

RESEARCH NOTE

Trans-Pacific Partnership and Political Motivations: Interpretive Work Based on Analyses of the Chinese State Media

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Abstract: This writing is about studying political motivations for and against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) through interpretive work based on analyses of Chinese state media articles. My criteria for article selection centers on the use of Google index search for such articles drawn from three newspapers: *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, and *Global Times*. From receiving the call for paper by this journal on 6 January 2016 to the submission deadline for the call for paper on 15 April 2016, a period of about three months, I downloaded articles from these three dailies for analysis. The motivation for the selection of these three dailies are the following. First, they represented the major media outlets in China that are internationally circulated and available online. Second, as state-owned media operating at a national level, they are often perceived to represent the voices of the state, its leaders, or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This has the added advantage for scholarly work to understand and analyse the official narratives behind the pronouncements and ideological inclinations of the Party. It provides an additional layer of cognitive and emotive understanding beyond just bland un-contextualized official statements released by the government, especially when these official contents are editorialized or grafted onto major arguments put forward by the authorities. This study is not meant to be comprehensive in surveying all TPP articles but provides a selective glance at media news reporting on TPP in the official media platforms in China.

Keywords: China, Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), media, economic, narrative

JEL Classifications: F15, F5, F50, F53, F59

The TPP is crafted by large multinational firms and the state along with a large number of other stakeholders. It originated with a P4 agreement led by four countries before it was expanded to 12 states with 800 million citizens are its main advocates and the commonality is that they are all located along the rims of the Pacific Ocean which makes up approximately 40% of the world's total economic production. Like other free trade agreements, it breaks down carriers, promotes connectivity, lowers tariff barriers and creates conditions for greater interdependence and spur

economic growth between these countries. Greater interdependence may strengthen policy coordination between members and encourage complementarity in shaping the regulatory frameworks. It may also possibly lead to a single market but that would be a long-term vision. Unlike other free trade agreements, the TPP is seen as the golden standard of all agreements with strict stipulations on environmental integrity, labour rights and intellectual property rights.

The viability of the TPP is also dependent on consensus and ratifications by all 12 nations. Without

US participation, some of the other states are keen to carry on with the idea, albeit in a small and less ambitious form. If it had been ratified by all 12 states, the TPP will be bigger in population size than the EU or ASEAN. But, without US participation, to obtain 6 states to make up 85% of the 12 nations' total economic output would not be possible so some form of modification will be needed to have a TPP minus the US. TPP minus the US may have less significance since the world's largest economy is absent. Not all agree with its tenets, some trade unions and anti-regionalism advocates are against its objectives. From their perspective, they detect little benefits for ordinary blue-collar workers. Some are also concerned that the supra national structure may diminish sovereignty of participating states. This paper is about studying political motivations for and against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) through interpretive work based on analyses of Chinese state media articles.

Methodology

My criteria for article selection centers on the use of Google index search for such articles drawn from three newspapers: *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, and *Global Times*. From January 6, 2016 to April 15, 2016, a period of about three months, I downloaded articles from these three dailies for analysis. I then selected a handful of articles for contents analysis, particularly for narratives arguing for and against the TPP based on political motives, mainly for comparative angles in their editorials. The motivation for the selection of these three dailies are the following. First, they represented the major media outlets in China that are internationally circulated and available online. Second, as state-owned media operating at a national level, they are often perceived to represent the voices of the state, its leaders, or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This has the added advantage for scholarly work to understand and analyse the official narratives behind the pronouncements and ideological inclinations of the Party. It provides an additional layer of cognitive and emotive understanding beyond just bland un-contextualized official statements released by the government, especially when these official contents are editorialized or grafted onto major arguments put forward by the authorities. Journalistic criticisms is sometimes helpful in such analyses though they are

limited and circumscribed by a one-party political system that enjoys hegemonic power, control, and state resources.

Third, the three dailies appear to have subtle differences in ideological orientation. The *Global Times* is widely-known to reflect conservative views of some hawkish factions, elements, and personalities within the CCP. *People's Daily* toes the official line and propaganda slogans of the state while *China Daily*, especially its US version, is comparatively (not absolutely) moderate compared to the other two dailies although, as state-owned entities, they do not veer away drastically from the Chinese government's line. The realities of a one-party state must feature into the context here. The ideological line and orthodoxy of the three dailies, however, have increasingly diminished significance as they are deployed interchangeably on the Internet with ease through online technologies. For example, hawkish *Global Times* articles are sometimes reproduced on the *People's Daily* website. Ideological lines are therefore not apparent by the platform on which the article appears, but rather, the originating source of the article itself (which is often indicated in the article itself).

