

a *casus belli* to justify a war with China, the United States aims to prevent China's economy from overtaking it, a mission that will underpin the agenda of United States foreign policy in the coming years.

Keywords: China, geopolitics, foreign policy, Sinophobia, online news

Before becoming US president, Teddy Roosevelt wrote Henry L. Sprague of the Union League Club and remarked that America should "speak softly and carry a big stick." His view of American foreign policy at the time would later manifest itself geopolitically through the United States' Great White Fleet, a large pantheon of 16 battleships and escorts that circumnavigated the globe between 1907 and 1909 to showcase American military and thus geopolitical might. However, the US thalassocracy has not disappeared into history. During the mid-summer of 2010, reports emerged from journalists aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington in the Yellow Sea about a new anti-carrier weapon designed by China that could threaten US naval supremacy. China had just announced the upcoming deployment of the Dong-Feng 21D hyper-ballistic missile, one designed with the sole purpose of being able to sink American carriers by striking so quickly—ostensibly at ten times

the speed of sound—that an American naval response would be impossible. Soon, the USS George Washington would be sailing to Vietnam to woo the Vietnamese government into an alliance to hedge against China. On August 8, 2010, the US carrier arrived in Da Nang City, Vietnam. The *realpolitik* is as disturbing as it is one based on a double standard—further evidence that any democratic country's sloganizing of democracy at home can quickly be rendered disingenuous when one observes who they befriend transnationally.

China's response has been to continue its militarisation of the South China Sea.¹ With a variety of islands created to house facilities for China's military and, ostensibly, scientists that will be conducting research through them, Beijing is aware that US foreign policy interests, under its sociopathic president, will be to ultimately distance Taipei, Taiwan from Beijing. Taipei has quietly become a new political project for the current administration and Taiwan will soon serve as a site where an atavism of the Gulf of Tonkin incident will likely manifest. Indeed, as recently as September 30, 2018, the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) Lanzhou and the USS Decatur, two advanced missile destroyers in the South China Sea came perilously close to a collision, with the former closing in at less than 45 yards before the Decatur had to undertake evasive action.

The media reporting of events thereafter, and within an intensification of the Sino-US trade war that the media of the left and right are concurrently focusing on, reveal a degree of bias that prompted my hypothesis that the "objective" the American media is actually complicit in socially constructing China's foreign policy to be primarily diabolical and malevolent. Upon composing this hypothesis, I was curious as to what degree in time Sinophobic reporting, that is, reporting designed to highlight only negative attributes of all things China, has been ongoing. Although my findings are discussed in the later sections of this manuscript, the concerns for this undertaking is high-

Diego Garcia: Unity and Division among Activists in the Indian Ocean" that notes how pets were gassed in front of the inhabitants to intimidate and compel them toward accepting their forced relocation).

lighted at the outset for one key reason: at this time of heightened Sino-US relations, I have witnessed alternative axes of informational life, that is, online news media, engaged in geopolitical narratives that create subtexts to enable a revanchist foreign policy against China to be legitimised *outside* political institutions or the state apparatus.

Although one can counter argue that your author has adopted an alarmist stance given that Japan, when it was the world's second largest economy, did not inspire an American challenge to its sovereignty, one must consider how Japan's post-WWII foreign policy was defeatist. The country was diplomatically docile and sycophantic to Washington, an ethos that remains true to this day. Moreover, by allowing US bases on Japanese soil, Japan is essentially an occupied country (few remember that the first official "ruler" of Japan in the post-WWII period was General MacArthur). Yet China is not Japan. Its exponentially larger population and greater geographical spread, combined with China's unwillingness to be a servile sycophant of US foreign policy in ways that would make it a constabulary state to the United States, as Israel, South Korea and Japan are, is problematic for the United States' hegemonic ambitions in Asia and the Pacific. Moreover, China's 20th century chronology includes episodes of warfare that pushed the United States and United Nations' troops to the brink of collapse during the Korean War and support of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, makes its ascendance a matter of great concern to American Sinophobes. For the reason that Beijing will never concede to being Washington's "puppy," and because Beijing intends to employ communists to watch over Chinese capitalism and globalism, the United States will attempt to delegitimise China's geopolitical *raison d'être*: to be an alternative axis of how capitalism is made operative and how prosperity can be achieved.

With the West now aware that the utopianism for a free Tibet is unrealisable, only the theatre in the South China Sea remains an area where the US military can respond. Yet we should be historically aware that US foreign policy has always been searching for political entry points to destabilise a communist China. Indeed, Tibet had once been Beijing's Achilles'

heel, but aggressive Han migration to the province has ensured Chinese presence and lasting power. Trapped in India, and infused with the West's benevolent Orientalism that intoxicates and romanticises itself with half-naked holy men from the East, the ageing Dalai Lama can now only retreat into his Buddhistic role. Less well-known is that he was complicit in welcoming CIA funds earmarked for Tibetan nationalists between the 1960s and 1970s to fund a separatist guerrilla force comprising over 2,000 Tibetan fighters. The fighters received \$500,000 while the Dalai Lama himself amassed \$180,000 as a "subsidy" according to CIA documents (Mann, 1998). Even in his own autobiography, *Freedom in Exile*, the Dalai Lama recounted how his brothers had contacted CIA officials in 1956.

As American warships sail near the contested islands in the South China Sea at the time of this writing, a new form of sociopathic imperialism is guiding United States foreign policy, one that ironically also relies on "fake" news (if one considers exaggeration, sensationalism, and shock value as distorting attributes of current American journalism) that the United States president explicitly condemns or promotes depending on how the political climate synchronises with his erratic and jingoistic temperament, only to be further amplified by the hawkish apparatchiks of his inner circle (Lee, 2017). However, my manuscript argues that the maintenance and reproduction of American hegemony is not only determined by a coterie of politicians that attempt to shape public opinion; hegemons also rely on *mise en scène* of online news media to further exaggerate China as the new geopolitical threat in a new Cold War, a process that has been ongoing since China embraced capitalism and globalisation.

Punishing China with increasingly one-sided news reports on Beijing's economic and political manoeuvres, combined with the current tariffs meted against Chinese exports that will have a direct impact on American consumers are continuing acts to turn Americans on the left *and* right into Sinophobes. The key argument of this manuscript is that the United States' mass media is complicit in creating the conditions that will promote conflict between China and

the United States while it aims to maintain the appearance of objectivity and fairness. However, as any follower of the American news media is aware, American news has a tendency for employing journalists who opine as much as they report.² Its journalists have also descended into their own identity politics, one they wear as victims to shut down discussion by detractors, one informed by fear, sectarian angst, and frequently a sense of self-righteousness that is conflated with being right.

Thus, in between election cycles where "democracy" does not manifest in a colonised lifeworld³—an important concept offered by sociologist Jürgen Habermas—a biased online news media therefore nourishes the foreign policy angst of arguably the least democratic White House administration Americans have witnessed in a long time. That my mention of "democracy" sees the word set off in quotations thus far betrays my view that democracy can be construed as non-existent or, more dramatically to a fault, dead in American life. Its president is alarmingly fascistic and his base of supporters are enablers of implicit or explicit white supremacy in civil society. If we consider how power is a finite and zero-sum resource in terms of its distribution in the community—that is, empowerment is not available for every group since power for one comes from somewhere else—then historically, the United States has *never* been a democracy. Indeed, when the founding fathers established their independence from the United Kingdom in the late 18th century, a slave economy was still present while at the time of this writing, civil rights are still in need of enforcement in many parts of the United States to assist undocumented families, women and members of the LGBTQ community.

