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“Dragon in the Eyes of Vietnamese News Media”

Analyzing China’s national image displayed by Vietnamese news media in 2017

Master’s thesis – MSc. in International Relations and Diplomacy

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Abstract

Vietnam has been accommodating the Dragon – China by showing both deference and aggressiveness in Vietnam-China foreign relations, which has also been reflected in the way how Vietnamese news media perceived China. This paper argued that the shared and competing interests existing in Vietnam-China foreign relations affect Vietnamese authorities' perceptions of China, and consequently have a direct impact on the national image of China portrayed by Vietnamese news media since Vietnamese news media are under the control of Vietnamese authorities. To examine the national image of China in Vietnamese news media, this study, adopting content analysis and case study research methods, analyzed 3444 news articles focusing on China in 2017, collected from two mainstream Vietnamese newspapers, *VnExpress* and *Tuoi Tre*. Results suggest that Vietnam's foreign relations with China and Vietnamese authorities' foreign strategies toward China influenced Vietnamese news media frames used in the reporting of China, and further led to a multi-faceted image of China with diverging tones found in different news topics about China.

Keywords: Vietnam, China, National image, News media, Media frames, Foreign relations

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	the Belt and Road Initiative
CPC	Communist Part of China
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSTS	Culture, Sport, Technology, and Science
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OBOR	One Belt One Road Initiative
PM	Prime Minister
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCS	South China Sea
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
THM	Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau
UK	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States

1. Introduction

China's overseas national image has been a long-standing concern of Chinese authorities. On the one hand, China has always been active in building China's overseas national image by different tools. Among those tools, most of them range from media publicity tools¹ including the Journal Peking Review issued in 1958² and the Government Work Reports delivered by Premier Minister since 1954³, to the cultural exchange tools, such as the booming of Confucius Institutes around the world and "Happy Chinese New Year" activities host in more than 130 countries so far (Wang, 2003, p. 50; Hooghe, 2015, p. 171; Zhou, 2018).

On the other hand, China has also been busy with analyzing whether those efforts China put in national image building ever paid back. With the aim to make China's overseas communication strategy more efficient, Chinese authorities founded the Center for International Communication Studies⁴ in 2004 to research on analyzing China's national image in foreign publics. Apart from Chinese government's efforts, the academia has also sought to understand China's national image perceived by international community and the factors behind the perception (Xue et al, 2014; Zhang, 2012; Han and Wang, 2007; Cao, 2015; Ding, 2011; Wang, 2008; Xie and Page, 2013; Wang, 2013; Barr, 2011; Wang, 2009).

As suggested by agenda-setting theory, the media content will set people's daily agenda of information for public discussion, which means that the media can play an essential role in leading the public opinion and contribute to the shaping of a foreign country's national image in foreign publics (McCombs, 2014; Zhang and Gonzenbach, 2011; Zhang and Meadows, 2012; McCombs and Reynolds, 2009; Dearing and Rogers, 1996;). Therefore, another group of scholars took the initiative and turned to analyzing China's national image displayed in mainstream foreign news media including media of the US, the UK, Germany, India, Latin America, Australia, and South Korea (Charles, 2016; Estupinan, 2017; Chatterij et al., 2016; Richter and Gebauer, 2011; Chang, 2008; Li, 2009; Kim, 2017; Zhang, 2010; Daniel, 2013). In addition to the mainstream foreign news media from major powers, some scholars have also

¹ Western scholars usually use the name: "strategic communication" instead of "media publicity" (Hooghe, 2010).

² Peking Review (later renamed Beijing Review) was launched by the Chinese government on 5 March 1958 and directed at foreign readers with the aim to show foreigners China's policies and domestic situations.

³ According to Wang (2003), the Government Work Reports are directed at both domestic and foreign audiences, and it was believed that the reports have shown what images Chinese government wished to build out of China in the eyes of foreign people.

⁴ From 2012, the Center for International Communication Studies started conducting the global survey of China's national image annually.

turned their attention to the local news media of some countries small but having close connectivity with China, from which Vietnam is a typical example (Huang, 2013; Li, 2012; Wu, 2014).

Vietnam, as one of the most rising countries in Southeast Asia, starts taking a multidirectional foreign policy strategy aiming at cultivating diverse foreign relations with different big powers including China, US, India, etc., while integrating Vietnam further into the international community and maximizing its various interests (Chapman, 2017). Concerning the Vietnam-China foreign relations, it is well known that Vietnam always holds a “hate-and-love” relation with China (Tong, 2010, p. 175). On the one side, Vietnam needs to stay firmly and friendly connected with China for the trade and economic ties that are vital for Vietnam’s economy. However, Vietnam is taking China as a potential enemy for the ongoing dispute in SCS, and the competition over Vietnam-China trade.

Although maintaining at a theme of “hate-and-love”, Vietnam has been increasingly engaged with China in several aspects in recent years. Regarding the political side, Vietnam has turned its strategic attention to SCS and showed Vietnam’s rising commitment to deterring China in the Sea (Farley, 2017). In the diplomatic and cultural aspect, Vietnam and China have been in frequent contacts via diplomatic visits, particularly since 2016 when Vietnamese government was newly elected (Pan, 2017). And both countries have also been sparing no effort to support Vietnam-China public diplomatic activity, such as the Sino-Vietnamese Youth Get-Together, which was held for the first time in Vietnam in 2016 (Le and Tao, 2016). In the trade part, Vietnam is a prominent and active member of many initiatives led by China, including OBOR⁵ and AIIB (Tran, 2016).

Therefore, this close relation between China and Vietnam in recent years motivates the researcher to call into question how Vietnam’s news media is perceiving China’s role. Out of those three studies mentioned above that addressed China’s national image in Vietnamese news media, all of them reached a similar conclusion that national image displayed by Vietnamese news media would mostly depend on the Vietnam-China foreign relations, especially the common and divergent interests between Vietnam and China (Huang, 2013; Li, 2012; Wu, 2014). The most recent study (Wu, 2014) was concerned with China’s national image displayed

⁵ “One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR)” was renamed as “the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” in 2017. The following will use BRI instead of OBOR.

in Vietnamese news media coverage in the year of 2012, which concluded that Vietnamese news media built a primarily positive image of China in aspects including diplomacy, society, economy, technology, and culture, military. However, the recent and significant shifts in Vietnam-China foreign relations led this research to consider whether the national image of China would still remain the same as five years ago. For example, Vietnam's increasing commitment to deterring China in SCS might shift more of Vietnamese news media attention to the SCS issue, and produce a more negative image of China in this regard.

Moreover, based on the public opinion poll of Global Attitudes & Trends in Pew Research Center, it shows that the percentage of Vietnamese people who have an unfavorable opinion of China out of all Vietnamese survey respondents has increased from 74% in 2015 to 88% in 2017, reaching the highest percentage among all surveyed countries in 2017 (Pew Research Center Database, 2017). Due to the causal link between public opinion and media agenda setting and that public opinion can be easily swayed by the media content, the decrease in Vietnamese public's favorability toward China might imply that Vietnamese news media has been constructing a worse image of China in recent years. Therefore, all the puzzles above have made it necessary to look into a recent China's national image portrayed by Vietnamese news media.

In addition, Vietnam, with its increasing importance in the geopolitics in Asia-Pacific, has successfully attracted attention from scholars and has brought the research topic of Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations to a main focus in the Asia-Pacific studies (Nguyen, 2016; Zhao, 2014; Hensengerth, 2010; Tran, 2016; Easley, 2012; Li, 2014; Tong, 2010; Thu, 2017). Therefore, updated research on China's national image in Vietnam's news media would be desired to enrich the Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations studies.

Concerning others relevance of researching on a recent China's national image depicted by Vietnamese news media, first, this research can offer some insights and policy implications for China's national image building process considering China's massive investments in building its overseas national image (Hooghe, 2015). Second, research focusing on Vietnamese news media can also show more details about how the mass media set the agenda for public discussion about China, and what the media expect Vietnamese audience to know about China. Third, a projected national image of China is causally linked with China's foreign policy behavior in the ways that the projected image of China can provide clues on the range of China's foreign behaviors and China's interpretations of international situations (Wang, 2003, p. 71).

Not only for China, because Vietnamese news media are under the supervision of Vietnamese authorities, the way Vietnam news media presents its relation with China might also reflect Vietnamese authorities' foreign strategy with China (Abuza, 2015). Therefore, the relevance to the foreign policy behaviors of both China and Vietnam can bring this research to a level of strategic importance.

Based on the puzzles and relevance above, this paper aims to examine the following research question:

How did Vietnamese news media frame the national image of China in 2017?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vietnam-China foreign relations

Jennings (2017) has described the Vietnam-China foreign relations as the best frenemies forever. The coexistence of sweetness and bitterness in Vietnam-China foreign relations has made it challenging for Vietnamese policy-makers to maintain a stable and beneficial relation with China while advancing Vietnam's self-interests that are not shared by China (Tran, 2016, p. 88). Therefore, both cooperation and struggles can be found in Vietnam-China foreign relations.

Regarding the cooperation, Vietnam and China have reached and been deepening the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, the second highest strategic partnership in China's diplomatic relation, under the direction of 16-word principle⁶ and 4-good-spirit⁷ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2000, 2017; The State Council Information Office of PRC, 2017; Li, 2012). The cooperation in the bilateral relation between Vietnam and China is usually reflected in three aspects: political cooperation, trade cooperation, and cooperation on the domestic development of each country.

Concerning political cooperation, the foremost common ground that Vietnam and China share is a similar political system: a socialist country led by the communist party. The close historical connection between China and Vietnam have also made these two countries alike in their traditional cultures and ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism and Confucianism (Huang, 2004). As mentioned by an article that Chinese President Xi (2017) published in Vietnamese news media, both Vietnam and China shared experiences and learned from each other in the struggles for national independence and liberation in the last century. These common points that both Vietnam and China held in the political ideology have prompted the political cooperation between Vietnam and China, especially in the aspects including the building and practice of socialism between CPC and CPV (Zhao, 2014, p. 29).

There is also a sense of warmth in Vietnam-China diplomatic relation. First, the traditional diplomatic visits between China and Vietnam have become more frequent in the recent period (Pan, 2017). Vietnamese General Secretary and President's separate official and state visits to

⁶ The 16-word principle, set by former General Secretaries of CPC and VPC in 1999, is “长期稳定、面向未来、睦邻友好、全面合作” in Chinese, which means “long-term stability, orientation toward the future, good-neighborliness and friendship and all-round cooperation” in English.

⁷ The 4-good-spirit refers to 好邻居、好朋友、好同志、好伙伴 (good neighbors, good friends, good comrades and good partners).

China in January and April 2017, and Chinese President's state visit to Vietnam in November 2017 all showed the growing strategic ties between China and Vietnam. Second, public diplomacy activities including Confucius Institute in Vietnam, Chinese Bridge competition, Youth Get-Together have been supported by both Vietnamese and Chinese governments (Hoang, 2017; Le and Tao, 2016).

Concerned about trade cooperation, Vietnamese leaders came to realize that Vietnam's economic development is the key to enhancing Vietnam's national security and regime legitimacy (Tran, 2016, p. 87). Given China's fast economic growth and as the neighboring country of China, Vietnam relies a large part of its economy on its trade with China, which can be seen by that China is always one of Vietnam's largest exporters (Pan, 2017; Nguyen, 2017). Moreover, Vietnam has also deepened its trade ties with China by actively participating in China's economic initiatives including BRI and AIIB (Zhang and Xu, 2017, p. 171). In 2016, Vietnam has surpassed Malaysia and become the biggest trade partner with China, out of all countries joining BRI, with the Vietnam-China trade volume reaching 10.3% of all BRI trade volume (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 18).

Also, considering the similarity both countries share in the political system and development path, both countries have frequently been communicating with and learning from each other on how to reach a more comprehensively and sustainably domestic development in different aspects including politics, economy, technology, and culture (Xi, 2017).

Apart from the cooperation under the bilateral context, Vietnam-China cooperation can be seen from the framework of regionalism (Hensengerth, 2010). Vietnam and China have joined together several regional institutions including GMS, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, the ASEAN+3, APEC, etc. These institutions have brought Vietnam-China cooperation to the regional level (Ogasawara, 2011, p. 355). Not only in trade cooperation, but these institutions have also undertaken responsibilities in many other aspects including water cooperation, food and environmental security, human and drug trafficking, and border cooperation, which would strengthen the bilateral relation between Vietnam and China (Ogasawara, 2011, p. 353).

The first struggle part between China and Vietnam is about SCS. The oil rig crisis in 2014 resulting in an anti-China riot in Vietnam has led the Vietnamese government to become more assertive in SCS. Apart from Vietnam's severe condemnation of China's behaviors in SCS,

Vietnam, itself, has also become an aggressive maritime nation by continuous landfilling in the islets in SCS, oil exploration with India, and conducting fishing in further waters in SCS (Jennings, 2017; Thayer, 2017). Nevertheless, in recent years, both countries have tried to seek their stability over SCS by meetings and dialogues. The Prime Minister of Vietnam and China agreed to deepen cooperation in SCS in 2016, a year which Jennings (2017) has described a sweet year in Vietnam-China foreign relations. However, the “sweetness” came to a low point in June 2017, shortly after the cancellation of Vietnam-China 4th Border Defense Friendly Exchange due to China’s displeasure at Vietnam’s oil exploration activities at SCS (Thayer, 2017). However, the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea was signed, which shows that both countries’ efforts to restore the stability over SCS are not cut off. More importantly, both Vietnamese and Chinese leaders understand that a peaceful solution to SCS issue will be beneficial to both countries (Zhao, 2014, p. 30). Overall, there exist many dynamics in the SCS dispute where both China and Vietnam want to increase their assertiveness and maintain stability via peaceful ways in the meantime.

Scholars have also been discussing another essential characteristic in the struggle of Vietnam-China foreign relations: the power asymmetry (Strasakova, 2017; Nguyen, 2015). Nguyen (2015) found that the power asymmetry between Vietnam and China has significantly affected Vietnam-China foreign relations over the years and the impact is expected to continue in the coming years. The asymmetry can be witnessed in both political and economic spheres, such as China’s rising assertiveness in SCS with a more powerful military and an increasing economic power disparity following China’s fast economic growth. Moreover, from the Vietnamese academia’s view, the widening trade imbalance between Vietnam and China and Vietnam’s growing economic dependence on China have now affected Vietnam’s economy to some negative degree, although China remains an important trade partner of Vietnam (Binh, 2017). However, both Strasakova (2017) and Nguyen (2015), by simultaneously using the term “accommodating the dragon,” have argued that Vietnam will utilize its hedging capacities to actively respond to the power disparity with China by pre-empting and acting deferentially at the same time.

Apart from the ongoing dynamics in Vietnam-China foreign relations, the long-standing stereotypes of China in Vietnam constitute a part that should be neglected in Vietnam-China foreign relations (Huang, 2013). The stereotypes are usually directed toward the social and human issues in China that are also frequently found in the western stereotype of China

(Mathias et al., 2013). Moreover, it is found that the value system in Vietnam is also being influenced by the Western values in “individualism, liberty, equality, and democracy,” that usually appear in the stereotyped criticism of China (Nguyen, 2016, p. 38). Therefore, despite the prevailing ideology shared by two countries in politics and other aspects of domestic development, there also exists a cleavage between the value systems in Vietnam and China, which often lead to a stereotype of China in Vietnam-China foreign relations.

Last, this thesis would like to summarize the significant events in Vietnam-China foreign relations during contemporary history. Overall, there are three types of big events that have significantly affected Vietnam-China foreign relations. The first type concerns about conflicts and wars with the main interactions between Vietnam and China. The earliest one in the contemporary history could date back to the Vietnam War where Communist China was an important ally to North Vietnam, who finally defeated the US and South Vietnam, and realized the reunification of Vietnam (Jian, 1995). However, after the victory of Vietnam War, Vietnam-China foreign relations have soured due to the Vietnam-China war in 1979 (Roper, 2000). Although the Vietnam-China war only lasted for 27 days, the clashes between Vietnam-China along their borders had been prolonged following the war in 1979 and had not stopped until 1990 (Roper, 2000). Moreover, despite the end to those clashes lasting more than a decade as discussed above, Vietnam-China territorial disputes, which are mainly focusing on SCS area, have been lasting till today.

The second type of main events in Vietnam-China foreign relations is their diplomatic events. Since the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese diplomatic relation in 1991, both countries have been maintaining close contact and strengthening cooperation in various aspects with each other via frequent high-level visits. China-Vietnam Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation was founded in 2006 as a particular institution in planning, promoting, and coordinating the smooth progress of Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2018). In addition to the high-level diplomacy, governments of Vietnam and China have been deepening the friendship between Vietnamese and Chinese youth through a series of public diplomacy events as Vietnam-China Youth Friendship Meeting and Vietnam-China Youth Gathering, which have been organized for 17 and 3 times respectively (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2018). The last type of events refers to the commercial ties. Apart from those multilateral institutions including AIIB, BRI, and China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, Vietnam and China themselves have established bilateral institutions (Yunnan

Economic Corridor, Cross-border economic zones) along the border provinces of Vietnam and China including Guangxi, Yunnan (China), Lang Son, and Quang Ninh (Vietnam) from the early years of 21st century to stimulate the economy (Loh and Chong, 2017; Asian Development Bank, 2009).

As a whole, the existing literature has revealed that starting from the war period in the mid of 20th century, Vietnam and China have been viewing each other as both enemy and friend. Although there exists remarkable wound in Vietnam-China foreign relations due to the historical conflicts, both countries have been striving to deepen their comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership in the Vietnam-China political and trade tie, as well as in the domestic development of each country. Apart from Vietnamese and Chinese leadership' efforts per se, both countries also rely on regional institutions to emphasize Vietnam-China foreign relations. Regarding the hottest topic - SCS dispute, in Vietnam-China foreign relations, the literature review found that both countries have grown more assertively in SCS. However, the growing assertiveness does not lessen China and Vietnam's wish to find a peaceful solution to SCS conflict. Moreover, the increasing power disparity between Vietnam and China has motivated Vietnam to take a hedging approach to deal with China, which has crucially affected the trajectory of Vietnam-China foreign relations. Last, the inflow of western values into Vietnam caused Vietnam to hold a few different values against China, which further resulted in the stereotype of China in Vietnam-China foreign relations.

2.2 Impact of foreign relations on national image

Scholars have found that foreign relations and national image are associated with and tend to have a mutual impact on each other (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987, 1990; Zhang and Meadows, 2012; Herrmann et al., 1997; Wang, 2003; Alexander and Levin, 2005). This section aims to review the one-way impact of foreign relations on the national image.

Hurwitz and Peffley (1987, 1990) argued that the interests or core values we hold in our relationship with another actor can shape our images of that actor. The perception one country hold of another depends on the features of the foreign relations between two countries, including the compatibility of goals, relative power, relative cultural/ideological status, and the difference in political systems (Jia, 2016; Alexander and Levin, 2005; Huang, 2004). In other words, perceived foreign relations with country B by country A, especially A's judgments about B's relative capability and status and the opportunities/threats B represents to A, can give rise

to the formation of B's national image in A (Herrmaan, 1997, p. 422). Zhang and Meadows (2012)'s study examined the correlation between foreign country salience in US media coverage, policy agenda, and public opinion. The results have supported 1) a significant and positive correlation between policy agenda (presidential public papers) and foreign country salience in media coverage, and 2) a significant and negative correlation between policy agenda and the negative coverage about foreign countries (Zhang and Meadows, 2012). These results suggest that the foreign policy agenda can affect how the media coverage portray foreign countries.

