

## Revealing Representation of China and America by the Media of CNBC Indonesia Relating to South China Sea Conflict

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**Abstract**

*In reporting conflict between countries, media was never possible to present completely neutral, accurate and full picture of the issues, instead it offered representations through language. This study aimed to reveal the representation of China and USA in coverage of SCSC by CNBC Indonesia. The research data were text excerpts of the reports (words, phrases, and sentences) which interpretatively constructed the media's representation. Data analysis was carried out descriptive-critically using Fairclough critical discourse analysis (CDA) model to describe the utilization of linguistic features (word choice, transitivity, modality, and rhetoric trope) in constructing representation of the story. The results showed that there was polarity representation of participants, actions, and events. The negative representation was labeled for China; conversely, positive representation was embedded for USA. In addition, it could also be interpreted that the media representation was influenced by the situational context of media institutions in selecting and organizing their news and the socio-political context, which gave rise to the choice of representation in reporting the SCS conflict.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the globalized world, mass media (henceforth referred to as media) has influential positions in disseminating news and information for public. In contemporary globalization, the role of media has become strategic and it has a powerful impact on economy, politics, social and culture (Zejnnullahi, 2016). In this regard, Ross (2002:3) argued that media played an increasingly important role as the public's source of knowledge about national and international issues, which contributes significantly to the construction of social reality. This is because, according to Fowler, (1991:223) news is not a natural phenomenon that arises directly from a 'reality' or natural nature, but is a product produced by a media industry. In recent years, issues

regarding territorial disputes, wars, and conflicts between countries, such as SCS have also attracted public attention (Macaraig and Fenton, 2021). CNBC Indonesia, national-global affiliate media, for instance, has intensively covered the development of the conflict in Indonesia's northern part of the border close to the disputed territory.

In reporting the conflict, media neutrality and trustworthiness are expected by the public as news consumers. However, in reality, Xie (2018) stated that media were not absolutely objective and fair, but contained ideology that affected readers. Therefore, media could lead to public opinion of an event or issue and portray the desired representation of reality (Sukarno & Amurwuni, 2019, Fajri, 2020). The coverage of SCS conflict by Xinhua, Chinese state-run wire services, for instance, perform propaganda, which portrayed China in positive representations of the legitimacy of its existence and activity in the region (Wijaya, 2018; Ahmed, et al., 2021). Conversely, western media coverage had illustrated China for its unilateral claims over the region, which triggered territorial conflict with its neighboring countries (Regilme, 2018, Macaraig and Fenton, 2021). Thus, it can be concluded that representation of reality, and conflict between countries, there are always different ways of reporting the same event, and it depends on how the news was constructed following the interests desired by the newsmaker. Having the driving force of power and significant position of media in contemporary society today, it was no longer surprising that in-depth discussion and investigation of news discourse has been continuously researched (Richardson, 2007: 2). Therefore, it was very important to investigate the media representation of the SCS conflict reported by CNBC Indonesia by conducting an in-depth and critical analysis of its news discourse (CDA).

Concerning CDA's research, several previous studies had been conducted. First, Fong, Ponnann, and Rycker (2020) investigated the Malaysian and Chinese newspapers' coverage of the South China Sea disputes and Malaysia–China bilateral relations. This study found that the Malaysian and Chinese newspapers reported the topics with different intensity and valence in reporting the South China SCS disputes. Second, Zhang and Wang (2019) examined the representation of China's policy related to the SCS dispute in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* by investigating the semantic prosody of the term "China" with a corpus-based approach. The result of the study showed that US news coverage associated China with negative semantic prosodies related to China's territorial claims, island construction, and resolution of the dispute.

Third, Sukarno and Amurwuni (2019) researched uncovering the frames of online media in covering political news of Prabowo Subianto (PS) as Minister of Defense in Kabinet Indonesia Maju. The results showed two types of frames constructed by media, supporting frames and criticizing frames. The former tended to claim that PS was the right man in the right place and his service was required by the state (President Jokowi). On the contrary, the latter tended to position PS as the person who approached Jokowi for political positions. In addition, the differences were strongly influenced by media orientation, market interests, and the socio-political situation in Indonesia. Last, CDA on western media coverage of China's high-speed rail accident by Weiwei and Weihua (2015). The results showed that the western media tried various ways to build a negative image of China on the issue. In representing the negative, the western media attacked and embedded hidden ideologies with linguistics.

