**Chapter 1: China Watch, Disguised Chinese Propaganda, and the American Media Landscape**

***“Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their tentacles.” — Xi Jinping, February 2016***

**Background**

Since 2010, the Chinese government has begun to make use of a novel type of political propaganda in their efforts to affect international public opinion about China, paid news supplements written by the Chinese state that later appear in international media sources. Coined “*China Watch*,” these supplements have historically been provided by *China Daily*, a Chinese government-controlled English-language newspaper, and paid for the *China Daily’s* owner, the Chinese government. Although it is unclear exactly how many of these supplements have since appeared in Western media since their first appearance in early 2010, it is known that, as of March 2018, *China Watch* supplements have appeared in at least 40 international media outlets in over 20 countries (Dai and Luqiu, 2020). These media outlets include many establishment, legacy newspapers, such as the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. According to Justice Department documents, *China Daily* paid approximately $19 million dollars to American media organizations between November 2016 and April 2020 for the purpose of publishing *China Watch* supplements. Payments included $4.6 million to the *Washington Post* and nearly $6 million to the *Wall Street Journal* alone.

Although the Chinese government has circulated *China Watch* in Western media channels for over a decade, it is only until recently that *China Watch* has gained attention in American security and political channels. In the leadup to the midterm November 2018 elections, China purchased a four-page insert in Iowa’s *Des Moines Register*. This insert, not so subtly, sought to soften China’s image among Iowans at the expense of the then-president, Donald Trump, including articles with headlines like “Book tells of Xi’s fun days in Iowa,” “China seeks pacts on robotics,” and “Dispute: Fruit of a president’s folly” (Funk, 2018). President Trump would later tweet a photo of the *China Watch* insert that ran in the *Des Moines Register* to his over 60 million followers, labeling it as propaganda and a Chinese attempt to interfere in the upcoming 2018 election. This Trump tweet brought a multitude of attention onto *China Watch* supplements and other versions of “political native advertising,” or paid political advertisements camouflaged as standard editorial content (Dai and Luqiu, 2020). Today, most major Western newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, have publicly announced that they will no longer be running *China Watch* supplements either in their newspapers or on their websites. Furthermore, as of February 2020, *China Daily* as well as other Chinese state-run media outlets have been placed on a restricted list by the U.S. government limiting the number of employees they can have in the U.S. after the Trump administration accused these Chinese media outlets as spreading propaganda for the CCP.

Despite the large literature on political propaganda and international relations, there exists little research on political native advertising. By design, native advertisements—oftentimes called sponsored content by the private sector—are supposed to be nearly indistinguishable from newspaper editorial output. While political native advertisements may not be classifiable as hard propaganda that is easily detected, like government-sponsored nationalist commercials, it should certainly fall in the category of soft propaganda. For instance, *China Daily* is formally managed by the State Council Information Office, a subdepartment under the supervision of Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party (otherwise called the CCP’s Propaganda Department) (Hartig, 2017). Previously, both *China Daily* and *China Watch* supplements have both been labeled as advanced instruments of China’s foreign-facing propaganda network (ibid). Therefore, *China Watch* articles serve as both a promising unit of analysis in of itself and as useful proxy to further investigate how Chinese state approaches at mediating American opinion have fared in the past decade.

This chapter seeks to answer the question of whether *China Watch* supplements have had any effect on American attitudes toward China in the time they have been inserted into American media outlets. By extension, I seek to seek to add to a growing set of literature that researches the efficacy of Chinese state efforts at mediating international public opinion about China. In this chapter, I begin by providing context about how American public opinion toward foreign countries is thought to be traditionally formed as well as the mechanisms by which propaganda might actually be persuasive, thereby mediating individuals’ attitudes about China. Next, I discuss on online survey experiment designed with a real *China Watch* advertisement featured in *The Telegraph* in 2018. This survey experiment sought to receive data that would aid in answering a number of research questions. Do readers consider *China Watch* advertisements to be persuasive? Are readers’ attitudes toward China and policy preferences regarding American foreign policy relating to China mediated? Does it matter the American media source in which *China Watch* is placed into? Will a *China Watch* advertisement featured in an establishment newspaper like the *New York Times* appeal to a different American audience than a *China Watch* advertisement placed in Fox News?

