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AGENDA-SETTING AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS:  
NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIALS ON THE  
1989 CHINESE STUDENT DEMONSTRATION IN TAINANMEN SQUARE

A Thesis Submitted to the Communication Department in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Art

by  
Yung-Yi Tang

PITTSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Pittsburg, Kansas

May, 1990

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. Thimios Zaharopoulos for his encouragement, helpful comments, constructive criticisms, patience, and timely suggestions which made this thesis possible.

The author also appreciates to Dr. Mary M. Roberts, Dr. Patricia Behlar, and Dr. Peter K. Hamilton for their constructive criticisms and suggestions.

A special note of gratitude is extended to my parent and my wife for being supportive throughout this period.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study attempted to explore a new dimension of the agenda-setting theory by examining the positions of the New York Times and the Bush Administration with regards to China policy in 1989. Content-analysis was applied to the New York Times editorials and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.

Results of the content-analysis indicated that, regarding China policy during 1989, the New York Times had a negative perception towards China and Chinese policies in general, also the New York Times expressed neutral or no attitude towards the Bush Administration's China policy most of the time. However, when the New York Times took a stand, it supported the Bush Administration's China policy except during the last period, when the Administration began to negotiate with the Chinese government (i.e., from September 15, 1989 to January 31, 1990).

This study indicated that, during the one-year period studied, the New York Times and the Bush Administration had different China policy issues. However, the study found that the Bush Administration initiated China policy during the period studied and the New York Times simply reacted to it most of the time.

This study concluded that during 1989, the New York Times followed the Bush Administration's China policy issue

agenda in general. However, when the foreign policy issue involved domestic politics, the New York Times changed its position and did not support the Administration.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Basic Issues

In a democratic society, it is assumed that citizens have the ultimate power to decide their government's policies. This assumption is based on the principle that individuals will be well informed so they can make intelligent decisions about public affairs; because "without sound information there can be no sound public opinion, and without sound public opinion there can be no intelligent foreign policy" (Bailey, 1948, p. 304).

Long ago, Lippmann (1922) noted that people have little opportunity to experience the world firsthand; therefore, people construct their perceptual world with information provided to them by the press. Although "the press may not be successful in telling its readers what to think . . . it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13).

Many scholars agree that the mass media have not fulfilled their responsibility in terms of providing sufficient international news information to their readers. Furthermore, the U.S. media have been frequently criticized as devoting less space to international news than media in other countries. For example, Spanier and Uslaner (1978) complained that "the vast majority of Americans are poorly informed about . . . foreign policy" (p. 92).

Furthermore, Cohen (1963) noted that "one can observe certain persistent influences and sources of judgement being brought to bear on the treatment of foreign affairs news" (pp. 142-27). These influences and sources of judgement are chiefly government officials, such as the President, who is "the principal spokesman of the nation," and almost "always has the initiative over both the press and the Congress" in foreign policy. (Reston 1976, p. 50).

If the nation's foreign policy is communicated from the government to the press and from the press to the public, as Chang (1986) argued, it is possible that the press becomes an organ of the government. It is also possible that the President as the "spokesman of the State" can orchestrate the press and can manipulate public opinion.

The issues here are whether the President and his Administration sets the foreign policy agenda for the press, or whether the press, acting as a "watchdog," acts independently from the government. These issues will be examined in terms of U.S. foreign policy; specifically in relation to U.S. foreign policy towards China in 1989.

## Significance of this study

This study is both empirically and theoretically significant. Empirically, it compares the media position and the Administration's position in a consequential time frame. Thus, as one case-study, it may provide evidence concerning who sets the media's agenda in the foreign policy arena.

Traditionally, agenda-setting studies examine the same issues regarding their coverage by the media and their importance to the audience. This study attempts to examine the positions of the New York Times and the Bush Administration on the same issue (China policy). By examining the positions taken in the editorials and the Administration, we may assert the following: one, the media and the Administration have the same agenda and same position; two they have the same agenda but different positions; and three they have different agenda. Thus by investigating interactions between the media and the Administration with regards to this foreign policy issue, this study extends the scope of "traditional" agenda-setting research to a new dimension.

## Background

A decade ago, China began an economic reform movement after Deng Xiaoping took over the communist party. Since then, Deng's reforms brought hopes of political reform to the intellectuals and students. But on the night of June 4, 1989, when the People's Liberation Army marched to Beijing and crushed the student demonstrators at Tainanmen Square, those hopes vanished.

The number of casualties is unknown since the Chinese government censored the news. In the United States, millions of people watched the bloody scene on network television. During this incident, China became part of the agenda of important issues for many Americans.

Following the Tainanmen Square incident, President Bush's China policy has been severely criticized by members of Congress. This incident and subsequent disputes concerning China policy between the President and the Congress, with the intervention of the press, provide a great opportunity for the study of the role of the Administration in setting the media's agenda.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Agenda-setting function of the mass media**

By covering certain events and certain issues, the media influence the audience's awareness of what is important. This kind of effect is called "agenda-setting."

The role of the news media in a democratic society has been long recognized not only as a channel for the expression of public concerns but also as one that shapes public opinion. The theory of agenda-setting was first introduced and tested by McCombs and Shaw (1972). They found that the news media help shape public opinion about Presidential candidates. They conducted a long-term, large-scale study of the relationship between the mass media and public opinion during the 1972 Presidential election campaign. In terms of the information seeking process, McCombs and Shaw found that the media did provoke the audience's awareness by providing a body of information. In other words, by heavily covering certain events/issues the media caught audiences' attention by telling them what were the important events/issues to think about.

In McCombs' (1976) terms, "the audience takes note of the salience of the news media, notes what is emphasized, what receives heavy play, and incorporates a similar set of weights into their personal agenda" (p. 3). Since their pioneering study, the agenda-setting theory has been

fertilized by numerous other studies examining the agenda-setting function of mass media.

According to McCombs (1981), agenda-setting research can be categorized in four types, depending upon the number of issues (sets of issues or single issue) in the media, and the type of respondent data (aggregate data or individual data) being analyzed, as shown in figure one.

Figure 1. A Typology of Agenda-Setting Research\*

|               | Aggregate<br>Data | Individual<br>Data |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Set of issues | I                 | II                 |
| Single issue  | III               | IV                 |

\* McCombs (1981), p. 124, Figure 4.1.

McCombs and Shaw's 1972 study is one of the best examples of the type I study comparing aggregate data (all respondents consenting to the importance of issues) to a set of issues. They found that the news media shaped the overall opinions of these respondents, as the issues being heavily covered by the news media were also regarded as important by the respondents. Similar methodology was applied in Weaver, McCombs, & Spellman's (1975) study of Watergate, by Shaw and McCombs (1977), and by Weaver et al, (1981). Results from all these studies show that the media's coverage influences public opinion, but they

differentiate this influence among different types of media through time. For instance, in the case of Presidential campaigns, the printed press sets the agenda earlier than does television, and the press has a greater influence on its readers than television has on its viewers. However, this type of study can only be viewed as media's influence in the acceptance of the top one or two issues by representative groups of voters or publics; the media agenda may not all be accepted by the audience.

As for an individual's agenda, the type II study compares set of issues in the media and the salience of these issues from individual respondents, (McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes 1974). The 1972 Presidential campaign study examined stories in two Madison newspapers and the individual audience's response. They found that the salience of individuals' response on the campaign issues was not quite matched with the press. In other words, what the press think is an important issue/event may not be important for individual readers. Other studies employing a similar approach found there was little agenda-setting effect: such as Siune and Borre (1975), Weaver, Stehle, Auh, and Wilhoit (1975), and Auh (1977). These studies show less support for media agenda setting than type I (also less than type III and IV). This is not surprising considering the methodology applied in this type of study--using a set of issues to match the audience's agenda on the individual basis.

Although this type of agenda-setting study does not seem to support the agenda-setting concept, it is not because the theory or concept of agenda-setting is wrong. The less effective agenda-setting result only shows either that the type II study does not fit into agenda-setting or a more detailed study should be undertaken.