The increasing research trend on news discourse implied that investigations of media coverage were undoubtedly important and attracted CDA enthusiasts. However, even though there has been much research on the construction (framing) of media coverage, it turns out that there were still few studies to reveal the media representation of which its target audience was business people and economists. These social groups have significant influences and are economically strong in a social context. Moreover, very few studies discussed the reality of international issues such as SCSC that investigated the construction of media representation

from the perspective of discourse practices and socio-cultural practices. Thus, this study referred to the Fairclough model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to investigate the media representation of CNBC Indonesia in reporting the SCSC.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Text analysis**

Fairclough's CDA (1995b: 97-100) has a three-dimensional model of analysis: text analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. Text analysis described linguistic features (word choice, choice of sentence, rhetorical trope, and choice of facts or opinions) presented in SCSC. Word choice deals with all types of words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) that have connotative (implied meaning) and denotative (literal) meanings. It was related to how the participants involved in SCSC were named and represented (realized by noun group), how the event was represented (realized by a group of verbs), and how the situation was represented (realized by groups of adverbs or prepositional phrases). Meanwhile, the choice of sentences (transitivity, modality) and rhetorical trope was adjusted according to the interests of the media to embed ideology for the reader. The choice also included options to present facts, opinions, and arguments articulated in the reports. Since the choices represented the ideology embodied through media representation, it could be revealed any positive or negative representation attributed to China and USA.

### **2.2. Discourse practice**

The discourse practice reviews various aspects of the production and consumption process of news texts. In SCSC conflict, it dealt with the news production (news selection and construction) in reporting the conflict, and how newsreaders (consumers) interpreted and understood the report. According to Fairclough (1995a: 59, 2001:119-120) discourse practice is linked between text analysis and sociocultural practice and employs interpretation analysis. The analysis investigated descriptively the interpretation (situational and intertextuality) of how media-constructed different representation toward China and USA in the reports.

### **2.3. Sociocultural practice**

Sociocultural practice explained news discourse as part of social processes and social practices. Concerning media, this analysis is related to the dialectical relationship between news discourse produced by media and the social context in society. The dialectical relationship is a two-way relationship between the social world and the world of journalism, both of which influence each other. Regarding this mutual influence, Richardson (2007:114) explained that society influences the work of journalists in various ways, from the constitutive effects of ideology, social structure, social power, agencies, and other institutions to the values and preferences of the target audience.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The methodological approach adopted was that of CDA. The research data consisted of news texts of SCSC broadcasted by CNBC Indonesia at <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com>, which interpretatively portrayed positive or negative representations of China and the USA. The news text data were collected from the results of the query hashtag 'South China Sea' on the website. The search results found 241 reports (201 news articles and 40 news flashes) released starting from 2017 to 2020. Critical reading of news excerpts (words, phrases, and sentences) carried out the data collection technique and the result acquired nine news articles interpretatively indicating a positive or negative representation of China and the USA in the story. The collected data consisted of words, phrases, and sentences, that were arranged (in a data list) and grouped to representation type. The data were coded in numbers and symbols (the news text source was symbolized 'T' and 'P' for paragraph position of the news excerpts). Then, news excerpt data indicating any representation (positive or negative) were marked in

bold (word choice), italic (sentences), or underlined print (rhetorical metaphor or hyperbole). Finally, the data were analyzed and discussed critically based on Fairclough's model. Meanwhile, there was a possibility to analyze similar data more than once because the analysis was carried out from different perspectives of linguistic features. For ease of analysis, the reanalyzed data were numbered differently and it was intended to be considered as different data.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The issues of SCSC among ASEAN countries, China, America, and their allies have attracted public attention. The conflict escalated since it also involved rivalry between China and USA. Numerous national and international media intensively cover the development of the conflict. Therefore, CNBC Indonesia had intensively broadcast the media coverage regarding the rivalry in the disputed region. The coverage is concerned with how reality (events or issues) is constructed by the media. Since the media is not objective and fair, and then it affects the scale of neutrality of media in representing the issues. There might be a scale of positive, negative, or neutral representation. However, studies said that it was never possible to present a completely neutral, accurate, and full picture of events; instead, media offered representations with language. Therefore, it was important to reveal the representation of China and the USA in the reports of SCSC. Based on the data, it was found that the reports released by CNBC Indonesia portrayed different representations. China was represented negatively; however, the USA was interpretatively positive. To have a full picture of both representations, the analysis will be discussed by text analysis, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice.

##### **4.1. Text analysis**

###### **4.1.1. The representation of China by the Media of CNBC Indonesia**

The following data exhibit the representation of China in the SCSC reports, which were portrayed negatively by CNBC Indonesia. This negative image was interpretatively realized through a representation of events and actions presented in (a) news title, (b) story tone, (c) economic motive, (d) ideology, (e) character, (f) selling fear, (g) commitment and evading, (h) illegal and irrational claim. The discussion of each would be as follows.

###### *a. News title*

The title is very important in news reports. Journalists use sentimental and hyperbolic titles to present issues from an emotional point of view in order to arouse emotions and to attract public attention. Tropes like metaphor and hyperbole can be used as rhetorical tools to deliver persuasive messages (Shen and Wang, 2019). In the SCS conflict, the media printed titles related to China not only to grab the audience's attention but also could trigger the reader's negative perception. The following data represents sensational, sentimental, and degrading titles, which build a negative image of China.