I also deliberately chose to analyse the English language versions of these three dailies as the time between the call for paper made known to me and the submission deadline does not permit the temporal leeway for translation work. Secondly, the English version tends to be the edition read by international readers. I am therefore more interested in how the Chinese government tries to portray their external gazes and political stance on the TPP issue rather than how domestic audiences consume such news. Third, the English version can be searched efficiently online with the time provided by the call for paper using keywords that zeroes in on "TPP" or "Trans-Pacific Partnership" to ensure the bulk of the articles' contents are focused on the regional trade scheme. I have divided my political analyses in terms of motivations into two categories: cognitive and emotive ideas deployed in the writings of the three state-owned papers. Weaved into cognitive and emotive concepts, analogies in terms of case studies, use of language, and superficial symbolisms (*yishixingtai* in Chinese Hanyu Pinyin Romanization system) codify some of the political implications and future outlooks arising from TPP agreement and implementation in a Sino-centric perspective.

In this writing, the term “propaganda” is used in a value-neutral format, not implying sinister propaganda intended to “brainwash” readers but a subtle attempt at editorializing contents, to use an older term/parlance, and “spin doctoring” some points to advocate a certain agenda. The latter role is particularly important since the international editions are often aimed at discerning international readers who have access to corroborative sources of information. These readers tend to be more curious or interested in understanding the Chinese government’s position rather than base their own evaluative judgements of regional and international affairs on the written contents in the Chinese media. Being discerning readers, they are less susceptible to official Chinese propaganda since they are not restricted by censorship rules domestically applicable in China. They have the opportunity to corroborate information away from the “Great Firewall” of digital media control within China.

Literature Reviewed

The writing is not a specialized critique of the media’s role in political affairs. But, it is necessary to discuss some ideas about the Chinese media system to contextualize the historical and functional role played by the Chinese state media in its political system. I turned to a World Bank report from an institution that is supposed to be value-free and politically autonomous with some semblance of neutrality and objectivity as an International Organization (IO). One of its articles published in 2008 is particularly relevant to the discussions here. Sheila Coronel (2009), who wrote on the subject of media as watchdog in this report made available through the auspices of the Harvard Kennedy School of government, argued that China is experimenting with notions of democracies. Therefore, the role of the press as a check on political excesses is often self-conceptualized and self-defined by the journalists themselves and also found in budding public expectations of media as watchdog, rather than entrenched constitutionally or enshrined in constitutional articles about the freedom of speech and information.

This means any reporting in terms of fairness and equity is dependent on the conscience, bravery, and adventurism on the part of the editor. It can also mean that if an editor or reporter defines himself or herself

as an advocate for hawkish views, a system with the absence of media watchdog expectations situated within a one-party system allows that individual to espouse those views in the mass media. In other words, individual inclinations and cherished political views are the basis for editorial conscience. There are no institutionalized societal, political, or constitutional expectations for the individual journalist to take up this role. Such expectations are organic and laissez-faire dependent entirely on individual preferences instead of collective public agreement or a social contract such as the situation in a Western liberal democracy.

For media freedom found in Western liberal democracies to work, protection has to be afforded to individual journalists. On page six of her writing, Coronel (2009) tackled the idea of protection for the journalists. She argued that, given the lack of institutionalized or constitutional protection in autocratic regimes, media watchdog-ism is really based on market forces (the *only* check on authoritarian government, Coronel argued), perhaps based on the proliferation of mass media platforms. Increase in media entities lead to greater competition and this stimulates public penchant for attractive sensational news and newspapers that depend on the zeal of young journalists for good probing stories that can attract readership. Therefore, despite all the official restrictions, investigative reporting as Coronel argued, does take place, including in a one-party Chinese political system. Coronel argued that the existence of a one-party state looms large in the background.

