

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN US–ASIA TENSIONS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF US–JAPAN TRADE WAR IN THE HEADLINES

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This chapter argues that trade wars between an established superpower and a rising contender are influenced by contemporary commercial and geo-political realities that are subsequently reflected in media discourse. It offers a timely discussion of the great-power politics involving the United States and China by examining the similar 1987 power struggle between the United States and Japan. Specifically, this chapter explores the depiction of the US–Japan trade war in the headlines of four Western newsmagazines – *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel*. The analysis employs Van Dijk's (1980) concept of macro-rules to determine the prevailing topics in the headlines of these newsmagazines, followed by an application of Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory of social actor representation. In doing so, this chapter analyses a historical event similar to the current US–China trade war—albeit involving a different Asian rival—to explore continuity and change in US–Asia tensions. The findings reveal that the broadly unfavorable coverage of Japan was restricted to the realm of economic affairs in contrast to the coverage of China, which spans economic, political and military affairs. The four newsmagazines did not speak in one collective voice regarding their coverage of Japan due to their respective countries' economic situations vis-à-vis Japan. While some lessons can be drawn from the earlier US–Japan competition to understand the contemporary US–China rivalry, the latter duo's divergent political systems and China's growing global ambitions may present a greater challenge to the incumbent power for years to come.

Keywords: China, Japan, media representation, trade war, the United States

1. Introduction

This chapter argues that trade wars between an established superpower and a rising contender are deeply rooted in contemporary commercial and geopolitical realities, which are subsequently reflected in media discourse. As demonstrated by Huang, Cook, and Xie (2021), events in international relations affect media responses, which in turn shape public opinion. Their findings corroborate the conclusions made by Aday (2018, 12), who stated that media coverage, particularly during times of crisis, can lead to rises and falls in public opinion. By adopting critical discourse analysis, a language-based methodology, this chapter aims to offer a timely discussion of the great-power politics between the United States (the global hegemon) and China (the rising contender) by examining an earlier power struggle between the United States and Japan (the challenger at the time) in the 1980s. The findings of this research have revealed a broadly unfavorable coverage of Japan that was primarily restricted to the realm of economic affairs, as opposed to the present-day coverage of China, which encompasses areas such as economic, political and military affairs. Furthermore, in their coverage of Japan, the four national newsmagazines did not speak in one collective voice due to their respective countries' economic realities vis-à-vis Japan. While the earlier competition between the United States and Japan can provide some insights into the contemporary US–China rivalry, the latter duo's divergent political systems and China's growing global ambitions may present a greater challenge to the incumbent power for years to come.

While there is a wealth of literature that has employed both economic and political theoretical frameworks to explore the trade dispute between the United States and Japan of yesteryear (Urata 2019; Govella 2022), there remains a lack of language-based research into the role of media narratives with regards to the constantly evolving dynamics of international trade between major global powers. As far as the US–China rivalry is concerned, many scholars and observers (e.g., Mahbubani 2021, 2022; Gomart 2020, 2022) expect the trade war between the current reigning superpower, the US, and a burgeoning China—which began under the Trump administration in mid-2018—to evolve into a protracted geopolitical contest. After all, incumbent powers are more inclined to confront the negotiating strategies of ascendant contenders as the latter's growing economic strength increases the likelihood that they will eventually challenge the international order maintained by the former (Allison 2017; Thompson 2022).

During a working visit to the United States between March 26–April 2, 2022, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2022, para. 39) advocated for new rules that would better reflect the balance of the present-day world economy, in which China accounts for a substantial share of world trade (para. 41), as opposed to the time when the United States was the dominant global power after the Second

World War. At the time, the United States had entered into a gentleman's agreement with its major European trade partners whereby the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was a European while the President of the World Bank was an American (para. 39), and where the voting shares amongst the members of the two inter-state institutions mirrored the weight of their economies (para. 40).

To better understand the dynamics of such power struggles, this chapter examines a separate trade war that took place four decades ago. At the time, another Asian country with a flourishing economy, Japan, was widely expected to overtake the US in terms of economic strength (Figure 1), thereby becoming the next superpower (Vogel 1979; Desjardins 1999). Similar to the growing discourse about China and its threat to American hegemony, Japan was also portrayed as a menace to the economic supremacy of the United States in the 1980s (Belke and Volz 2020; Mahbubani 2021; Yeung 2020). The subsequent implementation of a series of US-led foreign currency policies ultimately dealt a lasting blow to Japan's booming economy, thwarting its rise to becoming a superpower (Belke and Volz 2020, 4–5).

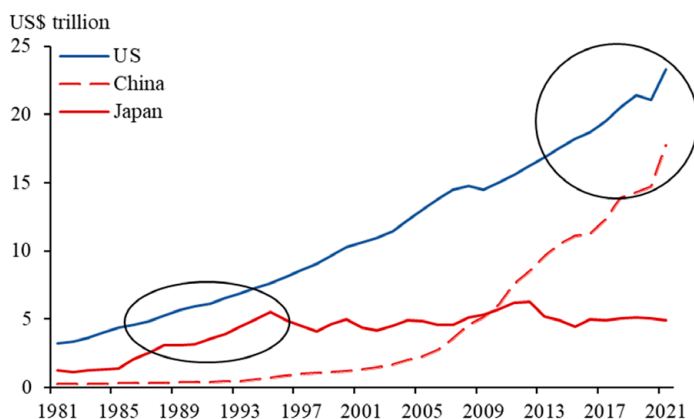


Figure 1: GDP nominal of China, Japan and the United States (1981–2021)

(Source: World Bank 2022)

Against this historical backdrop, this chapter explores the depiction of the US–Japan trade war in the headlines of four Western newsmagazines—*Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel*—in 1987. In particular, this year marked the first time that an edition of the *Time* newsweekly (1987) reported on the escalation of the trade conflict between the United States and Japan on the cover of its magazine. In doing so, this chapter analyses a historical event that is similar to the current US–China trade war—albeit involving a different Asian rival—in order to explore the continuity and change in contemporary US–Asia tensions. As Bain

(2019, 137) put it, the “discussions of hierarchy in international relations” clearly reflect the complex relationship between continuity and change in world affairs.

1.1 Research questions

To investigate the dominant media representation of Japan’s economic rise in 1987 and the US–Japan trade war, this chapter aims to answer the following questions:

- i. What were the prevailing topics relating to Japan’s economic rise and the US–Japan trade war in 1987?
- ii. Who were the key social actors involved?

1.2 Representation, ideologies, and the representation of trade wars in the media

According to the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall, representation is the language-based production of the meaning of concepts in the minds of people (Hall 1997, 17). Specifically, Hall (1997, 4) stated that individuals turn to words, concepts, categories, emotions, and mental images to make sense of society and better navigate a world of constant change. In doing so, individuals create mental models that are internal representations of real, hypothetical, or imaginary situations, events and processes (Liu and Stasko 2010; Pearson et al. 2015). Ideologies, which are based on the collective mental models of members of a particular social group, are thus social representations that define a group’s social identity and shared beliefs about their way of life (Hall 1997; Van Dijk 2006). As the socio-cognitive foundation of a social group, ideologies are generally established over a period of time. They include general cultural values such as freedom, equality, and justice, as well as attitudes like racism that are relevant to specific social groups (Van Dijk 2006, 116). Ideologies reflect the numerous differences between individuals due to their respective ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, political affinities, religions and sexual orientations.

As far as trade wars are concerned, there is an abundance of literature that explores the ongoing dispute between the United States and China from an economic and/or political perspective (Liu and Woo 2018; Choudhury 2021; Günar et al. 2021; Moore et al. 2022). In particular, there is also a significant amount of literature on the media representation of this dispute, which has only worsened since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ha et al. 2021; Jia and Lu 2021; Cheng and He 2022), as well as on the impact of news reports on the perceptions of American and Chinese people (Lai 2019; Ha and Willnat 2022). For instance, Cheng and He (2022) employed an eco-linguistic approach to examine coverage of the US–China trade war by the United Kingdom’s *The Times* publication and Russia’s *Sputnik* news agency. According to the authors, the British newspaper tended to adopt an

'eco-destructive' approach by focusing on the need for the United States to protect its national security against China, thereby justifying the established superpower's actions against its economic adversary (Cheng and He 2022, 456). In contrast, Russian coverage tended to emphasize the 'eco-beneficial' aspect of closer and more harmonious diplomatic relations between China and Russia (Cheng and He 2022, 457). In other words, both the overall international context and the domestic socio-political situation in the United Kingdom and Russia influenced the divergent positions of *The Times* and *Sputnik* vis-à-vis the trade dispute between the United States and China (Cheng and He 2022, 456).

Due to its growing economic and political might, a growing number of scholars and observers have turned their attention to China (Cheng and He 2022; Ha and Willnat 2022; Moore et al. 2022). Indeed, in terms of nominal GDP, the economy of the Asian powerhouse is widely expected to surpass that of the United States in the near future (World Bank and Development Research Center of the State Council 2013; Rajah and Leng 2022). It is thus understandable that Japan has played second fiddle to China in terms of the quantity of recently published literature (Forsberg 2014; Urata 2019; Ng 2022). Furthermore, the economic rivalry between the United States and Japan peaked in the 1980s, whereas the economic tensions between the United States and China continue to grow. Nevertheless, Urata (2019) attempted to extract lessons from the now-resolved dispute between the United States and Japan to help to shed light on the possible outcomes of the US–China trade war, which was initiated by the former country to reduce its bilateral trade deficit. According to Urata (2019), the United States managed to achieve one of its key objectives of protecting its domestic industries by exerting pressure on Japan to adopt certain specific measures. However, its intended outcome of having a lower trade deficit vis-à-vis Japan did not materialize (Urata 2019, 16–17). For this reason, Urata (2019, 16) doubted that the United States would be able to achieve its goal of reducing its bilateral trade deficit with China, although he remained cautiously optimistic that the former could manage to stop unfair trade practices by Chinese firms with regard to violations of intellectual property rights and forced technology transfers.

Ng (2022) analyzed the representation of the trade wars between the United States and Japan in 1987 as well as the United States and China in 2010 in the lead paragraphs of 180 articles collected from four western newsmagazines, namely *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel*. The findings of the empirical study led Ng (2022, 264–266) to propose the concept of the 'discourse of harm', which emphasizes the harm caused by the members of the out-group (China or Japan) to those of the in-group (the United States and its Western allies). Specifically, the proposed 'discourse of harm' encompasses two macro semantic strategies: (i) they harm others to benefit themselves, and (ii) they harm others, and they harm themselves (Ng 2022, 265).

Few other studies have adopted, however, this approach to examining the US–Japan trade war. This represents a significant knowledge gap in the literature because headlines play an important role in attracting readers to an article (Kuiken et al. 2017, 1300). This chapter aims to fill this gap by examining the representation of the US–Japan trade war in the headlines of four Western newsmagazines: *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express*, and *Der Spiegel*.

1.3 Methodological framework – Critical Discourse Analysis

This chapter combines quantitative and qualitative research by using critical discourse analysis to explore the major topics present in headlines from the four Western newsmagazines. Critical discourse analysis was adopted as the primary methodology for this analysis since it enables one “to examine the constitutive role that discourses play in contemporary society” (Vaara 2015, 491). As Fairclough and Wodak (1997, 271–280) explain, discourse constitutes both society and culture. In other words, critical discourse analysis addresses social problems since this approach sees the use of language as a form of social practice. For this reason, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) hold the view that “discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory” and is affected by new readings and new contextual information.