- (1) Ada Apa Lagi Ini, China Disebut Siap Perang ke AS & **ASEAN?**  
(What's else, China is prepared for war with US & **ASEAN?**) (T4)
- (2) China Disebut Bakal **Seret** RI dalam Konflik Laut China Selatan  
(China was reported would be **dragging** Indonesia into SCS Conflict) (T3)

Data (1) and (2) present rhetorical tropes in news titles, According to Burgers, Konijn, and Steen (2016), the utilization of hyperbole and metaphors in news discourse can increase interest, intensify public discussion, and attach the public's emotional side to news, which ultimately produces a persuasive effect for news consumers. Data (1) presented sensational and

hyperbolic titles. While some ASEAN countries involved in the SCS conflict were Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, the media preferred to refer to these countries as collective participants of the geopolitical entity and economic community ASEAN as a whole. This could be interpreted as an attempt by media to exaggerate (sensationally) and draw the issue of 'conflict' into the larger geopolitical entity. Data (2) presented a provocative title that could be interpreted to form negative perceptions of China's actions because it could evoke public emotions. This could be explained through the verb choice 'drag' which, in the context of conflict, the news title is connotatively interpreted negatively in the reader's perception because the 'drag' is generally carried out by force (by China). Literally, China made Indonesia go somewhere it does not want to go by force (conflict). Therefore, those titles could interpretatively portray a negative image of China.

*b. Negative story tone*

Story tone is the tone of a story chosen by the media to frame certain representations of SCS Conflict. The story tone for China tended to be negative in coverage. The negative tone was realized through the choice of words and 'repeated story of China's unilateral claim' in every news report. Meanwhile, the tone for USA was presented as positive as presented in the following data.

- (3) Sudah **bukan rahasia** lagi ada banyak konflik di Laut China Selatan. Perairan kaya itu jadi perebutan banyak negara, termasuk China yang mengklaim 80% wilayah dengan konsep 'sembilan garis putus-putus'  
(It is **no secret** that SCS is the subject of several overlapping territorial disputes. The rich waters have become a contested area for many countries, including China, which **claims** 80% of the territory under the 'nine-dash line' concept) (T9P1)

Data (3) displayed a headline stating that SCS conflict has become public awareness. The conflict has been known openly and clearly to the public, literally described through 'no secret' nouns. By observing a series of media reports, we could interpret that the openness and reality of the 'no-secret conflict' mentioned above, raised questions about the cause of its emergence in the first place, that was 'China's unilateral claim of the territory' as the tone of the story. The quoting verb 'claim' in the sentence '*China claims 80% of the territory*' represents no fact but is something that is still being disputed. The word choice 'claim' interpretatively undermined what might be China's official statement on the SCS. The word 'claim' might raise questions about the truth of the facts and imply doubts in the reader's mind. Since this expressive verb denoted something that was still in dispute and could indicate a perception of doubt (the truth of China's statement and attitudes). This word choice indicated an attempt to shape the reader's negative perception of China behavior. Moreover, the word 'concept', the reason for making the 'claim', could indicate a perception of doubt in the reader's mind about the legal standing of China in that territory. Those negative tones have been repeatedly denoting China as the primary antagonist, as it seeks to claim large territories in the development of SCS conflict (Macaraig and Fenton, 2021).

*c. Economic motive*

Motive deals with reasons for doing something and in the context of SCS, it drives China in economic and military contestation. The media tended to pin China on economic motives in a series of reports (besides its military-strategic interest). The representation of this motive was usually labeled negative especially when it dealt with the conflict between neighboring countries. The following data represented the economic motives for China which could interpretatively trigger the emergence of SCS Conflict.

- (4) Laut China Selatan sendiri memiliki potensi yang besar, sebab di sana ada **sumbu daya alam**, mulai dari gas, ikan, dan lain sebagainya.  
(The SCS has great potential, because of its **natural resources**, oil and gas, fish, and so on.) (T1P7)
- (5) Laut China Selatan diketahui menjadi salah satu pintu gerbang komersial yang krusial bagi sebagian besar industri logistik dunia, dan menjadi sub-wilayah ekonomi strategis di kawasan Indo-Pasifik.  
(The SCS is known to be one of the crucial commercial gateways for most of the world's logistics industry, and is a strategic economic sub-region in the Indo-Pacific region.) (T1P13)

Data (4), the media constructed the story in the interest of controlling its abundant 'natural resources' which drove the motive of unilateral claims made by China. This interpretatively could explain the emergence of disputes in the region. Meanwhile, data (5) showed the efforts of the media in representing the economic and trade value of SCS as a global maritime trade route. The SCS is economically significant for the global economy primarily, 50 percent of the annual world trade output pass-through this maritime area (Regilme, 2018). It could be interpreted that China's attempts to unilaterally claim the ownership and sovereignty of the region were the main reason (motive). Moreover, the 'commercial gateways' employed in the sentence, is a metaphor that juxtaposes 'gate' as ship traffic of entering-leaving and trade. Therefore, ownership and controllership of this area were very important and strategic for China. These motives have driven China even further through the claims movement supported by its economic and military power. Therefore, the driven economic motives and effects of its unilateral claim have made China labeled in negative representation.