In a type III study, a single issue or a whole set of related issues in the media is compared with aggregate data of the respondent; a single issue in the media is compared with public consensus. Few studies have been done in this category. Both Mackuen and Coombs (1981) and Lang and Lang (1981) found that, in addition to the media coverage, there are other factors affecting the public agenda. Mackuen and Coombs found the characteristics of the event (how dramatic it is), and the amount of news coverage playing roles in the agenda-setting effect. Lang and Lang found that other factors such as interpersonal discussion also help to "build the agenda." Although these findings suggest that the media cannot be singled out as the only force of public agenda, they are one of the most powerful.

The type IV study compares a single issue or one set of issues in the media with the individual agenda, with varying results. This variety could occur because of the differing research designs used instead of constituting a possible conflict in findings. For instance, in their one-time survey, Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) showed very

weak evidence of the media agenda-setting effect. Yet in a field experiment, Cook, Tyler, Goetz, Gordon, Protess, Leff and Molotch (1983) found strong evidence of media agenda-setting. Other studies showed the media agenda-setting effect between the two previously cited studies, such as Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1983), Schoenbach (1982), and Schoenbach and Weaver (1983). The type IV study shows support for media agenda-setting, although other factors such as social forces and psychological conditions should also be all taken into consideration. Furthermore, type II and IV studies can be analyzed together for a more detailed and subtle result. In short, although results of the type II study only weak support the media agenda-setting theory, results from all the other types support it.

Not all agenda-setting studies found that the media can set the agenda for public. For instance, Tipton, Haney, and Baseheart's (1975) study showed little effect of media agenda-setting in city and state elections; Sohn (1978) did not find a media agenda-setting effect on local non-political issues in a longitudinal study; Gadziala and Backer (1983) found little evidence for the agenda-setting effect on the Presidential campaign debates; and Sohn and Sohn (1982) found that there is no relationship between the press agenda and the opinions of community leaders, non-leaders, and press staffers.

According to Eyal (1980), one of the inconsistent

findings in the agenda-setting studies is due to the nature of the issues. He has distinguished issues as obtrusive and unobtrusive. Obtrusive issues are those with which people have personal contact, while unobtrusive issues are those which are remote from public opinion with the media as the primary and often the only sources. His study indicated that the media display the agenda-setting effect on unobtrusive issues, with little effect on obtrusive ones. Thus Eyal's study supports Lippmann's (1922) assertion that the media had a great influence on public opinion concerning the outside world.

It is evident that the mass media have the power to set the agenda for the public, especially on unobtrusive issues such as international relations. Nevertheless, if indeed the media do, in certain circumstances, set the public's agenda, the question which then arises is, who sets the media's agenda?

## Agenda-setting and international news

In discussing the role of the news media in foreign policy, the question is whether the role that the media play is an advocacy role or an adversary role. Ramaprasad (1984), in her study of the U.S. press coverage of two Indian Wars, has defined these two terms as follows:

Advocacy is defined as a more or less non-questioning acceptance of U.S. foreign policy manifested as favorable coverage of the country toward which the U.S. has a favorable foreign policy (and vice versa), and Adversary is defined as a more or less questioning non-acceptance of U.S. foreign policy manifested as unfavorable coverage of a country toward which the U.S. has an unfavorable foreign policy (and vice versa.) (p. 2)

Findings of studies on the role of the media in the foreign policy arena are inconsistent. For instance, in a study of news concerning the 1971 Indian-Pakistani War in the New York Times and the London Times, Becker (1977) used the former as the "experimental" setting and the latter as the "control" setting. He found that the New York Times changed from its pro-Pakistan coverage prior to the war to less pro-Pakistan after the war. Meanwhile, the official Washington policy shifted from neutral to pro-Pakistan. Becker concluded that "the U.S. government was unsuccessful in attempts it may have made to get the New York Times to change its news copy as the nation's policy shifted" (p. 368). Lefever's (1974) analysis of CBS news from 1972 to 1973 concerning the Vietnam War, did not find any



correlation between the news coverage and the government's Vietnam policy. In their study of New York Times' coverage of U.S.-India relations, Ramaprasad and Riffe (1985) found the Times' overall coverage did not parallel the U.S. government policy. In the last period of their study, from April 1977 to December 1980, however, they found there was a positive attitude in the New York Times' coverage toward India which was similar to the government's India policy. They asserted this correlation was due to the restoration of democracy in India and the beginning of a pro-India Carter Presidency.

Paraschos and Rutherford (1985) studied coverage of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon on three television networks and found that CBS had the most assertions unfavorable to Israel, while ABC had the most assertions favorable to the PLO. They also found that NBC showed the fairest stories. Their findings showed a mixed coverage among the networks, thus it was difficult to say that the news coverage reflects the government's policy toward the Mid-East countries. Neither did Soderlund and Schmitt's (1986) study of El Salvador's civil war find that the direction of news coverage was similar to the U.S. governmental position. In addition, they found that, in comparing positive and negative news coverage, the Washington Post and the New York Times portrayed the United States and her supporters positively less often than negatively. In studying the



content of the New York Times' editorials concerning Communist China's entry into the United Nations, Liu (1963) found that "except for the periods from the outbreak of the Korean War to 1958" there was "no relationship between the Times' editorial attitude change and government policy" (p. 67).

Therefore, the above studies do not show evidence that the elite press, when reporting foreign affairs, follow the government's foreign policy. At least one study, Rainey (1975) showed the press initiates a new foreign policy approach for the government to follow. He cited, "during an April 1974 cabinet meeting, Navy Secretary James Forrestal referred to one of Walter Lippmann's articles which warned of economic disaster in Europe unless steps were taken by the U.S. government to furnish financial support" (p. 103). This incident suggests that sometimes editorial writers or columnists can provide an alternative approach to foreign policy, thus playing an initiating role and setting foreign policy agenda for the government to follow.

On the other hand, there are numerous studies providing evidence that the government sets the foreign policy agenda for the mass media, and the mass media only reflect or follow the government's policy. For instance, Myers (1968, 1970, 1974, 1978, 1982) in a series of studies, examined the editorial content of the treatment of foreign policy issues during five presidential campaigns in ten daily newspapers.

He found that the foreign affairs issues appeared to be initiated by the presidential candidates, then the newspapers either criticized or applauded. Myers (1970), observed that, in the 1968 Presidential campaign, "after Humphrey announced his intention to halt the bombing should he become president, most newspapers reacted" (pp. 62-3). Stovall (1982) studied 49 daily newspapers on foreign policy issue coverage in the 1980 Presidential election campaign and found that foreign affairs topics made up 15% of the campaign stories. He concluded that "foreign affairs issues were indeed initiated by both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates" (p. 539).

In addition to the above studies, Chang (1984) found that the news coverage of Reagan's China policy in the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, and the Washington Post significantly changed after Reagan became President. Previously, these three newspapers devoted the most space to U.S.-Taiwan relations. After Reagan took office, however, the three newspapers gave the largest space to U.S.-China relations. The change of coverage in these newspapers paralleled Reagan's concerns about U.S. relations with both Taiwan and China during the campaign and after his inaugural. Chang did not indicate who initiated this change. The press may have initiated issues on China policy and influenced Reagan's change, or the press may have merely reflected Reagan's altered China policy. However, his study

did show that the press and Reagan had the same agenda on China.

In his thirty-year scale study, Chang (1989) examined interactions between presidential statements and editorials concerning Sino-U.S. relations in the New York Times and the Washington Post, and found a substantial relationship between press attention and government attention to China policy. He found that the increase and decrease of the coverage of China in these two newspapers followed the government's attention to China. By separating press contents into front-page news coverage and editorials, he found there was a positive relationship between the government's China policy and these two papers' news coverage of the issue at the same time, while this relationship was even stronger between the editorials and the government's China policy.

Furthermore, by employing the Fourier time series regression analysis, Chang (1989) also found some evidence concerning the causal flow in U.S.-China policy-making. He argued that "the causal flow . . . is thus from the government policy (cause) to the editorials of the two papers . . . [with] two to four weeks [period]" (p. 504). Thus, the press reacted to the government's foreign policy in a favorable way two to four weeks after the policy was made. However, Chang (1989) found this "impact of the government's China policy on the editorial position of the

two papers was negative" (pp. 272). He explained that "an increase in the government's attitude toward China in a certain year was accompanied by a decrease in the editorial attitude toward Sino-American relations in the following year" (Chang, 1986, p. 272). Accordingly, Chang (1989) asserted this negative impact might be due to "the papers' attempt to play an adversary or a counterpart to offset the government's leaning to China in its policy initiative" (p. 272). On the other hand, by reversing the analytical process, he found the editorials had no impact on the government's China policy.