Concerned about China's national image, several studies have also found that foreign relations can have an impact on China's national image perceived by other countries (Han and Wang, 2007; Ding, 2011; Zhang and Liu, 2012; Cao, 2015; Jia, 2016). On a general level, Han and Wang (2007) asked the question "what are the factors affecting China's national image" in their study. The analysis results concluded that three types of factors including China's actual situation, international communication, and international community's stereotypes of China, are affecting China's national image. The international communications refer to the interaction between China and foreign countries, in which the international trade, cultural exchange, international events and affairs, and cross-border human capital flows are the principal objects (Han and Wang, 2007, p. 58). Apart from the direct international communication, the stereotypes of China (e.g., China's threat) held by the international community, as another important aspect of foreign relations, also has a crucial impact on the formation of China's national image (Han and Wang, 2007). Studies of Wang (2000) and Kunczik (1997) also affirmed the influence of biased stereotypes existing in foreign relations on the national image.

Ding (2011) conducted a theoretical discussion about China's respective strengths and weaknesses in building the national image. This article argued that China's behaviors in foreign politics can directly affect China's national image (Ding, 2011). It is undeniable that China's enormous diplomatic efforts into promoting China as a non-aggressive and rising power in the eyes of developing countries have brought China some favorability in those developing countries. However, this article further pointed out that some missteps China made in its foreign politics also led to negative impacts on China's international branding. For example, China's investments in Africa have negatively impacted the local trade and environment in African countries, which reduced their favorability toward China (Adisu, 2010, p. 7; Ding, 2011, p. 304). Another case can be that due to China's oil interest in countries including Sudan, Angola,

Venezuela that are governed by dictators, China has no other choice but to maintain friendships with those dictators. However, in return, these friendships have increased China's negative publicity in the international community, although China insisted that China will only do business and not talk about politics (Ding, 2011). Therefore, it can be concluded from here that China's foreign relations with one specific country can not only change the way how that given country perceives China, but can also influence the whole international community's opinion toward China.

On a more specific level, Zhang and Liu (2012) questioned about the impacts of economic and trade exchanges between China and Arab countries on China's national image in the Arab region. This study discussed the impacts from two aspects: Chinese products and Chinese enterprises in the Arab region, from which this study found that the quality problem of Chinese products has made Arab consumers lose confidence in Chinese products and further led to a worse China's national image. Regarding Chinese enterprises, this study concluded that Chinese overseas enterprises' behaviors could influence the shaping of China's national image in Arab countries. Overall, Chinese enterprises maintained a good reputation in Arab countries. However, some problems including inefficient project implementation, social responsibility issues, and disobey of local culture and customs, have negatively affected China's national image. This study again proves Han and Wang (2007)'s argument that international communication including international trade, people exchange, will directly affect China's national image building.

Several studies also study the effectiveness of public and cultural diplomacy in building China's national image (Cao, 2015; Ding, 2011; Hooghe, 2015; Hartig, 2016). Ding (2011, p. 298) in his study mentioned that China's public diplomacy, including the globalization of Chinese culture, the global Chinese media, and Chinese overseas people force, has made some noticeable progress in China's national image building. One example used by the author is the positive correlation between the growing campaigns of Chinese culture overseas and the increasing number of foreign visitors to China over the past three decades (Ding, 2011, p. 299). Adding to Ding's study, Cao (2015) suggested that public diplomacy is a project that needs long-term efforts and will produce long-standing effects. Moreover, it is believed that public diplomacy is an important instrument for China to increase its influence of affinity and build overseas national image (Hartig, 2016; Hooghe, 2015).

Overall, foreign relations, decided by the common and different interests that countries hold with each other, can play a vital role in China's overseas national image building. Not only limited to the politic communication, other important aspects in foreign relations, including international trade, people exchange, public and cultural diplomacy, and even historical stereotypes, can all affect foreign countries' views on China.

2.3 China's national image displayed by foreign news media

This section will first discuss China's national image displayed by foreign news media from the Western world, India, South Korea, and Latin America, and turn to Vietnamese news media in the second part.

Several studies focused on analyzing China's national image in the mainstream Western news media including *BBC*, *ABC*, *The Economist*, *New York Times*, *International Herald Times*, *Financial Times*, etc. (Charles, 2016; Richter and Gebauer, 2011; Chang, 2008; Li, 2009; Zhang, 2010; Daniel, 2013; Yu and Wang, 2017). Several tendencies are suggested in Western news media coverage of China. First, the media coverage of China is usually restricted to a narrow agenda, which means that many other crucial topics of China are disregarded in the coverage (Daniel, 2013). One example given by Daniel (2013) is that the political media coverage of China is usually limited to the political corruption in China, without much attention given to other aspects of Chinese politics. Next, not only do Western news media (Australia, UK, US, Germany) have a preference for reporting the downside of China, comprising China's social problems, conflicts, and sovereignty issues (Hong Kong, Taiwan), the western news media tend to be unfavorably biased during reporting of those issues above (Charles, 2016; Li, 2009; Chang, 2008; Richter and Gebauer, 2011). Also, historical stereotypes of China, such as the "China threat" theory, still play an important role in Western news framing of China (Li, 2009). Fourth, despite the negative image of China, China is still highly and neutrally represented as a rising force in the global economic sphere and foreign politics (Zhang, 2010; Charles, 2016). Last, the differences between the political systems, cultural backgrounds of China and Western world give rise to the misrepresentation of China's national image in Western news media (Yu and Wang, 2017).

Apart from Western news media, Estupinan (2017) indicates in his study that China's national image in five mainstream Latin American news media from Peru, El Salvador, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela, is becoming more multifaceted with China's increasing importance

on the global stage, different from the image of monolithic communist in the past. Chatterij et al. (2016) concluded that China appears more often in five mainstream Indian news media including *The Hindu*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *The Economic Times*, and *The Financial Times*. The coverage of China in Indian news media is no longer confined to the China-India border issue. However, Indian media's perception of China is dominantly negative, especially in areas of the border issue, China's domestic situation, etc. However, China's economy has been receiving more favorable opinions. Kim's study (2017) took another perspective by discussing China's national image in one of the most influential South Korean news media, *The Chosun Ilbo*, based on its report of Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan. This article concluded that Chinese First Lady Peng, as a public diplomacy tool and a typical representation of China's image, has given rise to the formulation of China's national image as an uprising and influential country in the international community.

Regarding China's national image reflected in Vietnamese news media, all three related studies adopted a content analysis research method to analyze two aspects: degree of attention (number of news articles in each news topic), and the coverage direction (tones/attitudes of news articles), of Vietnamese news media coverage of China (Huang, 2013; Li, 2012; Wu, 2014). Regarding the selection of newspaper, Li (2012) decided to focus on the media coverage from 2000 to 2011 in *Nhan Dan* news (in print edition), the official newspaper of Vietnamese Communist Party. Wu (2014) also chose *Nhan Dan* news, but in its online version, and selected news from three years (2003, 2008, and 2012) for research. Huang (2013) analyzed the media reporting of China in 2010 and 2011 from newspaper *Tuoi Tre*, the most circulated newspapers in Vietnam and official newspaper of Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union.

Before discussing the results of these three studies, this thesis finds it necessary to compare the news media of Vietnam and other foreign countries that were selected by studies above. All the news media chosen in these studies are the most popular or circulated ones in their home countries or even around the world. However, what makes the two selected Vietnamese news media (*Nhan Dan* and *Tuoi Tre*) different from the news media of Western world and other countries is the ownership and role of these two Vietnamese news media. Both selected Vietnamese news media are subject to the direct control of VCP and Vietnamese authorities (Li, 2012; Huang, 2013). This exclusive ownership of them has also given rise to a particular role of these two Vietnamese news media, which is working as the mouth of Vietnamese authorities, and reporting only what the Vietnamese authorities want the readers to know,

without information in the news that contradicts the ideology of Vietnamese authorities (Abuza, 2015). By contrast, the rest news media of other countries are free from the direct intervention of their governments, although there exist a few Western news media including BBC and ABC that are funded by their governments.

As a result, the outstanding characteristics in the ownership and ideology of two Vietnamese news media that are different from other news media might have directly affected the way two Vietnamese news media processed the information of China, and eventually led to a different national image of China in Vietnamese news media than in other news media. The following will review how Vietnamese news media framed two aspects of China's national image (degree of attention and coverage direction), as found by previous studies.

Concerned about the degree of attention, Wu (2014) and Li (2012) reached the same conclusion that media reporting regarding political relations accounted for the most prominent percentage in China's media coverage of *Nhan Dan* news, followed by the media coverage of trade and economy, and China's society. More specifically, the topic of Vietnam-China political relations, particularly the aspect of the diplomatic level activities including high-level visits, cultural exchanges, appear most often in the news (Wu, 2014; Li, 2012). And US-China political relations has risen to the second most-concerned topic, next to Vietnam-China foreign relations. By contrast, in *Tuoi Tre* news, the biggest share of media coverage went to the topic of trade and economy from which Vietnam-China trade ties are mostly covered (Huang, 2013, p. 6). Interestingly, in all three studies, news regarding China's domestic politics only constituted a small part of Vietnamese media coverage of politics, different from Western news media agenda that focused more on China's domestic politics.

About the coverage direction, the depiction of China in *Tuoi Tre* news is a mix of negative and positive images (Huang, 2013). On the one hand, *Tuoi Tre* recognized China's fast growth in military, economy, and cultural influence, and *Tuoi Tre* believed that Vietnam could benefit and take some useful lessons from China's growth and Vietnam-China bilateral exchanges. On the other hand, *Tuoi Tre* held negative perceptions of China in the media coverage of China's social issues, Vietnam-China sovereignty issue, and Vietnam-China trade competition. By analyzing a ten-year period of news, Li (2012) concluded that China is portrayed as an important and friendly country to Vietnam. However, if we took a deeper look into the image, a significant transformation can be found in the national image of China, which is that China is

more viewed as an important partner than a role model to Vietnam. Such transformation means that more emphasis was put on how Vietnam can cooperate with China, instead of merely following China's impact and influence. Moreover, Vietnam also became more assertive in media coverage of Vietnam-China issues, such as SCS dispute. Last, Wu (2014) indicated that news frames of China adopted by *Nhan Dan* News are usually neutral or positive. Furthermore, the positive tendency is more obvious when reporting Vietnam-China diplomacy, China's domestic development in economy, politics, culture, sport, and technology. Last, it was also found that the stereotypes about China's society and social issues that usually exist in Western news media will sometimes be followed by Vietnamese news media, leading to a biased image of Chinese society in Vietnamese media coverage (Huang, 2013).

One common and vital conclusion all three studies reached is that the foreign relations between Vietnam-China significantly affected the way Vietnamese news media report China. The theme of "Comrade and Brother" and the "Friendship and Cooperation" advocated by Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership led to the production of positive news frames (Wu, 2014, p. 133). However, despite the friendly things, Vietnam-China's growing competition and conflict over several interests motivated Vietnamese news media to have such new and negative perceptions of China as an aggressive hegemon, expansionist in SCS, and a manipulator in the trade. As a result, these perceptions led to the increasing negative images of China in Vietnamese news media coverage (Huang, 2013, p. 13; Li, 2012, p. 116).

As predicted, there exist some differences between Vietnamese news media and news media of Western world and other countries when reporting about China. In the latter, the whole image of China tends to stay more negative and narrow, opposing to a more positive and broad image of China in Vietnamese news media. The difference is mainly due to the discrepancy between the interests Vietnam and other countries share or compete with China in several aspects of the foreign relations including politics, economy, culture, ideology, and stereotypes. Furthermore, Vietnam's interests in Vietnam-China foreign relations have directly affected Vietnamese authorities' perception of China. Due to the Vietnamese authorities' ownership and control of two selected Vietnamese news media, Vietnamese authorities' perception toward China is the main source of information for Vietnamese news media during their reporting of China. Unlike other media practitioners who have more freedom in reporting China based on their own ideology and perceptions of China, Vietnamese journalists from these two selected news media have no choice but to report the ideology of Vietnamese authorities mainly. As a result, the

image of China produced in these two selected Vietnamese news media is different from other selected news media.

However, despite the differences, China's image as a rising force received recognition from all news media, no matter it is from Vietnam, Western world, or other countries. Moreover, Vietnamese news media are also found to have somehow followed Western news media's coverage of China's society by giving more efforts to reporting China's social issues in a biased way. Another important takeaway is that China's national image is becoming more diversified, with the focus extending to more aspects ranging from China's domestic development to China's international behaviors. Last, studies on Vietnamese news media proved that the dynamics in Vietnam-China foreign relations, which include the traditional diplomatic relation between Vietnam and China, as well as the new rising dynamics in Vietnam-China issues (sovereignty, trade competition, etc.), will affect China's national image in Vietnamese news media.

Limitations are spotted in those three studies addressing China's national image in Vietnamese news media. First, Huang (2013) and Li (2012)'s studies only stayed at the analysis of the general national image of China, which means a more in-depth review of news content under each thematic dimension (e.g., politics, economy, military) of the national image lacks in these two studies. This thesis, apart from presenting an overall national image of China, will also endeavor to find out more details of the image of China under each thematic dimension. As shown by the study of Charles (2016), conducting case studies on news articles focusing on a specific event of China can help better interpret the news frames used in media coverage. Therefore, this thesis will adopt the case study research method to enrich and improve on the previous studies. Wu (2014) mentioned himself that one shortcoming of his dissertation is the limitation in the number of newspaper selected, which has made his study less comprehensive. All newspapers chosen by the previous studies are the direct subsidiaries of CPV. And these newspapers are common in their organizational structure, which is a news agency with different branches in offering both online and print edition of the news. However, there is lack of study on the type of online-only but extremely popular newspapers in Vietnam, including *VnExpress*, *Vietnam Net* (Catherine, 2010, p. 95). Therefore, this thesis would also like to include one online-only newspaper in the study, which could on the one side, strengthen the comprehensiveness of China's national image, and provide a comparison of Vietnamese news media coverages of China on the other side. Last, regarding the research methodology, none of

these three studies had conducted an inter-coder reliability test, which has left the validity of coding results unproven. This thesis will add a reliability test to make the coding results more reliable.

Despite these limitations, these three studies, together with other studies addressing China's national image in foreign news media, will be of great help in providing this thesis with enough knowledge regarding both relevant theories and the research methods that will also be applied and tested in this research. Theories including national image theory and media framing theory will be introduced in next chapter. The research method - content analysis method, especially the building of codebook and data analysis, offered by some studies can help this thesis build a systemic way to analyze news articles (Estupinan, 2017; Kim, 2017; Huang, 2013). Besides, Charles (2016) and Wu (2014)'s studies also offered this thesis some techniques about the case study of news articles, e.g., how to build the frame of news and find essential points on the frame.

3. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

To answer the research question, this thesis found two theories relevant here, which are first, national image theory to define the national image, and second, media framing theory to explain how news media frame the national image. Next, this chapter will first introduce two theories and then build a theoretical argument. Hypotheses will also be proposed at the end of the chapter.

3.1 National image

The earliest study provided a simplistic overview of national image, arguing that national images are the pictures of foreign countries in one's head (Lippmann, 1922). Boulding (1959) emphasized that national image is an important part of the international system since the national image is concerned about how the other nations in the international system perceive a specific country. Kunczik (1997) contended that national image is the cognitive representation that one person holds of a given country. Adding to the previous studies, Wang (2008) argued that national image is the climate of opinion that foreign publics hold of another country through publics' collective judgments of that given country. And the judgments here can be those over one country's politics, economy, military, and society (Wang, 2008; Xue et al., 2014).

Apart from the national image perceived by foreign publics, the national image displayed by foreign news media also constitutes an indispensable aspect of the framing of the national image (Li and Chitty, 2009). The national images held by foreign publics and foreign news media are not independent of each other. Since the foreign public primarily receives their information about other foreign countries from the news media of their country, the perceptions that media hold of one country can directly affect the foreign public's opinion toward that given country (Li and Chitty, 2009). The media will set an agenda that brings the salience and attributes of several particular aspects of a foreign country to the public via news reporting, which then affect the formation of that foreign country's national image in public (McCombs and Reynolds, 2009; Dearing and Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2014). To avoid confusion, the researcher states that this thesis only concerns about the national image portrayed by foreign news media, not by foreign publics.

Regarding the media perception of foreign countries, two integral components are usually concerned. First is the importance of one specific country in the eyes of foreign countries, which directly correlates with the volume and attention received by that given country in the foreign news media (Zhang and Meadows III, 2012; Liu, 2006). Therefore, the correlation led many

previous studies to analyze the degree of attention in the media coverage, which can reflect that to what degree are foreign countries concerned about another country in several topics/issues (Wu, 2014; Huang, 2013; Li, 2012). The second aspect is the qualitative content of perception, which is the emotional judgement one country hold of another country. This aspect corresponds to the coverage direction studied before, such as depicting China as an important rising force on the global stage in the coverage (Charles, 2016).

The rising importance of national image has been recognized by many countries whose governments are endeavoring to build a good national image overseas (Anholt. 2018). China has been proactive in improving its national image by undertaking several tasks such as the establishment of Overseas Propaganda Department in 1991, panda diplomacy, and other public diplomatic activities (Hartig, 2013; Wang, 2003). One important reason behind states' efforts to improve national image can be the vital role of national image in international relations. As already discussed in the literature review, the assessment of international relations by one nation will define the views this nation has of other nations (Alexander and Levin, 2005). The views, namely the national images, can be various, such as friend, partner, or enemy, expansionist. In return, these perceptions will affect the strategic responses and foreign policies made by decision-makers, leading to new dynamics in foreign relations (Kunczik, 1997). For example, if two countries assessed that they might have common interests in trade, this assessment might encourage foreign investment and mutual trust, which will, in turn, strengthen the trade tie between these two nations (Kunczik, 1997; Li, 2009). Generally speaking, the national image is important for its mutual impact on foreign relations and foreign behaviors.

3.2 Media framing theory

Goffman (1974) developed the concept of framing by mentioning that individuals will build a frame based on their knowledge. The framework will then serve as the principles by which those individuals interpret and understand social events. When it comes to media frame, framing is regarded as a central organizing idea that is used to make sense of an event or issue within the structure of a media package, and incorporate news to different frames (Gamson, 1989; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Media framing, usually done by media practitioners, tends to select and emphasize several attributes or stages of an event and make the selected information more salient in the news. As a result, the real stories will be rejuvenated in the news (Entman, 1993; Chyi and McCombs, 2004). Gitlin (2003, p. 6) further built the framing theory by arguing that framing refers to “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed

of little tacit theories about what exists, happens, and matters.” The argument above suggests that news frames may vary over different events or issues covered, which further implies that the images conveyed by the frame will be different (Gitlin, 2003; Gorp, 2007). Furthermore, the process of media framing usually includes evaluation, selection, alteration, or even deception (Li, 2009, p. 382). Hence, it is entirely possible that media framing, by reconstructing information, can misinterpret the real information of the world.

The news coverage regarding China’s 18th National Congress of CPC in *Nhan Dan* news studied by Wu (2014) can be an example to demonstrate the media framing process. Following the theory above, when reporting China's National Congress, the media frame chose to select some particular aspects of this event, such as the progress and results of the Congress, China’s past achievements, and greetings from Vietnamese leaders to the success of the event, as the most salient topics in the media coverage. After selection of topics, the media coverage tended to focus on the positive sides of that selected information during the stage of alteration, such as that China’s economic strategy would lead China to contribute more to the global economy. As a result, the image of China presented by *Nhan Dan* news in this specific event is highly positive.

Media frame is important for its role in shaping public perceptions of a country. The media reports of one country can negatively or positively affect the reputation of that country that is viewed by the public in another country. The function of media frame has made media a strong international image former (Choi, 2006; Kunczik, 1997). And this identity of media also made itself a crucial instrument used by decision-makers to influence people’s perception. More specifically, the ways by which news receivers evaluate and interpret the information from news will be influenced by different media frames (Gorp, 2007; Powell, 2011). By taking advantage of this, people that have power in controlling and constructing the media frame will tilt people toward particular perceptions of foreign countries that are of interest for those with power, which then contribute to the formation of other countries’ national images in the foreign public (Carragee and Roefs, 2004).