#### *d. Ideology*

Ideology deals with ideas, and principles actualized in politics or policy. In SCS conflict, the words used by the media could reveal the ideology they highlighted in their report. This was done by embedding ideological predictions attributed to China. The media attributed communism and represented this ideology as backgrounding China's government policy in SCS. This attribution interpretatively tended to be negative for China as shown below.

- (6) Media corong **Partai Komunis China**  
(Media mouthpiece of the **Chinese Communist Party**) (T4P1)
- (7) Apalagi China, tulis editorial itu, adalah **kekuatan ideologis** yang ditolak **AS dan Barat**  
(Moreover, China, in the editorial, is an **ideological power** which have ideological rejection from **USA and the West**) (T4P3)

Data (6), the participant was named 'The Chinese Communist Party, a ruling party in China and it was the media's efforts to attribute communism (ideology) to the Chinese government. Moreover, the media implicitly attached a predicate that could be interpreted as a negative representation of China. It was a predication strategy that aimed at giving social actors, in China, to evaluate attributions of negative traits through some linguistic devices (Fajri, 2020). The phrase 'ideological rejection' (data 7) tended to have a negative image since the tone of the story of China's policy in SCS triggered regional disputes. As we know, China and USA are involved in several rivalries economic, military and ideological, on the contrary US proposes liberal ideology and freedom.

## e. Character

Characters deal with how media attributed certain qualities to participants involved in news reports. In SCS conflict, it could be stated that the media attributed the quality of behavior interpretatively negative for China. The portrayal of behavior was predicated on the choice of words 'ensnare', 'apathetic', 'bold', and 'military and economic strength' as presented in the data below.

- (8) China disebut dapat **menjerat** Indonesia melalui sebuah proposal (China is said could **ensnare** Indonesia through a proposal) (T3P01)
- (9) Meskipun ada hukum internasional, yakni Konvensi PBB tentang Hukum Laut (UNCLOS), *China seakan tidak acuh dan bahkan semakin berani untuk mengklaim sepihak, setidaknya 80% kawasan di perairan ini.* (Despite the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), China seems **apathetic** and **getting bolder** to claiming unilaterally, at least 80% of the waters) (T1P2)

Data (8), media chose to construct passive transitive sentences by omitting the subject of the actor. This omission causes no information 'who was saying' in the sentence of '*China is said could ensnare Indonesia to achieve its vision of the SCS through a proposal*'. This sentence displayed China as an active actor with a peace 'proposal' offered in the SCS region that could 'ensnare' Indonesia (patient). Also, the modality of truth, realized through 'could ensnare' showed explicitly the degree of truth (level of probability of a prediction) that was believed about to happen. In addition, to evoke public emotion, the media utilized the rhetorical metaphor 'ensnare' which literally this verb was usually juxtaposed with animal. Forceville (2008:462) explains that metaphor is a linguistic process that involves the transfer of meaning between two conceptual domains, namely the target area and the source area. It could be explained that noun 'proposal' could be juxtaposed with noun 'trap'. In this case, the word 'proposal' had the same quality as the word 'trap' because both could cause suffering. The similarity in quality between 'target' and 'source' in this metaphorical expression could be explained based on the exposure of the semantic components of the two, China had the ability to make Indonesia suffer because of 'proposal' (trap). The metaphors are used to strengthen the themes and ideas discussed.

Data (9) indicated the choice of words to attribute the quality of actions taken by actors (China) and sentence construction that could build interpretatively negative representation implicitly. The prediction of action was realized through the choice of 'apathetic' and 'getting bolder'. The former denoted the meaning of showing no concern amid neighboring protests over the disputed territory. The latter indicated an increasing intensity of 'courage' in the action of 'unilateral claim' made by China. The material process of 'claim' indicated an active process that requires a target (SCS) and the choice of 'unilateral' adverb described that verb process, performing action or decision made by one side and without any agreement of others. These word choices could lead to a negative image for China. Moreover, the unconditional conjunction 'despite' in the sentence implied that China's 'unilateral claim' over SCS would still occur amid its 'apathetic' to 'international law' (UNCLOS) without any 'conditions' that 'actors' must follow. To add the image getting worse, the media emphasized its argument that China's "unilateral claim" to 80% of the SCS was illegal (unlawful). Overall, this representation could portray a sense of arrogance in the mind of readers. In the following data, the media presented the background behind this behavior.