Two other long-term studies have found evidence that press coverage of foreign affairs follows government foreign policy. Using the New York Times as the foundation for their twenty-eight-year time span study of press coverage of Iran, Dorman and Farhang (1987) also examined many other daily newspapers, magazines, and two wire services (UPI and AP). They found that the "American news media more often than not followed the cues of foreign-policy makers rather than exercising independent judgment in reporting the social, economic, and political life of Iran under the Shah" (p. 2). Furthermore, they also found much evidence suggesting that "journalists proved easily susceptible to ethnocentrism, a condition that served the policy goals of official Washington remarkably well" (Dorman and Farhang, 1987, p.2). Therefore, they argued that, in foreign policy,

the news media were advocates rather than adversaries. Knightley (1975) examined the news coverage of China in World War II, Korea and Vietnam in the major U.S. dailies. He concluded that, when reporting military affairs, the news media "got on side and went along with the U.S. military's view of how the war should be reported" (p. 355).

Other studies dealt either with a relatively short period, one specific country or area such as Asian countries. In a case study of the Japanese Peace Settlement, Cohen (1957) found that U.S. newspapers followed the government's viewpoint in reporting this settlement. Ganju (1975) examined three U.S. dailies' editorial treatment of China and found that the editorials did not function as adversaries but advocates. In testing the thesis that "the American news media have been transformed from a relatively passive and conservative institution into an institution of opposition to political authority," Hallin (1984, p. 2) conducted a content-analysis of television coverage of the Vietnam war. His data indicated that "the pattern of change in television content seems consistent with the thesis of an increasingly oppositional news media" (p. 6). However, in a deeper probing of the routines of objective journalism, Hallin found that "the media continued, . . . to rely heavily on official information and to avoid passing explicit judgement of official policy and statements" (p. 6). Thus he rejected the ideal of the

increase of negative news in the late Vietnam War reflecting the growth of domestic opposition, he argued that

the media not only reflect but strengthen prevailing political trends, serving in a time of consensus as consensus-maintaining institutions and contributing, when consensus breaks down to a certain point, to an accelerating expansion of the bounds of political debate. (pp. 22-3)

In a study of the New York Times' editorial treatment of India, Lynch and Effendi (1964) found the New York Times' editorials being relatively neutral. However, they also found there were substantial and significant differences among the treatments of themes in five categories. They found that, when there was a better relationship between India and the United States, India received a more favorable opinion in the Times' editorials. On the other hand, India's relations with the Communist bloc and other Asian countries were evaluated less favorably in the Times' editorials. Alfonso (1971) concluded that the attitudes of U.S. dailies, when reporting Philippine events, reflected a similar desire to preserve the status quo in the Philippines of the American governmental, military and industrial sectors.

Dealing with news from the Mid-East, Paraschos (1988) examined the coverage of seven U.S. foreign policy objectives in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Arkansas Gazette from 1978 to 1983. He found that the overall coverage in these three newspapers did not advance

the interests of American foreign policy; 36% were unfavorable, 32.1% were favorable and 31.9% were neutral. When he examined specific instances, however, he found that in the case of Cyprus, there were 43.5% favorable stories, 28.5% unfavorable, and 28% neutral. As he stated, "the Cyprus coverage. . . yielded mainly favorable stories toward both Carter and Reagan policies" (p. 208). Sahin (1973) examined the news of Turkish-American political relations during two four-year periods in the New York Times, and found that the direction of reporting changed in response to shifts in relations between Turkey and the United States. Guirguis (1988) conducted an image study of Egypt in the New York Times during the Suez crisis of 1956, the Egyptian-Israeli War of 1967, and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979. She found that only during the Egyptian-Israeli War was the image of Egypt in the Times and U.S.-Egypt government relations not parallel to the U.S. government position. Otherwise, the overall image of Egypt in the Times (before, during, and after these three incidents), reflected the state of U.S.-Egypt governmental relations.

Furthermore, on the basis of a set of image studies of Greece in the U.S. newspapers, Paraschos (1986) asserted that "foreign news will continue to be, in the foreseeable future, heavily colored by U.S. foreign policy aims" (p. 55).

Some studies have emphasized the news coverage of Latin



America countries. Asserting that the news media maintained an adversary relationship with government by providing criticism of official policy, Cozean (1979) content-analyzed the news coverage of Cuba during the early days of the Castro Revolution to illustrate the role of the press in the decision making process concerned with the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion in the New York Times and the Washington Post. His study suggests that, although these two newspapers criticized the government's policy of Cuba, most of the issues were initiated by the government. In their study of the relationships between the press and President Kennedy during four international crises (the Laotian Crisis of 1961, the Berlin crisis of 1961, the Cuban crisis of 1962, and the Vietnam crisis of 1963), Kern, Levering, and Levering (1983) examined the sources of the news coverage of these crises in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Chicago Tribune, and the San Francisco Examiner. They found that, in each of these four crises, the press helped shape the issues reflectively. They (1983) concluded:

The press plays a major role in defining public issues. . . And it is significant that he [Kennedy] followed the dominant viewpoint reflected in the press in his key policy initiatives during each of the four crises.

Although the press assisted in defining the issues, the crucial distinction that emerges from this study is that the manner in which issues were defined did not originate in the press, but rather stemmed from the politically significant forces at work on the issues. In this vital sense, the



press during these years was largely a reflective institution. (p.196)

Thus the press was merely a communication channel to reflect policy issue positions.

In his study of the frequency and direction of mention of El Salvador and Nicaragua during 1983 in four newspapers--the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, and the Chicago Tribune, Kelly (1988) found that there was a positive correlation between the policy position of the U.S. government toward the governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua and the type of coverage those two governments received in the elite press of the United State.

Inconsistencies in the literature may be caused by several factors. First is the varying research methods employed. Some study news coverage, others editorials; some compare the news content with government documents, and some interview either journalists or government officials or both. The second factor concerns the complexity of international affairs and the president's personality. The third factor is a gatekeeper ideology.

Fifteen years ago, Lent (1975) stated that the news media in a modern democratic society, such as the United States, should be able to provide "greater quantities of international news with more in-depth and fairer treatments," so "the American public, surrounded by mass media . . . [was] becoming critical followers of

international affairs" (p.1). From the literature, however, most studies in international news indicate the news media as a reflective institution of the U.S. government's foreign policy. Moreover, studies examining the initiative question concerned with foreign policy and press coverage also show that the flow of foreign policy is from the government to the press. These results suggest that the news media are influenced by the government in foreign news coverage. In short, it is the Administration who sets the foreign policy agenda for the news media.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

#### Research question and hypotheses

This study is designed to examine whether the Bush Administration set the foreign policy agenda for the media regarding China, by comparing the content of the New York Times' (hence NYT) editorials and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (hence WCPD).

The research question of this study is, what is the relationship between President Bush's (the White House) position and the New York Times' position on U.S. policy toward China? The literature presents the press as a "reflective institution" which helps to transmit the government's foreign policy issues. As a result, four research hypotheses are developed.

Hypothesis one: The New York Times and the U.S. President (White House) will have had the same general attitude (i.e., positive, negative, neutral) toward China, during the one year period studied (February 1, 1989 to January 31, 1990.) In other words, the New York Times will reflect President Bush's attitude toward China.

Hypothesis two: The New York Times and the U.S. President will have discussed the same issues (same agenda) regarding China policy. For example, both the New York Times and President Bush will have talk about sanctions, the Presidential veto, secret diplomacy, etc., at the same time.

Hypothesis three: The New York Times and the U.S. President/White House will have taken the same position on specific issues related to China policy. In terms of attitude, this hypothesis predicts there will have been a parallel attitude between the New York Times' editorials and President Bush's China policy (i.e., positive/negative/neutral). In other words, when Bush's China policy stand is negative, the New York Times' will also be negative.

Furthermore, as most studies have shown, in the discussion of foreign policy issues, the press is the follower while the government is the initiator. Thus hypothesis four is that, the President/White House will have initiated the issues related to China policy, then the New York Times will have joined in the discussions.

