



Framing China's Protests in Western International News: An Analysis of the Coverage of the Wukan Protests by CNN and the BBC

Ruiyue Zhang

Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster, London, UK
Email: ruiyue1995@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Zhang, R.Y. (2025) Framing China's Protests in Western International News: An Analysis of the Coverage of the Wukan Protests by CNN and the BBC. *Open Access Library Journal*, 12: e14276.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1114276>

Received: September 12, 2025
Accepted: November 2, 2025
Published: November 5, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This study focuses on how the global news media report on protests in China. It contributes an original analysis of the global news media coverage of protests in China from both the theoretical and empirical perspectives. The research is based on the purposive sampling of the BBC and CNN, in order to discuss how international news media outlets report on protests in mainland China, 2011-2016, especially given that they are non-Western contexts. Samples from Wukan are evaluated by using both quantitative and qualitative methods, including framing analysis and critical discourse analysis to determine the ways in which they are represented by the selected news outlets. The main findings have revealed hegemony in the news representations of protests in China, which includes biases, domestication, and geopolitical news angles. The analysis in the Wukan case showed that the reports offered a limited voice to the Chinese side, while carrying frames of bias from Western journalists. The analysis of the selected global news reports unmasked ideological presuppositions about Chinese political reform, including the perception that the Chinese regime was monolithic, and that most Chinese protesters craved Western democracy. The research has found that the predominance of one voice and absence of another has produced hegemony in the reports, which could be analysed as techniques of reporting, including vocabulary choices, rhetorical devices, and moral and emotional basis. To give an example, the slogan in the article saying "Long live the Communist Party", whereas there were completely opposite messages from the protesters in CNN's article. The research findings add to work by other scholars in media and journalism that has questioned the partiality of leading international or global (Western) media, particularly when it comes to reporting on non-Western and less developed countries. The research adds original evidence and insights to debates on the hegemony of international news coverage of protests, in the context of the Global South. It

should be noted that leading media from the dominant Global North, in this case, excluding Al Jazeera, project the interests of the developed countries while voices from the Global South are less heard.

Subject Areas

Journalism and Communication, Politics

Keywords

Framing Analysis, CNN, The BBC, Chinese Protests, Global Media

1. Introduction

The research analyses the coverage of the Wukan protests, 2011-2016, in China by CNN and the BBC. It is situated in a number of theoretical perspectives which are linked and relevant to discuss the framing of protests in Wukan in Western international news.

Despite those huge and increasing amounts of protests, sociological methodologies and theories applied to the study of Chinese societies and social phenomena are predominantly produced in the USA and Western Europe, from where they are disseminated to the rest of the world [1] [2], and the main reason is probably because the theories and methodologies which underwrite research on social movements in China are mostly adopted from studies of the US and European cases, experiences and theorisation [3] [4], therefore the Western social movements theories might not be applied to China's case.

Speaking of incompatibility of Western theories of social movements/protests with Chinese protests, one very distinctive character in Chinese protests is that unlike the mainstream Western protests which typically target the state [5], no collective action with similar expectations could operate by directly targeting the state in mainland China [6]-[8]. A common pattern in China is for mobilised workers or peasants to charge that local officials fail to carry out the central policy, and to hold that local officials are corrupt and despotic, and to suppose that if informed of local injustices the central state authorities will respond with sympathy and upright morality ([9]: p. 117). Aggrieved villagers, reported in some studies [8], believed that their chances of getting justice are higher the further from local leaders and the closer to central leaders they pitched their appeals ([9]: p. 118).

The reasons could be political—collective actions are deemed as threats to the Chinese government, therefore protesters have to choose their messages carefully. In fact, political opportunities are essential to protests. According to Cable (2016) [10], there are many issues that would influence protest groups, but among them all, the definition of political opportunities ties the relative success and failure of protest groups to political, institutional, and environmental variables that shape collective action [11] [12].