- (10) *China kini memiliki kekuatan militer dan ekonomi yang dapat memperkuat gerakan klaim mereka* di wilayah di Laut China Selatan.

(China now has the **military and economic power** that can strengthen their claim movement the SCS) (T1P5)

Data (10) was an indirect quote constructed in modality. The modality of 'can strengthen' indicated the degree of confidence of the informant about the quality of the 'claim movement' action. The word 'claim movement' was the nominalization form of the verb 'move' which explained the 'claim' activity. This could be interpreted that the "claim movement" had become an event of fact (since the 'movement' itself nominalized into noun (fact)) and it was carried out measurably and systematically. In addition, the choice of the word 'economic and military power' attached to China has added negative representation of arrogant behavior. Therefore, the accumulation of negative images and perceptions in the minds of readers were interpreted to have resulted in conclusions that lead to the description of China as an 'arrogant' actor with its military and economic power.

*f. Selling fear*

In SCS conflict context, it could be revealed media' efforts which were interpreted to portray negative frame through the choice of words 'threats' and 'real courage'. These words were the realization of the reference and predication strategy to represent China's behavior and action that could be interpreted as selling fear as presented in the following data.

- (11) China memiliki **keberanian nyata** untuk terlibat dalam perang, guna melindungi kepentingan inti negara itu dan siap **menanggung segala akibatnya**  
(China's has **real courage** to engage in war, to protect the country's interests and is **ready to bear all the consequences**) (T4P02)
- (12) *Klaim maritim yang melanggar hukum dan menyapu Laut China Selatan menimbulkan **ancaman serius** terhadap kebebasan laut'*  
(Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the SCS pose a **serious threat** to freedom of the sea) (T6P12)

Data (11) showed media efforts to represent China which interpretatively negative through sentence construction and reference strategies. The choice of the phrase 'real courage' which was juxtaposed with China as 'actor' could explicitly be interpreted to be negative reference for China. This was realized by the circumstance of the sentence which emphasized the actions taken by China, related to military 'war' and the consequences that arise. Meanwhile, data (12) showed that there were efforts made by media to attach quality attributes that tend to be interpreted negative, which was realized through the word 'threat'.

*g. Commitment and evading*

Commitment deals with media efforts in representing the degree of truth or belief in an action taken by China could be interpretatively portrayed negative which was realized through the modality. While evading was realized with nominalization strategy as presented in the following data.

- (13) *China memang **selalu mengklaim** bahwa mereka selalu ada di Laut China Selatan, yang Sembilan Garis Imajiner (Nine Dash Line) itu," ujar Hikmahanto ketika dihubungi oleh CNBC Indonesia.*

(First, China **has always claimed** that they have always been in SCS, the Nine Dash Line," said Hikmahanto when contacted by CNBC Indonesia on Friday) (T1P04)

- (14) *China sampai kapan pun akan mempertahankan sikap mereka*  
(China will forever secure and maintain their stance (territorial claim))  
(T1P05)
- (15) *China tidak pernah menanggapi permintaan diplomatik Indonesia yang meminta klarifikasi soal sembilan garis putus*  
(China **has never responded** to Indonesia's diplomatic note asking for clarification on the nine-dash line) (T3P14)

The data (13) displayed the construction of transitivity. According to Mills (1995:143-144) transitivity is related to how actions or actions in events or events are represented in a report in the form of what types of actions appear, who performs these actions and to whom the actions are directed. In the SCS, data (13) consisted of the actor participant 'China', the process of the verb 'claiming' and circumstantial 'always'. The choice of the word 'always' means the intensity frequency of the 'claims' made by China on SCS which could be interpretable have been carried out intensively in the past, present and even in the future. The construction of this sentence implied that the reality of China's claim in SCS was an event (fact). Data (14 and 15) showed that the representation of Chinese's actions was realized through the choice of truth modality quoted by media indirectly from sources. The media explicitly stated that the degree of prediction with the highest scale that SCS conflict was believed to be true would last a long time. The realization of the modality of truth referred to the use of the word 'will' which was found in the sentence (data 14).

Meanwhile, data 15, the media wanted to show that a series of diplomatic notes by the Indonesian government regarding China's claims to the EEZ waters of the Natuna Island, although not included as a claimant country, have never received a response from the Chinese side. This showed that China's actions were interpreted as a form of avoidance. The sentence 'China has never responded to Indonesia's diplomatic note asking for clarification on the nine-dash line' was transitivity and modality construction. The actor participant in the sentence was China with the verb process 'responded' with the patient of Indonesia's diplomatic note. With the construction of modalities that were realized through 'never' showing China's commitment that it did not respond to Indonesia's diplomatic note; it showed that these efforts were interpreted as evasion. Thus, the representation of China's actions could form a negative perception in the minds of readers and generate public sentiment towards China's related actions in SCS.