This chapter also employs Van Dijk’s (1980) concept of macro-rules to determine the prevailing topics within each headline. The macrostructure of a discourse, as expressed by the headline of a news article, is the structure of its global meaning or topic (Van Dijk 1980, 41–43). It is derived or inferred from the local meanings—also known as propositions (Van Dijk 1980, 16)—of the discourse using macro-rules that help to simplify complex information (Van Dijk 1980, 46–50). In other words, a headline describes the highest global meaning or macro-proposition of a news story (Van Dijk 1998; Tabe and Fieze 2018). As Abdel-Raheem (2021) explains, crucial information at the macro level helps with the comprehension and recall of discourses.

Specifically, Van Dijk (1980, 59–62) proposed and applied the macro-rules of ‘construction’, ‘deletion’, ‘generalization’, and ‘zero rule’ to deriving the propositions of an expository text. While ‘construction’ involves the creation of a new proposition, thereby constructing a “new predicate to represent the complex event described by the respective propositions of the text” (Van Dijk 1980, 48), ‘deletion’ simply removes all of the propositions of a text that are considered globally immaterial for the interpretation of other propositions of the discourse (Van Dijk 1980, 46). In contrast to the ‘deletion’ rule, ‘generalization’ creates a proposition that is conceptually more general (Van Dijk 1980, 47). Finally, in a ‘zero rule’, the proposition remains unchanged. In Van Dijk’s (1980, 48) words, nothing is changed. Since different people may reach different macro-propositions when attempting

to derive the macrostructure of a text, the application of the macro-rules is subjective (Van Dijk 1980, 230).

This is followed by an application of Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory of social-actor representation, which is used to investigate the frequency of—and the dominant media narratives of—social actors appearing in the headlines. In doing so, this approach can provide insights into the representation of the US–Japan trade war. Although Van Leeuwen (2008, 52) initially proposed 22 representational categories, this chapter only utilizes the first category: "inclusion and exclusion". 'Inclusion' refers to cases where the social actors are clearly indicated in the text, while 'exclusion' has two sub-categories: radical and less radical. Radical exclusion refers to cases where social actors and their activities are completely suppressed in the text, leaving no traces of their representation. This is in contrast to less radical exclusion, in which the social actors are merely backgrounded. In these cases, although the headlines do not indicate that the backgrounded social actors are related to the relevant action, they are mentioned elsewhere in the text (Van Leeuwen 2008, 29). In other words, the social actors are merely backgrounded to delay their appearance in relation to the actions described in the headlines.

In brief, social actors are considered to be 'included' whenever they are mentioned in headlines and are 'excluded' when they are not mentioned in relation to the action presented in the headlines. Four methods can be employed to accomplish this suppression and backgrounding; these include the use of passive agent deletion, non-finite clauses, nominalization and process nouns and adjectives (Van Leeuwen 2008, 28–32). In terms of the analysis of the representation of social actors, each headline is limited to only one of these methods. This ensures that the research design used in this chapter avoids any statistical biases that would lean toward a particular journalist or news article, which could easily employ more than one representation category in their depiction of a social actor. The total number of these counts should always add up to 100, which further eliminates the risk of counting errors.

1.3.1 Time period

The time frame considered in this study covers the entirety of 1987, the year in which trade tensions between the United States and Japan were at their peak. The corpus was comprised of 80 headlines from the four newsmagazines (*Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel*), with exactly 20 headlines collected from each newsmagazine. This number of headlines was chosen because the four newsmagazines only had 52 weekly issues per year, and news relating to Japan and the US–Japan trade war was not reported on a weekly basis. In particular, *L'Express* only had 20 articles relating to Japan in 1987.

1.3.2 Data collection

The corpus in this chapter is composed of 80 headlines; these were selected using search words such as ‘trade’ and ‘Japan’ in English, ‘commerce’ and ‘Japon’ in French, and ‘Wirtschaft’ and ‘Japan’ in German. For ease of reading, headlines from *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel* are translated into English from French and German, respectively.

1.3.3 Choice of Western newsmagazines

This chapter chose the *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel* newsmagazines due to the significant economic and political weight of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, where these weekly newsmagazines were headquartered in 1987. These high-quality weekly magazines were also selected due to their large circulation volumes within their respective countries as well as their popularity worldwide (Hachten and Scotton 2015).

2. Analysis I: *Time* magazine

This section examines the headlines in *Time* magazine. It begins by determining the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan's economic rise in 1987 through the application of Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules. This is followed by the use of Van Leeuwen's (2008) first category of social actor representation.

2.1 Prevailing topics

Table 1 presents the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan in 1987, which were derived from Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules for determining the relevant super-concept. It shows that the prevailing topics of 16 (80%) of the 20 headlines were derived from the use of the ‘generalization’ macro-rule, while three (15%) used the ‘deletion’ macro-rule and only one (5%) used the ‘zero-rule’.

Table 1: Prevailing topics of the headlines in *Time*

No.	Headlines	Macro-rules	Prevailing topics	No. of words
A1J	Japan: The 1.004% solution	Generalization	Gradual solution	4
A2J	Japan: Global affairs are a bummer	Generalization	International relations	6
A3J	Economy and business: Fighting off the suitcase brigade	Generalization	International trade	8
A4J	Economy and business: I'll take Manhattan - and Waikiki	Generalization	Global expansion	8
A5J	Employment: The might yen hits home	Deletion	Employment	6

A6J	Japan: A whiff of blood in the water	Zero rule	Japan: blood in the water	8
A7J	Style and design: An elegant sweep toward heaven	Generalization	International trade	8
A8J	Economy and business: Fighting the trade tilt	Generalization	International trade	7
A9J	The challenges of success	Deletion	Challenges	4
A10J	Trade face-off: A dangerous US-Japan confrontation	Generalization	International trade	7
A11J	Japan Yasu, the chips are down	Generalization	International trade	5
A12J	Economy and business: Saying hello to BMW-san	Generalization	Car industry	7
A13J	Economy and business: Publishing Tokyo's foxy biz whiz	Generalization	Industry	8
A14J	Economy and business: A puzzling toll at the top	Generalization	Industry	9
A15J	Economy and business: Beware of machines in disguise	Generalization	International trade	8
A16J	Economy and business: Beware of machines in disguise	Generalization	International trade	9
A17J	Japan tee time for the threesome	Generalization	Tee time	6
A18J	Business: Japan let us shake hands	Deletion	International relations	6
A19J	Born in the USA, sold to Japan	Generalization	International trade	7
A20J	Socking it away in Japan	Generalization	Safe haven	5
Total no.				136
Average no. per headline				6,8

Source: Author

The top prevailing topic was found to be issues related to *international trade* (seven headlines: A3J, A8J, A10J, A11J, A15J, A16J, and A19J), with a representation rate of 35%. For reasons of simplicity, *industry* (two headlines: A13J and A14J; 10%) and *automobile industry* (one headline: A12J; 5%) were merged to form the overarching topic *industry*, thus appearing with a cumulative frequency of 15%. Other topics include *blood in the water* (one headline: A6J; 5%), *challenges* (one headline: A9J; 5%), *employment* (one headline: A5J; 5%), *global expansion* (one headline: A4J; 5%), *gradual solutions* (one headline: A1J; 5%), *international relations* (two headlines: A2J and A19J; 10%), *safe haven* (one headline: A20J; 5%), *style and design* (one headline: A7J; 5%) and *tee time* (one headline: A17J; 5%).

2.2 Inclusion and exclusion

Once the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines were identified, Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic categories were applied to identify the nature of the representation of the main social actors in the headlines of the *Time* newsmagazine. In particular, how the main social actors are included and/or excluded in the 20 headlines was examined; social actors are included whenever they are mentioned in the headlines, and they are excluded whenever they are absent from the headlines.

Since the articles primarily concern Japan, the social actors were grouped into Japanese and non-Japanese actors. The main non-Japanese actors represented in *Time* newsmagazine in 1987 were the United States, the Soviet Union, West Germany, Western Europe and foreigners. Tables 2 and 3 show the frequency distribution of the inclusion and exclusion of Japanese and non-Japanese social actors across the 20 headlines while also distinguishing between agent and non-agent social actors. In this way, we can more clearly understand the role of agency and non-agency in the inclusion and exclusion of the social actors across the sampled headlines through their frequency distributions.

Table 2: Inclusion/exclusion of agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *Time*

Representational categories		Agent social actors					
		Japanese		Non-Japanese			
		Japan	US	Soviet Union	West Germany	Western Europe	Foreigner
Inclusion	No.	8	1	0	0	0	0
	%	40%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	4	4	0	0	0	1
	%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Total		60%	25%	0%	0%	0%	5%

Source: Author

Table 2 shows that the Japanese social actor is included as an agent actor at a frequency of 40%, the highest amongst all the social actors. Indeed, it is included nearly eight times more often than the next biggest agent social actor (the United States), which was included at a frequency of 5%. Since BMW (mentioned in A12J) is a German automobile manufacturer, it is treated as a West German actor for the purposes of this research. The agency of the Soviet Union, West Germany, and Western Europe was not included in any of the headlines.

In terms of the exclusion of actors in headlines, Japanese agents were also excluded more frequently (25%) than the other four non-Japanese actors. Similarly, the agency of the American actor was the most frequently excluded (20%)

among the subgroup of non-Japanese actors. The agency of the Soviet Union, West Germany, and Western Europe each had a frequency of exclusion of 0%.

The following examples show that it is difficult for the reader to identify the participants involved in the social practices present in the clauses if they merely read the headlines. Without further context and information, the causal relationship between the agent and the non-agent is unclear. In other words, the participants of the social practice could be American, Chinese, Japanese, or the international community at large. Here are some examples of the exclusion of the agency of Japanese actors:

1. *Economy and business: I'll take Manhattan – and Waikiki* A4J
2. *Style and design: An elegant sweep to heaven* A7J
3. *The challenges of success* A9J
4. *Economy and business: A puzzling toll at the top* A14J

Given that the Japanese and American agents are the actors that were most regularly included and/or excluded across the 20 sampled headlines, it also means that they were attributed with representational categories more frequently than the other non-Japanese actors. In other words, their appearance in the headlines was more readily recognizable to the readers of the newsmagazine.

Table 3: Exclusion of agent social actors in *Time*

Representational categories: Exclusion		Agent social actors					
		Japanese			Non-Japanese		
		Japan	US	Soviet Union	West Ger- many	Western Europe	Foreigner
1 Backgrounding	No.	4	4	0	0	0	1
	%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	5%
2 Suppression	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Author

Exclusion can be further subdivided into two subcategories: the radical (complete deletion or suppression) and the less radical (partial suppression or backgrounding). Table 3 shows that *Time* newsmagazine predominantly relied on backgrounding the Japanese (25%) and American (20%) social actors, thus delaying their appearance in relation to the actions described in the headlines. This reduces the number of explicit references to the agent that is the subject of the social action, consequently de-emphasizing the social actors. They were still referred to, however, in the subsequent lead and main texts associated with those headlines.

