From Ceremony to Social Media:
Indonesia's Diplomatic Image in Virtual Linguistic Landscape of Beijing's 2025 Victory Day

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Abstract

The transition toward a multipolar world compels middle powers like Indonesia to renegotiate and visually project sovereign non-alignment. This study examines Indonesia's geopolitical representation during President Prabowo Subianto's attendance at Beijing's September 2025 Victory Day commemorations. Integrating Bahasa Rupa, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, and Stuart Hall's Circuit of Culture, this qualitative research analyzes photographic framing, media coverage, and public responses. Findings reveal tensions between diplomatic protocol and commercial news framing. Cropped international media images excluded Indonesia, triggering domestic misinterpretations of geopolitical marginalization. The study highlights virtual representation as an unstable ideological arena where national identity and geopolitical positioning are continually negotiated.

Keyword: Virtual Linguistic Landscape; Bahasa Rupa, Wimba; Circuit of Culture.

Introduction

Indonesia's bebas aktif foreign policy faces growing challenges amid multipolarity and US–China competition. In summit diplomacy, national identity is projected through visual signs, including leaders' attire and spatial positioning, which are reshaped through media circulation. This study examines President Prabowo Subianto's participation in Beijing's September 2025 Victory Day commemorations. While Reuters' photograph included Prabowo among world leaders, an image attributed to Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun cropped him out, foregrounding Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un.

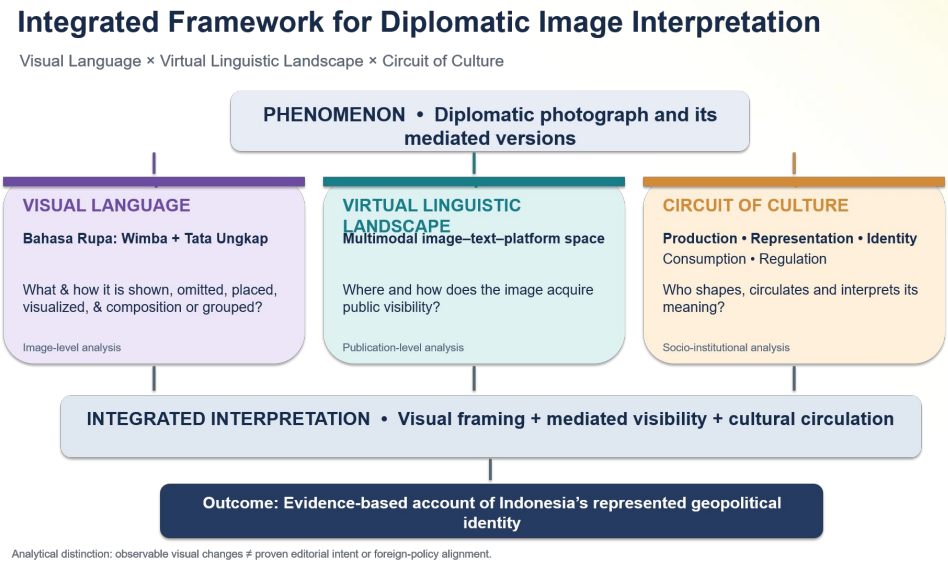
This visual difference sparked domestic debate over Indonesia's diplomatic position. Extending Linguistic Landscape studies into the Virtual Linguistic Landscape, this research integrates Bahasa Rupa, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, and Stuart Hall's Circuit of Culture to investigate how Indonesia's geopolitical image is constructed, mediated, and contested.

Theoretical Study

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives: Bahasa Rupa (Tabrani), focusing on wimba and tata ungkap; Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar for analyzing visual composition and framing; and the Virtual Linguistic Landscape (VLL) to examine digital media representations. Stuart Hall's Circuit of Culture and the Four Layers of Regulation explain how diplomatic meanings are produced, circulated, interpreted, and contested.

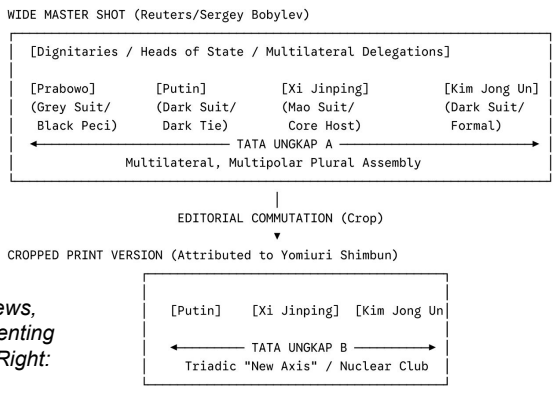
Research Methodology

This qualitative case study employs Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA) to examine Indonesia's diplomatic representation during Beijing's 2025 Victory Day commemorations. Data comprise Reuters photographs, Yomiuri Shimbun publications, Indonesian state media (BPMI), digital news and social media, protocol documents, and expert interviews. Analysis involves visual identification (wimba), spatial composition (tata ungkap), comparative image cropping, textual framing, and audience reception, supported by multi-source triangulation.



Picture 1. Integrated Framework of Visual-Language Analysis, Virtual Linguistic Landscapes, and The Circuit of Culture.





Picture 2. Group photograph used by detikNews, credited to REUTERS/Sergey Bobylev, documenting the broad multilateral presence of dignitaries. Right: Photo Framing Scheme.

Result and Discussion

The findings reveal tensions between diplomatic protocol and media representation. Reuters' master photograph showed President Prabowo among world leaders, wearing a black peci and grey suit that visually distinguished Indonesia's national identity. In contrast, an image attributed to Yomiuri Shimbun cropped him out, foregrounding Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Kim Jong Un. Through Bahasa Rupa, this cropping transforms tata ungkap, shifting the image from multilateral participation to a concentrated geopolitical triad.

The Circuit of Culture highlights four regulatory forces: diplomatic protocol, Indonesian state media (BPMI), foreign newsroom practices, and online community norms. While protocol established ceremonial equality and BPMI circulated wide-angle images, foreign editorial framing emphasized regional security narratives. On social media, audiences interpreted Prabowo's omission as diplomatic marginalization, reflecting limited protocol literacy. These findings show how editorial framing reshapes geopolitical perceptions, although cropping alone cannot establish deliberate political exclusion.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how diplomatic imagery shapes Indonesia's geopolitical identity within the Virtual Linguistic Landscape. Integrating Bahasa Rupa and the Circuit of Culture reveals the tensions between diplomatic protocol, media framing, and public interpretation. Visual representation thus becomes a contested space for negotiating national identity and sovereign non-alignment.