#### *h. Illegal claims*

Representation of actions tended to be represented negatively toward China through the legal aspect of claims on SCS. This negative representation was related to the legality and basis of China's SCS claim which was realized through sentence structure and choice of words 'illegal', did not have a legal basis as presented in the following data.

- (16) **Berbagai negara** termasuk AS, terus menegaskan bahwa klaim China merupakan sesuatu yang **ilegal**.  
(**Many countries**, including the US, continue to assert that China's claims are **illegal**) (T2P08)
- (17) Klaim hak historis **tidak memiliki dasar hukum internasional** dan sama saja dengan melanggar UNCLOS 1982

(Claims to **historic rights had no legal basis** and had violated UNCLOS 1982) (T2P02)

The data (16) above showed the media's efforts through the collective choice of participants which was manifested through the choice of the word 'many countries' which indicated the collective participants and the USA as actors in the construction of the sentence with the verb process 'continues to assert' and the patient was 'China's claim' showed the existence of an event (fact). Thus, it could be interpreted that media were trying to name a collective of participants with the intention of asserting that China's claims in SCS were objectively an 'illegal' act. The SCS dispute arises from China's actions regarding its claim of maritime territories that do not comply with international maritime law (Winanda , 2021). Moreover, in the same report, (data 17), media emphasized that China's claim was based on 'historical rights' and had no applicable international legal basis. China has continuously pushed for recognition of its historical nine-dash-line claim, which is thought to originate from a cartography document from Chiang Kai Shem's nationalist government (Macaraig and Fenton, 2021). Therefore, journalists represented China's action as an unlawful act; conversely, most claimant countries assert their claim based on the UNCLOS, which provides common legal framework for maritime holding and jurisdictions.

#### 4.1.2. The representation of USA by the media of CNBC Indonesia

The following data exhibit the representation of USA in the SCSC reports, which were portrayed positively by CNBC Indonesia. This positive image was interpretatively realized through representation of events and actions presented in (a) positive story tone, (b) freedom motive, (c) military protection, (d) law enforcement operations, and (e) conveying moral judgment. The discussion of each representation is presented below.

##### a. Positive story tone

Story tone is the tone of media coverage to frame representation of events. While, the story tone for China tended to be negative image, conversely the tone for the USA was displayed positively. This could be proofed by the frequency of news reports showing a positive image for America through words choice 'enter' and 'pretext' marked the positive representation as presented in data follows.

- (18) China mengklaim 80% wilayah laut itu sebagai areanya sementara AS **masuk** dengan **dalih** membela kepentingan sekutu dan kebebasan navigasi.  
(China claims 80% of the water area as its territory while the US **enters** under the **pretext** of defending its allies and freedom of navigation) (T8P5)

Data (18) interpretatively indicated media effort to frame friendly perception over the USA. The word 'enter' marks material process involving physical actions by the actor (USA) in SCS. It described the USA presence as being welcomed peacefully and wish-to-wait for its allies, despite the fact that its presence might lead to worsening conditions. Meanwhile, the noun 'pretext' in the sentence could be interpreted as something about fact (noun) compared to opinion (which was realized by the verb 'claim' used for representing China). The choice of 'pretext' was rather more neutral word such as 'reason' could be interpreted that 'pretext' implied legitimate reason (fact for USA to protect freedom of navigation). Those selective word choices in representing the USA in the story displayed more positive tone in SCS issue. As

##### b. Freedom motive

In the report of SCSC, media however, delivered different motives to represent USA involvement in the conflict. The motive for USA sounded more heroic and savior since it was represented as the freedom motive; displayed in following data.

- (19) AS lagi-lagi menyebut alasannya menyiagakan militernya di kawasan adalah untuk **memastikan kebebasan** di kawasan  
(The US again mentions the reason for alerting its military was **to ensure freedom** in the region) (T6P15)

The data (19) above showed media efforts that could be interpreted to build positive perceptions by conveying the underlying motive for the USA's entry into SCS. It was realized through the choice of words 'to ensure freedom'. This motive generally gained a positive perception in the minds of readers because it was associated with independence and equal status. This positive picture of USA's involvement has gained support and welcome from its allies, as opposed to the negative one on China's side.

*c. Military protection*

The USA has been known for its superpower; for military power and economic giant. The media represented the image of USA by displaying its military power. In the context of SCS, this military power tended to be interpreted positively because it was narrated to protect the region and its allied countries. The following data refer to military show of force.