I find that *China Watch* supplements, compared to direct statements by the CCP, fail to mediate Americans’ attitudes toward China or policy preferences about American foreign policy regarding China. Moreover, I find that exposure to *China Watch* articles actually shifts attitudes toward China in the negative direction, prompting Americans to have less favorable views of China overall and to endorse more antagonistic, tension-inducing foreign policy. I also find that the media source in which *China Watch* inserts are placed in matters for mediating attitudes—Americans attitudes shift most negatively when *China Watch* is depicted as inserted into an establish newspaper and shift least negatively when the *China Watch* adverts are depicted as placed on social media of conservative media platforms. Utilizing regression analysis, I also was able to analyze the role that demographic variables and media interaction has one’s attitudes about China after exposure to *China Watch*. I find that race, partisanship, overall time spent engaging with the news, and beliefs in media conspiracy theories often explain Americans attitudes about China, regardless of exposure to political native advertising. In a second study focusing on the effect political speeches and comments from Chinese president Xi Jinping might have on attitudes toward China, I find that these same covariates are robust and explain Americans’ perceptions of threat from ethnic Chinese and Chinese Americans living within the United States.

This study makes several contributions. First, its results show that greater exposure to Chinese state propaganda will likely not have induce Americans to have more favorable views of China and may actually have an effect in the opposite direction. This finding would imply that Americans view China with previously set definitions and that their attitudes are not malleable through Chinese state efforts. Second, this research ties into a number of ongoing debates in political science relating to the formation of domestic public opinion about international affairs. This study’s findings suggest that as compared to the traditional models of public opinion which assumed rational evaluation of foreign policy by Americans, Americans are more likely to assign attitudes about foreign countries through an integrated threat determination. Third, this research has implications for American public policy. Results from this study suggest that United States policymakers need not be particularly concerned about the threat of Chinese propaganda in mediating the majority of Americans views to trust or even like China.

**Persuasion, Media Sources, and Propaganda**

Persuasion directly relates to propaganda because persuasion has to do with cognition and the active assessment of a message’s content. It involves changing minds, opinions, and attitudes about causality as well as modifying identity through non-coercive means. As communication theorist Richard Perloff puts it, persuasion is an “activity or process in which a communicator attempts to induce a change in the belief, attitude, or behavior of another person… through the transmission of a message in a context in which the persuade has some degree of free choice” (Perloff 1993). In the context of Chinese propaganda targeted at the United States, this propaganda aims to persuade Americans to reconsider and then change their views towards China in a positive affect direction. That is, persuasion attempts to close the distance between individual’s causal understandings of complex political affairs.

How persuasion actually works is a different matter, though. It is a topic of mutual interest for social psychologists, political scientists, communication theorists, and sociologists. Previously some communication theorists have even argued that persuasion is evident in all forms of social interaction and communication that involves altering “perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations” (Berger 1995). So as to narrow my discussion, I will focus only on connecting persuasion to how it might explain where and when Chinese propaganda will be effective. The best way to start is to review the literature on how an actor might be persuaded.

In general, persuasion can be successful through three distinct mechanisms. First, actors can engage in high-effort processes of cognition, reflection, and internal argument about the content of new information they are given (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1990). Second, an actor can be persuaded because of his identity relationship to the persuader through a “peripheral” route. Here, the actor looks internally for cues about the nature of his identity relationship to the persuader before judging the legitimacy of counter-attitudinal arguments (Johnston, 2008). Third, and lastly, persuasiveness of a message can be channeled through the characteristics of the individual being persuaded himself. This can refer to the cognitive processing abilities of a persuasion target, the strength of existing attitudes and more. Some argue that all three of these mechanisms are necessary for successful persuasion (Lupia & McCubbins 1998).