There are several attempts to update the concept of political opportunities in

the protest context, but the important work of Cammaerts (2012) [13] has begun to link political opportunities and protests with media [14]. Under what Cammaerts has called the “mediation opportunity structure”, he has added media opportunities, network opportunities by way of access to communications technologies and social media, and discursive opportunities or what he refers to as “self-mediation by protest groups” ([13]: pp. 120-130). Therefore, the choice of protest tactics becomes increasingly important, because maintaining open media and political opportunities requires adapting media and protest tactics to the prevailing media and political context. Among those tactics, the message and modes of communication used by the protest group are subtle and critical ([14]: p. 4). For example, in this study, protesters in Wukan village used “Long live the Party” to protest against the village-level land corruptions to attract attentions from the Central government in Beijing, and villagers leaned more on Chinese media than Western media, whereas Hong Kong SAR, China’s 2019 anti-extradition law protesters used “free Hong Kong SAR, China” (in English) to attract world attention but mainly Western political attentions and some Hong Kong SAR, China protesters boycotted mainland China media and even beat up a mainland China journalist. As mentioned above, to bring these issues to public attention, protest groups utilise a number of different protests and media tactics according to different political opportunities [15]-[17].

However, some international news organisations tend to deal with different protesters’ messages as a whole while ignoring the nuanced discrepancies. As Cable (2016) [14] points out, the impact of media frames on protest group messages is numerous, because messages can be changed, challenged, incorporated, co-opted, depoliticised, ridiculed, and manipulated by the press ([14]: p. 20).

2. Globalisation of International News

Before the framing analysis of the coverage, it is necessary to briefly review globalisation of international news. Cross-border communications are defined very unsystematically in the globalisation literature, sometimes as inter-and transnational and sometimes as inter-transcultural communication. “Cross-border” thus describes those processes of information exchange in the course of which system borders, of the nation-state or culture, are traversed ([18]: p. 175). Globalisation also imposes a great impact on cultures around the globe, that “globalisation might be conceived as an aspect of the progressive “culturalization” of social life proposed by theories of postmodernization” [19]. As globalisation increased in the 1980s and 1990s, Habermas called the “emerging global public sphere” a key development that may conceivably a harbinger of a “new universalist world order” ([20]: p. 444). Meanwhile, the global sphere of an assumed “public sphere” can be considered as a multi-discursive political space, thus it is expected and inevitable that scholars urgently require conducting media research from national to international scale [21] [22]. In this paper, I have no ambition to review all views on globalisation. Only debates on globalisation that are relevant to the emerging global news media and culture will be included.

The first view, which is often called as “hyperglobalist/optimistic” view, is that globalisation “create(s) extensions of organisations and societies across space and time” that “weaken the cultural hegemony of nation-states” ([22]: p. 126) and thus erodes the borders of the nation-state [23]. Similarly, for Tomlinson, globalisation “dissolves the securities of locality, it offers new understandings of experience in wider—ultimately global-terms” ([24]: p. 30). By “global terms”, hyperglobalists believe that conflicts could be reduced or even ultimately eliminated by an appreciation of common planetary values and problems rather than commitments to material interests ([25]: p. 160). The modern technology, satellites for example, have largely facilitated the information dissemination. Meanwhile, the availability of digital television and the use of the internet have triggered interactive and innovative ways in which media messages are produced and distributed in real time in a digitally linked globe [26].

However, another increasingly dominating view expresses doubts and concerns over such “global public sphere”, or global media at large. First of all, the concept of “globalization” has been rebuked by some scholars. For Boyd-Barrett (1998) ([27]: p. 3) or Sparks (1998) ([28]: p. 122), globalisation is “a flawed conceptual tool”, or the “global public sphere should be replaced by the term imperialist, private sphere” [29]. As for global communication, Gurevitch *et al.* (1991) [28] questioned the validity of a shared global information and pointed out that the global media has actually been domesticated for national markets [30]. Some other scholars even link global media as a practice of “cultural imperialism” [27] [28] [31] [32], that the first world’s culture dominates the global mass media and threatens the existence of marginal cultures mostly in the developing countries.

To further understand and justify either opinion, it is necessary to discuss how international news flows around the globe.