Since a non-competitive political system does not accommodate political opinion differentiations and plurality of ideas (a necessary ingredient of Western democracies) when it comes to critiquing official policies and initiatives, differentiation between ideas are based on the intensity of ideological orthodoxy. In China’s case, it is based on the orthodoxy of adherence to socialism “with Chinese characteristics.” Thus, editorials in the *Global Times* take a highly hawkish approach to analysing, commenting, and editorializing international affairs to distinguish itself from more moderate approaches taken by *People’s Daily* or *China Daily* by adopting ideological conservatism and orthodoxy to the socialist cause. In this way, the latter two are more purist in reflecting official views, seemingly portraying the leadership intentions with comparatively minimized emotive contents that appeal

to nationalism and demagoguery, at least not in the highly ideological and critical strains.

A period of laxer media controls after the economic reforms had taken root in China resulted in more liberal news reporting although national state-owned dailies tended to remain more conservative than private periodicals and regional newspapers. (Some scholars argued that regional papers, e.g., *Nangfang Ribao* or *Southern Daily*, in China are more liberal in terms of contents and this is an important topic for further studies, but remains outside the purview of this writing which focuses on state-owned national dailies.) But because strongman Xi's administration has resorted to promoting Maoist orthodoxy in political views, it is now more fashionable to direct political critiques and media scrutiny outwards to regional or international external issues while toeing the ideological line more closely when it comes to domestic policy issues. This is especially true for state-owned dailies. This ideological development may go some ways in explaining a more virulent approach adopted by conservatives, ideologues, and hawks in critiquing the TPP deal, particularly with its perceived exclusion of China and containment of Chinese economic rise (real and imagined).

But the authorities are always careful to impose controls on uncontrollable runaway lashing (US-bashing for example) in the media in case the party or the government loses control of ideological campaigns and they can cause real damage to the international relations (IR) or the hurt domestic prestige and legitimacy of the Party or the government. The CCP must always be seen and perceived to be in charge of political developments in China, and not be directed by domestic political events and become a passive actor (*beidongzhe*) instead. The potential danger of runaway ideological narratives and initiatives that started under state control is real. Hugo de Burgh, who interviewed Chinese reporters, noted that "[Chinese journalists] are both upholders of the order and its critics, both limiting discourse to acceptable topics and extending moral boundaries" (Coronel, 2009, p. 12). As critics of the prevalent order, there is always a possibility that Chinese reporters and commentaries in the mass media may run amuck and attribute social injustices to the laggard efforts of the party or its omission, both outcomes can lead to de-legitimization of the Party. A double-edged sword, citizen-readers can be roused by both nationalism targeted at an external

threat or inwardly directed at massive social injustices, ultimately to the Party itself.

Coronel (2009) argued that, from the 1990s onwards, as Chinese state subsidies for the state media declined, media outfits became more sensitive to the need to attain larger readership size and advertising revenues, compelling them to focus on attractive news coverage to gain readership interests and bigger circulation numbers. It is therefore ironic but not idiosyncratic that competitive capitalistic priorities have become the main motivation for investigative journalism in China. Topics like TPP however do not require investigative journalism and most articles appear in the editorialized form or as political commentaries. Nevertheless, the same concepts apply. To advocate one's ideas to a larger audience, particularly in the international English language versions of the three dailies, editors and commentators (*pinglunyuan*) are prepared to vigorously espouse the ideological views toed by the official state-owned press to attract readership. It is difficult to ascertain if commentaries or the ideas advocated by *pinlunyuan* translate directly to profit hikes or larger readership numbers given there are no reliable quantifiable indicators since there is an amorphous connection between sensational editorials and readership size.

Emotive Use of Textual Language

The *Global Times* is often an aggressive narrator of Chinese views on the TPP. This fits the trend profile that nationalistic sentiments are often directed outwards at external forces, in a period of domestic ideological conservatism. In terms of the TPP, there are several targets of its occasional outbursts, including specific administrations and elite leaders. For example, when a *Global Times* article cited US President Barack Obama for claiming that US will have an economic advantage over China through TPP, the daily retorted, "It is not the first time that Obama has publicly talked about China like this, which shows his narrow-mindedness as a leader of a world power" (Ma, 2016b, par. 3).