Regarding the first channel described above in which an individual seriously grapples with new information, it seems most likely that this could only occur if that individual believed Chinese funded sources to be a truthful and legitimate sharer of information. This route of persuasion requires an individual to at least partially weigh evidence, puzzle through arguments counter to his previous beliefs, and come to a final conclusion different from his own. Persuasion is only effective when given internalized standards for evaluating the message gives it a positive evaluation. Arguments become more persuasive when they are systematic and are linkable to other internally held schema and attitudes (Petty et al. 1997; Wu and Shaffer 1987; Zimbardo and Leippe 1991). When environmental cues match internal validity checks of information’s veracity it becomes more likely for the actor’s affect to change. As such, the probability of successful attitude change through this cognitive process increases in an environment where new information cues linkages to preexisting positive attitudes and interests (Johnston 2008). Logically and countercyclically, if this new information is linked to preexisting negative beliefs about, say, a potential enemy or high-risk threat, then probability of acceptance goes down.

In the mechanistic route by which an actor is convinced because of her relationship to the agency or person attempting to engage in persuasion, the nature of the identity relationship between both parties is most important. In other words, we can reasonably expect that information from ingroups is more persuasive than information from outgroups. In the context of Chinese propaganda, this seem to suggest that Americans of Chinese ethnicity or that have cultural connections to China would be more likely to be persuaded by the information shared with them. It also suggests that people who identify with the content of the message being shared—such as a self-identified supporter of globalism identifying with content related to Chinese entry into international institutions—might be more easily persuaded. This finding is particularly true for novices who have little prior information about the issue being presented (Zimbardo & Leippe 1991). Additionally, information from recognized and respected authorities—such as scientists, religious leaders, doctors—will tend to be more convincing than if it had come from another source. In short, this identity focused mechanism for persuasion suggests that people will be more likely to be persuaded by sources that are “liked” than “unliked.” Liking something is highly correlated with ingroup identity, thereby bringing this mechanism full circle. If a piece of information is widely supported and agreed upon in an in-group then it becomes even more likely that an actor accepts that information as persuasive (Petty et al. 1997).

The most nebulous and expansive view on persuasion has to do with the persuasion target herself. Besides cognitive processing abilities and strength of existing attitudes, an individual might also value ideological consistency and therefore be resistant to changing a view that might lead others to interpret the actor as inconsistent or hypocritical (Wu & Schaffer 1987). In my view, this purported mechanism looks more like a catch-all term than a specific causal chain of persuasion. Therefore, the main takeaway I get from it in terms of its application towards Chinese propaganda is that researchers should stay cognizant of the social interaction between an individual’s prior traits and the variation, if any, in attitudinal change after exposure to Chinese propaganda.

Besides internal mechanisms of persuasion, the characteristics of the source from which information comes from is important too. Familiarity with a source, perceived authority of that source, and perceived trustworthiness all matter. A person is much more likely to be persuaded by a reputable acquaintance than a complete stranger, that is to say. Persuasion is also not necessarily a one-shot game. It can involve multiple games over an elongated time period. During this attempt at persuasion, the source of information is free and unconstrained in modifying its technique, including the content of the very information it is aiming to persuade an individual about. Therefore, the standard model of persuasion, as presented in Lupia and McCubbins (1998), argues that these described mechanisms and characteristics boil down into two crucial conditions: (1) that the persuade believes the persuader to be knowledgeable about an issue and (2) that the persuader’s intentions are perceived as trustworthy. This model has widely been accepted as a sort of rational, realpolitik view of persuasion.

This model, however, likely misses the mark in terms of addressing the role of social variables in modifying the efficacy of attempts at persuasion. For example, ideology, identity, and cultural variables all likely can interact with attempts at persuasion and either boost them or harm them. The model also leaves unanswered as to what mechanisms persuasion ultimately operate on. Although external forces to persuasion are undeniably important, research literature studying social psychology has shown that actors often do not rationalize their thoughts in a coherent and systemized fashion. In an arena of limited interactions through social media and American news media, it might seem that the importance of familiarity and other internal variables to the persuadee-persuader relationship should be discounted, but it could also be that identity, culture, and ideology become more critical for persuasion than external sources and costly signals. Either way, it is difficult to make an assessment without further empirical research without a reference to the often-odd nature of human psychology.