3.3 Theoretical argument and hypotheses

By incorporating the theories above into the case of China’s national image in Vietnamese news media, this thesis argues that the Vietnam-China foreign relations will affect Vietnamese authorities’ perceptions of China. Due to the state ownership of Vietnamese news media and the fact that Vietnamese authorities use the news media to influence Vietnamese public’s

perception of China, the Vietnamese authorities will play a crucial role in news media and the development of media frames when reporting about China. Consequently, Vietnam-China foreign relations motivates Vietnamese authorities to select particular aspects about China and make them more salient, which leads to the formation of the national image of China in Vietnamese news media. The following figure briefly explains the formation process.



Figure 1. Formation process of China's national image displayed by Vietnamese news media

Suggested by previous literature about China's national image in foreign news media, two main aspects of news media frames (1. degree of attention, and 2. coverage direction), which are also the two main sides where the national image is reflected, will be studied (Estupinan, 2017; Kim, 2017; Daniel, 2013; Li, 2010; Li, 2012; Wu, 2014; Huang, 2013; Liu and Yang, 2015).

First, the particular aspects of China about which Vietnamese authorities are most concerned decide the degree of attention in the media coverage. Based on three relevant studies, topics including 1) politics, 2) economy, 3) society, 4) military, 5) Culture, Sport, Technology, and Science (CSTS), are the main five themes that Vietnamese media coverage will choose when reporting about China (Huang, 2013; Wu, 2014; Li, 2012). This trend is also reflected in some other studies about foreign news media's perception of China (Li, 2009; Zhang, 2010; Daniel, 2013). Moreover, politics, economy, military, domestic development, and culture of each country are the main sources of power in the competition of relative power that will result in one country's perception of another country (Nye, 2004; Li, 2009). Therefore, this paper predicts that these five aspects will be the most covered topics in Vietnamese news media coverage of China in 2017.

However, under these five main topics, the subcategories might change according to the changes in foreign relations, China's society, and domestic development (Alexander and Levin, 2005). For example, the increasing prominence of SCS issue, the warming diplomatic relation between Vietnam and China, China's 19th NCCP in 2017, and several other trending international problems with China involved as the leading actor (North Korea issue for instance) might dominate China's political news in Vietnamese news media. Besides ongoing changes in

foreign relations, several topics might also remain on the top of the list due to the stereotypes that Vietnamese authorities and foreign news media have long been holding of China, such as the air pollution problem, human rights issue, and other social problems (Huang, 2013).

Second, coverage direction will depend on how Vietnamese authorities judge Vietnam-China foreign relations (Wu, 2014; Li, 2012). In international politics and military affairs, the coverage direction in the news regarding Vietnam-China sovereignty issues tends to be more negative due to their conflict over interests, while the coverage of Vietnam-China diplomacy and regional cooperation will be more objective or positive as these events are in the same interest for both Chinese and Vietnamese authorities. The same rule applies to international trade, more positive or objective news might be produced in the trade cooperation between Vietnam and China, opposing to a negative trend in the trade competition. Regarding the domestic aspect of China, the media coverage of Chinese domestic development in politics, economy, society, CSTS, might be presented more positively or objectively since both Vietnam and China share a similar path in domestic development and China's experience in domestic development is a useful mirror for Vietnam. However, report of China's social issues might be presented negatively due to the long-standing negative perceptions of China's social problems in Vietnamese authorities.

These assumptions brought this thesis to make three hypotheses below:

Vietnamese news media, affected by Vietnam-China foreign relations, tend to build a media frame with two important aspects: degree of attention and coverage direction, which will create:

H₁ A multi-dimensional image of China displayed in five main aspects: 1) politics, 2) economy, 3) society, 4) military, 5) CSTS

H₂ A more positive or objective image of China in dimensions where Vietnam and China share common interests in foreign relations, including Vietnam-China diplomacy, trade cooperation, China's domestic development in politics, economy, and CSTS.

H₃ A more negative image of China in dimensions where Vietnam competes for its interests with China or hold negative stereotypes of China, including Vietnam-China sovereignty issues, trade competitions, and China's social issues.

4. Research Design

4.1 Variables

4.1.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable will be China's national image portrayed in Vietnamese news media. The national image, as one country's perception of a specific foreign country, will reflect many dimensions and issue areas of that foreign country, ranging from trade to culture, politics, society, and military, etc., which means that the national image is typically multifaceted (Liu and Yang, 2015). The multi-dimensional nature of national image leads to a two-step approach of operationalization. In each step, two aspects of the national image (degree of attention and coverage direction) discussed above will be analyzed.

The degree of attention, showing the degree of importance one country pays to another in the agenda setting, will be decided by counting the volume of news articles and the percentages of them among all (Zhang and Meadows III, 2012; Liu and Yang, 2015). This research will display the degree of attention in each thematic dimension and see how the Vietnamese media set the priority list for the news topics related to China. The coverage direction, namely the affective judgment and interpretation of China reflected in Vietnamese media coverage, is more qualitative than the degree of attention (Liu and Yang, 2015). This study will base the coverage direction upon the tone of each news article frame, which will be discussed later.

Regarding the two-step approach, first, a general image of China in Vietnamese news media will be presented. This research will combine the general information about the degree of attention and the coverage direction to reflect the overall status of China in Vietnamese news media. Starting from the general perception, this research, on the second step, will focus on each thematic dimension covered by Vietnamese media coverage of China. As predicted, five dimensions (1. politics, 2. economy, 3. society, 4. military, 5. CSTS) will be the main focuses in the media coverage (Wu, 2014; Li, 2012; Huang, 2013). Operationalizing in this step will be to assess how Vietnamese news media coverage perceives China in each thematic dimension from the two aspects mentioned above. Besides assessing each main dimension, this research will also identify the main reported topics under each meta-dimension. For example, under the dimension of politics, the main news topics can be China's domestic politics, China-Vietnam political relations, China-US political relations (Huang, 2013). However, since these topics are subject to the changes in foreign relations and affairs, it is difficult to predict a complete list of topics. Therefore, more will be discovered during the research later. The discovery and analysis

of topics can help this research better identify the specific topics that affect China's national image under each dimension.

4.1.2 Study variable

The researcher argues that Vietnam-China foreign relations will affect the perception of China held by Vietnamese authorities, who will then influence China's national image displayed by Vietnamese news media via media frame. However, since the researcher focuses on analyzing how Vietnamese news media frame China's national image, which is precisely the stage 3 in the theoretical model (see figure 1), the study variable should be Vietnamese news media frames.

As mentioned, the media frame will make some aspects of one subject (country, event or issue) more salient in the news and sometimes even make false information about the subject (Saleem, 2007; Entman, 1993; Li, 2009). The argument implies that 1) several aspects of one subject will be more highlighted in the news, 2) the news might contain some bias that affects the overall tone of news. Therefore, this research will operationalize the independent variable (media frame) by identifying the salience of news topic and tone of each news article. More specifically, the salience refers to the frequency of selected topics covered in the news. And regarding the tone, news articles that hold more favorable opinions of China will be pro-China tone, and those more unfavorable will be anti-China tone. A neutral tone will refer to the news that is neither favorable nor unfavorable (Choi, 2006, p. 24). More details about methodology will be introduced in the following section.

4.2 Research method

This research will adopt a mixed-method approach: content analysis and case studies. The mixed research method will interpret and analyze the media content systematically with both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The main methodology will be as following:

The first step will be coding, which will quantify one news article into data for further quantitative analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 1980). Several aspects of one news article will be coded, which include the title, main thematic dimension, main topic, and

the overall tone of a news article. The coding and further analysis of coding results will be finished in an Excel workbook.⁸

Regarding the overall tone of each news article, each news article will be paired with one of three types of tones (positive, neutral, and negative). This study will look into main article context, and decide the tone of each news article based on the main emotional words used in the whole context of the news article (Huang, 2013, p. 9; Wu, 2014, p. 36). Several rules will be respected during the coding of overall tone:

1. Positive news: news appreciating China's society, military, technology, economy, politics, Chinese people and culture by mainly using positive keywords "cooperation, success, achievement, development, beautiful, great, excellent, strong, modern, peaceful, praise, efforts, kind, hardworking, etc." that can bring news readers a positive imagination of China.
2. Negative news: news criticizing China for its issues (human rights, air pollution, and other social issues), its misbehaviors in international affairs, and its negative impacts on other countries with the use of primarily negative keywords "violation, illegal, protest, condemnation, crime, disaster, threat, corruption, angry, malpractice, lagging-behind, etc." that render the dark side of China to the readers.
3. Neutral news: news with the use of only objective keywords, or a fair mix of negative and positive keywords. For example, a news article that report both China's death in a natural disaster and Chinese government's efforts to rescue victims is neutral since this article reports both China's negative side (the serious consequence left by natural disaster), and positive side (Chinese government's great efforts) (Giap, 2017).

After the first round of coding, the reliability of coding results will be tested. A second coder will be trained to code the main thematic dimension and the overall tone of a random sample (5%) of all news articles (Kaid et al., 1989). This research will use both percent agreement and Scott's pi to indicate the inter-coder reliability. Percent agreement compares to what extent the researcher and 2nd coder agree on the coding of thematic dimension and overall tone (Lombard et al., 2002, p. 590). Based on the percent agreement, Scott's pi will also be introduced to double

⁸ For further details on the codebook and coding examples, see Appendix.

check the inter-coder reliability (Scott, 1955). The calculation of Scott's pi is based on the following formula:

$$\pi = \frac{\text{Pr}(a) - \text{Pr}(e)}{1 - \text{Pr}(e)}$$

(Pr(a) is the observed percent agreement, and Pr(e) is the square of joint marginal proportions.)

For an acceptable result, the percent agreement and Scott's pi usually need to meet 80% and 0.7 respectively (Frey et al., 2000; Reinard, 2001; Neuendorf, 2017). The discrepancies between the coding results of the researcher and 2nd coder will be re-examined to improve the coding results.

Thereafter, this research will take a quantitative approach to analyzing all the articles collected from coding. The research will first follow the structure provided by Liu and Yang (2015) by analyzing the degree of attention and coverage direction on an overall level, and then on the level of each thematic dimension. The results of the analysis will be used to test the three hypotheses.

Last, this research will identify the most two important events in Vietnam-China foreign relations in 2017 based on coding results of degree attention and select news articles related to these two events for further case analysis. The media frames adopted by these news articles will be carefully examined by this study, which will produce results that reveal more detailed information regarding China's national image in the Vietnamese news media (Wu, 2014; Leavy and Prior, 2014).

4.3 Case selection and data collection

Since the research will analyze China's national image in Vietnamese news media, the first type of case this research needs to choose will be the news media. Before the selection of news media, an overview of Vietnamese news media landscape will be provided here:

Based on the data of Freedom House (2016) in the category of press freedom, Vietnam is labeled as "Not Free," which means that Vietnamese news media do not enjoy freedom from the control of Vietnamese authorities. Vietnam has reached the worst situation in its legal environment where Vietnamese authorities are employing tougher legal mechanisms to restrict the rights of media professionals. It is also found that multiple journalists and bloggers have

been physically harassed or even imprisoned by the Vietnamese government for their conducts in “anti-government propaganda” (Freedom House, 2016; Abuza, 2015). Overall, Abuza (2015, p. 2) argued that state’s control over Vietnamese media had only increased since 2012 when multiple bloggers were punished for their involvement in a corruption scandal.

Regarding the news media and their ownership, all media operations in Vietnam are subsidiaries of CPV (Abuza, 2015, p. 5; Catherine, 2010, p. 90). Most newspapers offer both online and print editions. However, there also exist a few online-only news sites (*VnExpress*, *Vietnam Net*, *Vietnam Media*) (Catherine, 2010, p. 95). All news media outlets work as the propaganda tool for the CPV to promote the party and state policy in public and ask people to undoubtedly believe what they read from the news, which has made Vietnamese newspapers highly influential in guiding public opinion (Freedom House, 2016; Catherine, 2010, p. 95). Vietnamese authorities are working hard to consolidate the state-owned media by reducing the number of independent media and media staff (Abuza, 2015, p. 6). Additionally, several news media outlets including exclusively online news sites (*VnExpress* and *Vietnam Net*), *Thanh Nien*, *Nguoi Lao Dong*, and *Tuoi Tre* newspapers might enjoy a fair degree of editorial independence due to their higher financial independence (Freedom House, 2016; Catherine, 2010, p. 90). However, these news outlets are eventually under the supervision of the state.

Based on the overview, this research decided to choose two Vietnamese news media: one print news media (*Tuoi Tre*) and one online-only newspaper (*VnExpress*). They are chosen for the following reasons. First, *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* are the most circulated newspaper and the most read online newspaper among Vietnamese people, respectively (Newspaper Web Ranking, 2016; SimilarWeb, 2018). Second, each news media is different from each other.

Tuoi Tre News is the official newspaper of Ho Chi Minh Communist Union, directly under the supervision of CPV. *Tuoi Tre* offers both online and print editions. Since this research can only collect online news from *Tuoi Tre* online news website, the variation between online and print news content in *Tuoi Tre* might produce different results in online news from the print news. However, the previous study found that the online content highly matches with print content in *Tuoi Tre* news, which means that the presented national image of China will be consistent in both print and online editions (Huang, 2013, p. 6).

VnExpress is the first and the most popular online-only newspaper in Vietnam, belonging to Financing and Promoting Technology Corporation, the 23rd largest company, and 7th largest private enterprise in Vietnam, which makes the identity of *VnExpress*, as a subsidiary of a private company, different from that of *Tuoi Tre* - the direct subsidiary of the Communist party (VNR500, 2017). *VnExpress* has successfully attracted many loyal readers for its fast and timely updating speed and a wide variety of high-quality news topics covered, which has also been positively recognized by the former Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Tran Duc Lai ("*VnExpress* trong cách", 2010).

After the selection of news media, the next step will be the selection of news articles. First, this research will only select news articles that have China as the main discussed subject in the media coverage. To target those news articles, the researcher will use the search bar of each newspaper website with keywords: Trung Quốc (China), Trung Hoa (China), Bắc Kinh (Beijing) (Huang, 2013). Second, regarding the language, since the common language used in two news media is Vietnamese, and the news is more frequently updated in Vietnamese, this research will only select news articles written in Vietnamese. Third, the period for research is from 1st January to 31st December 2017. Therefore, all online news articles from *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* that meet three requirements above will be collected as data.

5. Results and Analysis

In this chapter, the first section will provide general results of coding in both the degree of attention and the coverage direction, and present an overall image of China. Specific coding results of each dimension will be introduced in next five sections. After the display of coding results, the seventh section will conduct case analyses on two groups of news, followed by the last section that will reflect on Vietnam-China foreign relations with China's national image found by this research.

5.1 General information

5.1.1 Degree of attention

	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Total number of articles	846	2598
Average number (per day)	2.32	7.12

Table 1. Total and daily average numbers of news articles

Excluding articles unrelated to China (Trung Quốc, Trung Hoa, Bắc Kinh), the researcher collected 846 and 2598 pieces of news from *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* news website, respectively (see table 1). On average, 2.32 news articles related to China were produced daily on *Tuoi Tre* online website, much less than a daily average of 7.12 news articles produced by *VnExpress*. To explain the significant difference in the size of media coverages of two newspapers, one reason could be the difference in the organization structure of two news agencies. *VnExpress* is exclusively focusing on its online news website, while efforts of *Tuoi Tre* News staff have to be divided into many other news branches including several print editions of news.

	Politics	Economy	Society	Military	CSTS	Total
Tuoi Tre	254	215	176	75	126	846
VnExpress	617	447	690	313	531	2598

Table 2. Number of news articles in each main thematic dimension

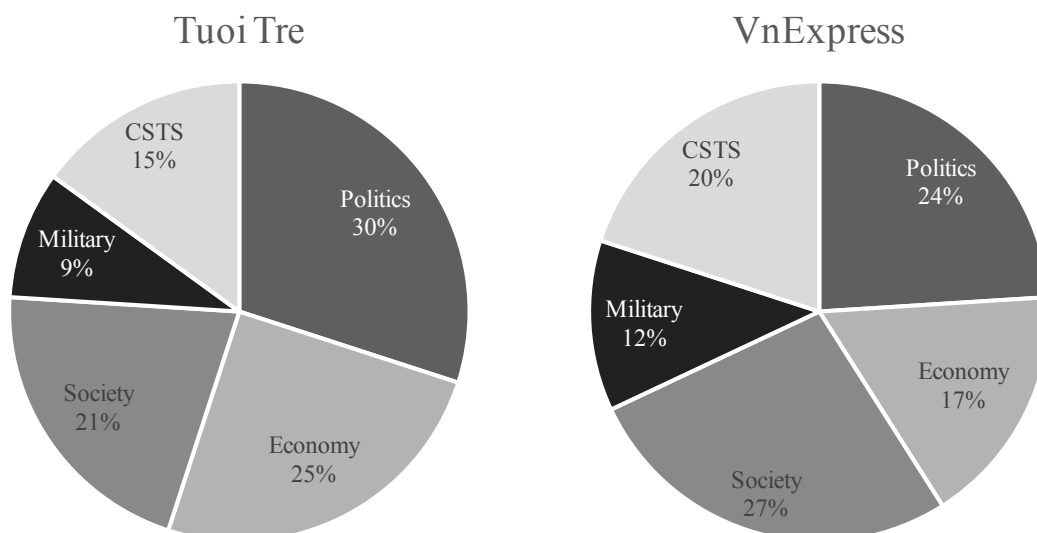


Figure 2. Percentage of each main thematic dimension

Regarding the degree of attention in each thematic dimension, this research found that five dimensions (politics, economy, society, military, CSTS) are still the main themes adopted by Vietnamese news media to frame the national image of China (see figure 2). The reliability of results regarding the coding of main thematic dimension was tested by the inter-coder reliability test (see table 3). The test results, which have exceeded the threshold (80% for percent agreement, 0.7 for Scott's pi), show that the coding results are reliable.

	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Percent Agreement	95.0%	97.6%
Scott's pi	0.929	0.962

Table 3. Inter-coder reliability test results for the coding of degree of attention

Based on figure 2, politics account for the biggest percentage (30%) in the media coverage in *Tuoi Tre*, followed by the dimension of economy (25%), and society (21%). The data have shown that in 2017, *Tuoi Tre* news was most concerned about the political side of China, with the China's economy and society at the 2nd and 3rd position.

The situation in *VnExpress* is different. Regarding the share of media coverage, the top 3 are society (26%), politics (24%), and CSTS (21%). The dimension of China's society has successfully "defeated" other dimensions and secured the position as the most attractive topic in the media coverage of 2017. Last, the dimension of military is the least interesting part, compared to other four dimensions, for both *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* when reporting about China.

5.1.2 Coverage direction

Before analysis, it is necessary to mention that the coding results of coverage direction also passed the inter-coder reliability tests (see table 4). Regarding the analysis of coding results, from figure 3, we can learn that the neutral image constitutes the largest proportion in the coverage directions of both newspapers. The rest, apart from neutral news articles, tends to be more negative, with the positive direction accounting for 14% in both newspapers. However, compared to *Tuoi Tre*, *VnExpress* portrayed a more neutral and less negative image of China.