Characterization of personalities within the top leadership is a form of blame attribution to the objectives of certain leaders who are portrayed as irrational and having limited field of vision. In this sense, the propaganda materials try to downplay impact of the TPP by indicating the transitional nature of the

US leadership promoting the TPP, in this case, the Obama administration. In other words, if the outcome of the TPP is correlated with a particular leader and this is distinguished from the TPP development itself (since the next US administration may have different ideas), that means the process itself is autonomous and can dynamically change when another leader takes over the negotiation, steering, or implementation process. After the top leader is highlighted for especial mention, the competitive nature of the hawkish narrative becomes apparent. The same article continues: “The US does seem to have gained the upper hand in rule-making. But the TPP only paints a picture based on US wishes for the Asia-Pacific economic landscape in the 21st century” (Ma, 2016b, par. 6).

This implies that the alleged US-centered TPP monopolizes Asian Pacific trade for American self-interests. Emotively phrased propaganda like this helps to divide the opinions of the readership if they can be persuaded or sufficiently convinced that TPP serves the interest of an imperium rather than the individual national interests of each member state. The divide and conquer approach is quite classically deployed in news materials aimed to portray the demerits of the TPP. Beating the nationalistic drums can also be a way to attract readership through sensationalized emotive editorials, particularly since Coronel (2009) pointed out greater competition amongst national dailies in the post-reform era due to reduced subsidies and greater reliance on advertising revenues. In the same article, the hawkish daily resorts to more emotive statements and turns the much-vaunted US quality of transparency in dealings into political commentary sarcasm:

It seems that Washington is so transparent that it does not mind instigating a strategic trade rivalry between China and the US that goes beyond normal competition. If this is the case, the TPP is far from enough to secure US “domination” in the world economy in the 21st century. (Ma, 2016b, par. 8)

The portrayal of a US-dominated TPP is consistent with the idea that the Chinese media has been advocating, which is the core idea of US hegemony dominating the world, and more importantly, from the Chinese perspective, East Asia. In terms of its major policy worldview, China has consistently been advocating the idea of a multipolar world with many

strong regional powers as opposed to domination by a single superpower (unipolar worldview). Therefore, TPP becomes an embodiment of this domination in the economic sphere. The emotively constructed narrative is intended not to appeal to arguments focused on rationality (e.g., that the trade standards of the TPP can help intensify trade linkages and set golden standards to break down trade barriers further for the region) but to highlight the China-centered perspective as a major power and its ideas of an alternative regional trade arrangement. The Chinese-supported alternative to TPP, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), is curiously omitted here. The Chinese worldview against unipolar domination is reflected in the editorial, an example of Coronel’s (2009) portrayal of the tendencies of the mass media in one-party autocratic regimes to toe the official line (although interestingly the more moderate *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* do have some self-reflective pieces discussed below that conform to Coronel’s argument that the Chinese press is also the vanguard of self-criticisms of domestic issues.)

The *Global Times*’ take on Cold War scenarios is not shared by other comparatively moderate media outlets like *China Daily* or at least the writers and journalists who wrote the editorials for them. Chu Yin’s (a researcher in the discipline of international politics with Beijing’s University of International Relations) *China Daily* article argued the following:

As long as Sino-US relations remain stable, an “economic Cold War” will be an exaggerated conjecture. Most of the 12 countries have joined the TPP for economic reasons, rather than the ideological containment of China. A so-called value alliance against China is only wishful thinking. (Chu, 2015, par. 12)

Chu’s article adopts the classical Chinese strategic thinking that economics (including economic regionalism) are dependent on political developments. Following this interpretation, the state of economic competition and cooperation are not dependent on market-driven factors but the overall geopolitical framework of Sino–US relations and in associating this relationship with the analogy of the Cold War, the implication of a G2 condominium looms large (a concept or idea that economic and political affairs can be divided and negotiated by two superpowers

on behalf of the region or even the world). Because of the stability of this framework, according to Chu, an economic confrontation structured around TPP is unlikely. The charge and accusation of exaggeration is equally applicable to foreign critics as they are to domestic nationalistic elements advocating a more confrontational position against the TPP.