In sum, persuasion is likely some sort of combination of three processes. Through their logical interactions, it is simple to predict when persuasion might be more effective. These environments include situations in which an individual is highly motivated to analyze new information, when a persuader is an authoritative member of an ingroup which the individual is included in or wishes to be included in, when the individual is a novice in a new environment and is exposed to counter-attitudinal information repeatedly over time, and when the perceived threat from the persuader is viewed as being quite low. Does the Chinese state fit cleanly into any of these proposed environments? With the highly polarized, anti-China sentiment shared widely across the U.S. now, the answer is likely no except in cases in which the actor being exposed to propaganda is somewhere included in an ingroup that is supportive of Chinese state interests. A logical ingroup along these lines would be American born Chinese, or those Americans who still might have familial or cultural ties to China.

**Mass Opinion and Integrated Threat Theory**

In my view, there are still two possible families of theories that might explain how Americans will react to CCP external propaganda, in particular Americans without cultural ties to China. The first, and perhaps easier to understand, theory follows the mass opinion theory as presented by John Zaller in his 1992 book The Origins and Nature of Mass Opinion (J. R. Zaller 1992). As Zaller suggests, mass opinion is largely shaped by exposure to the media, which shares elite opinions on political issues. In the context of Chinese propaganda, this theory would suggest that the participant will feel more warmly towards China if he is sufficiently convinced that the information being shared is truthful. The second family of theories I aim to present can be characterized as an integrated threat theory, as written about by Walter and Cookie Stephan in 2000. Integrated threat theory refers to the phenomenon in which social groups that feel threatened by a perceived threat rather than an actual threat, which increases their levels of prejudice against the source of that threat, generally an outgroup. In the context of Chinese propaganda, this theory would suggest that the participant will feel less warmly towards China after exposure, perceiving China as a potential threat and outgroup to be prejudiced against. Although I am unsure which theory holds truer with regard to Chinese external propaganda, it would serve the reader well for me to give a quick introduction to each and how, in particular, they might interact with the mechanisms that change an individual’s political attitudes.

Due to new technologies like the internet and social media, it has become easier than ever for foreign countries to directly interact with American citizens so as to influence American public opinion. As to why China has decided to specifically target American media sources with their external propaganda, it appears that the CCP believes, like many political scientists, that the apparent source of information matters just as much as the content of information itself.

The Zaller “receive-accept-sample” model of public opinion, as described previously, particularly applies to media issues. According to researchers, media reporting can effectively change people’s expressed opinions through a process of priming and framing (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Altogether, this research suggests that media narratives and media reporting on public interest issues can play a role in dictating public response to policy issues, including foreign policy positions. If Chinese propaganda was to effectively disguise itself as written by a legitimate news source or if were to imply that the trusted news source endorsed the propaganda in some fashion, it is likely that this propaganda could have an outsized effect on American public opinion towards China.

The alternative family of theory I am working from is based upon integrated threat theory (ITT), also known as intergroup threat theory. This theory attempts to describe how situations of perceived threat between social groups can lead to prejudice. The basic threat model includes two types of threat that can potentially play a role in causing prejudice: realistic threats and symbolic threats (Stephan et al. 2002). Realistic threats are those that pose a danger to the in-group’s well-being, including economic and political power. Symbolic threats are those that arise when an ingroup feels that an outgroup poses an existential threat to their group identity, including morals, beliefs, or attitudes. This theory has been empirically supported by a number of experiments. In one study conducted by Esses et al., the researchers found that after exposing research participants to newspaper articles about a collapsing job market, research participants held more negative attitudes towards immigrants and were less supportive of immigration in general, suggesting that these participants interpreted the news being shared as some sort of threat (Esses et al. 2006). In the context of China, it is possible that after Americans read CCP propaganda that emphasizes the success of the Chinese economy, they would feel a realistic economic threat coming from the success of the Chinese nation, leading to an overall decrease in attitudes towards China. Therefore, this theory would suggest that Chinese external propaganda is backfiring by exposing more Americans to positive news stories about a rival, triggering a perception of real or symbolic threat and thereby leading to a decrease in American attitudes toward China.

The application of integrated threat theory to describe U.S.-China relations in the twenty-first century is not new. In fact, scholars have previous coined the term “China threat” to characterize China’s emergence as an economic and militaristic threat to the national interests of the United States (Broomfield 2003).