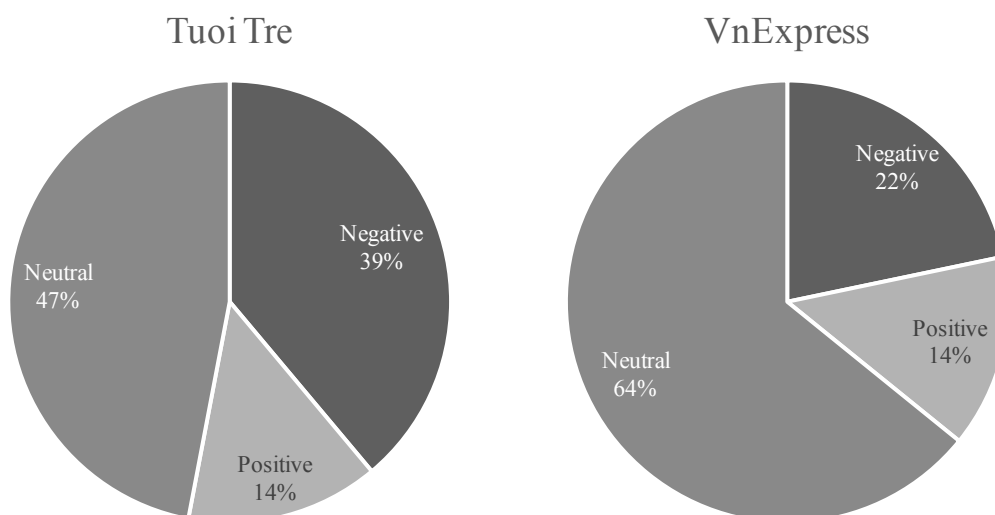


Figure 3. Percentage of each coverage direction

	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Percent Agreement	87.5%	91.3%
Scott's pi	0.765	0.825

Table 4. Inter-coder reliability test results for the coding of coverage direction

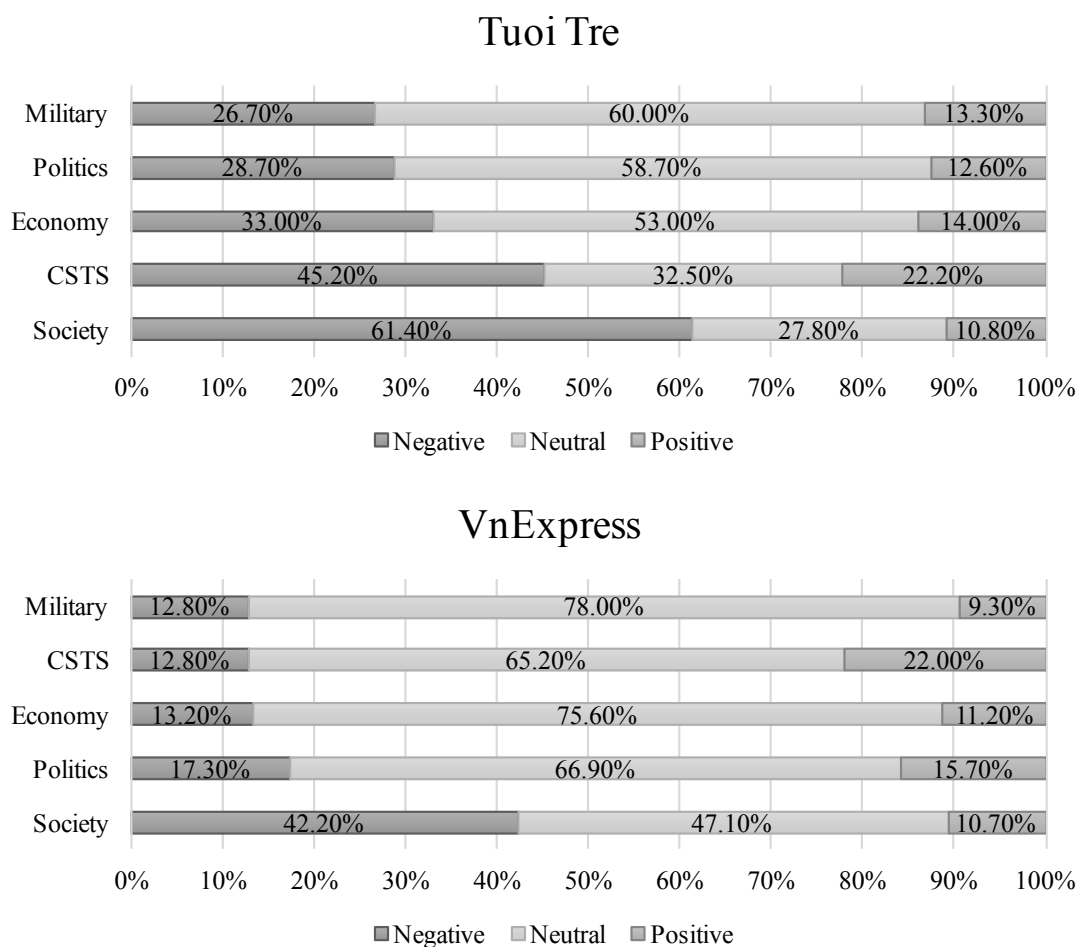


Figure 4. Percentage of each coverage direction in each main thematic dimension

Dimension	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Politics	2,28	1,13
Economy	2,37	1,18
Society	5,63	3,89
CSTS	2,07	0,61
Military	2,00	1,31

Table 5. Ratio between negative news and positive news in each main thematic dimension⁹

To observe the contribution of each dimension to the overall direction of media coverage, this study calculated the percentage of news articles under each coverage direction in each dimension (see figure 4). In both news media, society is the dimension with the highest percentage of negative news. From the ratios between negative and positives under each dimension (see table 5), the dimension of society stands out in both news media for its much higher ratio between negative and positive than other dimensions. Another important point

⁹ The ratio is calculated as the number of negative news/the number of positive news. A ration >1 means a higher number of negative news than positive news.

should be noted about the ratios is that the ratios between negative and positive tend to be more balanced in *VnExpress* than in *Tuoi Tre* where negative news articles are more than two times as high as positive news articles. Next, in *Tuoi Tre* news, society is one of the two dimensions whose negative percentages exceed both positive and neutral percentages. The other dimension is CSTS. However, in *VnExpress*, neutral news articles always account for the largest proportions under all dimensions. Last, the military dimension is the dimension with the lowest percentage of negative news for both news media.

5.1.3 Summary

China's national image is multi-dimensional under five dimensions: politics, economy, society, military, and CSTS. However, there exists the difference in the priority of each dimension that each news media put on their agenda. Overall, *Tuoi Tre* is more politics-oriented, and *VnExpress* is more interested in the societal dimension of China. The researcher argues that the difference in the organizations of two news media (*Tuoi Tre* as the official media of Communist Youth Union and a direct subsidiary of CPV, and *VnExpress* as a more independent commercial news media) leads to the various priorities on the agenda of two Vietnamese news media. Besides the priority, this study also found that the difference in the organizational structure of media agencies resulted in different volumes of news articles related to China in both news media.

Regarding the coverage direction, we can conclude that a neutral image dominated in the dimensions of military, politics, economy in *Tuoi Tre*, while the rest two dimensions (CSTS and society) are presented in a more negative image. Similar to *Tuoi Tre*, society is the most negative dimension in *VnExpress*, with the other four dimensions having a fairer balance between negative and positive news. However, compared to *Tuoi Tre*, the media coverage of China in *VnExpress* is more objective.

The following sections will reveal more details and conclude China's image under each thematic dimension.

5.2 Dimension: politics

5.2.1 Degree of attention

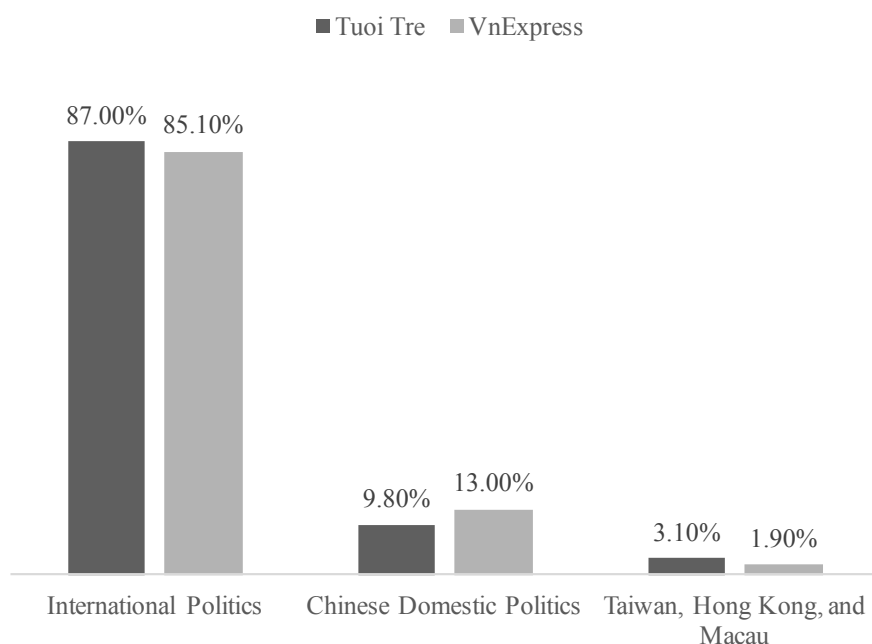


Figure 5. Percentage of each subcategory under the dimension of politics

The researcher divided the media coverage of politics into three sections: Chinese domestic politics, international politics, and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau (THM) (see figure 5)¹⁰. The ratios between three sections in two newspapers are similar to each other. In Chinese domestic politics, the top 3 covered topics are corruption, National Congress of CPC, and China's leaders, in both newspapers (see figure 6). This trend corresponds to the most important affairs in Chinese domestic politics in 2017: the anti-corruption campaign, 19th National Congress of CPC, and the election of Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC (Communiqué of the First Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CPC, 2017; Zhang, 2016). The results indicate that both Vietnamese news media kept a close eye on the situation of Chinese domestic politics.

¹⁰ News articles that only report the interaction between the Chinese government and Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau will be put in the subcategory of THM, while news with the involvement of other countries (e.g., the US) in topics of China-Taiwan/Hong Kong/Macau will be put in the subcategory of international politics.

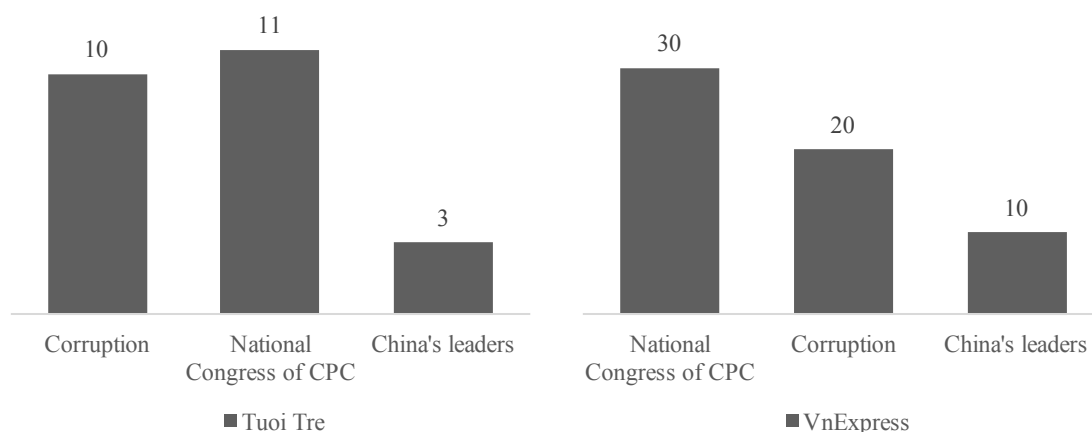


Figure 6. Frequency of each most reported topic under the subcategory of Chinese domestic politics

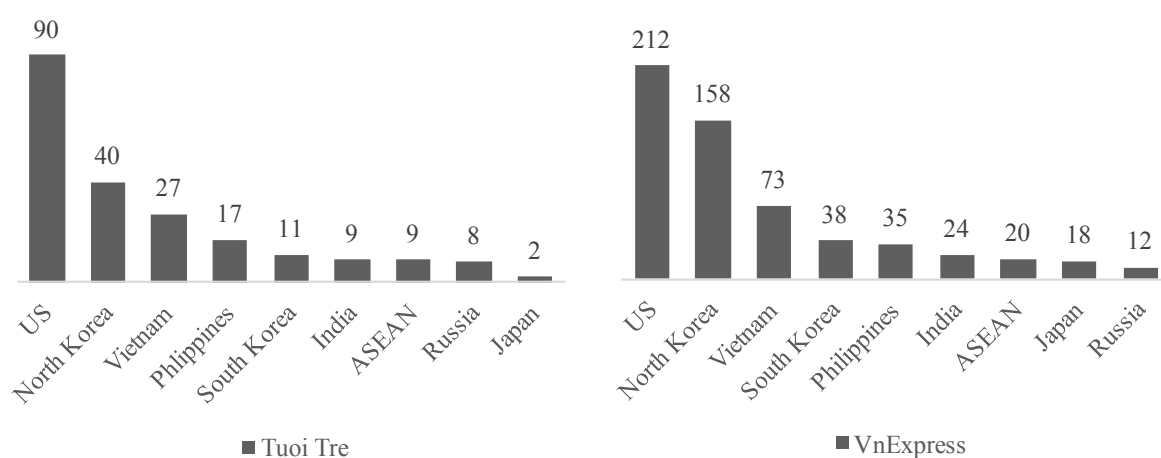


Figure 7. Frequency of each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international politics¹¹

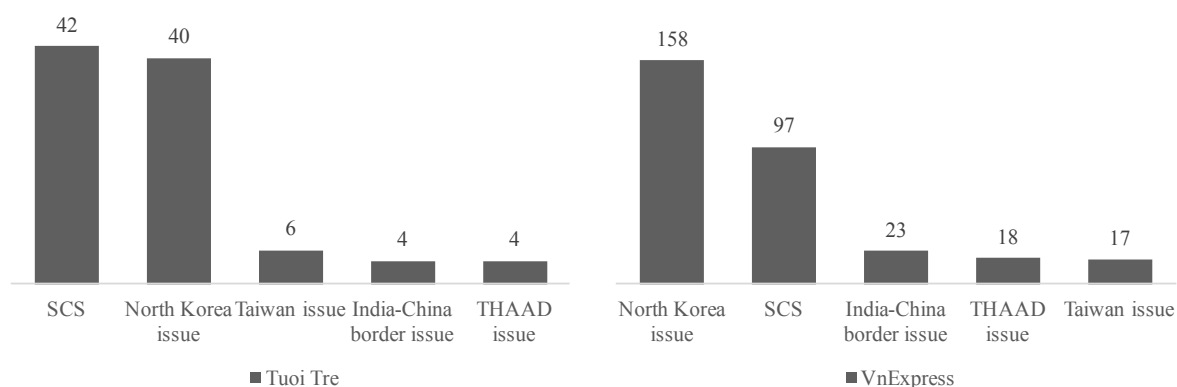


Figure 8. Frequency of each most reported international affair under the subcategory of international politics

Concerned about international politics, a similar trend can be observed from both *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* (see figure 7 and 8). A few points can be made here. First, note that US, North Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, and South Korea occupied the five most important foreign countries in Vietnamese media coverage of China's international politics. However, it is worth mentioning

¹¹ Other ASEAN member states, except for Vietnam, will be included in the group of ASEAN.

that the media coverages of US significantly surpassed that of China-Vietnam politics, showing Vietnamese news media is more concerned about how China and US have been dealing with each other in international politics.

Second, the high frequency of these foreign countries in the media coverage of China is mainly due to the extensive attention both Vietnamese news media put on several trending international affairs where those frequently mentioned foreign countries, especially the US, are the main parties. These international affairs include SCS issue, North Korea crisis, THAAD crisis, India-China border dispute, Taiwan issue, from which SCS issue and North Korea issue are the most concerned.

Third, Vietnam is mostly covered in two topics: China-Vietnam high-level visits, and SCS issue. However, it is worth mentioning that when it comes to the coverage of high-level visits, it shows that Vietnamese news media is also highly concerned about China-US high-level visits, whose media coverage size is even slightly larger than that of China-Vietnam.

The last point here is about the media coverage of public diplomacy in which *VnExpress* released 20 news articles and only 1 article came from *Tuoi Tre*. Among 20 news articles from *VnExpress*, most of them are dedicated to describe US-China public diplomacy including First Lady of China and US, Ivanka Trump's popularity in China, and Donald Trump's granddaughter learning Chinese, while only one news article mentioned Vietnam-China public diplomacy, which is about the establishment of new Vietnam-China friendship center. This variation shows that Vietnamese news media are more concerned about the traditional diplomacy (top-leader visit) between Vietnam-China than their public diplomacy.

5.2.2 Coverage direction

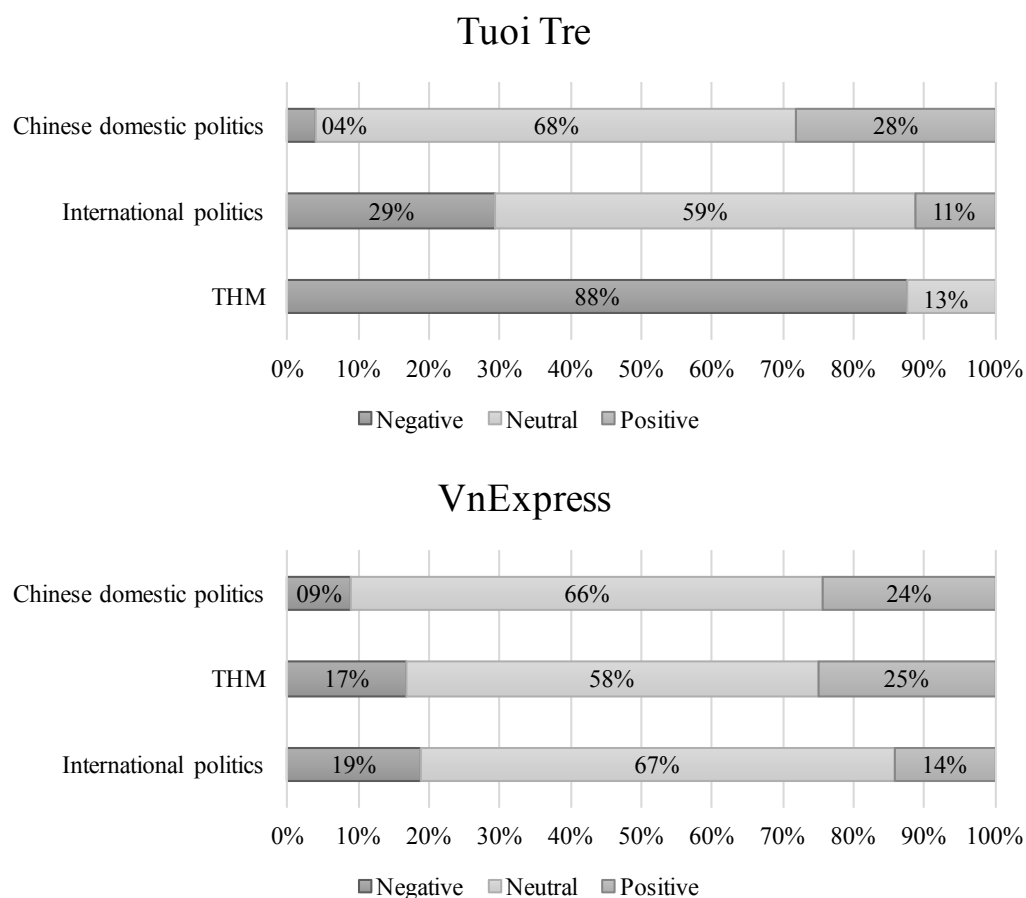


Figure 9. Percentage of each coverage direction under each subcategory of politics dimension

From figure 9, we can learn that out of three subcategories, domestic politics and international affairs are dominated by neutral news in both media coverages. Moreover, both news media reported more positive news than negative in the subcategory of domestic politics, opposite to the situation of more negative than positive in news articles of international politics. One distinct difference between two news media is that a negative image is overwhelmingly predominant (88%) in the subcategory of THM in *Tuoi Tre* news, different from a more neutral or positive image in *VnExpress*. The researcher found that most of the negative news regarding THM in *Tuoi Tre* is surrounding the tension between local people in Hong Kong and Chinese central government's policies toward Hong Kong. However, since the proportion of THM subcategory is much smaller compared to other two main subcategories, the coverage direction of THM does not significantly affect the overall direction of the political dimension.