Geopolitically construed, Chu's (2015) views are likely to be considered an optimistic reading of regional affairs, giving rising temperatures in the South China Seas where the US and China have different interests and US publicly advocated positions such as the upholding of the freedom of navigation for the US-led network of trading nations and Chinese insistence on issues of sovereignties. Chu's logic is also derived from a Machiavellian reading of regional affairs which is the idea that economic pacts are solely based on the maximization of individual state interests. Those interests can be subjugated core political interests when necessary—economic pragmatism subjugated under political imperatives. Moreover, he noted that the individual states that make up the TPP are themselves a heterogeneous bunch with different political systems ranging from soft authoritarian regimes to Western liberal democracies. The lack of homogeneity, it is assumed, hampers the formation of a like-minded political union out of TPP to challenge China geopolitically. Therefore, the prospect of teaming up against another major economic player in the region offering large volumes of economic goods cannot hold. Chu (2015) finally insisted that ideological confrontations are a thing of the past. This interpretation counters *Global Times*' hawkish views centered on personality-driven zeal, targeting the Obama administration for especial mention. The hawkish views espoused in the *Global Times* may also be attributed to its editorial contributors. The daily is well-known for its utilization of retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) generals and ranking senior colonels still holding office—ideologues to put their political points across. Arguments of economic rationality are often subjugated to hawkish ideological views although I highlight limitations to unmitigated conservatism even in the *Global Times* in the section below.

More moderate news appears to originate from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOC), published by Xinhua News Agency in the *People's Daily*. In a statement released on February 2016 as a response to

the TPP agreement, the Ministry of Commerce vowed, "...the country will actively participate in and push forward regional free trade arrangements that feature high-degree transparency, openness and inclusiveness" (Xinhua, 2016, par. 1).

Instead of targeting the US for criticisms like the *Global Times* commentaries, MOC seems to view the TPP agreement as a motivating factor for China to increase "high-degree" transparency and other qualities that can match the golden standards promoted by TPP. This is a self-reflective element for internal improvements to match or even surpass externally-set targets. The statement of moderation which glances inwards instead of focusing exclusively on foreign pressure lends credence to the *People's Daily* and *Xinhua*'s status as the official mouthpiece of the State, with greater cognitive appeal than emotive attraction.

When China is on par with the other TPP signatories in terms of free trade standards, it can potentially mean eventual Chinese membership into the TPP. This is something which China has repeatedly expressed interest in joining if the conditions were right and conformed to their national interests. The MOC also released a decidedly dovish constructivist statement: "We hope the various free trade arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region will complement each other and jointly contribute to trade, investment and economic growth of this region" (Xinhua, 2016, par. 4), which is an antithesis to the fiercely-worded realist *Global Times* commentary. Appeals for regional constructivism try to contour the zero-sum assumptions held by realists opposed to the TPP as an existential threat for China. On the other hand, it may also be interpreted by international sceptics as a continued attempt in dovish charm economic diplomacy which China was relatively successful for most of the early 21st century before the East China and South China seas maritime disputes broke out.

Cognitive Evaluation

Not all *Global Times* articles are emotive in content orientation and textual presentation. Some try to appeal to cognitive senses. For example, one of its editorials that appeared in October 2015 tried to downplay possible impact from the TPP by characterizing it as a form of irrational psychological fear. It quotes Chinese economists' (working in ministerial-level

governmental research institutions) take on the TPP: Huang [Huang Wei, director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] believed the TPP created more of a “psychological effect” on China that the country has been left out by its neighbors and trading partners from such a significant trade agreement. “But don’t turn pale just at the mention of a tiger,” she told the *Global Times* on Wednesday. (Liang, 2015, par. 4) Three points are important in this narrative. First, due to the prevailing atmosphere in October 2015 (just after the announcement of TPP agreement between the US and Japan, the two most trade important partners in the TPP) of pessimism not only within the Chinese domestic media but also the international media at that point of time, the *Global Times* article characterized anxieties and anticipation as mainly imagined. The symbolic analogy of a fearsome tiger intimidating trade policy stakeholders in China appeals to the emotive senses of the Chinese readership whose classical literatures have often encountered fearsome man-eating tiger stories but that analogy is dispelled by a rational deconstruction of the mythical threat when it is characterized as a psychological impact rather than something quantifiable through scientific (*kexue*) and rational means. This is therefore another self-reflective piece that tackles irrational fears amongst the state dailies’ readership, looking inwards and tackling China’s own domestic issues rather than taking on an external gaze. The article appears to indicate the presence of a widespread feeling of marginalization and isolation amongst Chinese trade policymakers but dismisses it as irrationality because it argues that the omission of China in the membership will be a catalyst for it to conclude more free trade agreements regionally and globally (Liang, 2015).