Time newsmagazine uses three methods to accomplish the less radical exclusion or backgrounding of the Japanese actors: (i) passive agent deletion, (ii) adjectives and (iii) nominalization. For example, in the *global expansion* topic (A4J), the explicit reference to the agent social actor is absent from the headline and is instead replaced with the use of the first-person singular nominative personal pronoun 'I'. This makes it more difficult for the readers to ascertain the agent responsible for the takeover of Manhattan and Waikiki – two city districts in the United States. As Manhattan is America's major economic and financial center and home to the world's two largest stock exchanges by total market capitalization, the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq, the concept of a 'takeover' conjures the image of a foreign acquisition that could potentially compromise the economic and financial interests of the United States.

The second method used to background excluded actors is the use of adjectives, such as 'elegant' (A7J) and 'puzzling' (A14J). In the *style and design* topic, the use of the adjective 'elegant' in combination with the noun 'heaven' brings to mind an image of grace and is greatly appealing. This is in contrast to the *economy and business* topic, where the adjective 'puzzling' suggests a situation that is perplexing and difficult to understand.

The last method that *Time* newsmagazine uses to background Japanese agent actors is through the nominalization of the verb 'to challenge'. This results in the exclusion of the social actors as it makes no explicit reference to them; instead, they are portrayed as having to overcome difficulties in order to achieve success.

In contrast, American agency is backgrounded through the use of (i) gerunds and (ii) defective verbs. The verb 'fight' is used twice at the beginning of clauses A3J and A8J, and functions as a grammatical subject, bypassing the need for explicit references to the relevant agent. This has the effect of focusing the reader onto the phrasal verb 'fight off' in A3J, which brings to mind a situation in which a trading partner has to defend itself against an attack by another entity, while the verb 'fight' in A8J depicts the struggle of the backgrounded agent in overcoming and eliminating the trade imbalances. In addition, the phrasal verb 'to take on' conjures the idea of competition, and the use of the defective verb 'beware of' (A15J) appears to warn one of something hidden and potentially even insidious. This semantic strategy has the effect of targeting the message directly at the readers, causing them to be more sympathetic to the actions of the backgrounded American actor against those of the Japanese.

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution of the inclusion and/or exclusion of key non-agent social actors.

Table 4: Inclusion/exclusion of non-agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in the *Time* newsmagazine

Representational categories		Agent social actors					
		Japanese		Non-Japanese			
		Japan	US	Soviet Union	West Germany	Western Europe	Foreigner
Inclusion	No.	3	0	0	1	0	0
	%	15%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	4	3	1	0	3	0
	%	20%	15%	5%	0%	15%	0%
Total		35%	15%	5%	5%	15%	0%

Source: Author

Table 4 shows that the Japanese actors are included at a frequency of 15%, three times more often than the non-agent actors of the United States and West Germany, which are included at a frequency of 5% each. This pattern points to a higher incidence of the Japanese actor being on the receiving end of an activity described in the headlines. The other non-agent actors (the Soviet Union and Western Europe) have a 0% rate of inclusion in headlines. In terms of exclusion, Table 5 shows that the Japanese non-agent actors are excluded at a rate of 20%, while the non-agency of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe are excluded at 15%, 5%, and 15%, respectively.

Table 5: The Exclusion of non-agent social actors in *Time* magazine

Representational categories: Exclusion		Non-agent social actors					
		Japanese		Non-Japanese			
		Japan	US	Soviet Union	West Germany	Western Europe	Foreigner
1 Backgrounding	No.	4	3	1	0	3	0
	%	20%	15%	5%	0%	15%	0%
2 Suppression	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Author

Table 5 shows that *Time* newsmagazine has the tendency to background the non-agency of Japan, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe, thus reducing any explicit references to the non-agents in association with the activity mentioned in the headlines. Their traces, however, can still be found in some headlines.

<i>Economy and business: Fighting off the suitcase brigade</i>	A3J
<i>Economy and business: Fighting the trade tilt</i>	A8J
<i>Economy and business: Beware of machines in disguise</i>	A15J
<i>Economy and business: Global competition: Taking on the world</i>	A16J

The examples above show that the Japanese non-agents have been backgrounded through the use of the impersonalized nouns ‘suitcase brigade’, ‘trade tilt’, ‘machines in disguise’, and ‘the world’, which are depicted as grammatical objects of the action relating to the economy and business indicated in the clauses. Readers thus have to figure out the identity of the non-agents by continuing to read the other parts of the articles.

<i>Business: Japan let us shake hands</i>	A18J
<i>Born in the USA, sold to Japan</i>	A19J

The backgrounding of American non-agency can also be used to portray an image of helplessness due to the action caused by the agents. For instance, *Time* relies on the pronoun ‘us’ (A18J) and a prepositional phrase (A19J) to background the non-agency of the American actor. Furthermore, the obfuscation of the subject has the effect of directing the message at the readers, putting them in the shoes of the subject undergoing the action.

2.3 Closing remarks

This section examined the representation of social actors in the headlines of *Time* newsmagazine. This analysis revealed that the key social actors were associated with Japan, the Soviet Union, West Germany, Western Europe, and the United States, which clearly reflects the economic and political importance of these social actors, as well as US foreign policy vis-à-vis the others at the time (Kanet 2006; Russell 2022). Our focus will shift to *The Economist* magazine in the following section.

3. Analysis II: *The Economist* magazine

This section examines the headlines in *The Economist* magazine. It begins by determining the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan’s economic rise in 1987 through the application of Van Dijk’s (1980) macro-rules. This is followed by the use of Van Leeuwen’s (2008) first category of social actor representation.

3.1 Prevailing topics

Table 6 presents the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan in 1987, which were derived from Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules for determining the relevant super-concept. Table 6 shows that the topics are principally derived from the following two macro-rules: generalization (19 topics; 95%) and deletion (1 topic; 5%).

Table 6: Prevailing topics in the headlines of *The Economist*

No.	Headlines	Macro-rules	Prevailing topics	No. of words
B1J	Japan's protected telecoms	Generalization	International trade	3
B2J	Tokyo stockmarket: Who's afraid of the big bad rabbit?	Generalization	Threat from Japan	9
B3J	Tokyo learns to sprint	Generalization	International trade	4
B4J	Awful truth about exchange rates	Generalization	Currency	5
B5J	Japanese stockmarkets: A yen to grow	Generalization	Currency	6
B6J	World business: Is Japanese industry prepared to join the world?	Generalization	International trade	10
B7J	A very Japanese affair	Generalization	Japan's domestic affair	4
B8J	West Germany and Japan: strange bedfellows	Generalization	West Germany-Japan bilateral relations	6
B9J	US-Japan trade: Japan's turn to lose its temper	Generalization	International trade	6
B10J	Dreaming of trade wars	Generalization	International trade	4
B11J	Why America needs Japan as much as Japan needs America	Generalization	US-Japan bilateral relations	10
B12J	World business: Diminished giants	Generalization	International trade	4
B13J	Economic policy: Can Japan bow to international opinion?	Generalization	International trade	6
B14J	Germany's surpluses are not like Japan's	Generalization	International trade	6
B15J	Japan über alles	Generalization	Japanese superiority	3
B16J	Japan's bed of unsavoury rice	Generalization	International trade	5
B17J	EEC-Japan trade: Japan-bashing catches on	Generalization	International trade	5
B18J	Japan Inc. To the rescue	Generalization	International trade	5
B19J	The new threat from Japan is patience	Deletion	Threat from Japan	7
B20J	Japan and the Gulf: Timidly rising sun	Generalization	International relations	3
			Total no.	111
			Average no. per headline	5,55

Source: Author

The top three prevailing topics were found to be issues related to *international trade* (eleven headlines: A1J, A3J, A6J, A9J, A10J, A12J, A13J, A14J, A16J, A17J, and A18J; 55%), *currency* (B4J and B5J; 10%), and *threat from Japan* (B2J and B19J; 10%). For purposes of simplicity, *West Germany-Japan bilateral relations* (B8J), *US-Japan bilateral relations* (B11J), and *international relations* (B20J) were merged into one single overarching generic topic: *international relations*, which thus becomes the second most frequently represented topic (three; 15%) across the 20 articles sampled from *The Economist*. The other, less prominent topics include *Japan's domestic affairs* (B7J) and *Japanese superiority* (B15J), which were represented at a frequency of 5%.

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion

An examination of the corpus collected from *The Economist* shows that the main Japanese social actors were the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Europe, the Gulf, the world, and the four Asian tigers (FAT), which are comprised of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Tables 7 and 8 show the frequency distribution of inclusion and exclusion of agent social actors.

Table 7: Inclusion/exclusion of agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *The Economist*

		Agent social actors								
Representational categories		Japanese Non-Japanese								
		Japan	US	UK	West Germany	France	Europe	Gulf	World	* FAT
Inclusion	No.	15	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
	%	75%	10%	0%	10%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	1	3	2	1	0	2	0	0	0
	%	5%	15%	10%	5%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
	Total	80%	25%	10%	15%	0%	16%	0%	0%	0%

Note: Since Toyota (B3J) is a Japanese car manufacturer, it is merged with the Japanese actor for the purposes of this chapter. *FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 7 shows that Japanese social actors were included as an agent actor at a frequency of 75%, the highest among all the social actors. They were included nearly seven times more often than the next group of agent social actors, the United States and West Germany, which were included at a frequency of 10%. Europe was included at a rate of 5% in the form of the European Economic Community (EEC)

(B17J), while the remaining non-Japanese actors—the United Kingdom, France, the Gulf, and the world—were included at a rate of 0%.

In terms of exclusion, the agents of Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and Europe were excluded at frequencies of 5%, 15%, 10%, 5%, and 10%, respectively. In contrast, the agents of France, the Gulf, and the world were excluded at a rate of 0%. B12J is an example of a headline that excluded Japanese agent actors:

World business: Diminished giants B12J

The following are some examples of the exclusion of the agency of the American actor:

Awful truth about exchange rates B4J

Dreaming of trade wars B10J

Can Japan bow to international opinion? B13J

The examples presented above make it difficult for the reader to identify the participants involved in the social practices described in the clauses by merely reading the headlines. Without further context and information, the causal relationship between the agent and the non-agent is unclear; the participants of the social practice could be the Americans, the British, the West Germans, the Europeans, the Chinese, the Japanese, or the international community at large.

Table 8: Exclusion of agent social actors in *The Economist*

Representational categories: Exclusion		Agent social actors								
		Japanese Non-Japanese								
		Japan	US	UK	West Germany	France	Europe	Gulf	World	*FAT
1 Backgrounding	No. 1	3	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	
	% 5%	15%	10%	5%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	
2 Suppression	No. 0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	% 0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 8 shows that *The Economist* predominantly relies on backgrounding to exclude the Japanese (5%), American (15%), British (10%), West German (5%), and European (10%) social actors, which delays their appearance relative to the actions described in the headlines.