		19th National Congress	China's leaders	Corruption
Tuoi Tre	Negative	0,0%	0,0%	10,0%
	Positive	27.3%	0,0%	40,0%
	Neutral	72.7%	100,0%	50,0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		19th National Congress	China's leaders	Corruption
VnExpress	Negative	0.0%	0,0%	15,0%
	Positive	23.3%	30,0%	30,0%
	Neutral	76,7%	70,0%	55,0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported topic under the subcategory of Chinese domestic political affairs

To have a deeper look into each subcategory, this study also calculated the percentage of each direction under the most frequently mentioned topics discovered in the section of the degree of attention. Regarding China's domestic politics (see table 6), news with a neutral or positive tone dominated in top 3 topics. Only a small number of negative news (10% in *Tuoi Tre*, and 15% in *VnExpress*) are found to exist in the topic of corruption, which mainly reported the lately arrested Chinese officials who committed corruption.

		US	Vietnam	Philippines	North Korea	India	Japan	ASEAN	Russia	South Korea
Tuoi Tre	Negative	18,9%	48,1%	17,6%	10,0%	55,6%	0,0%	22,2%	0,0%	18,2%
	Positive	10,0%	29,6%	5,9%	2,5%	0,0%	0,0%	22,2%	0,0%	0,0%
	Neutral	71,1%	22,2%	76,5%	87,5%	44,4%	100,0%	55,6%	100,0%	81,8%
	Total	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0 %
		US	Vietnam	Philippines	North Korea	India	Japan	ASEAN	Russia	South Korea
VnExpress	Negative	18,9%	30,1%	40,0%	7,0%	12,5%	5,6%	10,0%	8,3%	13,2%
	Positive	11,8%	52,1%	5,7%	3,2%	4,2%	0,0%	15,0%	8,3%	5,3%
	Neutral	69,3%	17,8%	54,3%	89,9%	83,3%	94,4%	75,0%	83,3%	81,6%
	Total	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0 %

Table 7. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international politics

Table 7 presents the percentage of each type of direction under the most frequently appearing countries and regions in the media coverage of China. For most of the countries and regions

including US, North Korea, Japan, ASEAN, Russia, and South Korea and their relations with China, both news media present a primarily neutral image with either an overpowering percentage of neutral news or a fair share between negative and positive news. Vietnam-China is presented in a mainly negative way in *Tuoi Tre*, in contrast to a slightly more positive image in *VnExpress*. Moreover, this study discovered that most of the positive and negative news surrounding Vietnam and China are mainly concerned about Vietnam-China high-level visits and SCS issue, respectively, which are also the most covered topics in the Vietnam-China media coverage.

A similar trending is also found in table 8, which shows the situation of top international affairs in the coverage. Both news media tend to be highly neutral in international affairs of North Korea issue, Taiwan issue, and THAAD. However, in SCS issue, where Vietnam and Philippines are the main parties, the overall coverage direction is more negative. Last, regarding India-China border dispute, news of *Tuoi Tre* is predominantly negative (75%). The negative news regarding India-China border dispute is mainly focusing on India's accusation of China, a theme that is rarely mentioned in *VnExpress*.

		SCS	India-China border dispute	THAAD	Taiwan issue	North Korea issue
Tuoi Tre	Negative	57,1%	75,0%	0,0%	0,0%	10,0%
	Positive	4,8%	0,0%	0,0%	16,7%	2,5%
	Neutral	38,1%	25,0%	100,0%	83,3%	87,5%
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		SCS	India-China border dispute	THAAD	Taiwan issue	North Korea issue
VnExpress	Negative	59,8%	13,0%	0,0%	0,0%	7,0%
	Positive	3,1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	3,2%
	Neutral	37,1%	87,0%	100,0%	100,0%	89,9%
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8. Percentage of each coverage direction of each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international politics

5.2.3 Summary

Overall, both news media presented a similar image of China in politics. Suggested by results above, this study found that both news media perceived China as a vital player in international politics considering the massive size of media coverage given to reporting China's participation

in several important international affairs and China's relations with other powers. Besides the importance of China in international politics, China is mainly perceived as a neutral party in most international affairs and its relations with foreign countries. However, things changed when it is about Vietnam and SCS issue. The image of China became more positive-negative mixed when both Vietnamese news media reported about Vietnam-China, in which China is perceived as a friendly visitor or host during the diplomatic visits, while an irresponsible country in the SCS issue.

Apart from international politics, although little attention was given to China's domestic politics and THM, it could still be seen that Vietnamese news media spoke highly of China's development in its domestic politics with a focus on the most two important domestic political events (19th National Congress of CPC and anti-corruption campaign). However, the negative side about Chinese central government's issue with Hong Kong has been amplified in the coverage of *Tuoi Tre*.

5.3 Dimension: economy

5.3.1 Degree of attention

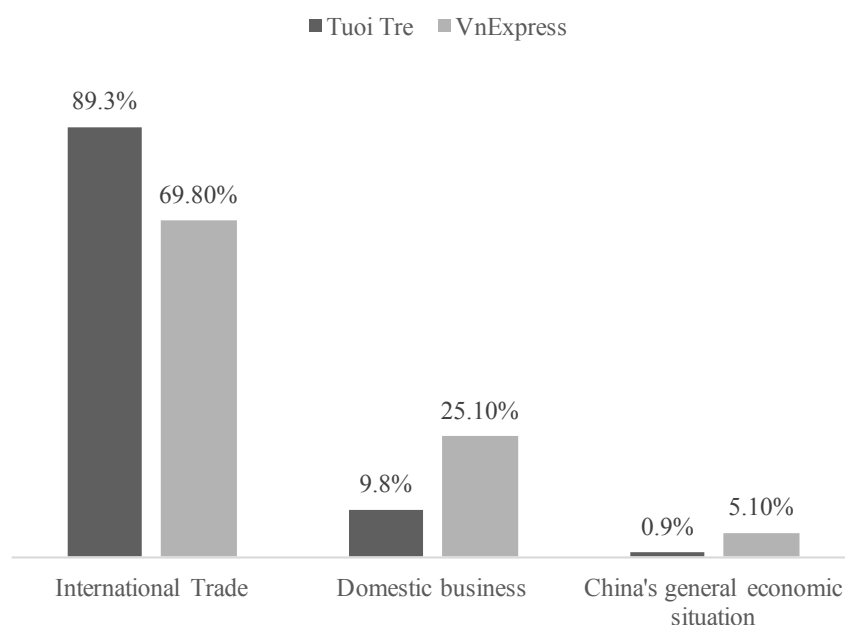


Figure 10. Percentage of each subcategory under the dimension of economy

News articles regarding economy are divided into three sections: international trade, domestic business, and China's general economic situation (see figure 10). The percentages have shown that international trade is mostly covered in the economic dimension of both *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress*. However, the category of international trade received 20% more coverage in *Tuoi*

Tre than in *VnExpress*, which suggests that *VnExpress* showed more concern for China's domestic economic situation than *Tuoi Tre* did. In the media coverage of China's domestic business, three types of business are mostly covered: 1) online business, 2) sharing economy, 3) real estate. Among three types of business, real estate always remains one of the most trending topics in China's domestic business (Hancock and Wildau, 2017). The other two, online business and sharing business, are recently booming in China and constitute important aspects of China's domestic business (Yan, 2017; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017). Therefore, by giving more media attention to these "hot" business types in China, Vietnam stays closely on the transformation of China's domestic business.

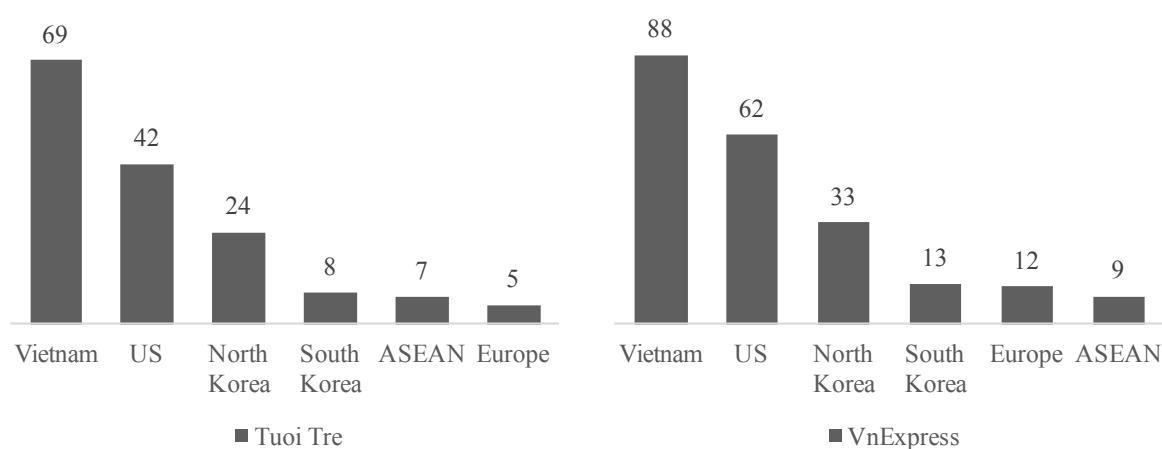


Figure 11. Frequency of each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international trade

Different from the situation in international politics, Vietnam has overturned the US and become the most frequently referred foreign country in the media coverage of international trade (see figure 11). Regarding Vietnam-China trade, most of the news articles are around topics including Vietnam-China trade cooperation, Chinese and Vietnamese products in each other's market, and tourism business. Following Vietnam, US, North Korea, and South Korea maintain their high prominence in the media coverage of international trade, similar to international politics. It is noteworthy that a large part of the news regarding North Korea and South Korea are concerned about the trade sanction on North Korea and South Korea due to the North Korea issue and THAAD issue. Regarding the US, the media coverage is more concerned about US-China worsening trade conflict, especially the trade penalty on China by Trump administration. Last, this study also found that BRI, the trade initiative led by China, is also one of the main focuses in both news media coverages. However, another trade initiative led by China, AIIB, is rarely mentioned in the news.

5.3.2 Coverage direction

Concerned about the coverage direction in the dimension of economy, both newspapers projected a neutral image of China's domestic business, with positive news ranking the second (see figure 12). The image of international trade is overwhelmingly neutral (80.4%) in *VnExpress*. However, the neutral percentage has been reduced to 53,1%, with the negative percentage rising from 12,5% to 35,4% in *Tuoi Tre*, showing a mix of mainly neutral or negative image of China in international trade. Last, *Tuoi Tre* is 100% positive when reporting China's general economic situation, while *VnExpress* tends to be primarily neutral, but with a higher percentage of positive news than that of negative news. Nevertheless, due to the relatively small size of media coverage in China's general economic situation, the overall coverage direction of economy dimension is mainly affected by the other two subcategories.

More specifically, out of three business types that are mostly covered in China's domestic business, real estate is mainly presented in a neutral or positive image by both Vietnamese news media. However, the other two types, online business and sharing economy business have been given both positive and negative judgments, which mainly refer to the fast developments achieved on the positive side and relevant issues brought by the new business types on the negative side.

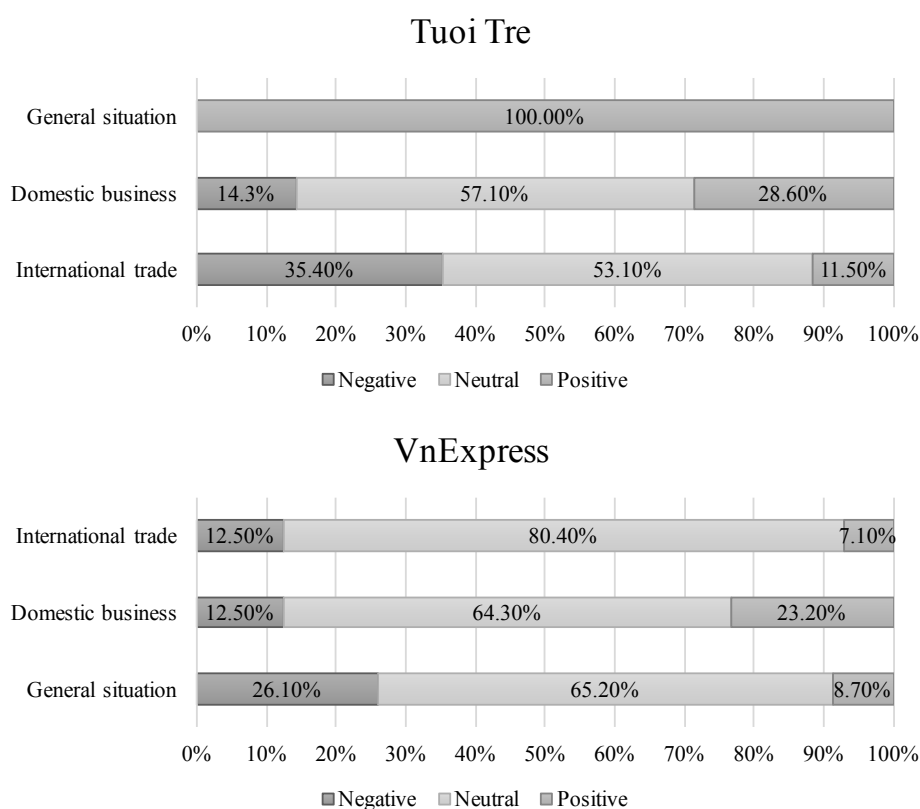


Figure 12. Percentage of each coverage direction under each subcategory of economy dimension

		Vietnam	US	North Korea	South Korea	Europe	ASEAN
Tuoi Tre	Negative	33,3%	47,6%	29,2%	12,5%	20,0%	71,4%
	Positive	11,6%	11,9%	0,0%	0,0%	40,0%	0,0%
	Neutral	55,1%	40,5%	70,8%	87,5%	40,0%	28,6%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		Vietnam	US	North Korea	South Korea	Europe	ASEAN
VnExpress	Negative	21,6%	12,9%	0,0%	7,7%	0,0%	11,1%
	Positive	9,1%	4,8%	6,1%	7,7%	16,7%	22,2%
	Neutral	69,3%	82,3%	93,9%	84,6%	83,3%	66,7%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 9. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international trade

Regarding international trade, we can observe from table 9 that *VnExpress* presents a principally neutral image in each trade relation between China and those most frequently reported foreign countries or regions, displaying an objective role of China in international trade. However, the situation is slightly different in *Tuoi Tre*. In most countries or regions, China is depicted in a principally neutral tone, with the exceptions of US and ASEAN whose percentages of negative news toward China even exceeding that of neutral news. Overall, the coverage direction of China in international trade tends to be more neutral-negative mixed. This study further discovered that most of the negative news is around the issue of the Chinese products quality, the negative impacts of China's overseas business and enterprises on foreign countries, Vietnam-China and US-China trade competition.

5.3.3 Summary

Similar to China's image in international politics, China has also received the image as a crucial player in the international trade for the numerous media attention given not only to Vietnam-China trade but also to China's trade relations with other countries, especially US. However, the importance of China in international trade is paired with a relatively negative image as perceived by the coverage of *Tuoi Tre*, compared to a highly neutral image of China in *VnExpress*.

Regarding China's domestic business and the general situation of China's economy, China's image as a rising economy with an initiative in developing new types of business was found to

exist in both news media. Both of them made a neutral or slightly more positive standing with their affirmation in China's economic development, although there remain a critical analysis of the illness existing in China's economy and the issues brought by China's development in domestic business.

5.4 Dimension: society

5.4.1 Degree of attention

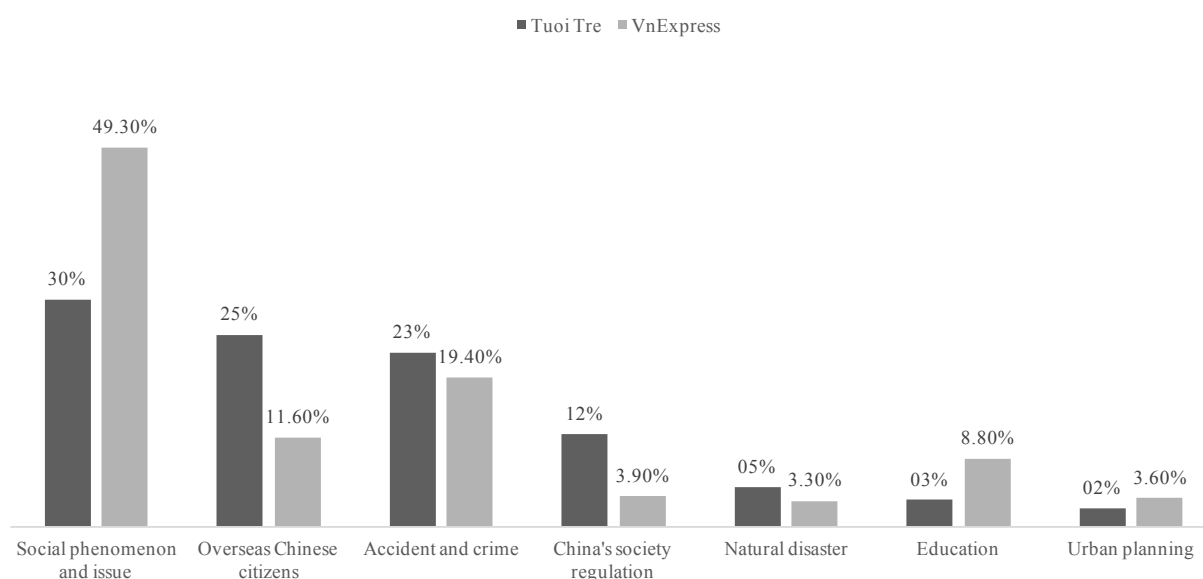


Figure 13. Percentage of each subcategory under the dimension of society

Regarding the media coverage of society, seven main subcategories are found by this study (see figure 13). In both news media, the subcategory of social phenomenon and issue ranked first with the highest share of all news articles in the dimension of society, followed by subcategories of accident and crime, and overseas Chinese citizens. Two types of overseas Chinese citizens are primarily covered: Chinese tourists abroad, and Chinese citizens who committed civil crimes abroad. Moreover, when reporting overseas Chinese tourists, both Vietnamese news media gave many attentions to the misbehaviors of Chinese tourists, which is also a hot topic among discussions of many other news media worldwide (Volodzko, 2016). These high-ranking categories show to us that Vietnamese news media are more interested in the down-sides of Chinese society, such as China's social issues and tragedies, and Chinese people's misbehaviors, than the good aspects.

Apart from the top 3 shared by both news media, *Tuoi Tre* is found to be more interested in China's society regulation than *VnExpress*, while *VnExpress* shows more concern for China's education than *Tuoi Tre*. Under each subcategory, China's social phenomenon and issue

covered a wide range of topics, but with the main focus on topics including China's family and marriage, Chinese children and youth, and air pollution. In the section of accident and crime, human trafficking, especially the human trafficking between Vietnam and China, constituted an important topic here. And News articles regarding China's society regulation mainly report China's internet regulation and China's censorship. The subcategory of natural disasters includes news related to the landslide, earthquake, flood that occurred in China in 2017. Urban planning covers various urban constructions in China, without a focus in a specific event. Similarly, no focus is found in the subcategory of education, which covers various topics including school activities, regulations on students, and updates in Chinese education system.

5.4.2 Coverage direction

Due to the main focus on the downsides of China, it can be found from figure 14 that a dominantly negative image of China was presented in the top 3 subcategories in the degree of attention as discussed above, plus one more subcategory – natural disaster, whose news articles mainly discuss the negative consequences left by natural disasters. In the subcategory of social phenomenon and issues, a negative image is primarily found in news that reports several social problems including air pollution, family violence, behaviors of delinquency and disrespect shown by Chinese people. When reporting accident and crime, both Vietnamese news media focused more on the death and injuries caused, which led to a central negative image in this category. Last, the subcategory of overseas Chinese citizens, the most negative subcategory of all, gained its strong negative sense from Vietnamese news media's highly unfavorable judgments about the improper and wrongful conducts of Chinese people abroad.