- (20) **Kapal induk Amerika Serikat (AS) Theodore Roosevelt** dikabarkan akan kembali berlayar di Laut China Selatan pada pekan ini  
(The **US Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier** return in the SCS this week)  
(T6P01)
- (21) **Kapal induk USS Ronald Reagan** mengerahkan pesawat udara untuk melindungi wilayah maritim sekutu dekat AS di kawasan tersebut  
(**The USS Ronald Reagan** carrier deploys aircraft to protect the maritime territory of US allies in the region) (T4P09)

Data (21) and (22) above showed how the way media represented the USA military power through naming and reference strategies. This military power is represented by naming warships with influential American public figures and leaders; Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. In addition, these influential figures reference the superiority and influential military power. The description of military power was imaged more positively by representing the role played by America in the SCS, namely as a protector and defender both regarding America's own interests, partners and the interests of freedom of navigation in SCS region. The choice of verbs 'to protect' and 'to defend' represents America's role in SCS as shown in the following data.

- (22) Kapal induk USS Ronald Reagan mengerahkan pesawat udara untuk **melindungi** wilayah maritim sekutu dekat AS di kawasan tersebut  
(The USS Ronald Reagan carrier deploys aircraft to **protect** the maritime territory of US allies in the region) (T4P09)
- (23) Pasukan siap tempur **melindungi** dan **membela** AS, dan kepentingan maritim sekutu serta mitra di wilayah tersebut  
(a combat-ready force that **protects** and **defends** the United States, and supports alliances, partnerships and collective maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific region) (T4P11)

In representing America's role in the contested SCS, the media constructs a transitivity sentence that described the relationship between the participant (America) and the role it played in the form of what kind of action appears and to whom the action was directed. Data (23) and (24) were transitivity sentences with the choice of material process verbs 'to protect' and 'to defend' which shows the involvement of actors in carrying out actions or actions. In this process verb, the actor was America and the other participants are called the target (allies, partners, and maritime interests). This image as a protector and defender was represented as a good character; to protect the interests of partners and freedom of navigation in the disputed territory. As a protector and defender, America's involvement in the region (SCS) was to carry out and be responsible for maintaining world security (Dipua et al, 2020). Thus, the media had portrayed positively through the description of America's military strength and the role it played as a protector and defender (freedom) of the SCS maritime area.

*d. Law enforcement operations*

The media constructs a representation that tends to be positive regarding America's actions which were narrated as 'law enforcement operations' in the SCS region that were at odds in their news quotes. The narrative of the 'law enforcement' campaign was realized through a reference strategy and word choice which was interpreted to contain elements that portray America's actions positively. The positive reference related to the way the media positively projects meanings and values for American actions which were manifested through the choice of the words 'our operation', 'sign of our willingness' and 'under international law' as presented in the following data.

- (24) **Operasi kami** adalah tanda kesediaan kami untuk **membela kepentingan dan kebebasan kami** di bawah **hukum internasional**.  
(**Our operations** are a sign of our willingness to **defend our interests and freedoms** under **international law**) (T5P02)

The data (24) showed the way the media positively painted USA actions in SCS that were acclaimed under international law and mandate to enforce the law. The word 'our' in 'our operations' was reference "Us Vs Them" strategy used by media to present positive representation for 'Us' and negative one for 'Them'. This operation was intended to defend and ensure the freedom of the region'. Moreover, the operation was conducted under 'international law'. According to Hart (2010: 63) states that giving this predicate involves strategy of presenting positive image for their own group or circles and usually constructing a negative image for other groups. Therefore, it was interpretatively positive 'operation' in regard to the action for USA in SCS.

*e. Conveying moral judgment*

In reporting, media sometimes conveys moral messages related to the content of the news which was intended to arouse public morals in responding to the news. These moral messages were represented positively for USA, whereas negative images for China as presented below.

- (25) Amerika Serikat **mengatakan** ingin melihat **lebih banyak partisipasi internasional** dalam **operasi kebebasan navigasi** di Laut Cina Selatan.  
(The United States **said** that it wanted to see **more international participation in freedom of navigation operations** in SCS.) (T5P20)

- (26) Operasi itu adalah upaya terbaru untuk menentang apa yang dianggap Washington sebagai upaya **Beijing untuk membatasi kebebasan navigasi di perairan yang strategis**.  
(The operation was the latest attempt to challenge what Washington viewed **Beijing's efforts to restrict freedom of navigation** in the strategic waters)  
(T5P02)

The data (25) and (26) above showed the efforts of media in describing the actions which represented positive image for America, however negative image for China. Data (24) marked positive moral messages delivered for USA. The verbal processes 'said' refer to movement of the message through language. The message in the sentence '(USA) want to see more international participation in freedom of navigation operations in SCS' implied positive intentions of freedom in region and inviting more international support behind USA. This could be interpreted as positive representation delivered by media. However, the representation of actions taken by China were represented negatively through moral messages embodied in the sentence "Beijing's efforts to limit freedom of navigation in strategic waters" (data 26). The phrase 'restrict freedom of navigations' indicated negative message. On the one side, USA wanted for freedom, conversely another side restrict freedom (China).