In the case of Japanese agency, B12J uses passive agent deletion to circumvent the need to explicitly reveal the identity of the subject agent(s) responsible for diminishing the importance of the non-agent—the ‘giants’—in global business. B10J is an example of the backgrounding of non-Japanese agents; it uses the gerund of the verb ‘dream’ at the beginning of the clause, which functions as a grammatical subject and eliminates the need to identify the agent of the social action. Another method of backgrounding is the use of the abstract noun ‘international opinion’ (B13J), which masks the identity of the agent responsible for forcing Japan to submit to their pressure and demands. These semantic strategies make it difficult for the reader to determine the identity of the agents if they only read the headlines. The agents could refer to the Japanese, non-Japanese participants, or even the international community at large.

Table 9 shows the frequency distribution of the inclusion and/or exclusion of key non-agent social actors.

Table 9: Inclusion/exclusion of non-agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *The Economist*

Representational categories	Non-agent social actors									
	Japanese		Non-Japanese							
	Japan	US	UK	West Germany	France	Europe	Gulf	World	*FAT	
Inclusion	No.	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
	%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	10%	0%
Exclusion	No.	2	12	4	4	1	1	0	0	2
	%	10%	60%	20%	20%	5%	5%	0%	0%	10%
Total		20%	60%	20%	20%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 9 shows that the non-agency of social actors from Japan, the Gulf, and the world, were included at a rate of 10%, 5%, and 10%, respectively. In contrast, American, British, West German, French, European, and FAT non-agent actors were not included at all. In terms of exclusion, the non-agency of the Japanese, American, British, West German, French, European, and FAT social actors were excluded at rates of 10%, 60%, 20%, 20%, 5%, 5%, and 10% respectively. This pattern indicates a higher incidence of the American actor being the recipient of the social action described in the headlines.

The following examples show that the headlines obfuscate the identity of the participants involved in the social practice described by these clauses. This has the effect of confusing the reader since the causal relationship between the agent

and the non-agent is unclear. Specifically, the participants of the social practice could be Americans, the British, the West Germans, the Europeans, the Chinese, the Japanese, or the international community at large. Here are two examples that illustrate the exclusion of the non-agency of Japanese actors:

<i>Awful truth about exchange rates</i>	B4J
<i>Dreaming of trade wars</i>	B10J

The following are some examples of the exclusion of the non-agency of the American actors:

<i>Japan's protected telecom</i>	B1J
<i>Tokyo stockmarket: Who's afraid of the big bad rabbit?</i>	B2J
<i>Tokyo learns to sprint</i>	B3J
<i>Is Japanese industry prepared to join the world?</i>	B6J
<i>A very Japanese affair</i>	B7J
<i>West Germany and Japan: strange bedfellows?</i>	B8J
<i>World business: Diminished giants</i>	B12J
<i>Germany's surpluses are not like Japan's</i>	B14J
<i>Japan über alles</i>	B15J
<i>Japan's bed of unsavoury rice</i>	B16J
<i>The new threat from Japan is patience</i>	B19J
<i>Japan and the Gulf: Timidly rising sun</i>	B20J

The exclusion of the non-agency of the British actors is shown in the following headlines:

<i>Japan's protected telecom</i>	B1J
<i>Tokyo stockmarket: Who's afraid of the big bad rabbit?</i>	B2J
<i>A very Japanese affair</i>	B7J
<i>World business: Diminished giants</i>	B12J

The following are some examples of the exclusion of the non-agency of German actors:

<i>Japan's protected telecom</i>	B1J
<i>Awful truth about exchange rates</i>	B4J
<i>Is Japanese industry prepared to join the world?</i>	B6J
<i>Japan über alles</i>	B15J

Finally, the following are some examples of the exclusion of the non-agency of French or European actors:

<i>Japan's protected telecom</i>	B1J
----------------------------------	-----

Awful truth about exchange rates

B4J

Is Japanese industry prepared to join the world?

B6J

Japan's bed of unsavoury rice

B16J

Table 10: Exclusion of non-agent social actors in *The Economist*

Representational categories: Exclusion	Agent social actors									
	Japanese Non-Japanese									
		Japan	US	UK	West Germany	France	Europe	Gulf	World	*FAT
1 Backgrounding	No.	2	12	4	4	1	1	0	0	2
	%	10%	60%	20%	20%	5%	5%	0%	0%	10%
2 Suppression	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 10 shows that *The Economist* predominantly relies on backgrounding to exclude the non-agency of the Japanese (10%), American (35%), British (10%), West German (20%), French (5%), European (5%) and FAT actors (10%). Only the non-agency of the American (25%) and British (10%) actors were suppressed; in other words, there are neither traces of their existence nor do they have any association with the social action mentioned in the headlines.

Headline B1J is an example of the backgrounding of American, British, French, and West German non-agency using passive agent deletion. This obfuscates the identity of the recipient(s) of the protectionist measures that were enacted by Japan on its telecom sector. Although there is no way for the reader to know the identity of the non-agents by reading the headline alone, the adjective 'protected', the past participle form of the verb 'to protect', conjures up an image of Japan's efforts to shield its domestic industry from foreign competition. When it comes to the question of whether Japan is ready to join the world, B6J backgrounds the non-agency of the American, British, European, and West German participants through generalization in the form of 'the world'. The focus thus shifts away from 'the world' to the question that the headline seeks to answer: Is Japan ready to play by the rules set by the four participants?

American and British non-agency is backgrounded through the use of the noun 'giants' (B12J), eliminating the need to explicitly mention their identity. If one only reads the headline, they will not know who the 'giants' are, whose importance and leadership in global business is being diminished, and by who. In contrast to other Western participants, such as France, West Germany, and Europe,

the non-agency of the American and British is suppressed. This is accomplished through the use of the (i) interrogative pronoun, and (ii) adjectives.

The interrogative pronoun 'who' (B2J) functions as a grammatical subject that bypasses the need for explicit references to the non-agents. Furthermore, the headline itself, 'Who's afraid of the big bad rabbit?' (B2J), is an allusion to the song 'Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?' featured in the 1933 Disney cartoon *Three Little Pigs*, suggesting that only the wisest among all could defeat the invader on the stock exchange. Furthermore, although rabbits are widely considered to be affectionate, sociable animals (Moore et al. 2012), which should endear Japan to the reader, the use of the adjectives 'big' and 'bad' to modify the noun 'rabbit' (B2J) conjures up an image of a Japan that is up to no good. Furthermore, in English, the noun 'rabbit' is also used in the animal simile 'as timid as a rabbit', to describe someone shy and easily frightened. In other words, the use of 'rabbit', in reference to the stock market, implies that the Tokyo stock market is not as strong as the West's.

In B7J, the use of the adjective 'Japanese' limits the subject matter to the Japanese, which is further emphasized by the adverb 'very'. This has the effect of suppressing the non-agency of the other participants from the headline since there is nothing to associate them with the subject of the clause.

West German actors are also backgrounded through the use of allusion, as shown in the headline of B15J. The choice of the German phrase 'über alles', which means 'above all else', is derived from the first stanza of Germany's historic national anthem, which has now come to be widely associated with the Nazi regime (Hanson 2013). By alluding to the national anthem of Nazi Germany, which glorified its racial and cultural superiority (Essif 2013, 4), Japan is depicted as a rogue regime that believes in its cultural superiority over others. The lexical choice is in line with Van Dijk's (2006, 737) assertion that lexicalization can be used in an overall ideological strategy that paints a negative representation of the Other.

The backgrounding/suppression of the non-agency of social actors separates non-Western countries into two groups in the context of Japan's trade practices in global business: a group comprised of the United States and the United Kingdom, and a second group comprised of France, West Germany and Europe in general.

3.3 Closing remarks

This section examined the representation of social actors in the headlines of *The Economist*. Unlike *Time*, more social actors were represented across the headlines of *The Economist*. Not only did the United Kingdom portray itself and its key neighbors—such as France and West Germany—in the sampled headlines, but the FAT economies, comprised of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and

Taiwan, the Gulf, Japan, and the United States were also mentioned in the British newsmagazine. In the following section, we shift our focus to *L'Express* magazine.

4. Analysis III: *L'Express* magazine

This section examines the headlines in *L'Express* magazine. It begins by identifying the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan's economic rise in 1987 through the application of Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules. This is followed by an analysis using Van Leeuwen's (2008) first category of social actor representation.

4.1 Prevailing topics

Table 11 presents the prevailing topics of 20 headlines about Japan in 1987, which were derived from Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules for determining the relevant super-concept. Table 11 shows that generalization (17 headlines; 85%) and deletion (3 headlines; 15%) were the primary macro rules used to derive the topics of the 20 headlines.

Table 11: Prevailing topics of the headlines in *L'Express*

No.	Headlines	Macro-rules	Prevailing topics	No. of words (EN)	No. of words (FR)
F1J	Analyse de l'accélération de la chute de la dollar Analysis on the acceleration of the fall of the dollar	Generalization	Volatile US dollar	10	9
F2J	Analyse de l'ampleur du déficit commercial U.S. Analysis on the extent of the US trade deficit	Generalization	International trade	9	7
F3J	Lancement de la privatisation de N.T.T. Launch of the privatisation of N.T.T.	Generalization	Growth model	6	6
F4J	Performance des japonais dans la miniaturisation des puces Japanese performance in chip miniaturisation	Generalization	Semiconductor industry	5	8
F5J	Progression du chômage au Japon The rise of unemployment in Japan	Deletion	unemployment	4	5
F6J	Nature de la coopération Austin Rover et Honda pour la conception de voitures Nature of the cooperation between Austin Rover and Honda in car design	Generalization	Automotive industry	12	11

F7J	Performance du Japon sur le marché des semi-conducteurs, aux dépens des USA Japan's performance in the semiconductor market, at the expense of the USA	Deletion	Semiconductor industry	12	12
F8J	Performance du train japonais à lévitation et entraînement magnétique (sans bruit ni pollution, ni rail, ni roues) Performance of Japanese trains using magnetic levitation technology (no noise and pollution, no rail, no wheels)	Generalization	Automotive industry	16	16
F9J	Excédent record de la balance commerciale japonaise, pour l'année fiscale se terminant en 87 Record trade surplus for the fiscal year ending March 1987	Generalization	International trade	10	14
F10J	Origines des déclarations de J. Baker et P. Volcker sur la nécessité de stabiliser le dollar Basis for J. Baker's and P. Volcker's declaration on the necessity to stabilize the dollar	Generalization	Volatile US dollar	15	16
F11J	Recours à une machine de marque japonaise pour la fabrication des passeports des citoyens américains The use of a Japanese brand machine for the manufacture of passports for American citizens	Generalization	International trade	15	15
F12J	Aveu d'infériorité? Admitting to inferiority?	Generalization	Japanese superiority	3	2
F13J	Le Japon est-il fautif? Is Japan at fault?	Generalization	Japanese superiority	4	5
F14J	Coût de la vie à Tokyo Cost of living in Tokyo	Deletion	Cost of living	5	6
F15J	Effets des variations du dollar sur les coûts de productions au Japon et aux USA Effects of the fluctuations of the dollar on the production costs in Japan and USA	Generalization	Volatile US dollar	15	15
F16J	Commerciale Japon: Émirats du Golfe et Arabie Saoudite Japan trade: Gulf Emirates and Saudi Arabia	Generalization	International trade	7	8
F17J	Succès au Japon des cartes alimentaires Success of food vouchers in Japan	Generalization	Japan's domestic industry	16	16

F18J	Réactions aux initiatives commerciales du Japon au Vietnam Reactions to Japan's trade initiatives in Vietnam	Generalization	International trade	7	8
F19J	Concessions du Japon à l'égard des occidentaux nouvelles mesures du plan de relance économique Japan's concessions with regard to the new economic stimulus measures enacted by the West	Generalization	International trade	14	14
F20J	Dents du géant, le Japon à la conquête du monde Teeth of the giant, Japan's conquest of the world	Generalization	Global expansion	9	10
Total no.				194	203
Average no. per headline				9,7	10,15

Source: Author

The top prevailing topics found in *L'Express* were issues related to *international trade* (four headlines: F5J, F9J, F10J, and F13J) and *currency* (four headlines: F1J, F6J, F12J, and F19J), which were each represented at a frequency of 20%. *Japanese superiority* (F7J and F8J) was represented at a frequency of 10% across the sampled headlines. For purposes of simplicity, *unemployment in Japan* (F3J) and *Japan's labor market* (F14J) were merged into a single overarching topic, *Japan's labor market* (two headlines); *America's political realism* (F2J) and *global dominance* (F18J) were similarly classified under *new world order* (two headlines); and *global stock markets* (F11J), the impending crash (F17J), and *global markets* (F20J) were categorized under *global markets* (three headlines). Other less prominent topics are *France's economic success* (F4J), *price of the miracle* (F16J) and *speak up* (F15J).