#### Methodology

This study aims to explore the interaction between the press' stand and government policy concerning the China policy agenda during the past year. Four research hypotheses deal with both the New York Times' and President Bush's attitude toward China, position on China policy, and the initiative role in China policy.

This study concerns a time frame of one year, from February 1, 1989 to January 31, 1990. During this period, the New York Times editorials related to China will be recorded and analyzed for content. President Bush's

statements on China policy recorded in the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents will be similarly analyzed. These statements constitute the "control" setting to be compared with the content and the dates of the editorials.

This sampling period is chosen because of its relationship to the Tainanmen Square incident when the Chinese government crushed the student demonstration on June 3, 1989. This dramatic incident has been heavily covered by the media, and President Bush's China policy has been criticized, too. Thus, this transition period has been selected to test the agenda-setting relationships between the media and the U.S. government. In order to test whether there was a change of the New York Times' and the Administration's perceptions of China and China policy agenda, data was collected four months prior to this incident as well as eight months afterward, from the New York Times' microfilm and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. The inclusion of eight months following the Tainanmen Square incident is important because a variety of related issues were involved in the public agenda during this period, including the government's secret negotiation with China.

The reasons for choosing the New York Times are several. First, it is probably the most influential newspaper in the United States, as the most widely read

within U.S. government circles (Weiss 1974), and the most widely quoted (Gau 1976). Second, the New York Times is one of the world's elite newspapers (Merrill 1968). Third, attempting to be the nation's historical document, the New York Times keeps a complete index.

There are two reasons to analyze the editorials rather than the news. First, editorials reflect public concerns and public opinions and clearly indicate the newspaper's opinions. By studying the editorials, one expects to find a position toward government policy. Furthermore, it was evident in many other studies including Chang (1986), that there is a positive correlation between the editorial content and the news content. Therefore, it is asserted that the general direction of the news can be predicted through a study of the editorials.

The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, the official record of the President, includes every public statement concerning China policy that the President made during the period being studied. These statements will be analyzed for content in the similar way as the Times' editorials. Since the President is the spokesman for the national foreign policy and takes full responsibility for the nation's foreign policy (United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp. 1936), this study chooses his statements instead of those from the state Department as the index for the nation's foreign policy.

Content analysis is employed in this study as the tool for analyzing the positions of the editorials and the Presidential Documents. Content analysis has been described in Krippendorff (1980) as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21). Certain criteria are developed as the standards for encoding the content.

## Coding Procedure

The following coding system will be used. For editorials in the New York Times, each paragraph is a coding unit with the whole item as the context unit. The context unit is defined either as a whole editorial article or a set of paragraphs set off by an obvious space with a black dot in the middle of the space. In the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, the coding unit is defined as a group of paragraphs: a letter to the Congress, a statement released by the White House spokesman, or an answer to a single question and the follow-up question (if any) during a White House press conference. Only the paragraph or paragraphs which include China or China-related material will be analyzed. The coding procedure identifies and records the following categories:

A. Date: Month, day, and year.

B. Name of document: The New York Times or the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.

C. Symbols of the actors on China policy--a symbol is defined as a word or phrase used to denote a proper noun. This study uses six proper nouns: Chinese government, Chinese dissidents, Chinese people, Bush Administration, the U.S. government, and others. Only the main symbol in each coding unit may be recorded.

1. Chinese government: Beijing government, Communist party, Communist party officials, Chinese



government officials, China and Beijing.

2. Chinese dissidents: Known Chinese individuals who are recognized as dissidents by the Chinese government, such as Fang Lizhi, Wei Jingsheng, Liu Binyan, Wang Ruowang, and Tibetan political and religious leader Dalai Lama, etc.

3. Chinese people: Except those mentioned as Chinese government or identified as Chinese dissidents: includes all other Chinese such as students, workers, citizens, demonstrators, Tibetans, reformers, Chinese students in the U.S., etc.

4. Bush Administration: Mr. Bush and his White House officials.

5. U.S. government: Officials from the three branches of government except White House officials.

6. Others: Symbols and proper nouns which do not fall into the above five categories further subdivided as follows:

6.1. British government.

6.2. Former U.S. President Nixon.

6.3. U.S. Congress.

6.4. American business:

6.5. Other Communist countries: countries such as Soviet Union, Poland, etc.

D. Subjects of U.S.-China relations: The topics of the New York Times' editorials or the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents concerning U.S.-China relations. As

with the symbols, the subjects will be coded by the main subject only of each editorial and document. Eleven subjects of U.S.-China relations are coded as follows:

1. U.S.-China relations: The diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China, interrelations between these two governments, diplomatic negotiations, visits of the two governments' officials.

2. China's international relations: The diplomatic relations with all other nations except the United States.

3. Military: China's military actions, such as the movement of troops, military actions, and military treaties or confrontations with other countries.

4. China's domestic economics: Chinese economic reform, Chinese domestic economics.

5. Economics/trade: Economic relations between China and foreign organizations and/or world economic organizations, etc. (except sanctions); thus, foreign investments in China, China's loan from the World Development Bank, trade between China and other countries.

6. Chinese politics: Domestic Chinese politics such as demonstrations, declaration of martial Law, internal power struggles, and China's policy on Tibet.

7. U.S. politics: The U.S. domestic politics such as the debate between the President and the Congress, criticism from outside the Executive Branch.

8. Educational and cultural exchanges: Chinese students in the United States, exchange of students and scholars.

9. Human rights: Chinese government's policy of forced abortion, arresting citizens without trials, destroying aboriginal cultures, and jailing political dissidents; the U.S. government's policy of political asylum for refugees, sheltering Chinese dissenters.

10. Sanctions: Economic and military sanctions toward China.

11. Others: Additional subjects that do not fit into the above ten categories, such as American values (i.e., humanitarian mores, progress, equality, freedom, democracy, etc.) and reforms in other communist nations.

E. The main concerns in U.S.-China relations: The focus of attention given to U.S.-China relations in each context unit (i.e., each Times' editorial article). A qualitative view of the coder in one sentence, about the overall message of the editorial. These views were then clasified by content.

F. Perception of China: A description or an impression of China as perceived by the President or his White House officials, or the editorial writer. A positive perception is defined as the depicting of China as friendly, open, peace-loving, stable, strong and the like; negative, the depicting of China as weak, dangerous, aggressive, unstable,

closed, evil, undesirable, blatant, cruel, brutal, fading, ugly, inhumane, colorless, blood-stained, autocratic, isolated, savage, offensive, 'Big Brother,' Stalinist, etc. When there is no direction or there is any doubt about the direction, the perception has been coded as neutral. If there is no description or impression of China, the perception has been coded as none.

G. Attitude toward the President's China policy (in the Times' editorials): As supportive: praising it as desirable, sound, significant, firm, crafted, constructed, judicious, and the like, or as unsupportive: indicating criticism of the President's China policy, such as weak, soft, failed, double-talk, shameful, etc. When there is no direction or there is any doubt about the direction, the attitude has been coded as neutral, otherwise it has been coded as none when there is no mention of U.S. China policy.

H. Initiatives: The initiative role of the New York Times' editorial concerning China policy will be considered to be defined by the tense and the style used in the coding unit. Thus, issues described in the future tense or as prescribing action (policy) using words such as "should", are considered to be initiated by the Times' editorial; issues described in the past tense or as reacting (i.e., applause or criticism) are considered to be initiated by the President; issues described in the present tense or as reporting (i.e., without comments) and issues not related to

Bush's (the White House) China policy are considered as not related to initiative.

In order to compare attitudes toward China before, during, and after the student demonstrations, the data have been divided into three time periods; February 1, 1989 to May 4, 1989 (before the student demonstrations), May 5, 1989 to September 15, 1989 (before the Times' editorial suggested Bush Administration to keep talking to China), and September 16, 1989 to January 31, 1990 (during the secret negotiations and the discussions about Chinese student visas).

All content categories in the coding system have been applied to each New York Times' editorial, while only four have been applied to the Presidential Documents: the date, the name of the document, the subject, and the perception of attitude toward China or China's policy. The followings have not been applied to the Presidential Documents: the symbol, the main concern, the attitude toward the President's China policy, and the initiative. It would be redundant to analyze the President's attitude toward his own China policy, or to ask the President about his initiatives in his policy.