#### **4.2. Discourse practices of media in SCS conflict**

Discursive practice related to interpretation analysis of news production and consumption of which was motivated by ideology and media interests. This analysis combines the results of descriptive linguistic analysis with the interpretation of socio-culture which affects the production of the report. Based on the result of text interpretation, it was confirmed that there were different media representations in describing actors, actions, and events through word choice, sentence choice, overall cohesion and coherence and intertextuality through quotations, either directly or indirectly in the report. Meanwhile, the interpretation of context reviewed the context of CNBC Indonesia that gave rise to the choice of reporting on the SCS conflict related to economics, political, and cultural aspects that influence it. Therefore, it could be concluded that the media portrayed a negative representation of China, whereas a positive for the USA.

The economic aspect was related to the media's efforts to produce a series of reports on the development of the conflict by taking into account the value of income and the efficiency of the news reporting process. The media income was obtained through advertising which could be maximized through the series of SCS reports maintaining the traffic of its reader visits which has implications for increasing revenue. In addition, the media's efforts by quoting sources either through journals, or quoting from statements monitored via Twitter, and foreign media could be interpreted as efforts by the media to save operational costs through affordable media sources. The political aspect was related to media's efforts to build relationships with parties who have power by quoting sources from government authorities, military, and media affiliations. This power relation was needed to maintain access to information sources and to control power relations with the Indonesian, USA, and power relations with their media affiliations and ideologies. The ideology was related to maintain and strengthen the influence of ideology according to the interests of the media.

The cultural aspect was related to CNBC Indonesia's effort to maintain identity and cultural values. These could be interpreted as reflecting the cultural values and adapting to the interests of the media. The report on the SCS conflict could be interpreted as an effort by the media to maintain the identity and values of the Indonesian government in front of the international community through linguistic representation in their reporting. These values and identities were related to the philosophy of the Indonesian free and active foreign policy and the value of maintaining world peace and obeying the principles of international law.

Therefore, the media was trying to pull the Indonesian government away from China's influence and minimize the business, economic and trade impacts of the SCS conflict.

#### **4.3. Socio cultural practices of SCS conflict**

Based on the results of the interpretation of the news text about the SCS conflict and the situational context behind the production of the news, it could be explained that there were efforts to frame actions and events that were constructed according to the interests of the media. In the production process, the media gained significant influence from the power agencies that were the sources of the news (government authorities, military, government institutions, officials and others). To maintain this relationship, the media tried to secure a position with a tendency to take sides with the Indonesian government and most ASEAN countries. Regilme (2018) argued that ASEAN countries are deeply embedded in pro US orientation. It is expected to have a firmer US role by vigorously facilitating the increased US military activities in the region, while delivering strong diplomacy against China. The choice of partisanship adjusts the ideology and interests of the media which were influenced by the media owner and the country of origin of the media (CNBC Global, USA). Moreover, these interests were related to the economy and trade in the SCS region or which involved partner countries from which the media originated. Thus, the media felt the need to guard and secure business and trade interests through the construction of reporting on the security situation in the SCS area.

The tendency of the media to construct a positive representation for America and a negative for China could be explained through the choice of representation of events, participants, and action in their reporting. This polarization of representation was motivated by the ideological tendency between the media and the government (USA) which was congruent. Moreover, through the choice of sources, quotations tended to be interpreted to strengthen and defend ideology. It was an ideology of freedom articulated by America and its allies. Meanwhile, the interpretation of the ideological struggle occurred through the choice of the word 'rejected ideology' which was represented China. Thus, it could be interpreted that there was an unbalanced media tendency in representing participants (China and America), action, and events in the context of reporting on the SCS conflict. Regarding the SCS issue, Robertua and Sinaga (2017) stated that the Chinese claims have much broader implications for maritime security, peace, stability, and security in the region.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The results of the study showed that there was polarity media representation in representing the reality of SCS conflict by CNBC Indonesia; negative representation was embedded in China, conversely, positive representation was labeled as USA. The representation was done through choice of words that reflect ideology implicitly and through the choice of sentence construction and persuasive rhetorical trope. based on the interpretation of text analysis, this was influenced by the situation context of media in selecting and organizing its news. The context of the situation was the economic aspect of the media in obtaining revenue through advertising. The political aspect was related to power relations through the selection of sources and ideology was realized through the choice of words. Meanwhile, the cultural context covers the identity and cultural values that were adapted to the interests of the media that reflected the interests of the owner and the country of origin of the media. So that all these aspects affected the choice of reporting on the SCS.

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