For those who cannot fathom my assertion that the United States has never been democratic, I can entertain a tempered view that nonetheless is still rather critical: that through its 20th and 21st century imperialisms, one that Vine (2015) notes in his incisive work *Base Nation*, has resulted in close to a thousand military bases around the world, and through its machinations against progressive groups and/or the grass roots in the country—if not through governmental policies then through America's corporato-

cratic establishment of big business regulations that have as its population a captive audience—American democracy is at the very least a very low-quality democracy.

The critique elaborated in this manuscript should thus be seen as a means to demystify the United States as a beacon of democracy. Pundits and proponents of democracy have for too long only sought one context to legitimise their democratic *bona fides*: whether there are elections. Such a process overlooks how democratic practices of a country that sloganise it must also be seen to be consistent abroad. With this consideration, United States foreign policy actually betrays the country's desires for hegemonic absolutism in foreign policy. For over 100 years, such a process has included the installation of dictators in many countries in South America, formation of “banana republics”, the enabling of genocide if not through Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge then through Suharto's regime to highlight but a few examples, and as noted at the outset of this manuscript, the ubiquitous placement of American military bases around the world in ways that make China's militarisation of the South China Sea's *uninhabited* islands pale in scope insofar as territorialisation logistics are concerned. Democracy then, should never be identified simply by the act of electing political leaders since, as noted in an important 2006 *Foreign Policy* article on failed states, voting “might give voice to the disenfranchised, *but they don't necessarily translate to good governance* (emphasis added)” (Failed States Index, 2006).

Journalism and its Assault on China

The manuscript randomly selected *Yahoo!* from Medium.com's “30 Most Visited Websites on the Internet in 2018.” Within *Yahoo!*, data were derived from its World News section. This rich section includes daily reports from the *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), *Associated Press* (AP), *Mashable*, *New York*

Times, *Time*, *Reuters*, *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Negative and neutral/positive headlines were our units of analysis and source of data. A year was randomly selected between the beginning of the 21st century, 2001, and 2018, to examine if thematic similarities of negative reporting existed in other years. The randomly selected year was 2010. I then extended from 2010 one more year of analysis. Thus, data in the form of news headlines were derived from a period that spanned two years, from 2010 to 2011. Specifically, geopolitical news headlines, whether negative or neutral/positive, were collected for 16 months between August 2010 and November 2011 from the *Yahoo!* Collection of news headlines and was undertaken twice a day during this period. Overall 201 headlines were collected during the 16-month period of data collection.

During 16 months of twice-daily monitoring of *Yahoo!*'s World News section, there were 175 China-negative headlines as opposed to only 26 neutral/positive headlines about China, resulting in a skew where 87% of reports on China were negative. As can be seen in Table 1 (for 2010) and Table 2 (for 2011), negative news headlines exhibit a consistent pattern where China is vilified in ways that may inspire fear and anger in the readership. Thus, even as far back as eight years ago there was a consistent pattern of negative headlines that demonised China. Of the 175 negative headlines, n=156 (n=59 for 2010; n=97 for 2011) were from the *Associated Press*; n=8 were from *Agence France-Presse* (n=2 for 2010; n=6 for 2011); n=3 were from *Reuters* (from 2011), n=1 was from the *New York Times* (from 2011); n=2 were from *Time* (from 2011); n=2 were from the *Envoy* (from 2011); n=1 from *Mashable* (headline only in 2011); n=1 from the *Washington Post* (from 2011); n=1 from the *Wall Street Journal* (from 2011). During the 16-month period, there was an average of 11 China-negative news headlines per month.

Table 1: 2010 China-Negative Headlines from Yahoo! World News

“Chinese missile could shift Pacific power balance” by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Aug 05, 2010
“China surges past Japan as No. 2 economy; US next?” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Aug 06, 2010
“Former enemies US, Vietnam now military mates” by Margie Mason (AP)	Aug 08, 2010
“Book says Chinese premier is no reformist” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Aug 09, 2010
“Chinese navy to hold drills in Yellow Sea” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Aug 29, 2010
“N Korea confirms Kim’s not-so-secret trip to China” by Jean H. Lee (AP)	Aug 30, 2010
“Chinese hold anti-Japan protests over boat dispute” by Scott McDonald (AP)	Sep 18, 2010
“Japan urges calm after China severs contacts” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Sep 20, 2010
“China tells U.S. to keep out of South China Sea dispute” by Ben Blanchard (AP)	Sep 21, 2010
“China Premier threatens Japan over boat dispute” by Cara Anna (AP)	Sep 22, 2010
“China rises and rises, yet still gets foreign aid” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Sep 25, 2010
“China seen as isolating self with tough diplomacy” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Sep 28, 2010
“Japan PM urges China to act responsibly” by Mari Yamaguchi (AP)	Oct 01, 2010
“O’Donnell said China plotting to take over US” by Ben Evans (AP)	Oct 04, 2010
“Japan says maritime spat with China over” by Arthur Max and Scott McDonald (AP)	Oct 05, 2010
“Chinese dissident Liu wins Nobel Peace Prize” by Charles Hutzler and Karl Ritter (AP)	Oct 08, 2010
“China remains uncompromising in response to Nobel” by Charles Hutzler (AP)	Oct 09, 2010
“Wife allowed to meet jailed Chinese Nobel winner” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Oct 10, 2010
“In Asia, Gates reassuring allies unnerved by China” by Anne Gearan (AP)	Oct 10, 2010
“Furious China blocks visit to Nobel winner’s wife” by Tini Tran (AP)	Oct 11, 2010
“Japan PM calls for release of Chinese Nobel laureate” by Agence France-Presse (AFP)	Oct 13, 2010
“China’s Wen inspiring debate with calls for reform” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 14, 2010
“US trade deficit with China balloons to new record” by Veronica Smith (AFP)	Oct 14, 2010
“Thousands in China, Japan rally over island claims” by Cara Anna (AP)	Oct 16, 2010
“China Media mostly quiet as mine blast traps 16” by Cara Anna (AP)	Oct 16, 2010
“China rejects clean energy probe, calls US unfair” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Oct 17, 2010
“China raises key rate for 1 st time since crisis” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Oct 19, 2010
“China paper blasts Western-style democracy” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 20, 2010
“Tibetan students protest use of Chinese in classes” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 20, 2010
“Diplomats: China tries to block UN Sudan report” by Edith M. Lederer (AP)	Oct 20, 2010
“US General: China Buildup Real but Clash Avoidable” by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Oct 21, 2010
“China defends language policies in Tibetan areas” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 22, 2010
“Chile display spurs questions on China mine safety” by Chi-chi Zhang (AP)	Oct 25, 2010
“Japan, worried by China, may boost submarine fleet” by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Oct 25, 2010