4.2 Inclusion and exclusion

This section applies Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic categories to the representation of the main social actors in the headlines of *L'Express*. The first category examines how the main social actors were included and/or excluded in the 20 headlines. Altogether, there were nine non-Japanese actors: the United States, France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Europe, the Soviet Union, China, South Africa, and the FAT countries. Table 12 shows the frequency distribution of the inclusion and exclusion of the Japanese and non-Japanese agent social actors across the 20 headlines.

Table 12: Inclusion/exclusion of agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *L'Express*

Agent social actors											
Representational categories	Japanese					Non-Japanese					
	Japan	US	France	West Germany	UK	Europe	USSR	China	*FAT	South Africa	
Inclusion	No.	9	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	%	45%	10%	5%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	9	10	2	8	0	4	0	0	5	0
	%	45%	50%	10%	40%	0%	20%	0%	0%	25%	0%
Total		90%	60%	15%	40%	0%	25%	0%	0%	25%	0%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 12 shows that Japanese social actors were included as an agent actor at a frequency of 45%, the highest amongst all the social actors. Other social actors that were included were the Americans (10%), the French (5%) and other Europeans (5%). In terms of the exclusion of social actors from headlines, the Japanese, American, French, West German, European, and the FAT agents were excluded at frequencies of 45%, 50%, 10%, 40%, 20%, and 25%, respectively. Here are some examples of how the agency of American and Japanese actors was excluded:

<i>Economy (parity) - Currency: the waltz with four beats</i>	F1J
<i>Economy (markets) - United States: Defending the empire</i>	F2J
<i>Economy (electronics) - War on the chip planet</i>	F5J
<i>Economy (currency) - Dollar: the reasons for an about-turn</i>	F6J
<i>Admitting to inferiority?</i>	F7J
<i>Economy (stock market) - can the 1929 crash happen again?</i>	F11J
<i>Economy (technology) - Audiovisual: Europe counterattacks</i>	F13J
<i>Economy (social) - Japan: forced vacation</i>	F14J
<i>World - the miracle on credit</i>	F16J
<i>Business - Crash: the hold-up of the century</i>	F17J

Table 13: Exclusion of agent social actors in *L'Express*

Representational categories: Exclusion	Agent social actors									
	Japanese Non-Japanese									
	Japan	US	France	West Germany	UK	Europe	USSR	China	*FAT	South Africa
1 Backgrounding	No. 9	10	2	8	0	4	0	0	5	0
	% 45%	50%	10%	40%	0%	20%	0%	0%	25%	0%
2 Suppression	No. 0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	% 0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 13 shows that *L'Express* relies on backgrounding to exclude social actors from its headlines. F1J, F5J, F6J, F11J, F16J, and F17J are examples of how the identity of the agency responsible for the action indicated in the headlines is backgrounded through nominalization. Actors are excluded from the headlines, for example, by using nouns, such as 'the waltz' (F1J), 'War' (F5J), 'reasons' (F6J), '1929 crash' (F11J), 'miracle' (F16J), and 'hold-up' (F17J), which omit the identity of the agents responsible for (i) causing the waltz to take on a four-beat rhythmic pattern instead of the usual three-beat pattern in relation to an issue relating to currency (F1J); (ii) causing conflict in the chip industry (F5J); (iii) causing an about-turn in policy with regard to the US dollar (F6J); (iv) increasing the likelihood that the stock market could crash like that of the 1929 crash (F11J); (v) enjoying a miracle that has to be compensated at a later date (F16J); and (vi) causing a delay in an imminent economic crash (F17J).

Actor agency is also backgrounded through the use of the gerund of the verb 'defend' and 'admit' at the beginning of the clauses (F2J and F7J), which eliminates the need to identify the agents responsible for the social action indicated in the headlines. In these representations, the identity of the agency is unclear with regards to who (i) caused the United States to react and (ii) caused the non-agent to have no other choice but to concede defeat due to the agent's superiority. F13J and F14J demonstrate that the backgrounding of agency can also be accomplished through the use of the intransitive verb 'counterattack' and the adjective 'forced'. Such semantic strategies render it more difficult for the reader to determine the identity of the agency, especially if they do not read beyond the headlines. Social actors could have been included to make it easier for the reader to understand the key stakeholders involved.

Table 14 shows the frequency distribution of the inclusion and/or exclusion of key non-agent social actors.

Table 14: Inclusion/exclusion of non-agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *L'Express*

Representational categories		Non-agent social actors									
		Japanese					Non-Japanese				
		Japan	US	France	West Germany	UK	Europe	USSR	China	*FAT	South Africa
Inclusion	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	2	4	5	1	2	4	1	1	1	1
	%	10%	20%	25%	5%	10%	20%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Total		10%	20%	25%	5%	10%	20%	5%	5%	5%	5%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 14 shows that none of the non-agent actors were included. In contrast, in terms of representational exclusion, the Japanese, American, French, West German, British, European, Soviet, Chinese, FAT, and South African actors were excluded at frequencies of 10%, 20%, 25%, 5%, 10%, 20%, 5%, 5%, 5%, and 5%, respectively.

Table 15: Exclusion of non-agent social actors in *L'Express*

Representational categories: Exclusion		Non-agent social actors									
		Japanese					Non-Japanese				
		Japan	US	France	West Germany	UK	Europe	USSR	China	*FAT	South Africa
1 Backgrounding	No.	2	4	5	1	2	4	1	1	1	1
	%	10%	20%	25%	5%	10%	20%	5%	5%	5%	5%
2 Suppression	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

*FAT: four Asian tigers, which comprise Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.

Source: Author

Table 15 shows that *L'Express* backgrounds the non-agency of the Japanese, American, French, West German, British, European, Soviet, Chinese, FAT, and South African at frequencies of 10%, 20%, 25%, 5%, 10%, 20%, 5%, 5%, 5%, and 5%, respectively. The five headlines that excluded the non-agency of French social actors—the category of actors that were excluded most frequently—are presented here:

Economy (stock market) – can the 1929 crash happen again?

F11J

World – the miracle on credit

F16J

<i>Business – Crash: the hold-up of the century</i>	F17J
<i>Special Japan: The yen's surge</i>	F19J
<i>Special Japan: The third shock</i>	F20J

The above headlines show that the identity of the non-agents affected by the associated social action was backgrounded through the use of nominalization, such as in the use of the terms '1929 crash' (F11J), 'miracle' (F16J), 'hold-up' (F17J), 'surge' (F19J), and 'shock' (F20J). Such representations conjure a gloomy image of a world that is not only embroiled in economic turmoil but may be forced to face adverse consequences that could affect the non-agents and the world at large. In particular, the headlines do not mention the identity of the participants that are subjected to the social action; it is unclear if the social action affects the major trading countries, the developed world only, or the world community at large.

4.3 Closing remarks

This section examined the portrayal of social actors in the headlines of *L'Express*. There were even more social actors represented across the headlines of the French newsmagazine compared to *Time* and *The Economist*; examples of social actors that were absent from the headlines of the two Anglo-American newsmagazines were China and South Africa. The difference could be explained by France's foreign policy vis-à-vis China and Africa. France was, for example, one of the first major Western nations to establish diplomatic bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China on 27 January 1964 (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs 2022, para. 1). In the following section, we shift our focus to *Der Spiegel* magazine.

5. Analysis IV: *Der Spiegel* magazine

This final section analyses the headlines in *Der Spiegel* magazine. Like the previous three sections, it begins by identifying the prevailing topics in the 20 headlines about Japan's economic rise in 1987 through an application of Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules. This is followed by the use of Van Leeuwen's (2008) first category of social actor representation.

5.1 Prevailing topics

Table 16 presents the prevailing topics of the 20 headlines about Japan in 1987, which were derived from Van Dijk's (1980) macro-rules for determining the relevant super-concept. The macro-rules used to derive the topics include generalization (15 headlines; 75%) and deletion (five headlines; 25%).

Table 16: Prevailing topics of the headlines in *Der Spiegel*

No.	Headlines	Macro-rules	Prevailing topics	No. of words (EN)	No. of words (GE)
G1J	Ihr werdet Japan doch niemals verstehen You will never ever understand Japan	Generalization	Japan's identity	6	6
G2J	Welthandel: Lebt auf Pump International trade: Living on tick	Deletion	International trade	5	4
G3J	Dollar auf der Achterbahn Dollar on the roller coaster	Generalization	Volatile US dollar	5	4
G4J	Japan: Historischer Wendepunkt Japan: Historical turning point	Deletion	Japan's turning point	4	3
G5J	Automobile: Heisse Quelle Automobile: Hot springs	Generalization	Automotive industry	3	3
G6J	Chip-Industrie: Gereizte Stimmung Chip industry: Irritation	Generalization	Semiconductor industry	3	3
G7J	Noch ein Kind Still a child	Zero rule	Still a child	9	3
G8J	Amerikanisch/japanischer Handelskrieg: Warnschuss vor den Bug der Japaner American/Japanese trade war: A warning shot across the bows of the Japanese	Generalization	Warning to Japan's trade practices	4	13
G9J	Automobile: Hoch das Bein Automobile: Lift up your leg	Generalization	Automotive industry	6	4
G10J	EG/Japan: Von der Tarantel gestochen EC/Japan: Stung by the tarantula	Generalization	EC-Japan trade relations	4	6
G11J	Japan: Kunst des Zaitech Japan: Art of Zaitech	Generalization	Growth model	4	4
G12J	Japan: Kunst des Zaitech Japan: Art of Zaitech	Deletion	International trade	4	3
G13J	Wirtschaft: Wandelt sich das Export-Monster? Economy: Is the export monster changing itself?	Generalization	International trade	7	5
G14J	Wirtschaft: Man hasst uns wie die Kakerlaken Economy: They hate us like cockroaches	Generalization	Unequal trade relations	6	7
G15J	Automobile: Tut weh Automobile: It hurts	Generalization	Automotive industry	3	3
G16J	Automobile: Langsam peinlich Automobile: Slowly embarrassing	Generalization	Automotive industry	3	3
G17J	Automobile: Zukunft im Sack Automobile: Damaged future	Generalization	Automotive industry	3	4

G18J	Automobile: Steil bergab Automobile: Steep downhill	Generalization	Automotive industry	3	3
G19J	Welthandel: Japaner wollen Handel- spartnern entgegenkommen - Kyocho statt kyoso International trade: Japanese want to accommodate the demands of their trade partners - cooperation instead of competition	Generalization	Japan's trade practices	3	3
G20J	Über japanische Handelspraktiken: Freu- ndschaft allein reicht nicht About Japanese trade practices: Fri- endship alone is not enough	Deletion	Japan's trade practices	6	4
Total no.				90	88
Average no. per headline				4,5	4,4

Source: Author

Table 16 shows that the following topics appear more than once: *automotive industry* (six headlines: G5J, G9J, G15J, G16J, G17J, and G18J), *international trade* (three headlines: G2J, G12J, and G13J) and *Japan's trade practices* (two headlines: G19J and G20J). For purposes of simplicity, *automotive industry* and *semiconductor industry* (G6J) were merged into a single overarching topic: *industry*; in doing so, it becomes the most frequent topic (seven headlines; 35%) across the 20 sampled articles. Similarly, *warning about Japan's trade practices* (G8J) was incorporated into *Japan's trade practices*, resulting in a total of three headlines (15%); *EC-Japan trade relations* (G10J) and *unequal trade relations* (G14J) were classified under the topic *trade relations* (10%).