Authors that subscribe to this theory of thought believe that China—like other rising states—is apt to adopt an increasingly ambitious international strategy that imperils U.S. interests as its relative power grows. China hawks see evidence that from 2009 to the first half of 2020, China-U.S. relations have experienced a gradual yet sustained downtown in almost every dimension (Jisi and Ran 2019). One Chinese political scientist describes US-China relations as a “strategic competition… because China is closing the national power gap” (Zhao 2019). As tensions develop, it is increasingly likely that the U.S. and China will construct a narrative emphasizing zero-sum interests, coercion, and perceived blamelessness between the two (Breuer and Johnston 2019). All of this is to say that with increasing tension between the United States and China, it is logical that Americans might react negatively upon interaction with Chinese external propaganda, even if the propaganda was something as inconspicuous as a news article covering Chinese economic growth.

**Research Design**

1. *Hypotheses [build off above and add media differentiation stuff]*

This experiment focuses on Chinese external propaganda and the impact this propaganda might have on American public opinion. In this experiment, I exposed participants to the same China Watch article but vary the identifying information of the article as well as vary the media outlet in which the China Watch article appears to be located in. Based on the literature reviewed in the previous section, I came to a number of hypotheses regarding this experiment. First, I assume that (*H0) exposure to China Watch articles will actually depress American attitudes toward China as compared to non-camouflaged, direct communication from a Chinese source.* In other words, I expect that when Americans either correctly identify the *China Watch* article as originating from China or are exposed to a *China Watch* article that was edited so as to make the article appear like standard *New York Times* reporting, they will rationally interpret this as an attempt to undermine American opinion toward China. This realization will then ‘confirm’ the symbolic threat most Americans feel China poses in addition to making this threat feel more salient, elevating it into becoming a real threat. Extending this reasoning, I believe that *(H1) exposure to labeled China Watch propaganda in a legacy media source like the New York Times, participants will interpret the greatest perception of threat from China and by extension have the least favorable attitudes to China.*

With exposure to the identical *China Watch* article but located in China’s *People’s Daily*, the official state newspaper, however, I hypothesize that (*H2) exposure to a direct statement from the Chinese government will mediate individual attitudes toward China in the positively valanced, warmer direction.* Furthermore, I believe that Americans will interpret the *China Watch* article as being more persuasive and trustworthy than in the camouflaged, propaganda state. When presented as language coming directly from the Chinese government, I believe Americans will view *China Watch* as being less a form of propaganda and more a form of genuine outreach from China to the United States as, presumably, an English-language article of *People’s Daily* will also appear in the Chinese-language version of the paper. Since outreach is generally correlated with cooperation, I posit that Americans threat perception of China will decrease, mechanistically bringing about warmer feelings toward China.

In line with previous literature on the impact that media source can have on Americans’ interpretations of factual information, I also hypothesize that (*H3) exposure to China Watch propaganda will lead to different effects depending on the media source in which individuals saw China Watch placed in*. More specifically, I believe that (*H4) Americans will assign more negative attitudes toward China after exposure to China Watch articles located in legacy media sources as compared to China Watch articles located in non-legacy media sources.* This hypothesis is derived from the same logic that powered hypothesis (*H1)*. Assuming that attitudes toward China are driven at least partially by perceptions of threat, it is likely that participants will be most surprised to see Chinese propaganda located in legacy news sources who tout superior credibility compared to non-legacy news sources, like Fox News and social media sites. This surprise will translate to an emotional reaction that primes risk perception of China. Because participants might assume that non-legacy media sources have lower requirements for their published material, they might not interpret *China Watch* in Fox News as indicating as much risk from China. Alternatively, it is possible that people will interpret Fox News’ publishing of *China Watch* as an intrinsically conveying editorial approval of the article. This alternative mechanism would also explain why attitudes toward China might be the least warm after exposure to *China Watch* located in legacy media sources versus non-legacy media sources.