External context in this aspect is important because the political atmospherics changed tremendously between the immediate aftermath of the TPP agreement and the *Global Times*’ virulent editorial attack dated February 5, 2016. The context of hard power competition (not just soft power competition like economic contestations) played out in the South China Sea appear to contribute to the feeling of encirclement for the hawks in China. The February 5, 2016 article can be construed as lashing out against the self-perceived Cold War-style containment. Chinese (as well as Russian) narratives sometimes refers to this analogy when characterizing the US “pivot”

to East Asia (or in the Russian case, promotion of democracy in its Central Asian and Eastern European backyard).¹ Having discussed the hawkish contents of *Global Times* editorials, it would be unfair to say that there are no mitigating factors to the *Global Times*’ narrative. At times, attempts are made for impartiality in editorializing, perhaps to indicate the fact that alternative viewpoints were considered:

Zhang Jianping, a foreign trade expert at the National Development and Reform Commission, told the *Economic Daily* that China lags behind in meeting the TPP’s requirements, such as environmental, finance and labor standards. It will take a long time for China to reach those standards, and that is why China held back in joining the TPP, he said. (Liang, 2015, par. 12)

The frank admissions of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection gaps, labor rights deficiencies, and financial governance lapses limit the absolutism of the otherwise ideological narrative, although it occupies only a minor portion of the contents. More moderate articles found in *China Daily* written by Chu (2015), for example, in fact admitted that there were sectors that were lagging behind in terms of competing fairly in free trade although specific sectors were only named later in the article (“State-owned enterprises, labor standards, and government procurement”). The op-ed article in *China Daily* went a step further. Chu Yin who wrote the article argued that the TPP may actually *benefit* China:

However, there are some favorable elements in the TPP that China can make good use of. After the agreement was signed, China’s economic influence has become an “internal” factor for the 12 signatory countries of the TPP. But the people thinking it will start an “economic Cold War” are actually assigning to the TPP a “mission impossible.” To begin with, although the TPP reflects the United States’ strategic intention of returning to Asia, it is still a framework for regional economic integration. The direction of free trade it represents is in line with the needs of China’s development and rise. (Chu, 2015, par. 4)

Several arguments are important here. First, it

reverses the doomsday prediction of China's economic marginalization by this trade treaty. The realist assumption is refuted here by arguing that China may actually benefit from the TPP because of intertwined interests that the country has with each of the TPP signatories. In other words, deliberate marginalization is not possible given the pre-existing trade pacts that China has already signed with some of these states, for example, its free trade agreement (FTA) with ASEAN as an organization and individual bilateral FTAs with economies like Singapore. Consequently, Chu (2015) argued that many TPP objectives complement Chinese economic interests—a refreshing retort to the *Global Times*' negative characterization of the TPP.

Second, it rules out a Cold War-style economic containment policy. This was yet another refutation of the realist assumption, consistent with the narrative found in some of the more moderate *People's Daily*, *Xinhua*, and *China Daily* articles. Constructivist assumptions are preferred by moderate interpretations, often emphasizing the economic interdependency factor in regional linkages. Constructivists in the East Asian region often characterize this as the “noodle bowl” effect—referring to the complex interdependent linkages constructed through regional trade agreements that encourage free trade, formation of regional production networks, movement of goods, and ease of logistics that discourages trade friction, military adventures, and zero-sum competitions. Third, it recognizes TPP as part of the US pivot to East Asia, a position that moderates in China rarely contest against. While the political and security implications of this pivot are evaluated differently, the article argued that its economic objectives are not antithetical to China's own advocacy for free trade in the region. In other words, the logic in this argument is that China is a beneficiary of free trade, therefore TPP which promotes free trade is also good for China even though China is not a signatory yet. Following this logic, what is good for free trade is good for China, regardless of scheme or origins. The same article identified globally well-established Chinese companies that are able to better withstand the competition posed by TPP, including:

...some competitive private enterprises in China that started their internationalization about 10 years ago. And Chinese enterprises such as Lenovo and Huawei had been deeply

engaged in localizing their investments in other countries and regions since four or five years ago. (Chu, 2015, par. 10)

In other words, China's current response to the TPP are relying on highly-competitive international domestic companies with recognizable brand names that have captured shares in certain consumer products in overseas markets to compete with their TPP peers. These brand names and companies have also invested and built up their own production networks in overseas markets in the past few years. Chu Yin's (2015) suggested solution therefore is greater reliance and perhaps even creation of even more market-tested national champions and brands with highly-integrated regional networks to withstand competition from foreign players originating from countries that are signatories of the TPP. Economic arguments are based on rational behaviour and less dependent on subject interpretations and perceptions found in political analyses. Both have their own limitations and advantages when applied to analyses of economic regionalism.