"China official: dollar printing causing inflation" by Elaine Kurntbach (AP)	Oct 27, 2010
"China says Japan distorted facts in an island dispute" by Tini Tran (AP)	Oct 29, 2010
"Lawyers: China blocked US visit, citing 'security'" by Cara Anna (AP)	Oct 29, 2010
"Clinton pressures China to settle island dispute" by Matthew Lee (AP)	Oct 30, 2010
"US, Australia seek to influence China's behavior" by Matthew Lee (AP)	Nov 06, 2010
"US, Australia expand ties with an eye on China" by Anne Gearan and Matthew Lee (AP)	Nov 07, 2010
"China Bars Lawyer from Attending London Conference" by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Nov 09, 2010
"Japan May Form New Unit to Watch China Navy" by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Nov 10, 2010
"Chinese Father Punished for Food Safety Activism" (AP)	Nov 10, 2010
"Thousands Stage Anti-China Protest in Japan" (AP)	Nov 13, 2010
"Chinese Woman Sent to Labor Camp for Retweeting" by Chi-Chi Zhang (AP)	Nov 18, 2010
"US Embassy: Beijing Air Quality is 'Crazy Bad'" (AP)	Nov 19, 2010
"China Nobel Fury Unmatched Since Soviet Days" (AP)	Nov 19, 2010
"Analysis: China Keeps Pressure Off North Korea" by Christopher Bodeen and Charles Hutzler (AP)	Nov 24, 2010
"Analysis: US Carrier Visit a Dilemma for China" by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Nov 26, 2010
"Dozens of Kids Injured in China School Stampede" (AP)	Nov 29, 2010
"China Bar US Official from American Appeal" by Charles Hutzler (AP)	Nov 29, 2010
"Chinese Activist Detained After Posting 1989 Photo" by Cara Anna (AP)	Nov 30, 2010
"China Leaders Ordered Hacking on Google" by Gillian Wong (AP)	Dec 05, 2010
"AP News Break: China to Award Prize to Rival Nobel" by Tini Tran (AP)	Dec 07, 2010
"China's Campaign Against Nobel Seen as Backfiring" by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Dec 08, 2010
"Empty Chair Left for Jailed Chinese Nobel Laureate" by Matti Huuhtanen and Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Dec 09, 2010
"US Military Leader Chides China over NKorea Crisis" by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Dec 09, 2010
"Jailed Chinese Dissident Honored at Nobel Ceremony" by Bjoern H. Amland and Matti Huuhtanen (AP)	Dec 10, 2010
"New Japan Defense Policy Focuses on China" by Mari Yamaguchi (AP)	Dec 16, 2010
"Pope Urges Courage for Catholics in China, Iraq" by Frances D'Emilio (AP)	Dec 25, 2010
"China to Crack Down on Official Partying" by Cara Anna (AP)	Dec 29, 2010

*Note: News headlines acquired from *Yahoo!*'s World News section only. Because many news pages are cycled out of *Yahoo!*'s database after a few months, the best approach toward acquiring the above reports is through the *LexisNexis* database. All newspapers articles cited herein and displayed on subsequent tables can be found on the *LexisNexis* database by the headline, name of the news agency, and name of journalist/s.

Table 2: 2011 China-Negative Headlines from Yahoo! World News

“US Defense Visit Will Renew Ties With Rising China” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Jan 07, 2011
“US Defense Chief: China Moving Fast on New Weapons by Anne Gearan (AP)	Jan 08, 2011
“Chinese Official Suspended Over Lead Poisoning” (AP)	Jan 08, 2011
“Gates Says China Moving Fast on New Weapons” by Anne Gearan (AP)	Jan 09, 2011
“Report: Chinese Troops Cross Into Indian Territory” by Nirmala George (AP)	Jan 10, 2011
“AP Exclusive: Missing Chinese Lawyer Told of Abuse” by Charles Hutzler (AP)	Jan 10, 2011
“Chinese Stealth Fighter Makes First Flight” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Jan 11, 2011
“China’s New Stealth Fighter May Use US Technology” by Slobodan Lekic and Dusan Stojanovich (AP)	Jan 23, 2011
“China’s CCTV News Report was ‘Top Gun’ Scene” (AP)	Jan 30, 2011
“Report: Hackers in China Hit Western Oil Companies” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Feb 10, 2011
“Rights Group Says China Activist Beaten Over Video” by Cara Anna (AP)	Feb 10, 2011
“China’s Railway Minister Accused in Graft Probe” by Anita Chang (AP)	Feb 13, 2011
“Rising China Bests a Shrinking Japan” by Chester Dawson and Jason Dean (Wall Street Journal)	Feb 14, 2011
“US Admiral: Carrier Killer Won’t Stop US Navy” by Eric Talmadge (AP)	Feb 15, 2011
“China Cracks Down on Call for ‘Jasmine Revolution’” by Cara Anna (AP)	Feb 19, 2011
“China Tries to Stamp Out ‘Jasmine Revolution’” by Anita Chang (AP)	Feb 20, 2011
“Diplomats Say China Blocks NKorea Nuke Report” by Edith M. Lederer (AP)	Feb 23, 2011
“China Charges Subversion for Protest Reposting” by Anita Chang (AP)	Feb 23, 2011
“China Rolls Back Press Freedoms Amid Protest Calls” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Mar 01, 2011
“Beijing Tightens Controls Over Foreign Media” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Mar 06, 2011
“China Takes Hard Line on Activists, Many Missing” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Mar 21, 2011
“Activists: Clash Kills 2 Outside Tibetan Monastery” (AP)	Mar 23, 2011
“China Sentences Democracy Activist to 10 Years” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Mar 24, 2011
“AP Impact: China’s Spying Seeks Secret US Info” by Pauline Arrillaga (AP)	May 07, 2011
“How a Networking Immigrant Became a Spy” by Pauline Arrillaga (AP)	May 08, 2011
“More Confident China Confronts US in Latest Talks” by Martin Crutsinger (AP)	May 08, 2011
“On China’s Streets, Grisly Attempts to Cover Traffic Accidents” by Austin Ramzy (Time)	May 09, 2011
“Detained Chinese Artist Allowed Visit by Wife” by Alexa Olesen and Isolda Morillo (AP)	May 16, 2011
“China Blocks Release of UN Report on NKorea” by Edith M. Lederer (AP)	May 17, 2011
“Chinese Prisoners Forced to Farm Gold in Online Games” by Lauren Indvik (Mashable)	May 27, 2011
“China Says It’s Not Behind Google Email Hacking” (AP)	June 02, 2011
“China Calls US Culprit in Global ‘Internet une ’” (AP)	June 03, 2011
“China Seeks to Placate Neighbours, Demands Respect” by Roberto Coloma (AFP)	June 05, 2011
“China’s ‘Born in the USA’ Frenzy” by Zhang Yan (Time)	Jun 14, 2011