To test the intercoder reliability of the coding system, two coders encoded all materials separately. After the coding was finished, the coders compared each other's. The agreement on the symbols of the Times' editorials was 89.70%, on the subjects 79.9%, on perceptions of

China/China's policy 60.29%, on attitudes toward Administration's China policy 84.31%, and the Times' initiative of the Times' editorials 79.90%. Then the coders re-examined the differences between them and following a discussion referring to the original items, intercoder reliability increased to 87.70%, 84.80%, 94.11%, and 98.53%, for subjects, perceptions, attitudes, and initiative respectively. Intercoder reliability on both the subjects and perceptions of China/China's policy of the Presidential Documents was 84.%. In the cases of disagreement, the final code chosen alternated from one coder to the other.

## Limitations

Since this study concerns a period of approximately one year, and deals only with China, it has a limited generalizational power. Furthermore, a study on one type of media can explain little about the mass media as a whole. However, a study of the New York Times, one of the most influential newspapers, may identify some trends in the interactions between the mass media and the President in terms of agenda-setting in the foreign policy arena.

Further limitation is that it analyzes only the press and official documents. This methodology does not explore the actual influence in the decision-making processes in either the government's policy or the editorial writers'. Neither does this study examine the public's agenda. It explores only the outcome of the above two processes. An additional study could employ interviews to examine the influential factors during the decision-making process.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The study involved a census made up of twenty-seven New York Times editorials during a one-year period, yielding 204 coding items (paragraphs). The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, at the same time, yielded 102 coding units.

In order to compare the content of the two documents, frequencies of content categories were first calculated. Table I shows the frequency of symbols appearing in New York Times editorials during the study period. Throughout this period, the most frequent symbol appearing in the New York Times editorials was "Chinese government" which was the main symbol of 96 coding items, or 47.1% of the total. The second most frequently mentioned symbol was "Bush Administration" which appeared 65 times, or 31.9%.

Table II presents the subjects which appeared in both the New York Times editorials and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. There were eleven coding units in the New York Times which equally covered both China's economics and politics; thus a new category was created as "China's economics and politics". In the New York Times, the most frequent subject was "Chinese politics" (31.9%), while in the Presidential Documents the most frequent subject was "U.S.-China relations" (43.1%). The second most frequent subject in the New York Times was "U.S.-China



TABLE I

Symbols in the  
New York Times' editorials

| Symbols                   | Frequency | %    |
|---------------------------|-----------|------|
| China                     | 96        | 47.1 |
| Bush Administration       | 65        | 31.9 |
| Chinese People            | 22        | 10.8 |
| U.S. Government           | 8         | 3.9  |
| British Government        | 3         | 1.3  |
| Chinese Dissidents        | 2         | 1.0  |
| Richard Nixon             | 2         | 1.0  |
| U.S. Congress             | 2         | 1.0  |
| American Business         | 2         | 1.0  |
| Other Communist Countries | 2         | 1.0  |
| TOTAL                     | 204       | 100% |

TABLE II

Subjects in the New York Times' editorials and  
the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

| Subjects                        | NYT   |       | WCPD  |      | TOTAL |      |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|
|                                 | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %    | Freq. | %    |
| U.S.-China Relations            | 49    | 24.0  | 44    | 43.1 | 93    | 30.4 |
| China's Politics                | 65    | 31.9  | 15    | 14.7 | 80    | 26.1 |
| U.S. Politics                   | 20    | 9.8   | 9     | 8.8  | 29    | 9.5  |
| China's International Relations | 21    | 10.3  | 3     | 2.9  | 24    | 7.8  |
| Human Rights                    | 7     | 3.4   | 11    | 10.8 | 18    | 5.9  |
| Economy/Trade                   | 5     | 2.5   | 8     | 7.8  | 13    | 4.2  |
| China's Economy/Politics        | 11    | 5.4   | 0     |      | 11    | 3.6  |
| Military                        | 5     | 2.5   | 4     | 3.9  | 9     | 2.9  |
| China's Domestic Economy        | 8     | 3.9   | 0     |      | 8     | 2.6  |
| Sanctions                       | 4     | 2.0   | 1     | 1.0  | 5     | 1.6  |
| Education/Culture               | 0     |       | 1     | 1.0  | 1     | 0.3  |
| Others                          | 9     | 4.4   | 6     | 5.9  | 15    | 4.9  |
| TOTAL                           | 204   | 100.1 | 102   | 99.9 | 306   | 99.9 |

Freq.=Frequency

$\chi^2=44.19398$  D.F.=12  $P<0.01$

relations" (24.0%), while in the Presidential Documents "Chinese politics" was the second most frequent (14.7%). The New York Times also had nineteen items referring to the "Chinese economy", while the Presidential Documents failed to mention it.

A Chi-square test of the subjects (see table II) shows a value of 44.19392 which is significant at 0.01. When we examine each subject category, some obvious differences exist between the two documents. The New York Times had 24% of its items on "U.S.-China relations", while the Presidential Documents had 43.1%. The New York Times had 10.3% on "China's international relationships", while the Presidential Documents had only 2.9%. Regarding "China's domestic economy", the New York Times had 9.3%, while the Presidential Documents had none. As for "China's politics", the New York Times had 37.3%, while the Presidential Documents had 14.7%; and for the subject of "Human rights" the New York Times had only 3.4%, while the Presidential Documents had 10.8%.

Subjects in the New York Times and the Presidential Documents were further broken down by three periods, as shown in table III and IV respectively.

Table III indicates that the New York Times increased its coverage on subjects of "U.S.-China relations" and "U.S. politics" in the last period. It decreased its discussion of "China's politics" and "China's domestic economy" in the

TABLE III

Subjects in the  
New York Times editorials in the three periods

| Period                          | I     |      | II    |      | III   |      |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Subjects                        | Freq. | %    | Freq. | %    | Freq. | %    |
| China's Politics                | 15    | 37.5 | 37    | 38.9 | 15    | 18.8 |
| U.S.-China Relations            | 5     | 12.5 | 19    | 20.0 | 25    | 36.2 |
| China's International Relations | 0     | 0    | 13    | 13.7 | 8     | 11.6 |
| U.S. Politics                   | 3     | 7.5  | 4     | 4.2  | 13    | 18.8 |
| China's Economy/Politics        | 2     | 5.0  | 6     | 6.3  | 3     | 4.2  |
| China's Domestic Economy        | 6     | 15.0 | 2     | 2.1  | 0     | 0    |
| Human Rights                    | 7     | 17.5 | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |
| Economy/Trade                   | 0     | 0    | 5     | 5.3  | 0     | 0    |
| Military                        | 0     | 0    | 4     | 4.2  | 1     | 1.4  |
| Sanctions                       | 0     | 0    | 4     | 4.2  | 0     | 0    |
| Others                          | 2     | 5.0  | 1     | 1.1  | 6     | 8.7  |
| TOTAL                           | 40    | 100  | 95    | 100  | 69    | 100  |

$\chi^2=87.90953$  D.F.=20  $p<0.01$

last period. A Chi-square value of table III is 87.90953 and is significant at 0.01.

Table IV indicates subjects discussed in the Presidential Documents in the three divided periods. The Presidential Documents had generally emphasized the subject of "U.S.-China relations." It also had given a great amount of space to the subject of "China's politics" in the second period. But it had dropped the subject of "China's international relations" in the last two periods, while it had increased subjects of "U.S. politics" and "Economy/Trade" in the last period. A Chi-square value of subjects in the three periods is 40.21458, significant at 0.01.

A comparison of the subjects in both the New York Times and the Presidential Documents in the three divided periods is presented in Appendix B. Across the three periods, subjects in both documents had a Chi-square value of 28.81250 for the first period, 27.74004 for the second, and 34.56879 for the last, all significant at 0.01.

Each document emphasized different subjects in each of the three periods. The New York Times increased its coverage of "U.S.-China relations" and "China's international relations" in the last two periods, while the Presidential Documents dropped "China's international relations" completely in the same periods. But the Presidential Documents increased the discussion of "U.S.-

China relations" in the last period. Both documents decreased discussion of "China's politics" and "China's domestic economy" in the last two periods, while the Presidential Documents dropped them completely in the last period.