But Chu's ultimate rationalization is probably his call for Chinese self-reflections on the topic of TPP membership:

In this process, no power can really contain China, except China itself, should it adopt a Cold war-based closed-door mindset. As long as China can develop its free trade zones at home and free trade areas abroad, implement its Belt and Road strategies, and constantly deepen its reform and opening-up, it will successfully transform its economy and respond well to the challenges from home and abroad. (Chu, 2015, par. 16)

He warned Beijing against adopting an isolationist position in international trade and he specifically placed the onus of remaining liberal on free trade on Chinese policy makers themselves. It reflects worries amongst moderates and economic liberals in China that the conservative tack taken by hawks and ideologues would eventually lead to extremist positions of economic confrontations or formation of trade blocs. Therefore, he urged the readers to continue to support free trade advocacies domestically and externally. This is an exemplary example of what Coronel (2009) meant by how the Chinese media is also prepared to be

a vanguard in defending views espoused by critics and extending the moral boundaries of arguments, in this case the merits of a liberal trade order and economic openness.

Perhaps, one of the most important section in Chu's (2015) cited paragraph above is the focus on the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. This is a good example of what Coronel (2009) meant by editors and journalists in China being their own harshest critics and also purist in toeing the official line. It is also a good example of a narrative that displays such contradictions. On the one hand, Chu is a fierce critic of conservative and ideologue forces in China, deconstructing their arguments with ideas of economic rationality, market forces, constructivist tendencies, and cold hard national interest calculations and yet on the other hand, one of his suggestions or policy recommendation is to develop the OBOR policy advocated by the Xi administration as the only major foreign policy economic initiative for the entire duration of President Xi Jinping's tenure.

Conclusions and Limitations

There are limitations to this study. It is not meant to be comprehensive in surveying all TPP articles but provides a selective glance at media news reporting on TPP in the official media platforms in China. In addition, due to word limitations and focused studies, I am only surveying online versions of print articles in the Chinese state media whereas the blogospheres, chatrooms, *Weibo*, *Wechat*, and other social media instruments are utilized equally prolifically to disseminate the news in China. The Chinese language editions of the three dailies are assumed to have the same contents and have only merely undergone translation by the newspapers' own editors, writers, or translators.

Concluding, there are three main takeaways from the discussions. First, despite having a one-party political system, the Chinese mass media, even its official state-owned dailies, are showing signs of creeping pluralism. An example of this is the dichotomous debates and discussions between the hawks and ideologues versus the doves and moderates. Pluralism in China is not structured along the Western liberal order but takes on what Coronel (2009) observed as a schizophrenic entity of Chinese journalism's multiple identities as a reflector of official propaganda and vanguard/defender

of regime criticisms. It is an exercise in rudimentary grassroots democracy but also, simultaneously, a sophisticated disseminator of official propaganda. Second, the tendencies to have these media debates often influence public opinions (although a quantitative study would be difficult given controls present in the autocratic system). This by itself has a moderating effect on hawkish sentiments since conservative views, ideologue positions, and nationalistic sentiments have an equal and counterbalancing moderate and dovish retort. Tendencies to veer public debates or views towards the center has the overall effect of moderating Chinese and perhaps foreign public opinions towards a one-party autocratic state, even in times of strongman rule by President Xi Jinping's highly-centralized administration. Third, the trend that Coronel (2009) highlighted, which is greater media competition since the economic reform era, is likely to continue since traditional media (which is covered here) is now increasingly challenged by new media and social media. Thus, advertising revenues and readership interests will become increasingly competitive for national state-owned media. Competition is likely to spur more investigative and critical contents while paradoxically attracting more state attention and controls.

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