“China Invites Sudan Leader Accused of War Crimes” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Jun 16, 2011
“China Military Paper Urges Steps Against US Cyber War Threat” by Chris Buckley (Reuters)	Jun 16, 2011
“China Plan to Copy Austria Village Stirs Criticism” by George Jahn (AP)	Jun 17, 2011
“Philippines to China: Don’t Intrude Into Our Water” by Hrvoje Hranjski (AP)	Jun 17, 2011
“Singapore Urges China to Come Clean in Island Dispute” (AFP)	Jun 20, 2011
“China Plans to Step Up Fight Against Corruption” (AP)	Jun 21, 2011
“Artist Ai Weiwei Released by China, Says He’s Fine” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Jun 22, 2011
“Chinese Warships Cross High Seas off Japan Island” (AP)	Jun 23, 2011
“US Ready to Arm Philippines Amid China Tension” by Lachlan Carmichael and Shaun Tandon (AFP)	Jun 23, 2011
“Chinese Dissident Freed; More Surveillance Feared” by Scott MacDonald (AP)	Jun 25, 2011
“Dozens of Vietnamese Protest China Amid Tensions” (AP)	Jun 25, 2011
“China Eyes Canada Oil, US’s Energy Nest Egg” by Rob Gillies (AP)	Jun 26, 2011
“Freed Critics Not a Sign China is Soft on Dissent” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Jun 27, 2011
“Sudan President’s Arrival in China Delayed” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Jun 27, 2011
“Fake Photo Fallout: Chinese Officials Embrace Social Media to Explain Mixup” by Laura Rozen (The Envoy)	Jun 30, 2011
“Bai Ling Reveals Dark Memories of Chinese Army” by Lynn Elber (AP)	Jul 02, 2011
“Rescuers Rush to Reach 40 Trapped Chinese Miners” (AP)	Jul 02, 2011
“Military Chief Visits China, Says to Maintain Asia Presence” (Reuters)	Jul 10, 2011
“China Dating Show Bachelor Detained in Murder Case” by Chi-Chi Zhang (AP)	Jul 13, 2011
“China’s Catholic Church ‘To Ordain Another Bishop’” by Louise Watt (AP)	Jul 14, 2011
“Vietnam: Chinese Soldiers Attack Fishermen” (AP)	Jul 14, 2011
“US Military Leader Sees Stark Rifts with China” (AP)	Jul 14, 2011
“China Calls on US to Retract Dalai Lama Invite” (AP)	Jul 15, 2011
“US Lawmaker Wields Budget Ax Over China Space Ties” by Matthew Pennington (AP)	Jul 15, 2011
“China Slams Obama’s Meeting with the Daila Lama” by Louise Watt (AP)	Jul 16, 2011
“Iran Seeks to Triple China Trade to \$100 Billion” (AP)	Jul 16, 2011
“Vietnamese Hold Anti-Cina March Despite Crackdown” (AP)	Jul 16, 2011
“China Executes 2 Former Officials for Bribery” (AP)	Jul 18, 2011
“Taiwan Says China’s Military Advantage is Growing” (AP)	Jul 18, 2011
“China Protests Planned Philippine Trip to Spratlys (AP)	Jul 19, 2011
“China Says Violence in Far West Was Terrorist Act” (AP)	Jul 19, 2011
“Vietnam: Tensions in South China Sea a Challenge” (AP)	Jul 21, 2011
“iFraud: Entire Apple Stores being Faked in China” (AP)	Jul 21, 2011
“Chinese State Media Say 32 Dead in Train Accident” by Scott McDonald (AP)	Jul 23, 2011
“Aquino to China: Filipinos Will Defend Territory” by Jim Gomez (AP)	Jul 25, 2011

“Report Says Equipment Flaws Caused China Crash” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Jul 27, 2011
“China Vows Severe Punishment if Corruption Found” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Jul 28, 2011
“7 Dead in Northwest China After Men Attack Crowd” by Louise Watt (AP)	Jul 30, 2011
“North Korea Says China to Supply Flood Aid” (AP)	Jul 30, 2011
“China Expels Official Accused of Taking Bribes” (AP)	Aug 03, 2011
“China Orders More Gov’t Openness After Train Crash (AP)	Aug 03, 2011
“Experts Question if China Attacks Planned Abroad” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Aug 05, 2011
“China Tells US ‘Good Old Days’ of Borrowing Are Over” by Walter Brandimarte and Melanie Lee (Reuters)	Aug 06, 2011
“China Jails 7 More People in Tainted Pork Scandal” (AP)	Aug 10, 2011
“China’s First Aircraft Carrier Begins Sea Trials” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Aug 10, 2011
“Chinese Activist on Trial as Crackdown Continues” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Aug 12, 2011
“Chinese Journalist Suspended for Outspoken Report” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Aug 19, 2011
“Chinese Issues Protest Over US Report on Military” (AP)	Aug 25, 2011
“China State News Agency Blasts US Defense Report” (AP)	Aug 25, 2011
“Chinese Surgery Patient Dies as Doctors Flee Fire” (AP)	Aug 25, 2011
“New Tibet Boss Does Not Mention Daila Lama” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Aug 25, 2011
“Japan’s New Leader Noda Sparks Wariness in China” by Malcolm Foster (AP)	Aug 29, 2011
“China Says Carrier Met Targets in First Sea Trial” (AP)	Aug 31, 2011
“India Says Ship Near Vietnam was Warned by China” (AP)	Sep 03, 2011
“Activist: Child of Chinese Lawyer Denied Education” (AP)	Sep 06, 2011
“Top of Chinese Wealthy’s Wish List? To Leave China” by Louise Watt (AP)	Sep 07, 2011
“China to Monitor Officials Traveling Abroad” (AP)	Sep 08, 2011
“Chinese Activist Gets 9 Months for Protesting” by Charles Hutzler (AP)	Sep 08, 2011
“Police in China Seize 100 Tons of ‘Gutter Oil’” (AP)	Sep 12, 2011
“China Dissident Writer Free After 5 Years in Jail” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Sep 14, 2011
“Rising Independent Candidates Harassed in China” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Sep 15, 2011
“China Consolidates Grip on Rare Earths” by Keith Bradsher (New York Times)	Sep 16, 2011
“China Criticizes US Deal to Upgrade Taiwan F-16s” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Sep 19, 2011
“China Shuts Factory After Pollution Protest” by Bill Savadove (AFP)	Sep 19, 2011
“China Raps US on Taiwan Arms, Warns of Fallout” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Sep 21, 2011
“China Man Held on Suspicion of Keeping Sex Slaves” (AP)	Sep 22, 2011
“Chinese Tourist Seized, Beaten Up and Driven Home” (AFP)	Sep 25, 2011
“2 Tibetan Monks Self-Immolate amid Dalai Lama Feud” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Sep 26, 2011
“South Africa May Block Dalai Lama Visit to Tutu” by Michelle Faul (AP)	Sep 26, 2011
“Chinese Group Halts Homegrown ‘Peace Prize’” (AP)	Sep 29, 2011
“China: US Currency Bill Would Have Repercussions” by Scott McDonald (AP)	Oct 04, 2011

"Chinese Express Horror at Public Indifference to Toddler Hit-Run Victim" by Luaren Rozen (The Envoy)	Oct 17, 2011
"China Says Trade With NKorea Has Nearly Doubled" (AP)	Oct 22, 2011
"Tibetan's Failed Suicide Captured in Amateur Video" by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 22, 2011
"Another Tibetan Monk Sets Himself on Fire in China" (AP)	Oct 25, 2011
"China Sends Ai Weiwei Tax Bill: \$2.3 Million" (AP)	Oct 31, 2011
"China-Friendly Hopeful to Run for Taiwan President" by Annie Huang (AP)	Oct 31, 2011
"Almost Half China's Richest Want to Emigrate: Survey" (AFP)	Nov 01, 2011
"Thousands Evacuated After China Chemical Plant Blast" by (AFP)	Nov 24, 2011
"China's School Bus Donation to Macedonia Derided" by Louise Watt (AP)	Nov 28, 2011
"Digging Into China's Nuclear Tunnels" by William Wan (Washington Post)	Nov 30, 2011

During the same 16-month period of twice-daily monitoring of Yahoo!'s World News section, there were only 26 neutral/positive news headlines about China (see Table 3 for 2010 values and Table 4 for 2011 values). Of the 26 headlines, n=21 (n=11 for 2010; n=10 for 2011) were from the *Associated Press*; n=1 was from a *Yahoo!*-specific correspondent (headline appeared only in 2011); n=3 were from *Agence France Presse* (headlines appeared only in 2011); while n=1 was from *Reuters* (headline only in 2011). During the 16 month period, there was an average of 1 neutral/positive headline about China per month. Only 13% of all headlines during the 16-month data collection period exhibited neutral/positive sentiments about China.