International Information Flow—A One-Way Flow from North to South

Though the advent of satellites advanced global communication, the fact that the global information flow is not balanced between the developed and developing countries cannot be denied. Scholars such as Collin Sparks and the MacBride Report refer it as “North-South one-way flow” [33] [34]. The definition of “North” and “South” was from the Brandt Report, in which Brandt pointed out poorer countries (GDP per capita < US\$10,700) are mostly located in the tropical regions and south hemisphere, while the rich countries (industrial or developed countries) are mostly located in Northern hemisphere with the exceptions of Australia and New Zealand [35]. Though Solarz (*ibid.*) argued that the Brandt line that distinguishes the poorer and richer countries is slightly out-of-date in the 21st century because some developing countries such as China and India are emerging as important global economies, the North-South division still exists, especially in global communication ([34]: p. 86).

The imbalance of information flow is rooted in the imbalance of economic power. Both electricity and internet access are closely linked to a country’s GDP [33].

Developing countries that have low GDPs have difficulties getting access to

electricity and technologies that need to receive or send international news [33].

Secondly, compared to the Third World, the developed countries have far more mature and advanced news organisations, thus international news gathering, production and dissemination heavily rely on the West. First of all, the international news raw materials are mainly from the Western international news agencies, from which national news organisations in the west purchase news services and then sell the news to their national audience and the world. The international news outlets are mostly located in London, West Europe and America, such as Reuters in London, the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) in the U.S., Agence France-Presse (AFP) in France, thus the international news sources and production are mostly Anglo-American [26] ([36]: p. 69).

Here language is also considered to be another threshold of international news production and dissemination. The major languages of international news are (in descending order) English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic and Portuguese [37]. Most international news is written in English, which means the audience has to learn the language to be a part of the international information system. English has emerged, for good or ill, as the language that most people speak, or are prepared to learn, if they wish to communicate across borders ([38]: p. 111). Even those non-native English-speaking elites rarely have the opportunity to write international news in major Western news outlets, regardless of their Western journalism degrees, considering that foreign journalists are quite uncommon in Western organizations. Scholars have found that U.K. journalists come from the dominant ethnic and racial groups in society [39], while foreign journalists have few opportunities to write stories for major Western news outlets. The messages from the majority of developing countries are largely neglected in the international information world.

This one-way flow phenomenon raises many concerns, and one of the major concerns is the homogeneity of world culture. The higher living standard in the West becomes a lever on promoting the First World culture. Among nations, values and models of a few of the most advanced countries, and certain consumption and development patterns have spread to the rest of the world ([32]: p. 45). It has triggered the discussion of cultural dominance or even cultural imperialism [28] [32].

American media, for example, has taken many academic criticisms for being the major culprit of cultural imperialism by spreading American values and culture through its globalized media. As Roach (1997) ([40]: p. 47) has observed, the concept of cultural imperialism was most prominent in Latin America [41]-[43], but was also put forward by such scholars as Schiller (1976) [44]. Some other scholars [45] [46] pointed out that American cultural imperialism is a promotion of capitalism and an “American way of life” through its media. According to Hafez, there is no global network, not even CNN, which is considered by many scholars to be the prime example of a global media. “There are many CNN’s but no global programme... it is thus at best a multinational but not a global programme” ([18]: p. 13). Each continent has its own CNN and although it tries to broadcast a wide range of global issues, it does not accomplish to do it completely as it broadcasts according to its editorial and economical interest which conse-

quently brings biased content [47]. Meanwhile, the BBC has always been criticized by the academia because of its one-sided reporting [48]. The BBC's biased reporting could be traced back to the reports of 9/11 and the Iraq War. Though people in America turned to British media for more unbiased news during 9/11 chaos and the Iraq War [33], the BBC also went along with mainstream American media. David Barsamian and Noam Chomsky both agreed that "most of the media are echo chambers for the war on Iraq" [49], and Chomsky said "When the media had to go along, they went along. So if you watched the BBC or CNN when the war started, it was like cheerleading and continued that way" ([50]: p. 52).

This exclusiveness and dominance of Anglo-American international news reporting manufacture a homogeneous view of the world. This is done through the choice of where to allocate their resources, the selection of stories they distribute to clients, the amount of visuals provided, and the nature and amount of accompanying audio and textual information ([51]: p. 82). In this case, framing analysis, as a major qualitative content analysis method, will be applied to analyse the coverage of Wukan's protests, since it examines the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages.