As for the perception toward "China/China's policies", table V indicates that throughout the study period, the New York Times had a more negative perception toward "China/China's policies" (48.5%) than positive (4.4%). The category of "None" accounted for 32.4%, and "Neutral" for 14.7%. As for the perception toward "China/China's policy", the Presidential Documents had "None" perception most of the time (51.0%), followed by "Neutral" (27.5%), while they had a more positive perception (12.7%) than negative (8.8%). A Chi-square test shows a value of 48.88941, significant at 0.01.

A breakdown of the New York Times' attitude toward the Bush Administration's China policy in three periods is presented in table VI. A Chi-square test shows a value of 45.3548 which is significant at 0.01. The New York Times on 13.2% out of 204 units supported the Bush Administration's China policy, and most of this support took place during the second period when the Administration issued sanctions. Nonsupportive editorials accounted for 14.7% and most of these appeared in the third period, when President Bush vetoed the Pelosi Bill and the Administration started to

TABLE IV

Subjects in the weekly compilation  
of Presidential Documents in the three periods

| Period                          | I     |      | II    |      | III   |      |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Subjects                        | Freq. | %    | Freq. | %    | Freq. | %    |
| U.S.-China Relations            | 11    | 55.0 | 15    | 34.3 | 18    | 46.2 |
| China's Politics                | 1     | 5.0  | 14    | 32.6 | 0     | 0    |
| Human Rights                    | 2     | 10.0 | 4     | 9.3  | 5     | 12.8 |
| U.S. Politics                   | 3     | 7.5  | 1     | 2.3  | 5     | 12.5 |
| Economy/Trade                   | 1     | 5.0  | 2     | 4.7  | 5     | 12.8 |
| Military                        | 0     | 0    | 2     | 4.7  | 2     | 5.1  |
| China's International Relations | 3     | 15.0 | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |
| Education/Culture               | 0     | 0    | 1     | 2.3  | 0     | 0    |
| Sanctions                       | 0     | 0    | 1     | 2.3  | 0     | 0    |
| Others                          | 2     | 10.0 | 3     | 7.0  | 1     | 2.6  |
| TOTAL                           | 20    | 100  | 43    | 100  | 39    | 100  |

$\chi^2=40.21458$  D.F.=18  $p<0.01$

TABLE V

Perceptions of China in both the New York Times editorials  
and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

| Perceptions | NYT   |       | WCPD  |       | TOTAL |       |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|             | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     |
| Negative    | 99    | 48.5  | 9     | 8.8   | 106   | 35.3  |
| Positive    | 9     | 4.4   | 13    | 12.7  | 22    | 7.2   |
| Neutral     | 30    | 14.7  | 28    | 27.5  | 58    | 19.0  |
| None        | 56    | 32.4  | 52    | 51.4  | 118   | 38.4  |
| TOTAL       | 204   | 100.0 | 102   | 100.0 | 306   | 100.0 |

$\chi^2=48.88941$  D.F.=3  $p<0.01$



negotiate with the Chinese government. However, most of the New York Times editorials (63.7%) show no attitude toward the Bush Administration's China policy, and overall there is an almost equal number of supportive and nonsupportive editorial items.

Table VII shows the frequency of the New York Times' initiation of China policy during the three periods. A Chi-square test shows a value of 18.8706, significant at 0.01. Overall, 9.3% of the New York Times editorial items prescribe China policy (such as suggesting the Bush Administration distinguish between China and its "bloodstained" regime, June 5, 1989); 24.5% react to the Bush Administration's China policy (such as supporting the Administration's suspension of military sales to China, June 6, 1989); 3.4% simply report (such as describing President Bush's China policy after the Tainanmen incident, June 22, 1989); and a 62.7% do not relate to the initiative. The New York Times' prescriptions of China policy during three periods are 7.5%, 10.5%, and 8.7% respectively.

A Chi-square that is further applied to test the New York Times' prescribing and reacting roles, across the three periods, yields a Chi-square value of 0.7246, which is not significant.

A further examination of the New York Times' role in initiating policy suggests that it has initiated ten items on "U.S.-China relations", one on "Economy/Trade", two on

TABLE VI

Attitudes toward the Bush Administration's China policy  
in the New York Times' editorials in three periods

| Period       | I     |       | II    |       | III   |       | TOTAL |       |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Attitudes    | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     |
| Supportive   | 4     | 10.0  | 21    | 22.1  | 2     | 2.9   | 27    | 13.2  |
| Unsupportive | 3     | 7.5   | 3     | 3.1   | 24    | 34.8  | 30    | 14.7  |
| Neutral      | 4     | 10.0  | 5     | 5.3   | 8     | 11.6  | 17    | 8.3   |
| None         | 29    | 72.5  | 66    | 69.5  | 35    | 50.7  | 130   | 63.7  |
| TOTAL        | 40    | 100.0 | 95    | 100.0 | 69    | 100.0 | 306   | 100.0 |

$X^2=45.3548$  D.F.=6  $p<0.01$

TABLE VII

Initiative of China policy in  
the New York Times' editorials in three periods

| Period      | I     |       | II    |       | III   |       | TOTAL |       |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Times'      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Initiative  |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| in China    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| policy      | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     | Freq. | %     |
| Prescribing | 3     | 7.5   | 10    | 10.5  | 6     | 8.7   | 19    | 9.3   |
| Reacting    | 8     | 20.0  | 21    | 22.1  | 21    | 30.4  | 50    | 24.5  |
| Reporting   | 0     |       | 4     | 4.2   | 4     | 5.8   | 7     | 3.4   |
| None        | 29    | 72.5  | 61    | 64.2  | 38    | 55.0  | 128   | 62.7  |
| TOTAL       | 40    | 100.0 | 95    | 100.0 | 69    | 100.0 | 204   | 100.0 |

$X^2=18.8706$  D.F.=6  $p<0.01$

Prescribing versus Reacting in three periods:

$X^2=0.7246$  D.F.=2  $p>0.25$

"Chinese politics", five on "U.S. politics, and one on "others". Among these initiating items, six of "U.S.-China relations" items were in the second period, and three of "U.S. politics" items were in the last period.

Table VIII shows comparisons of the perception of China/Chinese policy between the two documents in three periods. In the first, Chi-square value of 27.45 is significant at 0.01. There is a great difference between the two documents in each perception. In this period, perception of China/Chinese policy in the New York Times is 2.5% positive versus the Presidential Documents' 45.0%, and New York Times' 57.5% negative perception versus the Presidential Documents' none.

In the second period, there is a Chi-square value of 7.89396 significant at 0.05. There is not as much difference between these two documents on each perception.

In the last period, a comparison of perceptions between the two documents yields a Chi-square value of 36.86087 significant at 0.01. Difference exists between two documents for each perception. The New York Times had 58% of its items with positive perception of China/Chinese policy while the Presidential Documents had none; New York Times had 27.5% positive perception while the Presidential Documents has 74.4%.

The perceptions of each document throughout these three periods are also compared. For the New York Times, a Chi-

TABLE VIII

Perception of China/China's policy in  
both the New York Times' editorials and the Weekly  
Compilation of Presidential Documents in the three periods

|             | NYT         | WCPD        | NYT         | WCPD        | NYT         | WCPD        |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Period      | I           |             | II          |             | III         |             |
| Perceptions | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  |
| Positive    | 1<br>2.5    | 9<br>45.0   | 6<br>6.3    | 1<br>2.3    | 2<br>2.9    | 3<br>7.7    |
| Negative    | 23<br>57.5  | 0           | 36<br>37.9  | 9<br>20.9   | 40<br>58.0  | 0           |
| Neutral     | 6<br>15.0   | 6<br>30.0   | 16<br>16.8  | 15<br>34.9  | 8<br>11.6   | 7<br>17.9   |
| None        | 10<br>25.0  | 5<br>25.0   | 37<br>38.9  | 18<br>41.9  | 19<br>27.5  | 29<br>74.4  |
| TOTAL       | 40<br>100.0 | 20<br>100.0 | 95<br>100.0 | 43<br>100.0 | 69<br>100.0 | 44<br>100.0 |

New York Times throughout:  $\chi^2=8.8016$  D.F.=6  $p>0.05$   
Presidential Documents throughout:

$\chi^2=40.9283$  D.F.=6  $p<0.01$

NYT v.s. WCPD:

First period:  $\chi^2=27.45000$  D.F.=3  $p<0.01$

Second period:  $\chi^2=7.89369$  D.F.=3  $p<0.05$

Third period:  $\chi^2=36.86087$  D.F.=3  $p<0.01$

square value of 8.8016 is not significant: while the Presidential Documents has the Chi-square value of 40.9283 is significant at 0.01. Examination of table VIII reveals that the Presidential Documents had changed in perception toward China from positive in the first period to negative in the second period to none in the last period.