1. *Experimental Design - Treatment*

In this chapter, my dependent variable is American public opinion and foreign policy preferences toward China. This overall dependent variable will be captured using a number of measurement variables, including favorability towards China, perceived threat of China ratings, favorability towards Chinese citizens, and policy preferences on American foreign policy related to China. My independent, treatment variable in this study is Chinese foreign-facing propaganda. More specifically, I expose participants to a *China Watch* article written by *China Daily,* and originally placed in *The Telegraph*,a British newspaper. Originally, I had wanted to use a *China Watch* article from an American news source, like the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal*, but was unable to do so as these news sources had completely removed their *China Watch* articles from their online archives. Because *China Watch* articles are technically advertisements, I knew I would also not be able to find any *China Watch* articles archived online. Therefore, I decided to select a *China Watch* article that previously had been modified in an online survey experiment by Dai and Luqiu (2020). Although this article did not appear in an American newspaper source, it provided the closest appearance of what might appear in a legitimate American media source, minus the slight differences in spelling found between British and American English. I assume that my survey participants were not affected by these spelling differences though, as most participants read their treatment quickly. Furthermore, even if my participants do notice the difference in spelling, I assume that they might interpret their articles as being international versions of their respective media sources or even that the Chinese Propaganda Department uses British English in their outreach campaigns. The potential concern that British English might alert participants to the true nature of the *China Watch* articles they are reading is not a concern as my treatment assumes that participants will recognize their treatment articles as being Chinese propaganda.

As for my experimental treatment itself, I employ a five-group design. All groups are shown a real article from *China Watch* but I vary the manner in which the article is shown, including whether (1) there is identification confirming that the article was written by the Chinese government and (2) the media outlet that the article evidently appears in. The control group (People’s Daily) will be shown a *China Watch* article that is edited to make it appear as if the article original appeared in the *People’s Daily*, China’s official state newspaper of record.

Graphical user interface, text

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This control group was designed so as to compare *China Watch’s* efficacy in mediating American public opinion versus direct proclamations from the Chinese government itself. Logically, there would be little need for the Chinese Propaganda Department to disguise their native advertising propaganda as coming from a different source if a direct article released by the Chinese government had a greater effect on American attitudes. Of note, I decided not to make my control group one that featured an article unrelated to China. Although this might have been useful in certain regards, I decided that this style of control was ultimately unnecessary because of the design of my first treatment group, the New York Times Base group.

My first experimental group (New York Times Base) was exposed to a *China Watch* article edited so as to appear as if the article was solely written by *The* *New York Times* (NYT). This treatment group lacked the usual identification that normally would indicate that a *China Watch* article was written by and funded by the Chinese government (see appendix for treatment design). Instead, this treatment saw what appeared to be a pro-China news article written by the NYT staff. In this manner, I can interpret the results from my New York Times Base group as being indicative of how Americans’ attitudes about China are modified whenever they encounter a positive news article on China for a legacy media source.

My second experimental group (New York Times CW) received the same China Watch article in the same American media source as my NYT Base group, but it also included a large header indicating that the article was a *China Watch* article, a disclaimer that the article was written by and paid for the Chinese state, and a note that the NYT was not affiliated in any way with the writing of the article. This treatment was my first to include full identification and replication of a *China Watch* article as it would have appeared in American media outlets before being 2020. This treatment group was designed to answer one of my core research questions, what effect does exposure to identifiable Chinese foreign-facing propaganda have on American attitudes toward China and toward foreign policy regarding China?

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My third and fourth treatment groups were both variations of the NYT CW group. Treatment group three (Fox News CW) participants were shown the same image as NYT CW participants, but the header was edited so as to make it appear as if the *China Watch* article had appeared in a Fox News publication. Likewise, my fourth treatment group (Facebook CW) was similar in approach as the previous two but with edits to make it appear as if the *China Watch* article was featured on a Facebook user’s news feed. Both of these groups served the purpose of investigating hypotheses *(H3)* and *(H4)* and answering whether the identity of media source mattered in the overall outcome of changes in attitudes toward China.

Using this five-group experiment, I hope to gather results that will be able to differentiate between the mechanisms at play. For instance, if it turns out that the People’s Daily group had the least positive views of China after exposure, the NYT Base group had a slightly more negative views of China, and the NYT CW group had the most negative views, this would imply that something about knowledge that the Chinese government funded the article’s submission to the NYT led to the biggest change in attitudes. A non-significant statistical finding will require further discussion. In a case such as this, it is possible that Zaller’s theory of mass opinion and integrated threat theory worked opposite each other to cancel each other’s effects out.