Other less prominent topics included: *growth model* (G11J), *Japan's identity* (G1J), *Japan's turning point* (G4J), *still inexperienced* (G7J), and *volatile US dollar* (G3J) at a frequency of 5% each.

5.2 Inclusion and exclusion

Tables 17 and Table 18 show the frequency distribution of the inclusion and exclusion of Japanese and non-Japanese social actors across the 20 headlines while also distinguishing between agent and non-agent social actors. There are six primary non-Japanese actors: the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany, Europe, the Third World and the Far East.

Table 17: Inclusion/exclusion of agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *Der Spiegel*

Representational categories	Agent social actors							
	Japanese				Non-Japanese			
		Japan	US	West Germany	Europe	Third World	Far East	UK
Inclusion	No.	6	2	0	0	0	0	0
	%	30%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	7	2	2	2	0	2	0
	%	35%	10%	10%	10%	0%	10%	0%
	Total	65%	20%	10%	10%	0%	10%	0%

Source: Author

Table 17 shows that the Japanese social actor was included as an agent actor at a frequency of 30%, the highest amongst all social actors, while the Americans dominated the representation of the non-Japanese agent actors at 10%. The agency of the other non-Japanese social actors had a representation of 0%. In terms of the exclusion of social actors, Japanese agents were excluded at a rate of 35%, more frequently than the United States (10%), Europe (10%), the Far East (10%) and West Germany (10%). The following are some examples of the exclusion of the agency of Japanese actors:

<i>Automobile: Hot springs</i>	G5J
<i>Chip industry: Irritation</i>	G6J
<i>International trade: New market</i>	G12J
<i>Economy: Is the export monster changing itself?</i>	G13J
<i>Automobile: It hurts</i>	G15J
<i>Automobile: Slowly embarrassing</i>	G16J
<i>Automobile: Steep downhill</i>	G18J

The following are some examples of the exclusion of the agency of non-Japanese actors:

American and European agency

<i>International trade: Living on tick</i>	G2J
<i>Economy: They hate us like cockroaches</i>	G14J

West German agency

<i>Automobile: Lift up your leg</i>	G9J
<i>Automobile: Damaged future</i>	G17J

Table 18: Exclusion of agent social actors in *Der Spiegel*

Representational categories: Exclusion	Agent social actors							
	Japanese Non-Japanese							
	Japan	US	West Germany	Europe	Third World	Far East	UK	
1 Backgrounding	No.	7	2	2	2	0	2	0
	%	35%	10%	10%	10%	0%	10%	0%
2 Suppression	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Author

Table 18 shows that *Der Spiegel* relied on backgrounding to exclude the aforementioned social actors. While the Japanese were backgrounded at a frequency of 35%, the American, West German, European, and Far East actors were each backgrounded at a rate of 10%.

Der Spiegel uses (i) modified nouns and (ii) nominalization to background the Japanese actors. The use of modified nouns such as ‘hot springs’ (G5J) and ‘export monster’ (G13J) to metonymically refer to Japan bypasses, for example, the need for explicit references to Japanese agency in issues relating to cars and international trade, respectively. From the perspective of the reader, however, it would be difficult to identify the agent(s) concerned by just reading the headlines, since ‘hot springs’ can be found in many countries other than Japan, and ‘export monster’ could refer to any of the major export nations in 1987, including West Germany, the United States or France (see Table 1). Nominalization using the terms ‘irritation’ (G6J) and ‘new market’ (G12J) also makes it difficult for readers to determine the identity of the actor(s) responsible for the annoyance (G6J) and the rising opportunity to sell goods and services to new customers (G12J).

The backgrounding of Japanese agency is also accomplished through the use of passive agent deletion which leaves no trace of their representation in the headline or the lead text. This strategy eliminates the need to explicitly mention the agent; for example, in G15J, G16, and G18J, the agent responsible for the ‘hurt’ (G15J), ‘embarrassment’ (G16J) and ‘worsening situation’ (G18J) associated with the car industry cannot be identified from the headline alone. In other words, the identity of the actors was intentionally obfuscated—the agency of the actors could have been identified and made obvious to the reader in G15J, G16, and G18J by using post-modifiers such as ‘by’, ‘of’ or ‘from’.

Table 19 shows the frequency distribution of the inclusion and/or exclusion of key non-agent social actors.

Table 19: Inclusion/exclusion of non-agent actors in terms of frequency and percentage in *Der Spiegel*

Representational categories		Non-agent social actors						
		Japanese		Non-Japanese				
		Japan	US	West Germany	Europe	Third World	Far East	UK
Inclusion	No.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exclusion	No.	5	4	4	3	1	0	1
	%	25%	20%	20%	15%	5%	0%	5%
Total		35%	20%	20%	15%	5%	0%	5%

Source: Author

Table 19 shows that the Japanese social actor was included as a non-agent actor at a frequency of 10%, while none of the non-agent non-Japanese actors were included. In terms of the exclusion of non-agency in headlines, the non-agency of Japanese, American, West German, European, British, and Third World actors were excluded at rates of 25%, 20%, 20%, 15%, 5%, and 5%, respectively. Some examples of the exclusion of the non-agency of Japanese actors are as follows:

<i>International trade: Living on tick</i>	G2J
<i>Dollar on the roller coaster</i>	G3J
<i>Automobile: Lift up your leg</i>	G9J
<i>Economy: They hate us like cockroaches</i>	G14J
<i>Automobile: Damaged future</i>	G17J

Some examples of the exclusion of American non-agency are as follows. It should be highlighted that the non-agency of the Third World and the United Kingdom was also excluded in headlines G12J and G13J, respectively.

American agency:

<i>Chip industry: Irritation</i>	G6J
<i>International trade: New market</i>	G12J
<i>Economy: Is the export monster changing itself?</i>	G13J
<i>International trade: Japanese want to accommodate the demands of their trade partners – cooperation instead of competition</i>	G19J

Table 20: Exclusion of non-agent social actors in *Der Spiegel*

Representational categories: Exclusion	Non-agent social actors						
	Japanese		Non-Japanese				
	Japan	US	West Germany	Europe	Third World	Far East	UK
1 Backgrounding	No. 5	4	4	3	1	0	1
	% 25%	20%	20%	15%	5%	0%	5%
2 Suppression	No. 0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	% 0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Author

Table 20 shows that *Der Spiegel* backgrounds the non-agent Japanese actors at a frequency of 25%, compared to American, West German, European, Third World, and British non-agents, which are backgrounded at a frequency of 20%, 20%, 15%, 5%, and 5% respectively. None of the non-agents are suppressed.

<i>International trade: Living on tick</i>	G2J
<i>Dollar on the roller coaster</i>	G3J
<i>Automobile: Lift up your leg</i>	G9J
<i>Economy: They hate us like cockroaches</i>	G14J
<i>Automobile: Damaged future</i>	G17J

The Japanese non-agents are backgrounded when the social actions described in the headlines, e.g., ‘living on tick’, ‘dollar on the roller coaster’, ‘lift up your leg’, and ‘damaged future’, do not directly concern them. In other words, there are no traces of Japanese non-agency in the headlines. They are occasionally mentioned, however, in the main text of the articles. In G14J, Japanese non-agents are backgrounded through the use of the noun ‘cockroaches’, which explicitly conceals the identity of the non-agent/recipient(s) that are being ‘hated’ by the agents. In addition, the use of polarizing pronouns such as ‘they’ and ‘us’ lead to the creation of an ‘us-versus-them’ narrative. As Van Dijk (2006, 738) explains, the us-them categorization is one of several semantic strategies employed to express polarized cognitions and categorically divide social actors into an in-group (us) and an out-group (them).

The backgrounding of the American non-agents is accomplished through nominalization using the terms ‘irritation’ (G6J), ‘export monster’ (G13J), and ‘trade partners’ (G19J) to circumvent the need to identify the non-agent(s) involved in the headlines. In other words, the reader is unsure who (the agent) is responsible for causing the ‘irritation’ to whom (the non-agent or patient) in the semiconductor industry (G6J); who’s (the agent) very large volume of exports is implicitly

depicted to be affecting the non-agents (G13J); and who demands that the Japanese (agents) should cooperate with them in international trade (G19J).

When it comes to issues related to the automobile industry, the inclusion/exclusion of the social actor agency/non-agency highlights the fact that the automobile industry is an issue that is exclusive to the relationship between Japan and West Germany. The exclusion of the non-agency of West Germany is accomplished through backgrounding, such as in the following examples:

<i>Automobile: Hot springs</i>	G5J
<i>Automobile: It hurts</i>	G15J
<i>Automobile: Slowly embarrassing</i>	G16J
<i>Automobile: Steep downhill</i>	G18J

Through the use of the intransitive verb 'it hurts' (G15J), as well as the adjectives 'embarrassing' (G16J) and 'steep downhill' (G18J), *Der Spiegel* leaves out the recipient(s) of the social action from the three headlines. The focus thus shifts to the intransitive verb and the adjectives, which serve to describe the unpleasant situation facing the unidentified non-agents in the automobile industry.

5.3 Closing remarks

This section examined the representation of social actors in the headlines of *Der Spiegel*, which also portrayed social actors other than the Americans and the Japanese. For instance, the social actors of the Third World, which refers to the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Jischa 2005, 126–131) were represented in the headlines of the German newsmagazine. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that the automobile industry was an issue that exclusively concerned Japan and West Germany. Johnson and Barbe (2022, 99) explain that the automobile manufacturing industry plays an important role in Germany's economy and history. For this reason, pressures were building regarding the restriction of imports, as Japanese cars were perceived as a threat to Germany's domestic industrial base (Riegle 1981, 73). The following section provides some discussion of the findings and concludes the chapter.