3. Chinese Protests in International News

There are studies focusing on the comparative analysis of Chinese protests in different media, mostly in Chinese, and a few Western ones, and some trace how specific frames and hegemony have been found within discourses. For example, a representative piece of research compared *China Daily* and *The Guardian* thoroughly, using reports of the Umbrella Movement protests in Hong Kong SAR, China in 2014 [52]. The conclusion was that *China Daily's* tone was generally more negative than *The Guardian's* and "the Guardian tended to distance itself from any direct attack toward the protesters" [52], while *China Daily* identified Western governments (mainly referring to the US and the UK governments), HK universities, pro-democracy parties, as enemies [52]. As for more recent HK protests, Wang and Ma's research (2021) [53] compared how the *China Daily* and *The New York Times* reported on the Hong Kong SAR, China protests, 2019-20. Their conclusion is that the two newspapers reported differently, in terms of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation/consequences, and the treatment recommendation to/of the Hong Kong SAR, China protests.

As for mainland protesters, political protests have been rarer, compared to those in Hong Kong SAR, China. More economic and environmental protests are seen across the country. For instance, in 2007, the coastal city of Xiamen made headlines because of a large-scale environmental protest against a proposed paraxylene (PX) plant [54]; the Dalian chemical plant protests in 2011; anti-PX protests in Ningbo in 2012; anti-chemical plant protests in Kunming in 2013 and in Maomin in 2014. However, little research has been conducted on how different media report on those protests, apart from Liu and Li's research (2017) [55], which compared the smog pollution articles in *China Daily* and a few Anglo American

newspapers (*The New York Times* from the United States and *The Times* and *The Guardian* from Britain), although there was no protest against such pollution. Amongst them, political opportunities for the success of protests [56], the impact of 21 social media and digital media on such protests [57] [58] the responses/strategies on the Chinese government [59] and civil rights and activism [60]-[62] are the main research topics on protests in mainland China, whereas discrepancies or frames in reports on such protests are rare in academia.

4. Research Questions

On the backdrop of such one-sided information flow mentioned before, the research intends to answer the following questions:

- 1) How have global/Western news organisations, the the BBC and CNN in this case, reported on protests in mainland China, or more specifically, what expressions and vocabularies have been used to cover those protests?
- 2) Are those texts in line with the overall picture of one-sided international information flow, or countering the existing imbalanced discourse?

5. Framing Analysis of the Wukan Protests

According to Entman (1993) [63] and Scheufele (1999) [64], framing is a “scattered conceptualization” [64] with previous studies lacking clear conceptual definitions and relying on context-specific, rather than generally applicable operationalizations [64]. While there have been many different definitions of frames, Entman’s general definition is possibly the most widely accepted; that is, framing is “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and make(ing) them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” [64]. Framing theory emphasizes the ability of any entity—media, individuals, or organisations—to delineate other people’s reality, highlighting one interpretation while de-emphasising a less favoured one.

This study will analyse framing in CNN and the BBC’s coverage of the Wukan protests and will seek to evaluate the characterisation of news about the protests. The framing of protests in relation to economic and political issues will be discussed.

The study includes the methods from Van Gorp’s frame matrix which is based on “media package” [65]: They regarded frame as a media package that consists of all indicators or framing devices by which the frame can be identified: metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, lexical choices, selection of sources, graphics, stereotypes, dramatic characters, etc. [65] [66] which are connected to the four functions of framing: defining a problem, assigning responsibility, passing a moral judgement and reaching possible solutions as the reasoning devices [6]. In this case, the overall pictures of protests can be understood in reasoning devices, while more language details can be revealed in frame matrix. Due to the limited numbers of existing reports, the study has applied inductive coding via NVivo to firstly categorise articles into different types of frame matrix, and then analyse the lexical, rhetorical choices,

and emotional and moral basis of the texts.

6. Data

The data articles are from two news organisations: CNN, and the BBC News Online. The study includes all the online news related to the Wukan protest on the two outlets, which have a manageable account of articles related to the affair. The following shows the period of time and the number of reports (See **Tables 1-3**).

CNN: Dec. 14th, 2011-Mar. 15th, 2012 (6 reports) Set. 13th-16th, 2016 (3 reports).

the BBC: Sep. 23rd, 2011-Dec. 22nd, 2012 (15 reports) Jun. 21st-Sep. 13th, 2016 (8 reports).