***Data***

After treatment, participants answered survey questions about their reactions to the article they were exposed to, their attitudes toward China, and about thoughts on the media as well as their media viewing habits. Participants first answered questions about their attitudes toward China and their views on American foreign policy relating to China.

The first section of my survey after treatment was focused on gathering participant attitudes about the main dependent measures in this study, American attitudes about China and American foreign policy. The primary dependent measure was an attitudinal feeling thermometer on a 100-point scale. Participants were asked to rate how they felt toward China where higher numbers correlated to warmer feelings and vice versa. This dependent variable is a standard measure used in the study of public attitudes and foreign policy. After completing this primary attitudinal scale, participants were asked to complete an Osgood semantic differential scale where the opposing adjectives “untrustworthy” and “trustworthy” were placed at opposite ends of a 1 to 7 scale. Participants were asked to choose the number best represented which adjective they thought better described China. Participants were also asked to complete a scale ranking the amount of influence they thought China has in the world from 0 to 10 and to rate how they view China as a threat from “not an important threat at al all,” to “important but not critical threat,” to “critical threat.”

Next, participants were asked to respond to a series of policy preference questions on American foreign policy related to China. Respondents were asked to rate if they supported, opposed, or had no opinion on policy questions ranging from economic to security policy. These policy questions asked for participants views on American tariff, scientific research exchange, human rights, international development partnership, and South China Sea military policies. The last component of the Chinese-related dependent measures survey was to have participants complete an additional feeling thermometer on participants’ feelings about Chinese citizens, again on a scale of 0 to 100 with higher numbers correlating to warmer feelings. Generally speaking, people tend to have warmer feelings about foreign people than they do for foreign governments.

The second dependent measures survey section focused on participants’ reactions to the article they were exposed to and also their views on the media at-large. Participants were first asked to identify the media group which wrote the article they had just read. China Watch identified group participants were expected to correctly identify China Daily as the author of the article they had read while the New York Times Base and People’s Daily groups were supposed to identify each of those two sources, respectively, as being the authors of their assigned articles. Next, participants were asked to rate the trust they had in the accuracy of the article they had just read from 1 to 7, with 7 indicating complete trust. The next question was also on a 7-point scale by asked for participants to rate how convinced they were by the article they had just read with 7 indicating very convincing.

The following questions all asked participants’ media viewership habits as well as their beliefs about the media at-large. These dependent measures were largely adapted from pre-existing media scales that measure how much survey participants interact with the news. Participants were asked to give responses to questions asking how much news they read, listened to, or watched on average per day and how familiar they thought they were with the news. Participants were also asked a number of questions on their beliefs about the role of the news media in society and about their beliefs in media conspiracy theories. These questions included one that asked whether participants trust media organizations to report the news fairly, whether participants thought the media helps society solve problems, and whether participants thought the media actively lies in their reporting so as to benefit the rich and powerful. Lastly, participants were also asked to identify the source they turn to most often for news about the U.S. and the world: newspapers and news magazines, radio, network TV (like ABC, CBS), cable TV (like Fox News, MSNBC), blogs and other websites, or social media.

I also collected standard demographic information from my survey participants, including race, education, gender, age, income, and so forth. Collecting these demographic variables allowed for me to control for them in my analysis and to build the following simple model exploring how Americans’ attitudes toward China will change after exposure to Chinese propaganda:

Model 1

Two different models: regression with demographics; regression with demographics + media

Collecting dependent measures allowed for me to create a more complex model and control for media viewership habits:

Model 2

Overall, the simple model was more helpful than the complex model with demographic variables because, as my results section will show, there were not many statistically significant differences in attitudes toward China after exposure to the different treatments. In cases where there was variation between treatment groups, however, the extra media variables showed that Americans’ media consumption habits were often also significant in explaining why attitudes toward China shifted after exposure to Chinese propaganda. As it can be predicted, participants who spend more time watching and following the news were more likely to recognize that the article they were reading was written by the Chinese government and, subsequently, have more negative attitudes toward China. Interestingly, belief in media conspiracies also had the equivalent effect, suggesting that time spent watching media and overall distrust in media can serve as substitutes when mediating Americans’ attitudes toward China.