6. Answering the research questions

This study aimed to analyze the dominant media representation of Japan's economic rise as well as the US–Japan trade war in 1987 by answering the three research questions highlighted in the introductory section. This section attempts to answer these questions based on the findings and observations made in Analyses I, II, III, and IV.

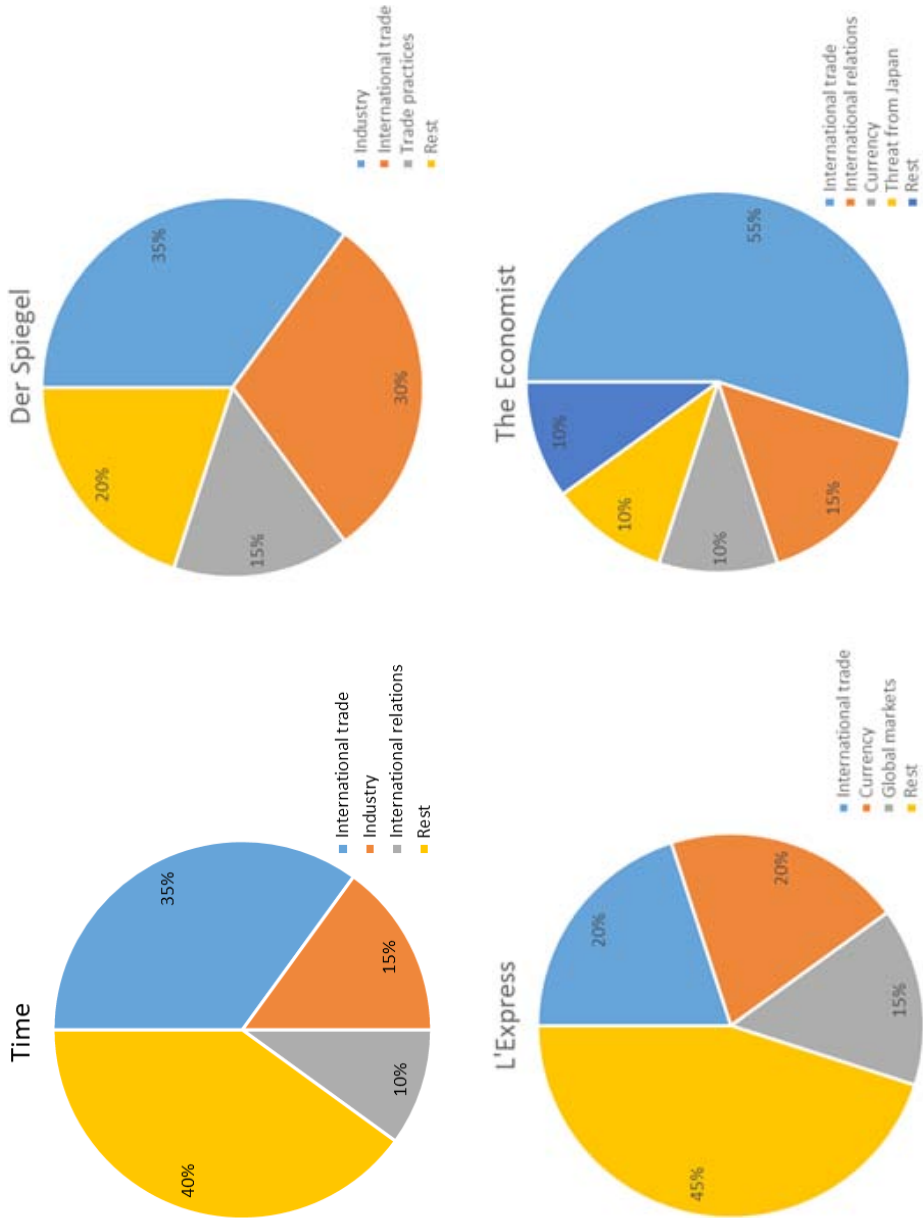


Figure 2: Overview of the top three key topics present in each Western newsmagazines
(Source: Author)

6.1 Answering the questions

Question 1: What were the prevailing topics in 1987?

The analysis of the key topics present in the headlines of each of the four Western newsmagazines, based on Van Dijk's macro-rules in Analyses I, II, III, and IV, showed that Japan was primarily depicted through the perspective of international trade. For instance, headlines from *Time* focused on Japan's international trade, industry, and international relations, while headlines from *The Economist* concentrated primarily on Japan's international trade, international relations, currency and the threat of Japan. In continental Europe, headlines printed by *L'Express* were more highly likely to be concerned about Japan's international trade, currency, and global markets, while *Der Spiegel* was more interested in Japan's industry, international trade and trade practices.

Question 2: Who were the key social actors?

Based on the 20 headlines sampled from *Time* in 1987, Japanese and American social actors were found to be the two most frequently included/excluded agents. This is in contrast to the other three newsmagazines, in which West Germany was the third most frequently represented social actor. Despite this disparity, Japan was overwhelmingly depicted as the dominant initiator—or the causal agent—of the social practice described in the headlines (Figure 3). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that different social actors were represented across the headlines of *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express*, and *Der Spiegel*, reflecting the national interests and foreign policy of the newspaper's respective host countries vis-à-vis the social actors associated with other countries.

To understand the possible reasons for the particular focus placed on Japan and the United States in *Time*, as well as the inclusion of West Germany in the rest of the other three newsmagazines (Figure 3), it is important to examine the political and economic context of 1987. First, West Germany, along with the United States and Japan, was one of the key players in the global economy in 1987. Data from the World Bank (1987) showed that, in 1987, West Germany was the wealthiest country in terms of GDP per capita, and the third largest economy in terms of nominal GDP after the United States and Japan. Second, given that it was the world's second-largest economy at the time, Japan was widely expected to challenge and overtake the United States' economic supremacy (Vogel 1979; Fingleton 1995), similar to how China's burgeoning economy is also broadly forecast to surpass that of the United States in the present day (see introductory section). This could potentially explain why American perspectives were more focused on its immediate competitor, Japan, rather than West Germany.

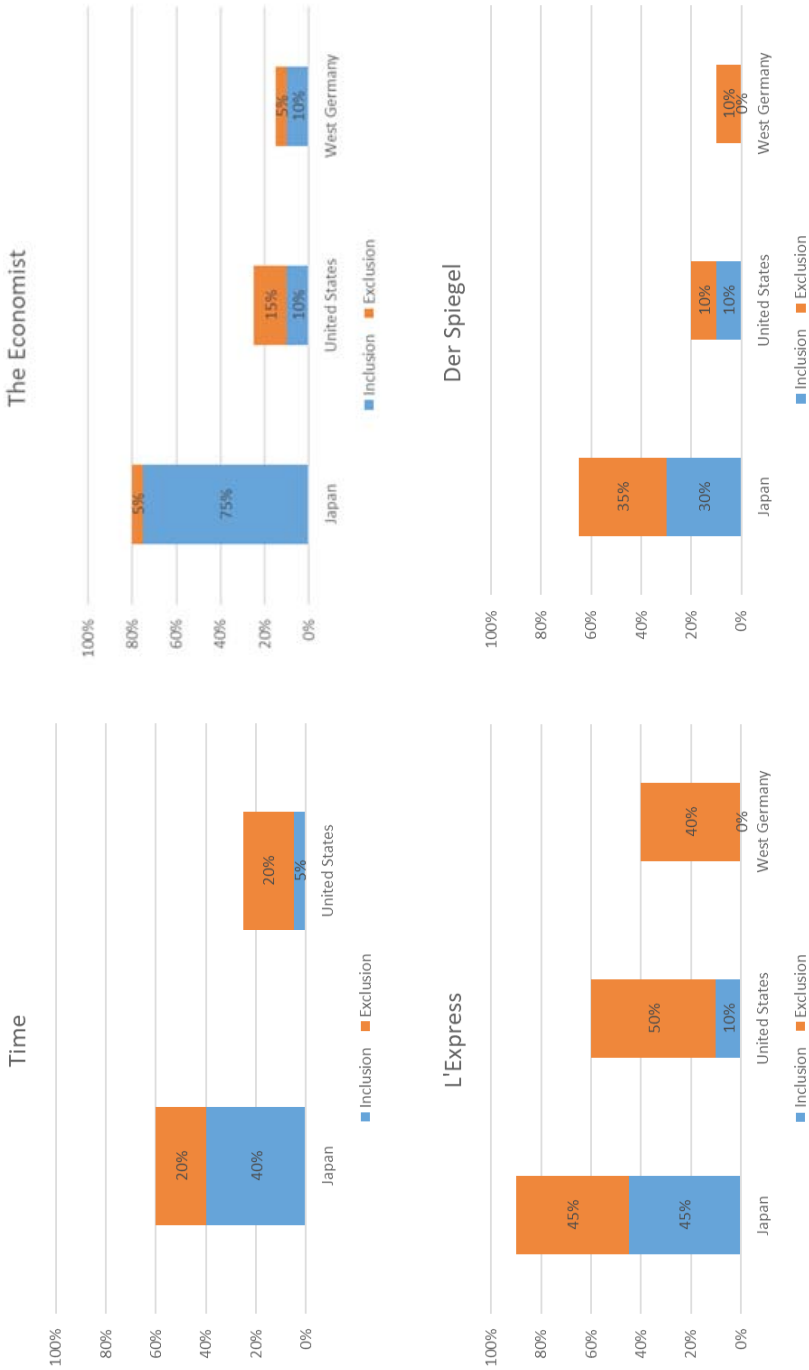


Figure 3: Overview of the inclusion/exclusion of the agency of social actors across all headlines
(Source: Author)



Figure 4: Overview of the inclusion/exclusion of the non-agent social actors across all headlines
(Source: Author)

6.2 Other key observations that arose from empirical research

Based on the analysis conducted in Analyses I, II, III, and IV, there is no evidence to suggest that *L'Express* put France in the discursive in-group. In addition, in terms of the inclusion/exclusion of non-agents, an interesting pattern began to emerge: in *Time*, *The Economist*, and *Der Spiegel*, Japanese non-agents were both included and excluded while all the other social actors (the United States and Western Europe for *Time*; the United States, West Germany, and the United Kingdom for *The Economist*; and the United States and West Germany for *Der Spiegel*) were excluded. This is in contrast to *L'Express*, which excluded Japan, the United States and France from its headlines. In addition, France was the second-most excluded non-agent in the French newsmagazine. This suggests that *Time*, *The Economist*, and *Der Spiegel* discursively created an 'us-versus-them' dichotomy that pits Japan (the out-group) against the rest (the in-group). Incidentally, there was no significant evidence that supported the observation that France was a part of the in-group in the three aforementioned newsmagazines (Figure 4).

Figure 4 also shows that the non-agency of the Japanese social actors was represented most frequently in the headlines of *Der Spiegel* compared to the United States and West Germany. As the analysis shows, *Der Spiegel* highlighted the automobile industry as an issue that exclusively concerned Japan and West Germany as, at the time, Japanese cars were perceived as a threat to Germany's domestic industrial base.