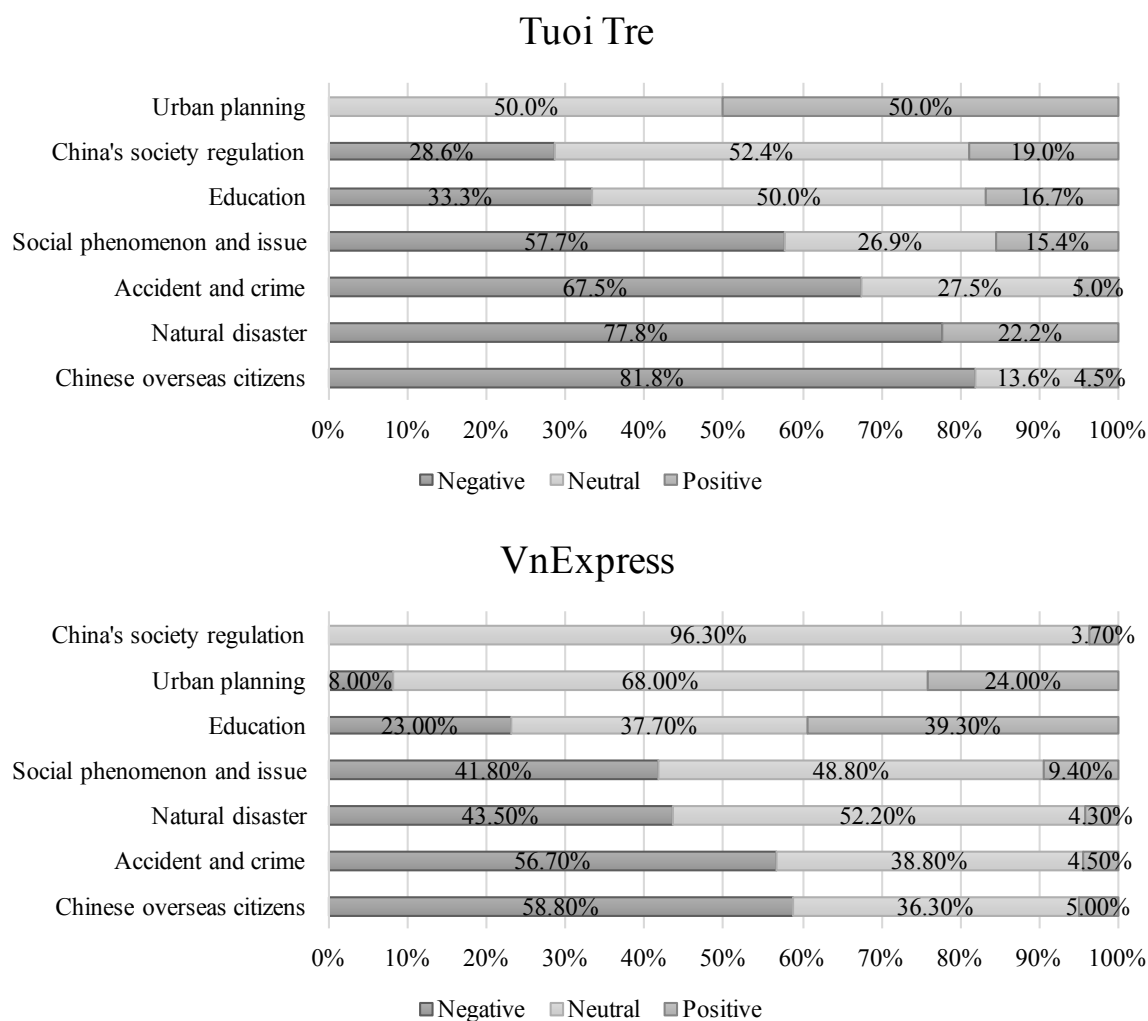


Figure 14. Percentage of each coverage direction under each subcategory of society dimension

Apart from these four subcategories, the other three subcategories tend to be dominated by a neutral image. Apart from the neutral news, both news media held more positive perceptions toward China than negative in the subcategory of urban planning, especially when discussing the usefulness of China's newly built urban constructions. Next, China's education is more positively perceived by *VnExpress*, which is a reversed situation in *Tuoi Tre*. And last, different from an almost completely neutral image under the subcategory of China's society regulation in *VnExpress*, *Tuoi Tre*'s reports have both criticized and praised the regulations, such as the good impact of China's environment regulation and the negative effects of China's internet and population regulation. However, the volume of criticism is higher than that of compliment in *Tuoi Tre*. Generally speaking, by comparing two news media, we can observe that *Tuoi Tre* was inclined to be more negative in almost every subcategory of China's society than *VnExpress*.

5.4.3 Summary

A “dark” Chinese society was presented in both news media coverages. The darkness not only comes from the selection of primarily negative topics in the media coverages, which include the social issue, accident, Chinese criminals, and natural disaster but also results from the negative way how both news media reported about the downside of Chinese society.

Nevertheless, some brightness was brought in when both news media framed a relatively neutral image of China regarding China’s urban planning, society regulation, and education. However, since these subcategories only constitute a small part of the media coverage in the dimension of society, China’s societal image is still predominantly negative.

5.5 Dimension: CSTS

5.5.1 Degree of attention

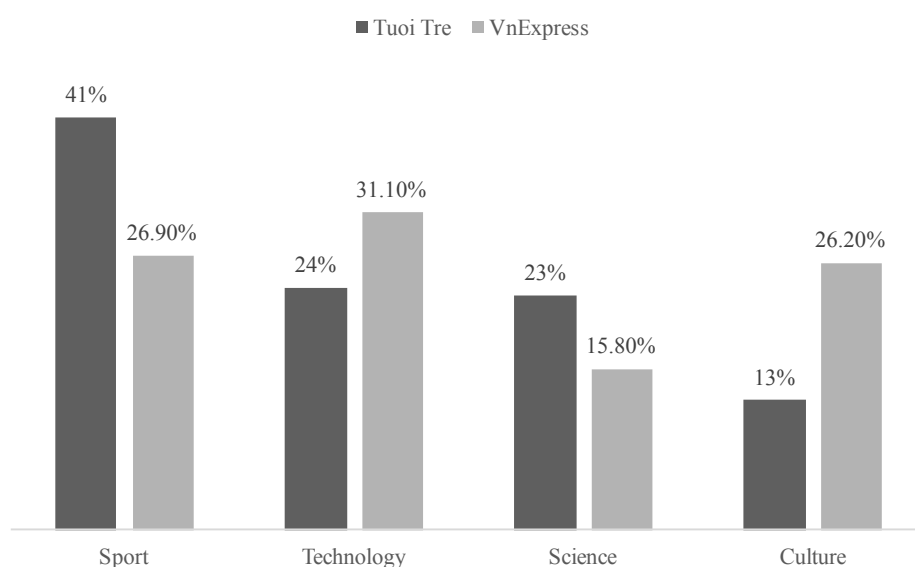


Figure 15. Percentage of each subcategory under the dimension of CSTS

Suggested by the name, CSTS covers four subcategories: culture, sport, science, and technology¹². Slight differences can be found in between *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* (see figure 15). *Tuoi Tre* is more concerned about sport and science, while *VnExpress* has a preference for culture and technology.

Within each category, both newspapers showed a similar tendency in their prioritized topics. First, soccer is the type of sport that both newspapers are most concerned. Two reasons might

¹² Technology is separated from science in the way that technology here is mainly concerned about technological products, while science stays on the level of knowledge, such as natural science.

explain here: 1) soccer is Vietnam's favorite sport, and 2) Chinese soccer teams have been attracting global attention by increasingly spending money on transferring foreign players to Chinese soccer teams (Huang, 2013, p. 8; Panja, 2017). Second, both newspapers give more attention to the Chinese celebrities and films, China's history and cultural traditions, and natural heritage in the cultural aspect. Third, in the science section, health science and natural science received more attention from both newspapers. Moreover, a central proportion of the topic "health science" is constituted by the news related to Chinese doctors and clinics operating in Vietnam. Last, both Vietnamese news media kept a close eye on China's technological development in transportation, AI, astronomy, and digital technology, with a special focus on the technology race between China and other big powers including the US. Not only in Vietnam but China's technological developments in those aspects above have also attracted worldwide attention, showing that Vietnamese biggest news media, when making their judgments about China, also learned from how the rest of the world perceives China (Ge, 2017; McParland, 2018; Leary, 2017).

5.5.2 Coverage direction

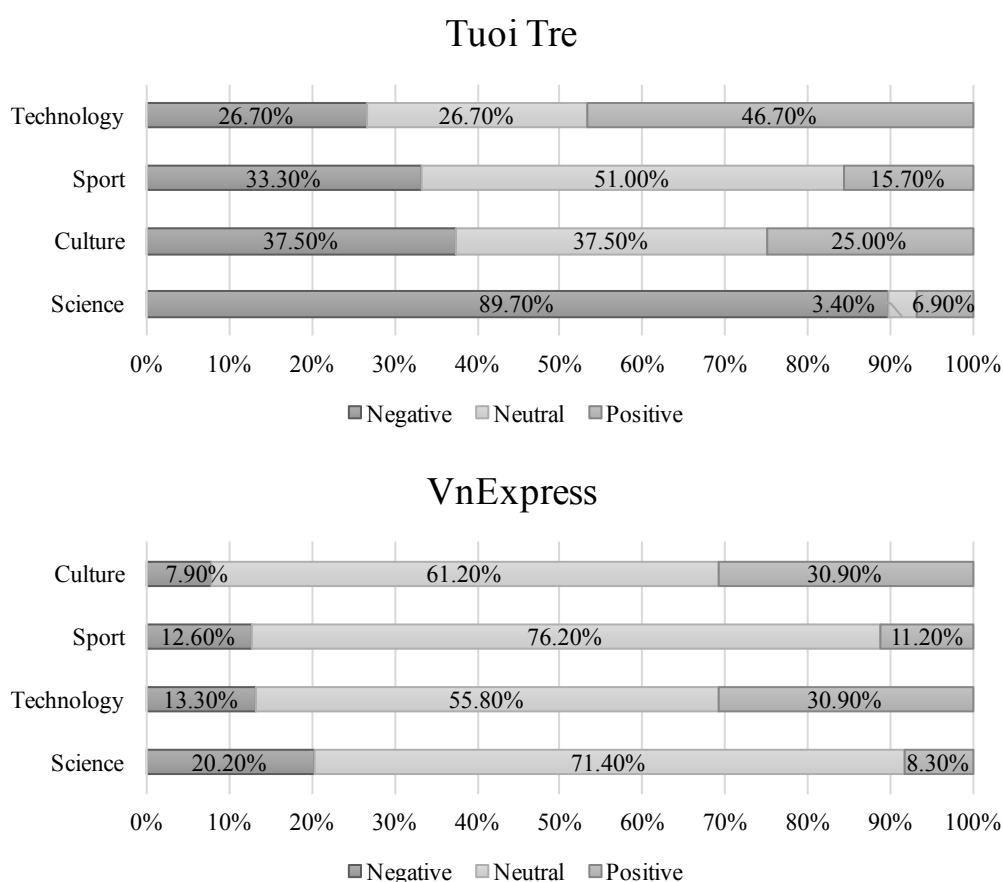


Figure 16. Percentage of each coverage direction under each subcategory of CSTS dimension

Several important points can be made from figure 16. First, the media coverage of *VnExpress* is chiefly dominated by neutral news under each subcategory, opposing to a higher scale of positive and negative news in *Tuoi Tre*, suggesting there exists a more biased image of China in the CSTS dimension of *Tuoi Tre*. When looking at each subcategory, it is surprising to find that around 90% of news is negative under the science subcategory in *Tuoi Tre*, while this percentage is only 20% in *VnExpress*. This study further discovered that most of the negative science news is directed toward Chinese doctors and clinics in Vietnam for their unqualified health services provided to Vietnamese public. Second, both newspapers rendered a more positive image in the subcategory of technology. By reading the news, the researcher understood that the positive image is mainly presented in the introductions of China's newly developed technological products (e.g., AI robots, supercomputer, unmanned airplanes). However, some negative news can still be found when it is about the issues brought by Chinese technology, which include data privacy, cybersecurity, and plagiarism. Next, Chinese culture is found to be more positive or neutral in *VnExpress* than in *Tuoi Tre*. Moreover, this study found that *VnExpress*' media coverage of Chinese tourist attractions, which is missing in *Tuoi Tre*, is the key to the higher percentage of positive news in *VnExpress*. Besides tourist attractions, both *VnExpress* and *Tuoi Tre* hold negative-and-positive mixed perception toward Chinese celebrity, films, and Chinese traditional culture. Last, under the subcategory of sport, although neutral-dominated in both news media coverages, the ratio between negative and positive news is higher in *Tuoi Tre* (2.12:1) than in *VnExpress* (1.125:1). And it was found that Chinese championships and failures in sports competitions and scandals of Chinese sports teams constitute the main positive or negative elements in the news.

5.5.3 Summary

Suggested by the results, both news media held the perception that China is not only a mighty force in sports, technology, but also a robust cultural power with rich cultural and neutral heritages, and the creative ability to build modern Chinese culture. However, this does not suggest the impeccability of China's CSTS image. In both media coverages, China was criticized for the negative impacts brought by China's technological and scientific development, especially when the impacts are directly on Vietnam. The criticism also exists in the subcategories of sport and culture where Chinese sports teams' misbehaviors and the downsides of Chinese traditional culture (e.g., feudalism) were reported by both news media. Compared to the overall highly neutral image in *VnExpress*, *Tuoi Tre* tends to give more biased opinions that are either positive or negative toward China in this dimension.

5.6 Dimension: military

5.6.1 Degree of attention

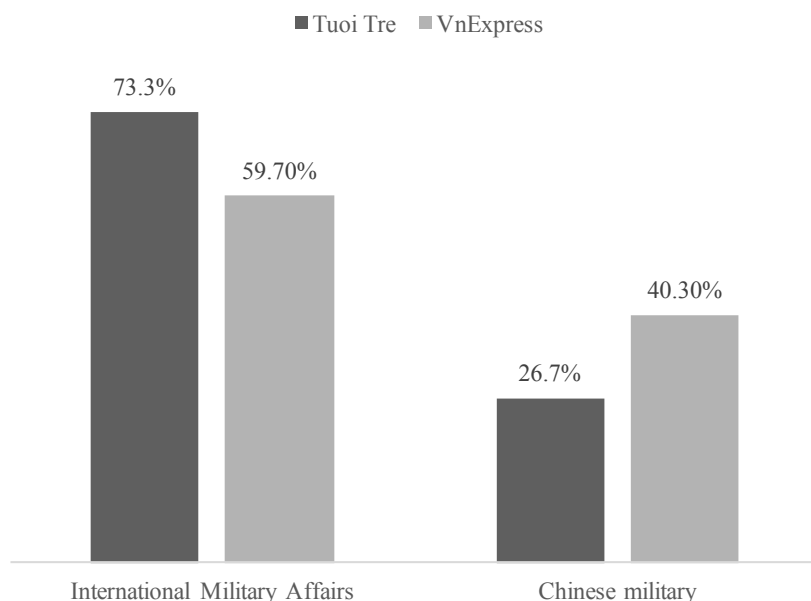


Figure 17. Percentage of each subcategory under the dimension of military

The last dimension, military, mainly covered military-related affairs including Chinese military, and international military affairs that involve China's participation (see figure 17). International military affairs occupied more space in the both media coverages than Chinese military. However, it was found that *VnExpress* paid more attention to Chinese military than *Tuoi Tre*.

Within the coverage of Chinese military, four types of information are given: Chinese military's activity, weapon, troop, and strategy (see figure 18). It is not difficult to find that both news media tend to focus more on Chinese military weapons. Chinese military weapon is an area where the Chinese government has been spending billions with its increasing defense budget over the years and a spot that is always catching the eyes around the world ("China Military", 2018). Besides military weapons, the reform in Chinese military troops has been seen a major step in Chinese military strategy and an important implication for the future of Chinese military, which is also a frequently reported topic in both Vietnamese news media (Ni, 2017).

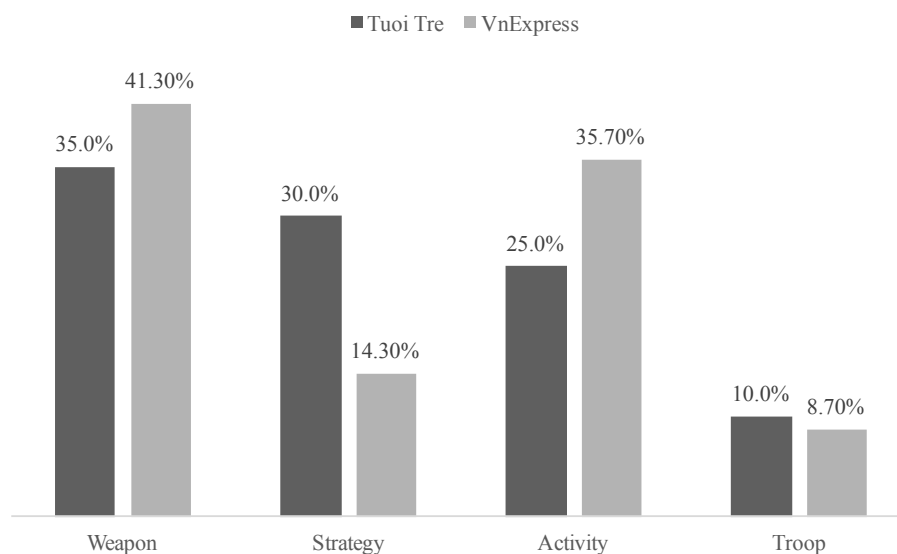


Figure 18. Percentage of each most reported topic under the subcategory of Chinese military

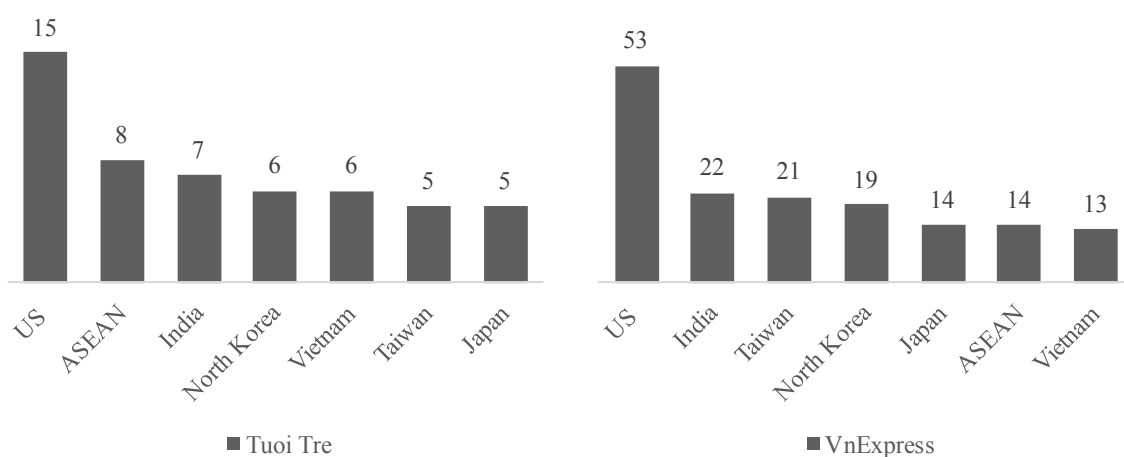


Figure 19. Frequency of each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international military affairs

About the media coverage of international military affairs, several foreign countries with high media exposure were noticed by the study (see figure 19). US remains the top of list with the media coverage mainly focusing around the changing dynamics in US-China military, such as US increasing military presence in SCS and the ongoing US-China military competition (Grossman, 2018; Bandow, 2017). In this dimension, Vietnam usually appear in news regarding SCS issue, which mainly discusses Vietnamese authorities' opinion toward China's military activities in SCS.