Table 3: 2010 Neutral/Positive Headlines from Yahoo! World News

“AP Interview: Stealth Expert’s Son Vows Appeal” by Herbert A. Sample (AP)	Aug 8, 2010
“China Landslide Toll Rises to 700” by David Wivell (AP)	Aug 11, 2010
“China Holds Day of Mourning for Landslide Dead” (AP)	Aug 15, 2010
“South China Landslide Kills 4, Leaves 44 Missing” (AP)	Sep 2, 2010
“Taiwan’s Ma Moves Ahead with China” by Brian Carovillano and Peter Enav (AP)	Oct 19, 2010
“China Raises Key Rate for 1 st Time Since Crisis” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Oct 19, 2010
“US Official Says China’s Hu Will Visit in January” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Oct 21, 2010
“Storm Dumps Rain on China after 12 Die in Taiwan” by Annie Huang (AP)	Oct 23, 2010
“Fast Train, Big Dam Show China’s Engineering Might” by Elaine Kurtenbach (AP)	Oct 26, 2010
“China’s Skyscraper Boom Buoys Global Industry” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Dec 5, 2010
“China Tunnel Links Last Isolated County to Highway” by Cara Anna (AP)	Dec 15, 2010

Table 4: 2011 Neutral/Positive Headlines from Yahoo! World News

“US, China Defense Chiefs Mend Frayed Military Ties” by Anne Gearan (AP)	Jan 10, 2011
“Gates Gets Tour of Chinese Nuclear Base” by Anne Gearan (AP)	Jan 11, 2011
“US Pomp Meant to Improve Tone of China Relations” by Christopher Bodeen (AP)	Jan 16, 2011
“China Online Photos Aim at Rescue of Abducted Kids” by Elaine Kurtenbach (AP)	Feb 10, 2011
“The Most Typical Face on the Planet” by Liz Goodwin (Yahoo News)	Mar 4, 2011
“US Ranks 17 as Clean Tech Producer, China is No. 2” by Arthur Max (AP)	May 7, 2011
“China Says Its Nuclear Reactors Passed Inspections” (AP)	Jun 14, 2011
“China Plans to Help Nepal Develop Buddha’s Birthplace” by Benjamin Kang Lim (Reuters)	Jun 16, 2011
“Passer-by Saves China Toddler in 10 Story Fall” by Liu Jin (AFP)	Jul 3, 2011
“China Pledges to Boost Restive West’s Development” by Gillian Wong (AP)	Jul 4, 2011
“China Makes Nuclear Power Breakthrough” (AFP)	Jul 22, 2011
“China’s Xi Confident of US Economic Strength” by Joe McDonald (AP)	Aug 18, 2011
“China: Attacks Thwarted in Xinjiang, Details Few” (AP)	Aug 31, 2011
“One-Child Policy a Surprising Boon for China Girls” by Alexa Olesen (AP)	Aug 31, 2011
“China Media Says US Sitting on Debt ‘Bomb’” (AFP)	Nov 22, 2011

How do news headlines have the power to maintain preferred themes over time? New headlines achieve this because they are written tersely and sensational so as to invite the readership to enter the story in ways that, under ideal circumstances, allow the reader to experience the story as fairly represented. Another dimension involves employing trigger words in headlines that are written with search engines in mind, allowing the reader to find a “landing page” such as *Yahoo!*’s main page where a variety of news content is presented.⁴ Finally, there is even a headline generation system such as Hedge Trimmer which creates headlines by employing “linguistically-motivated heuristics” through parse trees—an ordered diagram of the entire grammatical structure as well as how it proceeds as a sentence—to essentially select words from a news story for its headline generation. In 86.8% of all instances, headlines are usually formed from the first sentence of the story, with the average headline numbering 10.76 words. In their August 1990 examination of 100 Associated Press news reports (employed almost exclusively by *Yahoo!* World News on China), Dorr, Zajic, and Schwartz (2003) found that 51.4% of AP headlines included words from the first sentence of the news report, leading them to conclude that “although humans do not always select headline words from the first sentence, we observe that a large percentage of headline words are often found in the first sentence.” Such methods result in quick memorable soundbites that have an immediate and evocative impact on the reader.

The negative news headlines implicated or implied that China was, at the very least, complicit in undesirable geopolitical manoeuvres, or at worse, an antagonistic/belligerent actor. How this might affect perceptions of China is a point we must consider given the large demographic that reads online news over print news. For example, Eveland, Marton, and Seo (2004) found that young people under 30 have been using online news more frequently than print news. Furthermore, in an unrelated study of 2,000 Americans, more than half of adults under 30 go online for their primary source of news at least once a week (Pew Research Center, 2000a). In election season, over one third of adults under 30 rely on online

news sites (Pew Research Center, 2000b). Whereas print news will devote newspaper space, especially headlines, to what is deemed as the day’s most important news story (and thus, its presentation is a product of an editor’s decision), online news relies not on importance but recency of events, further rendered more intense by hyper-time that information technology processing affords, potentially increasing the urgency that readers feel upon being exposed to negative stimuli (Timiraos & Eveland, 2000).

Furthermore, the continuous weaving of an anti-China narrative is also achieved through hyperlinks dispersed in the text and/or sidebar—a phenomenon that is impossible to render in print news—that serve to amplify for better or worse the process of information or misinformation acquisition, respectively, for those that assemble informational bits (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002). The precarious nature of hyperlinks, if one adopts the view that news on China is primarily subjectively constructed, is in its ability to influence “the history of the current story...with elaborated information...about the interconnected nature of many events at the local, national, or international level” (Eveland, Marton & Seo, 2004, p.84). Online news sites possess another attribute in that they have the propensity to be topic-oriented, thus allowing readers to more holistically organise information, producing a subjective yet “somewhat more organised knowledge structure” (*ibid.*, p.85). However, what is not addressed is *to what degree misinformation can be constructed in the same manner by the reader of online news*. Tewksbury and Althus (2000) concede that online sites do have “independent effects on the kinds of stories readers notice and read,” with the variability contingent upon whether online news sites have their own interface or whether it is a simple transfer and presentation of information that follows the layout of the print newspaper.