Table 1. The reasoning devices CNN.

Types of frame matrix	Problem definition	Problem source	Policy solution	Moral and emotional basis
Pro-protest	How to stop local authorities selling land “illegally”	The tight grip of the authorities	Need a more democratic political environment	Supportive; sympathetic
Anti-protest	How to stop villagers and some officials protesting	Villagers’ eagerness to riot	Need to keep a tighter rein on protesters	Condemning;
villagers	How to go back to normal	The government fails people	/	Sympathetic; compassionate

Table 2. The reasoning devices of the BBC.

Types of frame matrix	Problem definition	Problem source	Policy solution	Moral and emotional basis
Pro-protest	How to stop local authorities selling land “illegally”	Farmers do not have ownership according to China’s land law	A land law that includes more farmers’ rights to involve in land selling	Sympathetic; supportive; compassionate
Anti-protest	How to stop villagers and some officials protesting	Local officials did not consider the wellbeing of farmers and sold land for profits	Searching for a more suitable way to govern rural areas, and stricter measures to crack down	Disapproval; sceptical; criticising;
villagers	How to go back to normal	The lack of communication between protesters, authorities, and the central government	village riots/	sympathetic

Table 3. Frame matrix of the BBC and CNN.

	Actors	Lexical choices	Rhetorical choices	Emotional & Moral basis
Pro-protest	Active villagers/ protest leaders (officials)	<p>CNN: Mourning for the death (2011/12/21) Continue to assert their political rights (2011/12/21) Held an election against the odds (2011/12/12); Finally suppressed by the police (2016/9/13)</p> <p>the BBC: “down with corrupt officials” “return the land” (2011/12/15) “long live the Communist Party” (2011/12/15; 2016/7/25) Fury against corrupt local officials, but not the central government (2011/12/15)</p>	<p>CNN: Thousands of residents took part in protests; drove out government officials; set up obstacles to deter police (2011/12/14; 12/21) Leading hundreds to protest (2011/12/14)</p> <p>the BBC: the villagers’ fury reached a new pitch (2011/12/15) Amid a heavy police presence, thousands marched around the village calling for him (Lin Zuluang) to be freed. (2016/7/21)</p>	CNN & the the BBC: Villagers: oppressed; cry for democracy; failed in the end
Anti-protest	Police/ authorities/ CPC	<p>CNN: Was suspected of beating the villager villagers; arrested 13 according to the law (2011/12/21) Block the access to food; Agreed to release the detained villagers; launched investigations (2012/2/1) The Communist Party usually reigns supreme (2011/12/21)</p> <p>the BBC: police with batons eating villagers; they had also fired tear gas and used water cannon (2011/12/15) The authorities had agreed to release three other village leaders detained (2011/12/21) The leader of protests, Lin Zuluang has been appointed the village chief (2012/1/16)</p>	<p>CNN: With wider attention from international media, Chinese government trod carefully to defuse the standoff (2/1/2012) Communist Party still keeps a tight grip on dissent nationwide, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring (2012/3/5)</p> <p>the BBC: China’s determination to maintain social stability by cracking down on anyone who could undermine it. (2011/12/15)</p>	<p>Authorities: suppressing; undemocratic; Police: violent CPC: dictatorship</p> <p>Authorities: suppressing; undemocratic; Police: violent CPC: dictatorship</p>
Neutral parties	Normal villagers/ Wukan/ China	<p>CNN: Were locked in a standoff with authorities (12/14/2011); “we hope the government can help us” (12/14/2011); Food is running very short (12/14/2011) (China) is one-party controlled (9/14/2016)</p> <p>the BBC: China’s determination to maintain social stability by cracking down on anyone who could undermine it. (2011/12/15)</p>	<p>CNN: Wukan remains heavily militarized (2016/9/14)</p> <p>the BBC: The Wukan model of village democracy is dead. (2016/9/13)</p>	Wukan/China: Suppressed by one party (the CPC)
media	Chinese (state-controlled media) International media	<p>CNN: denied the cause of the death of the villager; justified the actions of authorities (2011/12/21) Information is limited due to restrictions and censorship (2016/9/13)</p> <p>the BBC: Chinese release videos on state television of suspects admitting to crimes, in what rights activists say are forced confessions. (2012/3/5)</p>	<p>CNN: Dozens of foreign reporters—used to government interference in the field—savoured a rare moment to roam freely, filming the event and interviewing voters, as several officials watched from a second-floor balcony. (2016/9/14)</p>	<p>Chinese media: propaganda; unreliable International media: doing justice; reliable; information provider</p>