News that cover countries from other ASEAN countries mainly report about topics of joint military visits and exercises, as well as military weapon purchases between China and those ASEAN countries including Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Apart

from the coverage of SCS issue, some other international military affairs including India-China border dispute, North Korea issue, Taiwan issue, and Japan-China East China Sea conflict, are also the reporting targets by both media coverages, which made those related parties to disputes above stand out as the mainly covered foreign countries here.

5.6.2 Coverage direction

From figure 20, we can learn that both news media showed a similar pattern in the coverage directions. In the subcategory of Chinese military, a neutral image is prevalent, with the positive news outnumbering negative ones. By contrast, although a neutral image is still dominant in the subcategory of international politics, negative news accounts for a larger proportion than positive news.

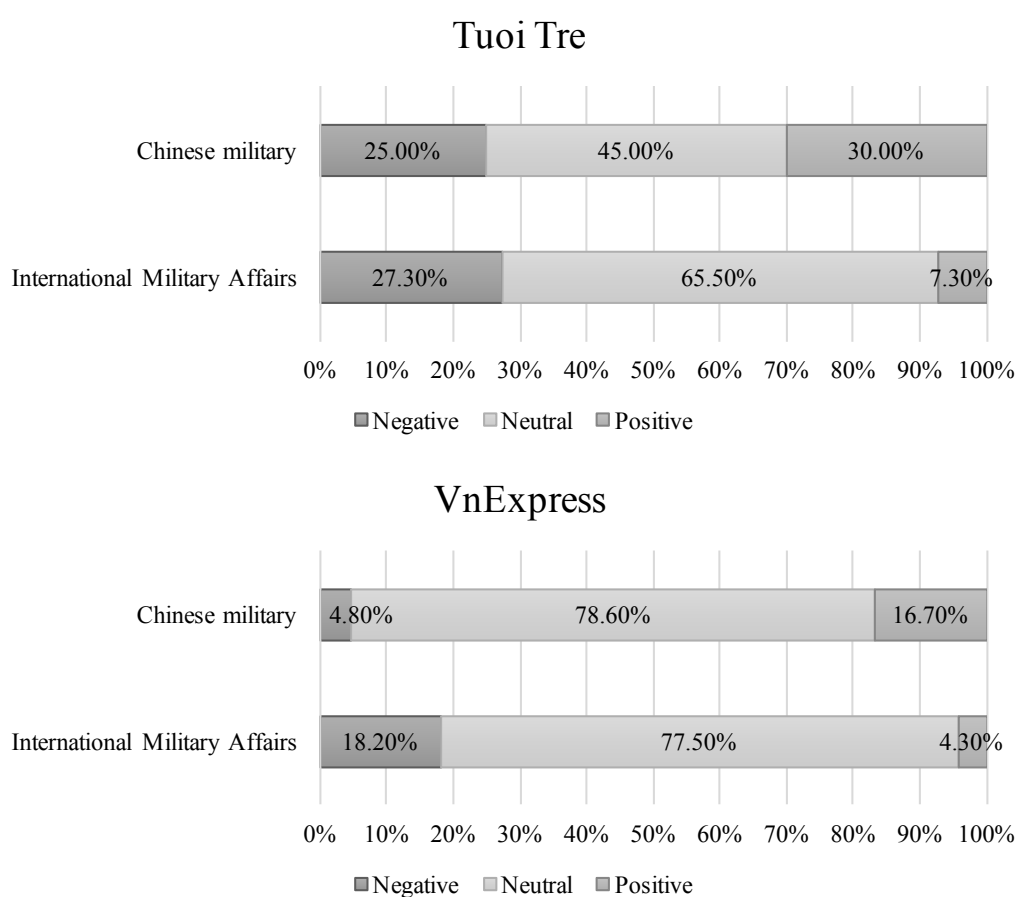


Figure 20. Percentage of each coverage direction under each subcategory of military dimension

		Activity	Weapon	Troop	Strategy
Tuoi Tre	Negative	20,0%	14,3%	0,0%	50,0%
	Positive	20,0%	42,9%	0,0%	33,3%
	Neutral	60,0%	42,9%	100,0%	16,7%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
		Activity	Weapon	Troop	Strategy
VnExpress	Negative	4,4%	7,7%	0,0%	0,0%
	Positive	17,8%	21,2%	18,2%	0,0%
	Neutral	77,8%	71,2%	81,8%	100,0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 10. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported topic under the subcategory of Chinese military

		US	ASEAN	India	North Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Vietnam
Tuoi Tre	Negative	40,0%	12,5%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	83,3%
	Positive	0,0%	12,5%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	16,7%
	Neutral	60,0%	75,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	60,0%	0,0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		US	ASEAN	India	North Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Vietnam
VnExpress	Negative	18,9%	14,3%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	69,2%
	Positive	5,7%	0,0%	9,1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	15,4%
	Neutral	75,5%	85,7%	90,9%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	15,4%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 11. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported foreign country or region under the subcategory of international military affairs

Under the subcategory of the Chinese military, both news media presented a more neutral or positive image in topics including the activity, weapon, and troop of the Chinese military (see table 10). The only difference exists in the subcategory of Chinese military strategy, where *Tuoi Tre* hold a dominant negative view and *VnExpress*, by contrast, hold a utterly neutral perception. Further, this study analyzed that the negative image in *Tuoi Tre* mainly results from their criticism on China's investment in military and China's rising military capacity.

Concerned about international military affairs, both news media present an overwhelmingly neutral image of China in most international military affairs between China and other foreign

countries, except for China-Vietnam where a negative image is predominant (see table 11). Further, this study found that all negative news concerning Vietnam-China is centering on SCS issue, which is also the only international affair (see table 12) where a chiefly negative image of the Chinese military is presented.

		SCS issue	North Korea issue	East China Sea	Taiwan	India-China border dispute
Tuoi Tre	Negative	81,8%	0,0%	20,0%	20,0%	0,0%
	Positive	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	0,0%
	Neutral	18,2%	100,0%	80,0%	60,0%	100,0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		SCS issue	North Korea issue	East China Sea	Taiwan	India-China border dispute
VnExpress	Negative	63,6%	0,0%	8,3%	0,0%	12,5%
	Positive	3%	0,0%	0,0%	4,8%	0,0%
	Neutral	33,3%	100,0%	100,0%	95,2%	87,5%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 12. Percentage of each coverage direction in each most reported international affair under the subcategory of international military affairs

5.6.3 Summary

It is interesting to find that both Vietnamese news media presented a similar image of China in international affairs, no matter it is about politics, international trade, or international military affairs that is being discussed in this dimension. In more detail, China is still portrayed as an active and important player in international military affairs. Most of the news covering China's military interactions with other countries in the international disputes presented a principally neutral image of China, only except for the Vietnam-China and SCS issue in which China is portrayed as an "aggressive and irresponsible expansionist/criminal." Since most Vietnam-China news here is surrounding SCS issue, we can conclude that China's military behaviors in SCS contributed the most to the negative image of China in international military affairs. However, for the other international disputes, both Vietnamese news media maintained a chiefly neutral judgment toward China.

Regarding Chinese military, a picture of an army with strong capacity and fast development in the military weapons emerged in both news media coverages, which could be confirmed by both news media's larger size of neutral and positive news. However, a slight difference

between *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* was found in the topic of China's military strategy, where *VnExpress* made an entirely neutral image of the strategy, opposing to a more negative perception in *Tuoi Tre*.

5.7 Case Analysis

Based on the coding results of the degree of attention, it can be found that the most two important international affairs in Vietnam-China foreign relations in 2017 are 1. Three times of high-level visits between Vietnam and China, and 2. Vietnam-China SCS dispute. This section will provide a deep analysis of news articles related to these two international affairs.

5.7.1 Vietnam-China high-level visits

Background

Vietnam and China established their diplomatic relation on 18th January 1950. Starting from the 1970s, the breaking of Sino-Vietnamese conflicts had led to the worsening of Vietnam-China foreign relations. It was not until November 1991 that both countries realized the normalization of their foreign relations. Since then, both countries have stayed in close contact through frequent mutual high-level visits and other diplomatic ways. From 1991 till now, Chinese leaders have visited Vietnam 23 times, with an average of around one time per year. The number of Vietnamese leaders' visits to China almost doubled, reaching 40 times in a period of 27 years. Moreover, the record shows that since 2013, the mutual high-level visits between Vietnam and China have become more frequent, reaching around 2 – 3 times high-level visits per year (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2018).

In 2017, there are three mutual high-level visits in total. From 12th to 15th January, Secretary General of Central Committee of CPV Nguyen Phu Trong officially visited China. This visit happened around the corner of the anniversary of the establishment of Vietnam-China diplomatic relation and the biggest festival (Lunar New Year) in two countries. The second visit happened in May when President of Vietnam Tran Dai Quang made a state visit to China and attended the BRI forum host by China. The last visit was a state visit made by General Secretary of Central Committee of CPC and President of China Xi Jin Ping to Vietnam and attending 25th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting held in Vietnam. At the end of each visit, an official document called Vietnam-China Joint Communiqué or Joint Statement was released.

Main themes of news

Overall, this study found 41 (11 from *Tuoi Tre*, and 30 from *VnExpress*) news articles related to the three Vietnam-China high-level visits. Regarding the coverage direction (see table 13), it can be found that the size of media coverage is shared more even between three visits in *Tuoi Tre* than in *VnExpress* where China's visit to Vietnam received more attention than other two visits. Regarding the coverage direction (see table 14), an overwhelmingly positive image was presented in the media coverage of high-level visits, with a positive percentage reaching over 70% in both news media coverages. Last, there is no single negative news article.

	Tuoi Tre		VnExpress	
Number of visit	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Vietnam's first visit to China	4	36,4%	6	20,0%
Vietnam's second visit to China	3	27,3%	5	16,7%
China's first visit to Vietnam	4	36,4%	19	63,3%
Total	11	100%	30	100%

Table 13. Percentage of each visit in the media coverage of Vietnam-China high level visits

Direction	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Negative	0,0%	0,0%
Positive	76,7%	72,7%
Neutral	23,3%	27,3%
Total	100%	100%

Table 14. Percentage of each coverage direction in the media coverage of Vietnam-China high level visits

Themes	Number	Percentage
General information about the visit	22	53,7%
Bilateral official meetings between leaders of two countries	8	19,5%
Deals and statements reached by two countries	5	12,2%
Other activities during the visit	6	14,6%
Total	41	100%

Table 15. Main themes of news and their percentages in the media coverage of Vietnam-China high level visits

Four themes of news were covered in the media coverage of Vietnam-China high-level visits (see table 15). The theme of general information about the visit is the most covered theme, constituting more than half of the media coverage. The other three themes share a similar percentage with each other. Next, this study will analyze the media frames applied in news articles of each different theme.

1) General Information about the visit

General information here includes state or MFA announcement of leaders' upcoming visits, introduction to the agenda and delegation groups of high-level visits, plus the overall goal or theme of the visit, and information about host country's preparations and welcome ceremonies for the high-level visit.

For most of the news articles in this theme, both news media present a similar media frame as follows. First, the news articles usually start a brief title that directly introduces the visit. Such as Chủ tịch nước Trần Đại Quang lên đường thăm Trung Quốc (President Tran Dai Quang began his state visit to China) (Vu, 2017). On the second stage, who (delegation group), when (the visiting period), and what (the ceremonial activities and the following agenda) during the visiting period will be mentioned at the beginning of news context. Third, some news articles will then introduce the goal during the visit. One typical example can be:

“Trong khuôn khổ chuyến thăm, hai bên sẽ trao đổi về phương hướng và các biện pháp lớn nhằm tiếp tục tăng cường sự tin cậy lẫn nhau, thúc đẩy giải quyết những vấn đề hai bên cùng quan tâm, củng cố hơn nữa tình hữu nghị truyền thống Việt - Trung.” (During the visit, two countries will discuss ways to reinforce mutual trust, promote a solution to the issues of mutual concern, and further strengthen the traditional Sino-Vietnamese friendship) (“Chủ tịch nước”, 2017)

This study found that both Vietnamese news media tend to use positive words when describing the goal of visit, which includes but not limited to “friendship,” “mutual trust,” “cooperation,” “support,” “improve.” On the last stage, some news articles will give an overview of Vietnam-China cooperation in many aspects, especially the trade cooperation, and positively emphasize the importance of Vietnam-China cooperation. As a result, news articles that contain the last two stages in their media frame always present a positive image of China for the reasons that the last two stages have a preference for reporting the positive elements about the visit.

2) Bilateral official meetings between leaders of two countries

This theme of news can be easily identified with news titles, which are either saying that leaders of two countries are having a meeting (e.g., Tổng Bí thư Nguyễn Phú Trọng hội kiến Thủ tướng Trung Quốc Lý Khắc Cường (General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong meets Chinese PM Li Keqiang)), or directly mentioning the main discussion topic (e.g., Việt Nam - Trung Quốc chia

sẽ kinh nghiệm chống tham nhũng (Vietnam and China share experience in anti-corruption)) (“Tổng Bí thư”, 2017; “Việt Nam - Trung Quốc”, 2017). Right after the title of news articles, the article will first introduce the leaders during the meeting. If the meeting is around a specific topic such as cooperation in SCS and anti-corruption, the topic will also be referred at the begging of news. Following the introduction, the media frame will then present each side’s views and opinions toward each other and the visit as a whole. The views and opinions are described a positive way in the news reports with the selection of some words including congratulations on each other’s development and the warm wishes for the future. The rest paragraphs are primarily used to report Vietnam and China’s agreement in strengthening their communication and cooperation in the future. As a result, the application of such media frame that only selects the positive aspects of the meeting has led to a completely positive image of Vietnam-China bilateral official meetings.

3) Cooperation deals and statements reached by two countries

Two types of media frames can be found under this theme. The first type is relatively simple, which mainly quoted the whole document of Vietnam-China Joint Statement in their coverage. The second type of media frames will first introduce the visit in a general way. After the introduction, the news will present the cooperation deals in different aspects covered by those deals. For example, news article titled Việt Nam - Trung Quốc ký kết 12 văn kiện hợp tác (Vietnam and China signed 12 cooperation documents) present the cooperation deals in three aspects: high-level cooperation, economic cooperation, and cooperation on the sea (Hoang, 2017). Two sides’ exchanges of their declarations, views, and points toward each other are usually used to end the news. Since the media frames used here have only discussed the positive aspects of reaching cooperation deals, news under this theme is also 100% positive.

4) Other activities during the visit

During the visit, besides official meetings between leaders, some other unofficial visiting activities along the agenda will also be covered by the media. These news articles will directly reveal activity (e.g., Chủ tịch Trung Quốc dự lễ khánh thành Cung hữu nghị Việt – Trung (Chinese President attended the inauguration ceremony of Vietnam-China Friendship Center)) (“Chủ tịch Trung Quốc”, 2017). In the following context, news articles would elaborate the related unofficial visiting activity in detail. This study found that the elaboration here is the key to deciding the tone of news articles. News tends to be neutral if the elaboration of activity only

stayed on a simply descriptive level. However, if the elaboration went beyond description and some analysis of Vietnam-China foreign relations was added, a positive image would be yielded.

Summary

This case study analyzed 41 news articles reporting 3 Vietnam-China high-level visits in 2017. This study found that both news media applied a similar media frame that is inclined to select the positive aspects during the visits, such as the agreements and cooperation deals reached during the meeting, the significance of the visit, and the benefits of a good Vietnam-China foreign relations. As a result, the inclusion of heavy positive elements in the media frames led to an overwhelmingly favorable image of China.

5.7.2 Vietnam-China SCS dispute

Background

SCS is an area that not only shoulders one-third of global sea trade, but also contains a rich source of islands and resources including fisheries, oil, and gas. The outstanding geographical position of SCS, plus its vast economic potential have also made SCS one of the most disputed areas in the world. Areas of disputes in SCS include the boundaries, islands, reefs, and banks to which several countries or regions (People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan) made overlapping territorial claims. SCS dispute has been a long-term issue that could be dating back to 1947 when the government of Chiang Kai-Shek published a map that claimed almost the entire SCS (Timeline: South China Sea dispute, 2016). In recent years, SCS issue has been upgraded with increasing confrontations and skirmishes between the navies and fishing trips of claimants. Many diplomatic tools have also been adopted by claimants to assert their claims over SCS. In 2016, China's maritime claim in Philippines v. China was ruled against by an arbitration tribunal under UNCLOS. However, China did not recognize the tribunal and insisted on other bilateral negotiations.

Vietnam-China SCS dispute¹³ is mainly surrounding areas including Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, Gulf of Tonkin, and nearby waters in SCS. Since the outbreak of violent confrontations in 2014, although skirmishes remain, both Vietnam and China have been trying to avoid further serious confrontation and seek a peaceful solution through bilateral talks or under the ASEAN framework. However, recently, it shows that SCS dispute between Vietnam and China has been

¹³ In Vietnam, SCS is called East Sea (Biển Đông).

festering with both China and Vietnam's activities in SCS that have been irritating each other, such as China's constructions of facilities on the islands and Vietnam's energy project (Lynn, 2017; Tweed, 2017; Panda, 2018).

Main themes of news

54 news articles in total (18 from *Tuoi Tre*, 36 news from *VnExpress*) are found about the topic of Vietnam-China SCS dispute. In stark contrast to the previous "high-level visit" group of news with a dominant positive image, there is a pronounced negative image shown by the "SCS issue" group, with *Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress* reaching a negative percent of 100 and 85.7, respectively (see table 16). However, there is still one positive news article found, which talks about Vietnam-China joint patrol cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin.

	Tuoi Tre	VnExpress
Negative	100,0%	85,7%
Positive	0,0%	2,9%
Neutral	0,0%	11,4%
Total	100%	100%

Table 16. Percentage of each coverage direction in the media coverage of Vietnam-China SCS dispute

Theme	Number	Percentage
China's construction and military activities in SCS	34	63,0%
China's other behaviors in SCS	14	25,9%
Vietnam's opinion toward SCS under an international framework	6	11,1%
Total	54	100%

Table 17. Main themes of news and their percentages in the media coverage of Vietnam-China SCS dispute

This study divided 54 news articles into 3 themes based on the main news content (see table 17). The results in table 17 indicate that Vietnam is most concerned about China's construction and military activities in SCS, by which Vietnam has constantly been accusing China of its "militarization" in SCS. The rest paragraphs will try to identify and analyze the media frame adopted by two news media in each theme of news.

1) China's construction and military activities in SCS

For this group of news, both news media will straightforwardly indicate the activity of China in the news titles. Moreover, more than half of news will also emphasize Vietnam's opinion or opposition against China's activity in the titles. One typical title can be Phản đối Trung Quốc

xây rạp chiếu phim trên đảo Phú Lâm (Opposition to China building a cinema on Phu Lam Island) (“Phản đối Trung Quốc”, 2017). Some other news titles have also used negative words including “being suspected,” “being accused,” “illegal” toward China when expressing their opinion of China’s activity.

At the start of each news article, both news media would briefly emphasize one more time the activity done by China in SCS or/and Vietnam’s negative judgment toward it. On the next stage, some news articles will first elaborate more details about China’s activity. During the elaboration, both news media choose to focus more on the negative sides of the event in their frame with the use of words “illegal,” “irresponsible,” “warn.” The rest news articles sound more assertive in their coverage by directly showing Vietnam’s opposition, accusation, or condemnation of China at the beginning of news. This study also found that announcement of Vietnamese MFA was often quoted at the beginning of news. Last, both Vietnamese news media usually would repeat their claim in SCS, sometimes even with the same wording in various news articles. One typical claim can be as following:

“Việt Nam đã nhiều lần phản đối các hoạt động phi pháp của Trung Quốc ở Biển Đông. Việt Nam có đầy đủ căn cứ pháp lý và chứng cứ lịch sử khẳng định chủ quyền của mình đối với hai quần đảo Hoàng Sa và Trường Sa.” (Vietnam has repeatedly opposed China's illegal activities in the South China Sea. Vietnam has the full legal basis and historical evidence affirming its sovereignty over Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands.) (Hoang, 2017)

Overall, we can observe that Vietnamese news media adopted a media frame that is tough and negative in almost every aspect here, which led to an overwhelmingly negative image of China.