From the concerns outlined in this paper, the precarious nature of online news is its ability to establish “meaningful mental systems” no matter how subjective they may be (Eveland, Marton & Seo, 2004). Gruber (2001) has a more charitable view, citing such an outcome as pivotal because the “ability to reason effectively depends on the ability to make connections

among ideas.” Yet I am of the view that the integration of knowing about an event combined with news *misinformation* that amplifies one’s content repository nonetheless still allow for the “organisation of political ideas and issues in terms of abstract or ideological constructs” even if the process is highly biased (Neuman, 1981, p. 1237). The knowledge possessed by readers, especially the sample of students employed by the researchers cited allowed them greater capacity to link social concepts across the present as well as across time, an outcome identified by McGraw and Pinney (1990) as well as Fiske, Kinder and Larter (1983). When this is combined with how online narratives construct, collect and distribute in a context freed from spatial obstacles, where events from online news take place in a manner that is equidistant from one another, a personalisation of events can likely occur, and in of concern to this paper, a personalisation of how an atavistic “Yellow Peril” Chinese threat is now afoot. Such a personalisation is highly plausible, for the onus of traveling like Marco Polo or Ibn Battutah in ways that behoved and inspired us to see the gradations of peoples within a larger nations are no longer there, and neither are geological features such as the Himalayas, the Tibetan Plateau, or the Gobi desert, impediments that can, ironically, make people appreciate the complex nuances and cultures of peoples. With the advent of online news, people now have the propensity to believe they can understand immediately, and thus pass judgment immediately and simplistically, with no historical, spatial, temporal and cultural considerations of the complexities of the human condition at the visceral level.

In this regard, a crucial question of whether online news sites—because of their agenda and negatively sensationalist dynamics—should be seen as a repository of objective information or, as Owston (1997) notes, one for “delivering predetermined content,” needs to be seriously considered. Decades of data on the web’s ability to promote political knowledge acquisition, at least among students, is still not conclusive (Clark, 1983). However, the “threat” that is China is already ensured by online news. Matters were given a great sense of urgency, as when the *Associated Press’ Eric Talmadge’s* reported on August 5, 2010

about China’s hyper-sonic missile being able to destroy US carriers in the Pacific. This report took place not from his office desk, but aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington which had sailed from the Yellow Sea near North Korea to project US thalassocratic might.⁵ A few days later on August 8, 2010, the *Associated Press’ Margie Mason* reported from the same carrier that had docked at Da Nang City, Vietnam. Images taken from the exercise show two F-18 Super Hornet jets lined abreast about to be catapulted airborne. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section through *Wordle* outputs, the vast majority of online news reports focus on themes of geopolitical conflict that threaten Americans, American allies in the region as well as American values at home.

Wordle Analysis of China

In the next phase of my analysis, the headlines of news reports were compiled and input into the *Wordle* metadata software designed by Jonathan Feinberg (<http://www.wordle.net/create>). *Wordle* generates “tag clouds” from input text and outputs word compilations where a larger word size indicates greater use of that particular word in the text (Viegas, Wattenberg & Feinberg, 2009). The “cloud” reference stems from how words are output in a manner that makes the compiled words appear as a chaotic compilation to a non-discerning eye. There is rich meaning within this compilation: large-sized words imply the greater importance of the word since its size is a reflection of frequency of use. Conversely, smaller-sized words indicate infrequent mention, and by implication, less importance.

The rationale for employing *Wordle* stems from its utility for content analysis of text. *Wordle* has already established a presence in peer reviewed journals in media studies and their outputs have frequently surfaced in reputable journals such as *New Media and Society*, as well as in information sciences journals such as *Communications in Computer and Information Science*.

In spite of its potential to illuminate meaning outside of sentences, I concede that *Wordle* is a blunt

instrument. Feinberg himself notes that *Wordle* outputs “make no scientific claims or inferences”; instead, “they offer their readers the possibility of unconstrained interpretations, based...on the assumption that word frequencies mean something.” My employment of *Wordle* will not be based on “unconstrained interpretations” but more rather, on cautious extrapolations. Its outputs will be displayed in a manner that “helps the researcher to understand meaning and/or cause behind the patterns...as well as discover additional patterns” (Manovich, 2010). Fans of *Wordle* agree that the program is filled with potential: “Scientists wordle genetic functions, fans wordle music videos, teachers wordle literary texts, spouses wordle love letters, kids wordle their thoughts and journalists wordle political speeches.” However, to what degree the *Wordle* instrument is blunt is an important discussion not undertaken here given the scope of this study.

For the purposes of this research, I conducted a *Wordle* analysis on all the news headlines gathered for the study. However, to remove redundancy, I con-

trolled for the word “China” and “Chinese,” that is, these words were removed from my input into the *Wordle* software. This strategy was employed because it is self-evident that our study is already on how China and the Chinese are essential. Had the two words been retained during inputting into *Wordle* news headlines, “China” and “Chinese” would appear as the largest words on the *Wordle* outputs. By removing the words “China” and “Chinese”, only themes that frame China are generated, allowing more explicit visibility of judgment calls made on the country’s domestic and foreign policies.

In Figure 1 below, the key theme that emerges across many months of headlines on China between August and December 2010 (seen in Table 1) point to concerns about China’s aggressive behaviour toward Japan, as can be seen by the large size of “Japan.”

The issues of Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands in Japanese) were frequently reported upon, with China’s stance toward the island rendered more belligerent. The term “dispute” is conspicuously large while a dramatic context of “protest” could be seen as a reading

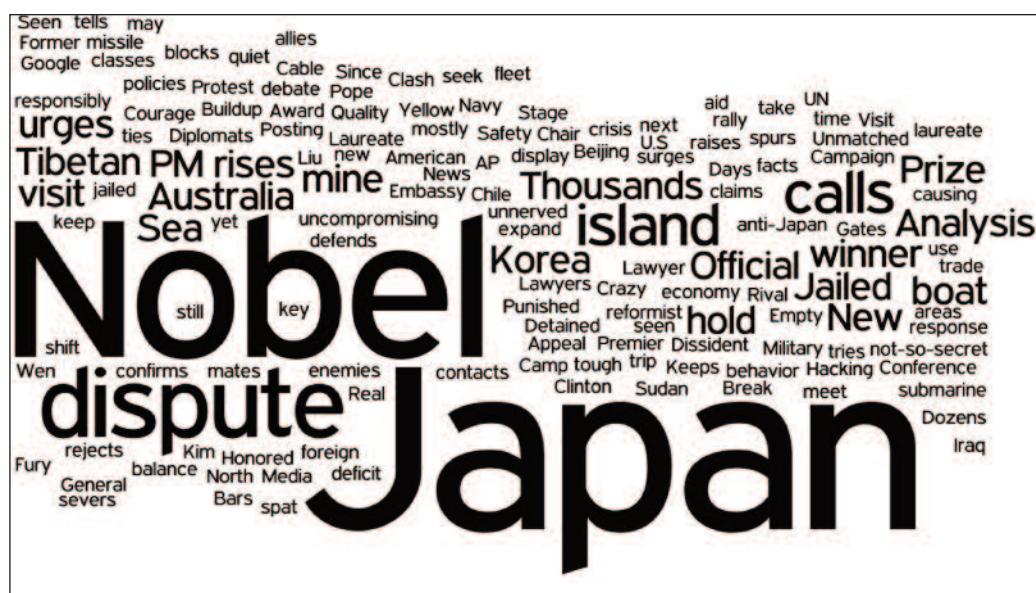


Figure 1: *Wordle* Output of Negative News Headlines between August and December 2010

of Chinese nationalism driving protests against Japan. The word “anti-China” invokes this context as can be seen in the output. During this period, reports of Japan’s prime minister urging China to “act responsibly” also served to paint China as an aggressive force (see Table 1, October 1, 2010 report). Moreover, in the same output, one sees mention of “Australia”; during this period, reports on Australian officials had been cooperating with American officials to exert foreign policy pressure on China were filed.