Table IX presents the positive and negative perceptions of subjects appearing in the New York Times and the Presidential Documents throughout the whole study period. The Chi-square of 18.27693 is significant at 0.01. There are obviously differences in the proportions devoted to each subject of each document. For instance, the New York Times had only one item of "U.S.-China relations" associated with positive perception (i.e., when the New York Times described the meeting of China and Soviet leaders as a sign of freer markets and open politics, and the student demonstrations as a sign of freedom, June 17, 1989), while the Presidential Documents had nine. In addition, the New York Times had six items of "China's international relations" associated with the positive perception, while the Presidential Documents had none. For the negative perception of subjects in these two documents, the Chi-square value is 5.92208 and is not significant.

As for the main concerns of New York Times' editorials during the periods studied there are twenty-seven (see Appendix B). In terms of subjects, "U.S.-China relations"

TABLE IX

Positive and negative perceptions of subjects  
in the New York Times and the Weekly Compilation  
of Presidential Documents throughout the period studied

|   | NYT        | WCPD       | TOTAL       | NYT        | WCPD       | TOTAL        |
|---|------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Perceptions                               | Positive   |            |             | Negative   |            |              |
| Subjects                                  | Freq.<br>% | Freq.<br>% | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>% | Freq.<br>% | Freq.<br>%   |
| U.S.-China<br>Relationships               | 1<br>11.1  | 9<br>69.2  | 10<br>45.5  | 25<br>25.3 | 3<br>33.3  | 28<br>25.9   |
| China's<br>International<br>Relationships | 6<br>66.7  | 0          | 6<br>27.3   | 4<br>4.0   | 0          | 4<br>3.7     |
| Military                                  | 0          | 1<br>7.7   | 1<br>4.5    | 5<br>5.1   | 1<br>11.1  | 6<br>5.6     |
| China's<br>Domestic<br>Economy            | 1<br>11.1  | 0          | 1<br>4.5    | 5<br>5.1   | 0          | 5<br>4.6     |
| Economy/Trade                             | 0          | 0          | 0           | 1<br>1.0   | 0          | 1<br>0.9     |
| China's<br>Politics                       | 0          | 2<br>15.4  | 2<br>9.1    | 38<br>38.4 | 4<br>44.4  | 42<br>38.9   |
| U.S. Politics                             | 0          | 0          | 0           | 8<br>8.1   | 0          | 8<br>7.4     |
| Human Rights                              | 0          | 0          | 0           | 6<br>6.1   | 0          | 6<br>5.6     |
| Others                                    | 0          | 1<br>7.7   | 1<br>4.5    | 2<br>2.0   | 1<br>11.1  | 3<br>2.8     |
| China's<br>Economy/<br>Politics           | 1<br>11.1  | 0          | 1<br>4.5    | 5<br>5.1   | 0          | 5<br>4.6     |
| TOTAL                                     | 9<br>40.9  | 13<br>59.1 | 22<br>100.0 | 99<br>91.7 | 9<br>8.3   | 108<br>100.0 |

NYT v.s. WCPD of

Positive perception:  $X^2=18.27693$  D.F.=6  $p<0.01$

Negative perception:  $X^2= 5.92208$  D.F.=6  $p>0.05$

was the main concern of eight editorial, "Chinese politics" of six, and "Chinese economy and politics" of five. In terms of attitude toward the Administration's China policy, three articles, Bush's visit to China (February 25, 1989), Bush's sanctions toward China (June 6, 1989), and Bush's keeping official relations with China (June 22, 1989) supported President Bush's China policy. On the other hand, two articles, Bush's failure to actively support Chinese student demonstrators (March 1, 1989) and Bush's high level staff visit to China (December 12, 1989), were not supportive of President Bush's China policy.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one states that both the New York Times and the Bush Administration will have had the same perception of China and Chinese policies during the period studied. This hypothesis is rejected ( $\chi^2=48.88941$   $p<0.01$ ), as indicated in table V. Throughout the one-year period, the New York Times had, as a percentage of the total, fewer positive perceptions of China and Chinese policies than the Presidential Documents, and expressed far more negative perceptions than the Presidential Documents.

However, there are two interesting points worthy of mention, as shown in table VIII. First, in the Presidential Documents, there is no negative perception during the first and second periods. Second, during the second period, the New York Times' perception of China was less negative than the other two periods. It is asserted that the New York Times did not treat the turmoil in China as a negative sign, rather, it was associated with a "positive", "neutral" or "none" perception. For instance, on May 23, 1989, the New York Times' editorial (entitled "After the Students Go Home") discussed the student demonstrations; six of all eight coding units were also talking about China's politics, and two third of these units did not express a negative perception while two coding units had a neutral perception.

Thus by treating China and her policy less negatively, it seems that the New York Times regarded the student demonstration as being a positive signal of a changing communist system in China.

Hypothesis two, which states that both the New York Times and the Bush Administration will have discussed the same issues regarding China policy at the same time, is also rejected ( $\chi^2=44.19398$   $p<0.01$ ). It seems that the New York Times dealt with Chinese domestic concerns much more than the Presidential Documents. As indicated in table II, throughout the whole period there are differences between these two documents with regard to subjects. For instance, the New York Times discussed "U.S.-China relations" and "Human rights" less than the Presidential Documents. On the other hand, the New York Times talked more about "China's international relations" and both "China's economy and politics" (because the New York Times saw them as tied together in terms of democratic progress and capitalist reform) than the Presidential Documents.

Some differences which were not anticipated from table II exist in each period, as indicated in tables III and IV. For example, contrary to table II, the New York Times has given more attention to "human rights" and less to China's international relations" than the Presidential Documents, in the first period. Although the New York Times dealt more with "China's politics" and "China's domestic economy" (see

table II), it decreased these two subjects in the last period. Furthermore, it increased emphasis on discussions of "U.S.-China relations" and "China's international relations" in the last two periods. The increasing discussion of China's relations with other countries in the New York Times seems to indicate that the New York Times treated the Tainanmen Square incident and its consequences as an international affair instead of China's internal affair.

To the subject of "Chinese politics", both documents gave much attention in the second period; however, the New York Times and the Presidential Documents were talking differently.

Hypothesis three expresses that the New York Times and the Bush Administration will have had the same position on specific subjects (issues). This hypothesis is rejected also ( $X^2=18.27693$ ,  $p<0.01$  for positive perception,  $X^2=5.92208$ ,  $p>0.05$  for negative). In fact, most of the New York Times' editorials and the Presidential Documents had neutral perception or none. However, as table IX indicates, the two documents apparently devoted different perceptions on different subjects. Thus, although these two documents had different positions on different subjects, they agreed on not taking a stand on each subject discussed.

Nevertheless, based on the above findings, one could except the New York Times to criticize the President's

policies toward China. Overall this did not give us much support as one would expect (see table IV). The New York Times increased its support for the Administration during the second period; and then reversed its attitude in the last period. The next two statements can illustrate the change of the New York Times' attitude. On June 22, 1989, the New York Times editorial (entitled "Firm, Not Just Angry. Toward China") discussed President Bush's China policy and stated that "his carefully crafted policy cannot be abandoned . . . it is far more likely to be constructive than are the merely angry message [sic] proposed by his critics." Contrary to the above support of the Administration's China policy, on December 28, 1989, the New York Times editorial (entitled "'Anti-Me' on China? No. Pro-Freedom") criticized Bush, in that "President Bush . . . still doesn't understand his critics . . . [his] narrow focus on realpolitik, and no himself, demeans [upholding freedom] . . . [and] sensible diplomacy doesn't require a public blessing of Beijing."