7. Discussions and Conclusions

This section summarizes the key findings of the research, the implications of these findings for the US–China trade war and presents the limitations of the research. Lastly, it concludes the chapter with some suggestions for future research.

7.1 Summary of the key findings

The macro-rules proposed by Van Dijk (1980) — 'construction', 'deletion', 'generalization', and 'zero rule' (see introductory section) — for deriving the topic of a particular headline were used to answer the first research question. It was revealed that, in 1987, the most frequently represented topics in the headlines of *Time*, *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Der Spiegel* were associated with economic affairs such as international trade (see Figure 2). Other than this, each of the four newsmagazines prioritized different topics, such as international relations, the threat of Japan and trade practices. While *Der Spiegel* tended to emphasize the questionable trade practices of the Japanese automobile industry, which reportedly had a competitive advantage against one of West Germany's most important export-oriented industries, *L'Express* was more likely to report about the volatile US

dollar and its impact on the global economy. In contrast, *The Economist* tended to associate Japan with West Germany due to both countries' over-reliance on their automobile manufacturing industry, which bolstered their export-driven economies at the expense of the others.

The overwhelming focus on economic affairs during the 1980s trade war between the United States and Japan—an ally of the West—across the headlines of the four Western newsmagazines is markedly different from the findings of other empirical research on the media representation in the contemporary US–China trade war. As a *Political Other* that does not have the same democratic political system as the West, China is generally unfavorably depicted across a broader range of areas spanning economics, politics and military affairs (Matanji 2022; Ng 2022).

The second part of the analysis focused on the application of the first representational category in Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory: 'inclusion', where social actors are clearly mentioned in the headlines, and 'exclusion', where any indication of the relevant social actors are either suppressed or backgrounded. This was accomplished by four linguistic methods: (i) passive agent deletion, (ii) non-finite clauses, (iii) nominalization and process nouns and (iv) adjectives (see introductory section).

It was found that the United States and Japan were the social actors that were most frequently represented across the headlines of the four weekly news publications. *Time* put the focus squarely on the United States and Japan, the most immediate economic competitor of its host nation (as Figure 1 shows, the gap between Japan and the United States in terms of nominal GDP was rapidly closing in the 1980s and early 1990s), while the European newsmagazines frequently represented West Germany along with Japan and the United States in their headlines. The discrepancy between the American newsmagazine and its European counterparts can be partially explained by the relevance of the sizeable economic weight of West Germany in Europe. It can thus be argued that newsmagazines reflect and are rooted in their respective countries' contemporary commercial and geopolitical realities.

7.2 Implications for the present-day US–China trade war

Although the trade war between the United States and Japan was a historical event, some lessons can still be learned from this earlier power struggle that can be used to understand the present-day trade war involving the incumbent superpower, the United States, and another rising contender hailing from East Asia, China. In 1987, the United States' trade deficit with Japan was approximately US\$56 billion, nearly 3.7 times greater than that of West Germany. Japan's comparatively large trade surplus may have been the reason why the American perspective was much more focused on its immediate competitor rather than West Germany.

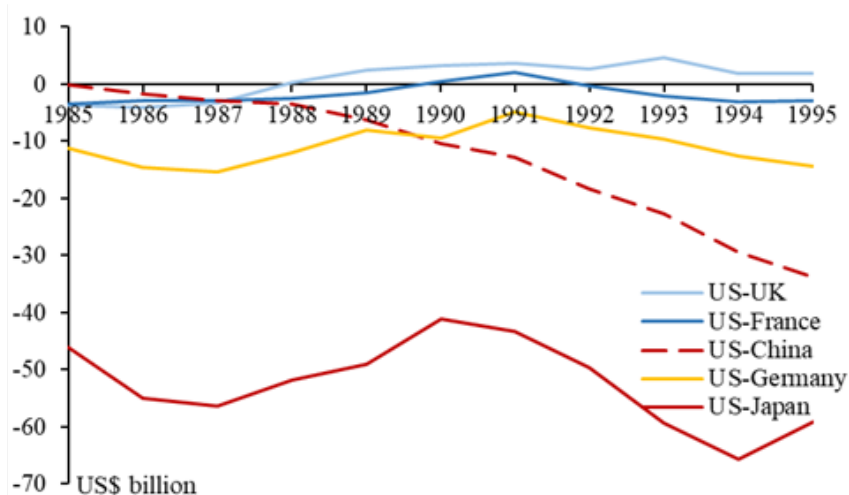


Figure 5: Balance of trade between the US and select trading partners (1985–1995)
(Source: Author)

Like Japan's superior export market with respect to the United States in the 1980s, the trade deficit between the United States and China has widened even further, exceeding US\$338 billion in 2022, a value that is nearly 5.8 times larger than that of the US trade deficit with Germany (see Figure 6). Like Japan, whose automobile, semiconductor and steel companies were reportedly involved in unfair trade practices (as *Der Spiegel* claimed in F19J and F20J), Chinese companies have also come under scrutiny for engaging in unfair trade practices (Urata 2019; Govella 2022). Given that nations that engage in close trade with China and the United States are more likely to outperform those with less integrated commercial ties (Frisbie 2017, 9), a greater degree of trade diplomacy between both economic superpowers is required to assuage the concerns of either party, especially in terms of addressing their persistent trade imbalance for the sake of global stability.

Nevertheless, the representation of Japan in 1987 was restricted to the realm of international trade and economic affairs. This stands in stark contrast to the present-day coverage of China, which is not only depicted unfavorably in the context of international trade but is similarly unfavorably covered in a broader range of areas ranging from politics to military affairs (Matanji 2022; Ng 2022).

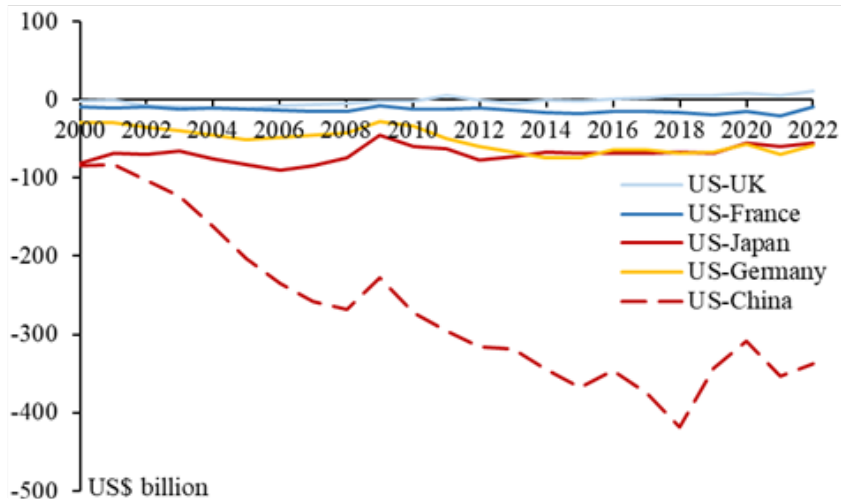


Figure 6: The balance of trade between the United States and selected trading partners (2000–2022)

(Source: Author)

Given that a state's political and military power tends to increase in tandem with its economic strength, concerns have arisen regarding the growing risk of an armed conflict between the established superpower, the United States, and the rising contender, China. Allison (2017) termed the structural stress caused by a rapid shift in the balance of power as the Thucydides' Trap. According to long-term economic projections, China's GDP is expected to overtake that of the United States by 2035 (Goldman Sachs 2022). Therefore, the potential erosion of bilateral US–China relations, or worse, the materialization of the Thucydides' Trap as a result of the escalating great-power rivalry, will not only have implications for the global economy and societies around the world but also for media discourse and public opinion (Ha et al. 2021; Lo et al. 2022). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that some observers have adopted a more pessimistic view of the potential of China's economic growth due to the country's rapidly aging population (Cox 2022; Sharma 2022), the US crackdown on Chinese technology and artificial intelligence companies (Marlow and Birnbaum 2022), and the expansion of security alliances like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which can curb China's rise (Ajami and Karimi 2021).

While the historical trade dispute between the United States and Japan can help gain an understanding of the contemporary US–China rivalry, the latter duo's divergent political systems and China's growing global ambitions may present a greater challenge for the incumbent power for years to come. A comparison

between the rise of a burgeoning contender in the East Asian region—such as Japan in the 1980s or China in the 2020s—to challenge the hegemony of the United States as the world’s pre-eminent superpower can provide insights into the continuity and change in tensions between the US and Asia.

7.3 Limitations of the research

Despite this study’s contribution to the discussion about the media representation of trade disputes and the continuity and change of US–Asia trade wars, there are still some limitations that must be considered. The conclusions reached by this study were based on the findings derived from the 80 articles collected from *Time*, *the Economist*, *L’Express* and *Der Spiegel*, with 20 articles sampled from each newsmagazine. Hence, the number of articles examined is relatively low. Nevertheless, this was deemed to be acceptable considering that the four news-magazines only have 52 weekly issues per year. Furthermore, news relating to Japan and the US–Japan trade war was not reported every week, and in particular, only 20 articles in *L’Express* were related to Japan in 1987. Thus, to make sure that the examination of the headlines from each newsmagazine was comparable, only 20 articles from each magazine were chosen for analysis.

The focus of the study was restricted to the coverage of Japan’s rise and the US–Japan trade conflict in 1987. Specifically, it uses critical discourse analysis, a language-based approach, to explore how meanings are reproduced and how social actors are represented and recontextualized throughout the year. It is important to note that this chapter did not apply these methods to identify the prevalent themes and discursively examine the headlines in media coverage of China’s rise and contemporary US–China relations since the launch of a tit-for-tat tariff war by the Trump administration in 2018. Nevertheless, the focus on an earlier power struggle between the US and Japan in 1987 further supports and complements the wealth of literature about the escalating rivalry between the US and China and the representation of their growing antagonism in the media.

Finally, although Urata (2019, 4) stated that we can use lessons from the US–Japan trade war in the 1980s to understand contemporary economic and political realities involving the US and China, it may be difficult to directly compare Japan and China since both countries are fundamentally distinct with respect to their potential threat to US hegemony. For instance, Japan was and remains a close strategic ally of the US, as evidenced by the strategic alliance between the United States and Japan over the last six decades (U.S. Department of State 2021, para. 4). In contrast, China is a strategic rival of the United States in areas such as military, economy and technology (Allison 2017; Mahbubani, 2021; Gomart 2022). The rise of a burgeoning contender in the East Asian region—be it China in the 2020s or Japan in the 1980s—to challenge the US hegemony as the world’s pre-eminent

superpower can, however, provide insights into continuity and change in contemporary tensions between the US and Asia.

7.4 The Road Ahead

Future research could focus on addressing the limitations of this study. First, it would be useful to explore the representation of Japan's rise and the US–Japan trade war in 1980s newspapers from the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. It would also be interesting for future research to include newspapers and newsmagazines from other countries, such as non-Western states in Africa and Asia, to analyze their representation of and perspectives on trade wars.

A second recommendation for future research would be to use the methods presented in this chapter to determine the prevailing themes and discursively examine the headlines in the media coverage of China's rise and the ongoing US–China trade war. In particular, critical discourse analysis could be effectively employed to help deepen our understanding of the ever-evolving dynamics of international relations, as well as the continuity and change in contemporary US–Asia tensions.

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