The term “Nobel” also figures prominently in the *Wordle* output. During this period, Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Much fanfare was made in many news reports about China’s stubborn refusal to acknowledge and validate this win. Reports thus branching from the Nobel fracas included a glorification of Liu as a political prisoner that has been denied his freedom, a component in the Western value system that is used by the Western foreign policy to direct general indignations as well as to vilify many countries not fitting its freedom-centric agenda. Seen in the same output are smaller words such as “de-

tained” and “jailed” that refer to the same story. The vilification of China continues as one can see the word “Tibetan” prominently in the *Wordle* output. This word refers to the news coverage of China denying Tibetans the right to use their indigenous language in classes as well as protests by Tibetan students against this policy.

In Figure 2, compiled from headlines collected between January and November 2011 (seen in Table 2), the *Wordle* output shows distinctly different themes. Issues with Japan subsided during this period, but the word “Report” figures prominently in the illustration. By revisiting Table 2, one can see that often the word “Report” is used as a qualifier in the headlines of the period to create a sense of urgency. This can be seen in the January 10, 2011 report titled “Report: Chinese Troops Cross into Indian Territory” and the February 10, 2011 report titled “Report: Hackers in China Hit Western Oil Companies.” In other uses of the word “report,” Chinese officials are seen condemning US reports on the Chinese military as well as the suspension of a Chinese journalist who wrote



Figure 2: *Wordle* Output of Negative News Headlines between January and November 2011

an outspoken article that challenged the Chinese Communist Party's favourable view on Sun Yat Sen, China's founding father.

Not surprisingly, perennial fear framing of the Chinese military continued during the entire 2011 year. Included in this frame are reports on China's new aircraft carrier, the country's preparation to respond to the US Cyber threat, a visit by the United States Navy's Admiral Mike Mullen to remind China about America's presence in the Pacific, as well as a report about Mullen and his view on the difficulties of trusting the Chinese military. Other reports about China's military threat abound, as in the July 18, 2011 report about Taiwan's warning about China's growing military advantage.

Issues related to Tibet, the Tibetans, and the Dalai Lama were also commonplace during the 2011 year. In a dramatic fashion, the news headlines sensationalised China's anger toward the US's accommodations of the Dalai Lama's visit while reports during the period reinforced the Tibetans' anger that China would choose the next Dalai Lama. In this context, the re-

port covered two Tibetan monks who immolated themselves as an act of protest against Chinese interference in Tibetan religious protocol (see headline on September 26, 2011). Not long after, more reports capture further immolation attempts.

During this period, *Wordle* outputs of the words Philippines, Vietnam and Japan, took place within the context of how the three countries perceived a *bona fide* threat by an expanding Chinese military. The news headline on June 23, 2011, notes how Chinese warships were patrolling off Japan. Moreover, India reported on September 3, 2011, that one of its own ships en route to visit Vietnam was warned by the Chinese Navy that it was in Chinese waters. Furthermore, there were reports on Chinese officials welcoming a Sudanese leader accused of war crimes (see headline on June 16, 2011) as well as its engagement with the US in an "internet war" (see headline June 3, 2011). Not surprisingly, the *Wordle* output in Figure 2 includes the word "Defense" somewhat prominently, with one report about China's criticism of the United States' sale of upgraded F-16 jets to Taiwan



Figure 3: *Wordle* Output of Negative News Headlines between August 2010 and November 2011

for its self-defense (see September 19, 2011).

When inputting the entire period of headlines collection, that is, between August 2010 and November 2011, the *Wordle* output can be seen in Figure 3 below.

A reading of the *Wordle* output in Figure 3 clearly displays a one-sided narrative of China as threat to the entire Pacific, the subtext of which also translates the country as an existential threat to the United States of America. Indeed, if an individual were raised on only online news alone, the simplistic conclusion drawn about China is that the country deserves, or should be, an enemy of the United States. Such a view is further informed by biased reporting that China's threat stems not only from its military, but from its totalitarian values where its own activists, journalists, as well as religiously inclined Tibetans are subject to severe repression. News reporters are jailed, artists like Ai Weiwei are jailed, etcetera. Indeed, the denial of the late Liu Xiaobo his Nobel Prize allows reporters to extend their critique of China's threat against American values based on freedom toward those similar values on the Western European continent, given that the Nobel Prize venue is in Norway. An important construction of implication is that no countries—especially those in Asia—are safe from Chinese attempts at regional, if not transpacific hegemony. The Philippines, Vietnam, India, are not safe. China's continuing support of North Korea is yet another point of entry into the vilification of China, alongside those reports show the corrupt characters inherent in the Chinese politician. From the 176 negative news headlines on China collected between August 2010 and November 2011, one sees a litany of Sinophobia essentialised around its sinister intentions and practices.

Epilogue

From our exploratory and inductive examination of negative news headlines on China, one can posit that the United States' antagonistic foreign policy toward China is assisted by a Sinophobic online news media. With the state apparatus and its news outlets working in conjunction, public opinion will likely be shaped

in ways that will enable the United States, through its foreign policy of trade wars and naval encounters, to ensure that China does not become the world's largest economy accompanied by an even more formidable military.

By resurrecting a new Cold War atavism, Washington is delighted to now have a new diabolical trope that lends credence to Huntington's clash of civilization thesis, one that allows the current White House administration to ensure and/or manufacture a variety of social dynamics that may enable them to instigate a war with Beijing. Such a strategy is rather brilliant in its *realpolitik*, for it prevents Americans from critically engaging with the sociopathy that is currently embedded in the American lifeworld, that is, the denying of human rights for children as they regularly get shot at school, enabling gun-related deaths that approximate the fatalities of the Korean War every year, enabling the continuing use of the race card, enabling of a resurrected sex war that will last for generations and finally, enabling political correctness—the irony of which must be appreciated given how the United States sloganizes its freedom of speech. Moreover, the current administration is currently pushing to remove many civil rights and social services from a variety of American populations, be it through its stance on immigration or its institutional machinations to ensure conservative representatives dictate notions of Americanism in the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court. This is, in essence, the current American experience: one that too frequently bases its conflict resolution on anger and physical and emotional violence. The United States is becoming balkanised, and Washington needs to avoid addressing this domestic dysfunction with an epic distraction. Democracy is broken in the United States and Washington cannot fix it.

Although both countries had been synchronising their globalisation dynamics, with "interlocking financial and manufacturing arrangements," the fact remains that China is an economic competitor and military rival to the United States (Kwong & Chen, 2010). The current trade war is meant to ensure that this competitor is repulsed, the process of which is hidden by pieties and ethics that allow American

hawks in administration and in the world of online news to claim the moral high ground. It should not be a surprise that the intensification of the current trade war is but an attempt by US foreign policy to speed up the process of isolating and weakening China so it will not be able to withstand a military conflict. Yet it will depend on to what degree the American population will be enablers of this conflict, one that could only be instigated if a captive audience is given a staccato of negative cues and themes that caricaturises China over time. Should such a process succeed, then by default China will be a hated state, a trope of Big Brother with diabolical dreams of world domination that will usher in a totalitarian planet.