The last hypothesis states that the Administration will have initiated the issues related to China policy, and the New York Times will then have joined in the discussion. This hypothesis is retained ( $\chi^2=18.8706$   $p<0.01$ ). Table VII shows that throughout the period studied, the New York Times' editorials only had one tenth of its items prescribing China policy.

One final remark should be mentioned, the researcher did not find any editorials of the Administration's first secret negotiations with the Chinese government after they were made public. The unexpected result suggests that by avoiding discussions of the first secret negotiation, the New York Times failed its "watchdog" function as the fourth estate.

This study attempted to investigate the question of the relation between the New York Times editorial and the Bush Administration with regard to their respective positions on China policy. It is asserted that the editorial position has a great impact on the news coverage which will set the agenda for the public. By examining the position of New York Times' editorials and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, this study tries to explore who sets the foreign policy agenda.

The first three hypotheses are rejected, and only hypothesis four is retained. The rejected hypotheses suggest that there are obvious differences between the New York Times' and the Presidential Documents' positions, which can be interpreted as different China policy agenda during the period studied.

In spite of an overall negative perception of China, the New York Times generally supported the Bush China policy, except during the last period. Thus by supporting the Administration's China policy, the New York Times

accepted the Bush Administration's agenda. As for the change during the last period, two factors might be involved. First, it might be the New York Times "attempt to play an adversary" to offset the Administration's China policy, as described by Chang (1986). Or, it might be due to the involvement of U.S. domestic politics (i.e., the Pelosi Bill and the President's veto): thus the issue was no longer one of foreign policy, as the case of the Vietnam War.

As for the question of who sets agenda and who follows, the data indicate that although the New York Times had sometimes initiated some policy issues, most of the time it only criticized or applauded the policy set by the Administration, as Myers (1970) found. Furthermore, since most of the time, the New York Times and the Administration had different issue agenda, the initiative of the New York Times appeared not to be taken by the Bush Administration. Thus, this study concludes that when the New York Times took a stand, it followed the Administration's China policy agenda during 1989, an important year for the Democratic movement in China.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This study dealt only with the interaction between the media and the Executive Branch with regard to only one foreign policy issue. Other forces relating to the foreign policy were not examined. Further research may also include data from other sources such as the State Department Bulletin, the public opinion polls, and the records from the Congress. The whole spectrum of foreign policy may be examined. Thus additional study can be conducted to reveal further the process of policy-making in our democratic society.

## Appendix A: Code Book



Based on the coding system, a code book has been developed for the coding.

A. Date: mmdcyy (i.e. month, day, year)

B. Documents:

1. New York Times
2. Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

C. Symbols:

1. Chinese government
2. Chinese dissident
3. Chinese people
4. Bush Administration
5. U.S. government
6. Others

D. Subjects:

1. U.S.-China relation
2. China's international relations
3. Military
4. China's domestic economics
5. Economics/Trade
6. China's politics
7. U.S. politics
8. Educational and cultural
9. Human rights
10. Sanctions
11. Others
12. China's economics and politics

E. Main concerns:

F. Perception of China/China's policy:

1. Positive

2. Negative

3. Neutral

4. None

G. Attitude toward Bush's China policy

1. Supportive

2. Unsupportive

3. Neutral

4. None

H. Initiatives

1. Prescribing

2. Reaction

3. Reporting

4. None

Appendix B: Subjects in the New York Times' editorials  
and the Presidential Documents in the three periods

Subjects in the New York Times' editorials and  
the Presidential Documents in the three periods

|                                 | NYT         | WCPD        | NYT         | WCPD        | NYT         | WCPD        |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Period                          | I           |             | II          |             | III         |             |
| Subjects                        | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  | Freq.<br>%  |
| U.S.-China Relations            | 5<br>12.5   | 11<br>55.0  | 19<br>20.0  | 15<br>34.9  | 25<br>36.2  | 18<br>45.2  |
| China's International Relations | 0           | 3<br>15.0   | 13<br>13.7  | 0           | 8<br>11.6   | 0           |
| Military                        | 0           | 0           | 4<br>4.2    | 2<br>4.7    | 1<br>1.4    | 2<br>5.1    |
| China's Domestic Economy        | 6<br>15.0   | 0           | 2<br>2.1    | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| Economy/Trade                   | 0           | 1<br>5.0    | 5<br>5.3    | 2<br>4.7    | 0           | 5<br>12.8   |
| China's Politics                | 15<br>37.5  | 1<br>5.0    | 37<br>38.9  | 14<br>32.6  | 13<br>18.8  | 0           |
| U.S. Politics                   | 3<br>7.5    | 0           | 4<br>4.2    | 1<br>2.3    | 13<br>18.8  | 5<br>12.8   |
| Education/Culture               | 0           | 0           | 0           | 1<br>2.3    | 0           | 0           |
| Human Rights                    | 7<br>17.5   | 2<br>10.0   | 0           | 4<br>9.3    | 0           | 5<br>12.8   |
| Sanctions                       | 0           | 0           | 4<br>4.2    | 1<br>2.3    | 0           | 0           |
| China's Economy/Politics        | 2<br>5.0    | 0           | 6<br>6.3    | 0           | 3<br>4.2    | 0           |
| Others                          | 2<br>5.0    | 2<br>10.0   | 1<br>1.1    | 3<br>7.0    | 6<br>8.7    | 1<br>2.6    |
| TOTAL                           | 40<br>100.0 | 20<br>100.0 | 95<br>100.0 | 43<br>100.0 | 69<br>100.0 | 39<br>100.0 |

First Period:  $\chi^2=28.81250$  D.F.=8  $p<0.01$   
Second Period:  $\chi^2=27.74004$  D.F.=11  $p<0.01$   
Third Period:  $\chi^2=34.56879$  D.F.=8  $p<0.01$

## Appendix C: Main Concerns of Times' Editorials

02/25/89

Bush is doing well visiting the Chinese, so to keep them tilting to the West.

03/01/89

Bush failed to actively support the democratic movement in China as he should.

03/10/89

The U.S. government should pressure China to recognize Tibetan autonomy (not independence).

04/11/89

China is moving back from economic reforms.

04/19/89

Forced abortion should be grounds for granting asylum in U.S. to refugees from China.

04/22/89

An open economy should be accompanied by an open political system. That is why students are demonstrating.

05/06/89

Chinese students are correct in protesting for more democracy.

05/17/89

Economic and now demanded political reforms in China are good, and the U.S. should support them.

05/19/89

The West should not fear a China-USSR warming of relations.

05/23/89

The Chinese leaders should listen to students calls, and the U.S. should take notice and support them.

05/27/89

Chinese leaders should follow economic reforms with political ones that people demand. And the U.S. should support them.

06/05/89

Chinese leaders should understand that economic reforms need to be accompanied by political ones. The blood shed (of the students) causes us all to mourn.

06/06/89

The best way to deal with China is as Bush has done, stay engaged with China but officially condemn what they have done--with some sanctions.

06/13/89

What Chinese leaders have done was a tragedy; they missed the boat to making China a modern industrial power.

06/22/89

Bush is correct in his approaches to China policy; condemning them, but keeping lines open.

06/27/89

"Graduated, targeted sanctions" is good policy, but Bush should say what Americans feel.

07/14/89

Democracy is the answer to people's cries.

09/16/89

Communist states should be incorporated into the Western trading system, but not yet China. Just keep talking to them.

11/04/89

Nixon is telling the Chinese the hard truth about their actions.

11/29/89

Bush should sign the Pelosi bill extending Chinese students' visas. It shows a commitment to human rights and tells the Chinese not to interfere in our legislative process.

12/12/89

Even though the U.S. cannot ignore China, it should not, at this point, normalize relations.

12/15/89

With economic and political reforms down in China, the U.S. should cultivate a relationship with new (young) Chinese, and keep the pressure on the old guard.

12/28/89

The U.S. should not support the current Chinese regime.

01/11/90

Lifting martial law in China is no big event, no matter what the authoritarian says.

01/18/90

China and U.S. finally agree on Cambodia.



01/23/90

China is about to ignore its own brand of democracy on Hong Kong. This will backfire.

01/24/90

Congress should override the Presidential veto on the Pelosi bill.

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