2) China’s other behaviors in SCS

China’s tourism activities, sailing ship racing, and fishing ban in SCS are the main topics covered in this group of news. Although these behaviors are different from the “militarization activities” of China as perceived by Vietnam, this study found that both Vietnamese news media adopted a media frame similar to the previous one in this group of news. What makes the media frame here different is that there is a less neutral description of China’s activity. Instead, more media coverage has, to the point, declared Vietnam’s stand. This trend starts from the news titles where both news media put Vietnam’s opposition to China’s behavior in almost every news article. Within the news content, a neutral elaboration of the event was reduced to the

minimal. Instead, what replaced the elaboration in the coverage is Vietnam's repeating objections to China and Vietnam's claims over SCS. Resulting from such a "tough" media frame, it is conceivable that China will not receive any except an extremely negative image here.

3) Vietnam's opinion toward China's interactions with other countries in SCS

Besides Vietnam's opinion toward China's activities per se, Vietnamese news media have also been judging about China's interactions with other countries in SCS, which mainly include Philippines and US. Moreover, this study found that both news media used a similar media frame in their judgments. Most of the news first start their news titles in the same pattern: "Việt Nam lên tiếng về ... (Vietnam spoke about ...)" (Lynh, 2017). The missing part usually refers to the interaction between China and one specific country, such as "Philippines-China negotiation about SCS." Instead of introducing more about the interaction or event, most news articles open their news content with direct reference to the announcements of Vietnamese MFA spokespeople. Next, different from previous two themes that focus more on the bilateral dispute between Vietnam and China, news in this theme are more inclined to put SCS dispute in a more international context (e.g., ASEAN) by mentioning that China has been in dispute with several ASEAN countries in SCS. Further, a decrease in the frequency of negative words in this theme is noticed by this study. Instead, Vietnamese news media, from a perspective beyond Vietnam-China, tend to use more neutral words when declaring their opinions. Some representative examples can be:

"Việt Nam khẳng định có chủ quyền với quần đảo Hoàng Sa và Trường Sa trên Biển Đông"
(Vietnam claims sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea)
(Lynh, 2017)

"Bộ Ngoại giao Việt Nam kêu gọi các nước cùng đóng góp để bảo đảm hoà bình và ổn định ở Biển Đông"
(Vietnamese MFA calls on all countries to contribute to the peace and stability in SCS) (Anh, 2017)

As a consequence, the image of China was presented more impartially in this group of news.

Summary

This case study analyzed 54 news articles related to Vietnam-China SCS dispute. For most news articles, a negative sense of smell already starts from their titles, not to mention the main

news context where both news media used more assertive and tough words. However, this study also found that when the SCS dispute comes to a higher level beyond Vietnam-China, such as ASEAN countries whose interests are also in dispute with China in SCS, Vietnamese news media's assertiveness tends to be more silent in the coverage. However, generally speaking, Vietnamese news media still hold a badly negative image of China in the media coverage of SCS issue.

5.8 Reflection on China's national image and Vietnam-China foreign relations

This section will reflect on how the Vietnam-China foreign relations affected China's national image in two Vietnamese mainstream news media coverages from two aspects: China on the global stage, and China on its domestic level.

5.8.1 Vietnam-China on the global stage

It is clear that the frenemy foreign relations between Vietnam and China has been extended to the national image of China as a role on the global stage. Following points can elaborate the researcher's argument above.

To begin with, the common interests shared by Vietnam and China, which form the Vietnam-China friendship, are the main drivers for Vietnamese news media to build a neutral or positive image of China in international affairs. China as an important partner and player to not only Vietnam but also to the rest of world, which was realized by Vietnamese authorities during their planning of developing Vietnamese economy, has also been recognized by both Vietnamese news media (Tran, 2016). The emphasis on the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, reached by leaders of both countries two decades ago, has been repeatedly reflected in Vietnamese news media coverage of China. These positive elements became the most salient when it comes to the coverage of mutual interactions between leaders of two countries, namely on the diplomatic level. The case study of news covering high-level visits between Vietnam-China can prove the point here. Last, the Vietnam-China trade cooperation, China's overseas FDI in Vietnam, and China's trade relations with other countries are also covered by some neutral or positive news, which corresponds to Vietnam's perception of China as a vital actor in developing Vietnam's economy or even global economy.

However, on the other side, a negative image would easily emerge in areas where Vietnam and China's interests conflict. Although Vietnam-China trade cooperation fulfills Vietnam's interests, which was positively perceived by Vietnamese news media, there also exists various issues in Vietnam-China trade tie, which include the widening trade deficit, and the negative impact of China's overseas FDI and companies on the local business and environment of Vietnam (Bui and Zhang, 2017). These issues have been consistently attracting attention from both Vietnamese authorities and public (Tran, 2016; Binh, 2017). As a result, the trade competition between Vietnam and China has even received a higher degree of attention than the Sino-Vietnamese trade cooperation in the media coverage. And the emphasis on the issues of Vietnam-China trade also led to a negative perception of China as a manipulator and local destroyer in some trade news articles.

Apart from trade, another conflict zone of interest, which is also the most severe one, is the Vietnam-China SCS dispute. Vietnam has shown a tendency of increasing assertiveness on the SCS dispute in Vietnam-China foreign relations (Grossman, 2018; Tweed, 2017). Further, this tendency has become more clear after the other claimants in SCS issue became more silent and left Vietnam alone standing against China. Suggested by the case study of SCS above, Vietnam's rising assertiveness in SCS can be observed from Vietnamese news media coverage of Vietnam-China SCS dispute where most of the news articles started being tough against China from the titles of news articles. Moreover, in more than half of the news articles regarding Vietnam-SCS dispute, the announcements of Vietnamese authorities were used as the leading context in the article or followed by the Vietnamese news media as a source of wording in the news. The findings above indicate again that Vietnamese authorities' perception of China affected the framing of China's national image in the news media.

However, it is interesting to note that Vietnamese news media's toughness was reduced to a more neutral stand when the SCS dispute was put under the framework of ASEAN in the news articles. This finding can be explained by that the regional cooperation between China and ASEAN will work for the benefit of improving Vietnam-China foreign relations (Ogasawara, 2011, p. 353)

Despite news articles that only focus on Vietnam-China, this study found that both Vietnamese news media had been striving to present a significantly neutral national image of China in the news regarding other international affairs and China's foreign relations with other countries.

This thesis argues that such formation of China's national image still results from Vietnamese authorities' perception of China. Vietnam has been proactively integrating into the global community by pursuing a foreign policy strategy of diversifying its external relations and partnerships with five major powers - China, US, Japan, India, and Russia, which are also the countries that often appear in Vietnamese media coverage of China (Thayer, 2017). The argument above implies that China not only remains a prime position in Vietnam's outward development but also has a close connection to other big powers that are simultaneously affecting Vietnam's foreign strategy. Therefore, unlike the SCS issue and Vietnam-China trade where Vietnam has to pre-empt and play tough due to the fact that Vietnam's interests are directly affected, Vietnam chose to play the card of "accommodating-the-dragon" by staying deferentially and neutrally when it comes to the international affairs between China and other countries. This thesis argues that Vietnam, otherwise, will not receive any benefit from being primarily negative about China in areas beyond Vietnam-China, and might even lose China, one of the most important partners, in Vietnam's foreign strategy.

The prominence of US in Vietnamese media coverage of China should not be ignored here. The US is the foreign country appearing most often, sometimes even exceeding Vietnam's frequency of appearance, in both Vietnamese news media coverages. Apart from the reason that US' deep involvement in most of the international affairs mentioned in the coverage, this paper also argues that Vietnam's increasing concern about Sino-US relation and the tight connection between US and China in Vietnam's foreign balancing strategy led to the high volume of attention given to the US in Vietnamese media coverages of China. In detail, the existing "cooperation-and-competition" foreign relations between US and China is compatible with Vietnam's interests (Tran, 2016; Thayer, 2017). However, recently, and especially since the administration of Trump, there exist various changes in Sino-US "cooperation-and-competition" relation that might affect Vietnam's interests, which prompts Vietnamese authorities to stay close on and make responses to those changes (Thu, 2017). Besides Sino-US foreign relations, Vietnamese government is actively balancing between US and China by warming its relations with US to the degree that Vietnam can still be assertive in SCS issue, and meanwhile avoid a new confrontation against China (Tran, 2016). As a result, the mutual interactions between US and China emerged as a prioritized topic on the agenda of both Vietnamese news media.

5.8.2 Vietnam-China on its domestic level

Vietnam-China foreign relations has also influenced Vietnamese media coverage of China's domestic development. For a long time, China has been seen as a role model for Vietnam in many aspects of domestic development, including the domestic business, politics, military, technology, culture, and sport (Dosch and Vuving, 2008; "A Bit of Everything", 2008). As discussed in the literature review, the cooperation between Vietnam and China is not only limited to the international level but is also emphasized on the domestic level for the reasons that both countries share a similar political system and economic development path since the independence (Zhao, 2014). The fact that experience sharing on domestic development is always a highlight on the agenda of Vietnam-China high-level visits could further prove the value of Vietnam-China cooperation on the domestic development of each country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2017). As a result, the perception of China as a role model held by Vietnamese authorities has driven a neutral or positive image of China in areas from which Vietnam is learning experience.

Suggested by the coding results, both Vietnamese news media have been keeping close eyes on China's domestic political events including anti-corruption campaign and national congress of communist party, two events that are also similarly on the top of Vietnam's political agenda (Thu, 2018; Phan, 2015). In the media coverages of two events above, China was perceived as a country with a strong and confident communist party, as well as a country with effective measures in eliminating corruption. Apart from domestic politics, both Vietnamese news media have also spoken highly, or neutrally, of China's progress in developing technology, economy, and Chinese sports teams, and affirmed the attractiveness and depth of Chinese cultural and natural heritage, and China's ability in creating modern Chinese culture. Therefore, we can observe that both Vietnamese news media, based on the Vietnamese authorities' perception of China as a model, have presented a neutral or favorable image of China in the coverage of China's domestic development.

Last, compared to the neutral or positive image of China's domestic development, the other aspect of China's domestic side – China's society received a terribly negative image. However, by specifically looking into the subcategories under the dimension of society, it can be found that both Vietnamese news media, in fact, held a highly neutral or even slightly more positive image of China in a few subcategories of society including urban planning, education, and social regulation, which are some aspects of China that will render some lessons to Vietnam for

its domestic development. For the other subcategories including the social issue, natural disaster, accident and crime, the image was presented in a significantly unfavorable way. To explain this phenomenon, this thesis argues that Vietnam's long-standing stereotype of China's social issues and the impact of Western news media played a role in the negative framing of China's societal image in two Vietnamese news media. This argument was supported by the discovery of this study that both Vietnamese news media followed the global western oriented news media that has a preference over the dark side of China's society (Li, 2009). Besides the finding above, results of the previous study (Huang, 2013) also suggested that China's social issues have always been a hot topic in the Vietnamese news media agenda. And the reports of those issues were significantly influenced by the biased or fake news about China in the western news media, which further proves the thesis' argument above.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Main findings

The significance of national image in foreign policy strategy has long been acknowledged by China, one of the countries who invested most in and cared most about the building of its national image in the eyes of the overseas public.

However, prior to the formation of one country's national image in the foreign publics, the image of that given country will usually be first processed at the news media of other foreign countries and then be released to the foreign public who rely on their local news media as the primary channel for information. The importance of news media in framing one country's national image in foreign publics has made the research of the national image in foreign news media a crucial topic in the research realm of the national image. Up to date, most academic attention was given to analyzing how the mainstream foreign news media of major powers perceive China in their media coverages, and less cared about how the small and less developed countries like Vietnam think of China. However, small countries' opinions should not be buried. Vietnam, with its rising importance in the map of international politics and a tighter but also complicated Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations, has made its perception of China not negligible.

This thesis set out to shed light on how Vietnamese news media frame the national image of China in the year of 2017. Before researching, this thesis argued that the respectively struggle and cooperation parts in Vietnam-China foreign relations, where Vietnam and China commonly share or contradictorily compete over interest, plus Vietnam's biased stereotype of China, will alter Vietnamese authorities' assessment of China. Eventually, Vietnamese authorities' assessment of China will influence the media frames of China's national image in Vietnamese news media that are all under the supervision of Vietnamese authorities. What the influence mainly concerns is that Vietnamese news media, based on the authorities' perceptions of China, will intentionally select several aspects about China and increase the salience of those aspects in the media frames during reporting. As a result, the process of salience rise in the selected aspects of China will influence two main aspects of China's national image: 1) the degree of attention, and 2) coverage direction, which separately contains the information about how Vietnamese news media set the priority for the different aspects of China on the media agenda, and how Vietnamese news media emotionally judge China in their selected information about China.

Three hypotheses were proposed by this thesis based on the arguments above. To test the hypotheses, this study selected two Vietnamese mainstream news media (*Tuoi Tre* and *VnExpress*) for analysis. All online news articles related to China in 2017 were collected in a codebook where the main information about each news article (title, date, tone, thematic dimension, and subcategory) was recorded. The coding results have passed the inter-coder reliability test. During the analysis of coding results, this study first concluded China's national image on both general level and the level of each thematic dimension. Afterward, case analysis of the most two important events in Vietnam-China foreign relations (high-level visits, and SCS dispute) in 2017 was made to reinforce the findings in the first step. In the end, the reflection on the impact of Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations on the perceived image of China was conducted to put the analysis result of China's national image under a framework beyond the connection between news media and national image, but extending to the Vietnam-China foreign relations.

Overall, both Vietnamese news media present a similar national image of China, with the slight difference in that *Tuoi Tre* reported more negative news of China than *VnExpress*. However, both news media coverages of China still remain highly neutral. The following points can conclude China's national image. On the positive side, first, China is perceived as an active and vital player in international affairs including international trade, foreign political affairs, and international military affairs. Second, China is a vital partner to Vietnam on both political and trade cooperation. Third, China is a country with a strong force and many achievements in several aspects of domestic development such as anti-corruption in domestic politics, new business types in the domestic economy, technological development, cultural preservation and production, and sports development. On the negative side, China is first regarded as an aggressive, irresponsible, and manipulative actor in SCS dispute and Vietnam-China trade. Next, coming together with China's massively domestic development are the issues inherent in China's development itself. Last, which is also the darkest side of China, is that China has a society where social problems, crimes and accidents, and natural disasters are rife.

All three hypotheses have been successfully proved during the analysis. First, both news media still concern most about China's politics, economy, military, society, and CSTS. However, this study also found that the difference in the organization structure and identities of two news media agencies caused the diverse priorities each news media set for within the five main

dimensions on the agenda. In short, compared to an international orientation in the media coverage of China in *Tuoi Tre*, *VnExpress* showed more interest in the domestic side of China.

The coding results also correspond to the second hypothesis that Vietnamese news media present a positive or neutral image of China in areas where Vietnam and China share common interests and where Vietnam is following China as a model. These highly neutral or positive areas, suggested by the coding results, include Vietnam-China diplomatic relation, Vietnam-China trade cooperation, and China's development in domestic politics, economy, CSTS, and military, which conform to the assumptions made in the second hypothesis. Similarly, the third hypothesis, which presumed that a negative image of China would emerge in the conflicting zones of interest between Vietnam and China and in the areas where Vietnam have stereotypes about China, is also confirmed by the study. The Vietnam-China SCS dispute, trade competition, and Vietnam's biased stereotype about Chinese society are the aspects that have been mainly negatively presented by both news media.

Further, this thesis reflected on Vietnam-China foreign relations based on the concluded national image of China and found that the image of China in Vietnamese news media has been significantly affected by the dynamics in Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations. More specifically, interests that Vietnam and China hold in common or in conflict led to different directions of the image of China in both Vietnamese news media coverages, which have been discussed in the hypothesis testing above. However, this study found that Vietnamese news media was less negative about China when there are other international actors involved in the disputes between Vietnam and China, such as other ASEAN countries in SCS dispute, which corresponds to the argument that Vietnam takes ASEAN as a buffer zone for Vietnam-China conflict and that China-ASEAN cooperation can work for the benefit of Vietnam-China foreign relations.

Moreover, Vietnamese news media tend to hold a neutral standing in other international affairs where Vietnam and China barely have common or contradicting interests, including North Korea issue, India-China border dispute, THAAD crisis, and Taiwan issue, Japan-China sea dispute. Together with these findings above, the other finding that the US has a significantly frequent appearance in Vietnamese news media coverages of China can be found in correspondence with Vietnamese authorities' foreign policies toward China. The foreign policies include, first, accommodating China on the global stage by acting both preemptively and deferentially in a hedging approach, which means that Vietnam being more active and

aggressive in Vietnam-China disputes, and on the other side, being more deferential and respectful in Vietnam-China cooperation and other areas where Vietnam and China have no dispute. And second, Vietnam actively balances between US and China, and has been extremely concerned about the status of US-China foreign relations given that US-China foreign relations can directly affect the interests of Vietnam. Last, this study found that despite Vietnam's stereotypes of China's society, which might have led to a negative image of Chinese society, another reason behind the negative image of Chinese society is the influence of Western news media and its ideology on Vietnamese news media.

6.2 Research limitations and future outlook

Despite the success of hypothesis testing, there are several limitations to this research. First, this study considers Vietnam-China foreign relations as the only factor affecting the framing of China's national image in Vietnamese news media. However, to some extent, this theoretical argument is circumscribed for that although foreign relations plays a prime role, some other factors that are not included in the scope of Sino-Vietnamese foreign relations here, such as the influence of Western media agenda on Vietnam news media, can also influence their perception of China.

Also, the dynamics of foreign relations are constantly moving, which means that their impact on the framing of the national image can be both long-term and short-term. However, to observe the long-term impact, it is better to assess the changes of China's national image in Vietnamese news media over the years. Apparently, this research only focused on the temporary image of China in 2017. Therefore, although this research can explain the most recent impact of Vietnam-China foreign relations on China's national image, this research lacks the ability to solely present a clear long-term impact of the foreign relations on the national image, which constitutes the second limitation of this research – a limitation in the research scope. However, since the research question is only concerned about the presentation of China's national image in Vietnamese news media in 2017, the two limitations above, in fact, do not affect answering the question *per se*.

The third limitation exists in the research methodology. The coding process of around 3500 news articles was finished by only one researcher with the help of just an Excel workbook. Although the coding results passed the inter-coder reliability test, it does not exclude the possibility that there still exist some inaccuracy and biases in the coding results.

So what lies ahead? The limitations above might provide some suggestions for the future research. We need to further think about the question what the other factors than foreign relations that can still affect China's national image. And compared to the past, in what ways did China's national image change and what in the foreign relations caused the change? We have been asking how the foreign relations influenced the national image. Though, how does the perceived national image, in return, affect the foreign policy strategy? In addition, if we go beyond the traditional news media and look into some information channels that do not entirely rely on the supervision and perceptions of authorities, such as the social media where Vietnamese young people have been openly expressing themselves, does there exist another different image of China?

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Appendix

Codebook (with three examples)

	No.	Headline	Date	Thematic dimension	Subcategory	Tone	Specific notes
Example 1	1	Việt Nam, Trung Quốc kỷ niệm 67 năm ngày thiết lập quan hệ ngoại giao (Vietnam and China celebrate 67 th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relation)	17/01/2017	Politics	Diplomacy	Positive	Vietnam, Vietnam-China diplomatic relation
Example 2	2	Những con hổ bị ngược đãi trong các gánh xiếc ở Trung Quốc (Tigers are being abused in several Chinese circuses)	25/03/2017	Society	Social phenomenon and issue	Negative	Chinese people, misbehavior, animal abuse
Example 3	3	Năm 2016 VN nhập hơn 22 triệu tấn sắt thép Trung Quốc (In 2016 Vietnam imported more than 22 million tons of steel from China)	22/01/2017	Trade	International trade	Neutral	Vietnam-China trade, Vietnam's import from China, steel