Although history does not determine the future, it may predict certain dynamics with some degree of consistency. Having had the Philippines as a colonial possession as well as compelled to contend with Japan during World War II, the United States has rarely ceased to forward its variant of capitalism and national interests in the Far East. From its late 19th century colonial forays into China and the Philippines, the latter of which resulted in over 200,000 military and civilian Filipino deaths, to its war with Japan, followed by the equally infamous wars with North Korea and Vietnam, as well as littering the 20th century Asiatic foreign policy landscape with a variety of proxy wars—for example, the “Secret War” in Laos, the purging of Indonesia’s pro-left Sukarno for the pro-US Suharto that included the genocide of at least half a million Indonesians suspected of being communists, the US has fought more conflagrations in Asia than in any other region in the world, even more so than the much hackneyed “troubled” Middle East.⁶

Despite the US having found succour in its economic links to China, and in spite of the fact that it exponentially has more military bases in more countries around the world than other states, it continues to paint China as a threat to regional, if not global, stability. What can this mean for US foreign policy in Asia? Because the US has always been heavily involved in the pax-Americanization of the Pacific for over one hundred years, and because the US has had since its 1776 promulgation as a state relied on all forms of

war (conventional or proxy), regime changes, as well as genocide of its indigenous peoples, enslavement of its African labour force, civil war against its own citizens, and let us not forget nuclear war (it remains the only country to have ever employed nuclear weaponry against another),⁷ and its interference in Syria and much of the Middle East, there is, following from this reasoning, a need to consider the probability that a military conflict of some degree will be designed to lure China into war with the United States. Should such a scenario occur, online news media will be unleashed to complete the task of embedding Sinophobia upon the American population. The contention of this paper is that online news sympathetic to American foreign policy are creating the cultural apathy needed to ensure that its populations remain docile, if not jingoistic, about the coming conflict between China and the United States. The latter desperately craves it while the former will fight it even if it results in defeat. Indeed, China’s Xi Jinping, now leader for life, would be committing political suicide if he cowers.

Notes

¹ The foreign policy condemnation of China is quite astonishing given that the United States and Great Britain in 1965 colluded to empty the island of Diego Garcia for the US to build a military base. While the islands attended to by Beijing have no indigenous populations (or inhabitants for that matter), the indigenous populations at Diego Garcia were by the thousands forced to evacuate at gunpoint (see Vine and Jeffrey’s 2009 work, “Give Us Back Diego Garcia: Unity and Division among Activists in the Indian Ocean” that notes how pets were gassed in front of the inhabitants to intimidate and compel them toward accepting their forced relocation).

² It is well known in the United States that if one wanted to read news to reinforce their prejudices against the current president and/or conservative politicians and policies, then one reads the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Huffington Post*.

³ The lifeworld, a term popularized by philosopher

Edmund Husserl and sociologist Alfred Schutz, represents the world of everyday occurrences and social interaction. As an epistemological and ontological site, the lifeworld is that space in social life where interactions take place beyond the scripts and messages dispensed to us by our frequently reified institutions. Sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1987), however, sees this world as colonized by regulatory language and capitalism—even in democracies—and thus democracy remains prophetically incomplete in this site of contemporary social life.

⁴ I am indebted to Tim Lynch, former *Los Angeles Times* copy/editor chief of twenty years for providing wonderful insights into the use of headlines.

⁵ Note: All newspapers articles cited herein can be found on the LexisNexis database by the headline, name of the news agency, and name of journalist/s. The August 5, 2010, *Associated Press* report “Chinese Missile Could Shift Pacific Power Balance” by Eric Talmadge can be found in this manner. Search Lexis-Nexis database for the *Associated Press*’ August 8, 2010 report “Former Enemies US, Vietnam Now Military Mates” by Margie Mason.

⁶ Whether or not Samuel Huntington’s assertions in the *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) are correct insofar as they specifically apply to China, US foreign policy may “make” his propositions correct. See also: Theodore Friend, *Indonesian Destinies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981); Hamish McDonald, *Suharto’s Indonesia* (Melbourne: Fontana Books, 1980).

⁷ The US is still the only country in the world to have used weapons of mass destruction upon civilians, if by WMDs we are referring to nuclear weapons, the diabolical ordinance that in Bush-speak justified our war with Iraq.

References

- Clark, R. E. “Reconsidering Research on Learning from Media.” *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 53, No. 4.
- Dorr, B., Zajic, D. & Schwarts, R. (2003). “Hedge Trimmer: A Parse-and-Trim Approach to Headline Generation.” *Human Language Technology Conference: Proceedings of the HLT-NAACL 03 on Text Summarization Workshop* 5.
- Eveland, W. & Dunwoody, S. (2002). “An Investigation of Elaboration and Selective Scanning as Mediators or Learning from the Web versus Print,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Vol. 46, No. 1.
- Eveland, W., Krisztina Marton, K. & Seo M. H. (2004). “Moving Beyond ‘Just the Facts’: The Influence of Online news on the Content and Structure of Public Affairs Knowledge”. *Communication Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1.
- Failed States Index. (2006). *Foreign Policy*.
- Fiske, S. T., Kinder D. R. & Larter, W. M. (1983). “The Novice and the Expert: Knowledge-based Strategies in Political Cognition,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 19, No. 4.
- Graber, D. A. (2001). *Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kwong, P. & Chen, E. W. (2010). “Chinese Americans,” In *The Encyclopedia of Asian American Issues, Volume 1*, edited by Chen, E. W. & Yoo, G. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Lee, B. (2017). *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin’s Press.
- Mann, J. (1998, September 15). “CIA Gave Aid to Tibetan Exiles in ‘60s, Files Show,” *Los Angeles Times*.
- Manovich, L. (2010). “What is visualization?” *Poetess Archive Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
- McGraw, K. M. & Pinney, N. (1983). “The Effects of General and Domain-specific Expertise on Political Memory and Judgment.” *Social Cognition*, Vol. 8, No. 1.

- Neuman, W. R. (1981). "Differentiation and integration: Two dimensions of political thinking" *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 86, No. 6.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2000a, June 11). "Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience". Accessed April 29, 2010 from <http://people-press.org/report/36/internet-sapping-broadcast-news-audience>
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2000b, December 3). "Internet Election News Audience Seeks Convenience, Familiar Names". Accessed April 20, 2010 from <http://people-press.org/report/21/internet-election-news-audience-seeks-convenience-familiar-names>
- Ronald, D. O. (1997). "The World Wide Web: A Technology to Enhance Teaching and Learning?" *American Educational Researcher*, Vol. 26, No. 2.
- Tewksbury, D. & Althus, S. (2000). "Differences in Knowledge Acquisition Among Readers of the Paper and Online Versions of a National Newspaper." *Journalism & Mass Communications Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3.
- Timiraos, A. & Eveland, M. (2000). *Variations in Prominence of News Story Types in Web and Print Newspapers*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago.
- Viegas, F. B., Wattenberg, M. & Feinberg, J. (2009). "Participatory visualization with Wordle." *Visualization and Computer Graphics IEEE Transactions*, Vol. 15, No. 6.
- Vine, D. (2015). *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Jack Fong is Professor of Sociology at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. His research interests comprise ethnopolitical sociology, nationalism, foreign policy, international relations, urban sociology, Southeast Asia, development studies, subaltern studies, social movements, and existential sociology. Jack's recent publications include a monograph titled *The Death Cafe Movement: Exploring the Horizons of Mortality* (Palgrave 2017), and journal articles appearing in *Urban Studies*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, and *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, among others.
 jackfong@cpp.edu