7. Findings

7.1. Discrepancies in Reasoning Devices

There are interesting discrepancies on reasons for protests, which are shown in “problem source” and “policy solution”. The reasons for riots, according to CNN, are more politically involved, while more financially and legally based on the BBC’s reports. Though both organisations pointed out the lack of democracy was one of the major problems leading to riots and suppression, CNN focuses more on villagers’ cry for democracy, such as **“asserting their (villagers/protesters) right to participate the local decisions” (2012/2/1)**; **“continue to protest after the negotiation with City government (2012/12/21)”**. On the other hand, CNN inserted some backgrounds of Chinese political environment, such as **“the Communist Party usually reigns supreme (2012/3/5)”** and **“Communist Party still keeps a tight grip on dissent nationwide, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring (2012/3/5)”**. CNN expanded the topic over politics that discussions of “whether Wukan election could be a ‘model’ as an experiment for a democratic system” can be seen in reports on 2012/2/ 1 and 2012/3/5, since Wukan held the election for its village committee.

However, apart from the similar background of one-party political system in the BBC’s reports, such as **“China’s determination to maintain social stability by cracking down on anyone who could undermine it. (2011/12/15)”**; **“The Communist Party believes this (crack-down) is an essential tool in maintaining power (2012/1/16)”**, the BBC contributed the financial and legal reasons for protests. As shown in “problem source” and policy solution, the BBC reported that the deprivation of land ownership from farmers gives authorities the right to sell lands without necessarily breaking any law.

7.2. Discourse in Frame Matrix: The Similar “Media Package”

The lexical and rhetorical choices, metaphors, and moral and emotional bases of both news organisations are majorly consistent apart from some minor discrepancies. The study will point out similarities and discrepancies in the following themes, as well as some questions leading to further analysis.

1) The death of Xue Jinbo: “Xue was beaten to death in the police custody, according to villagers”

The first incident that triggered the series of reports was the death of Xue Jinbo, a former local official who led villagers to protest the “illegal” land selling. When reporting the death of the uprising leader, CNN and the BBC used words like “mourning for the death of a fellow” (CNN, 2011/2/14) and “villagers reached a new peak of fury over the death of a fellow” (the BBC, 2011/12/15) to describe the condolences and fury over the death of a protester. Meanwhile, the BBC and CNN both quoted Xin Hua news agency that Xue Jinbo died of heart problems, and the propaganda nature of the news outlet that is mentioned in the reports—“state news agency” (CNN, 2011/12/14), “state media” (the BBC, 2011/12/15) deprived reliability of the news, contrasting the news that Xue was beaten to death by the

police, which was “alleged” by villagers. Such contrast of news was mentioned by Bell (1998) [67]. The frame of news does not have to be necessarily one-sided content. Bell (1998) argues that “the very authoritativeness of the hegemonic frame is contingent upon its implicit claim to objectivity, which means that it needs to regularly incorporate ‘awkward facts’ or even, under more exceptional circumstances, voices of dissent” [67]. In this case, the “awkward fact” or “voices of dissent” is Chinese state media, which contrasts the voice of villagers. However, such contrast is absent when the BBC uses Xinhua News Agency as one of the news resources on rare occasions, since in such case there is no “the state media” or “the state-run media” added throughout the report, and no contradictory information added—In an article late on Monday, Xinhua News Agency said that Wukan’s former party chief, Xue Chang, and the former head of the village committee, Chen Shunyi, had been expelled from the party for corruption (the BBC, 2012/4/24), “while some descriptions still have the title when opinions are quoted”—The lack of legal proof on rural land ownership has left farmers “interests poorly protected,” said an article on this issue published by China’s **state-run** news agency Xinhua (the BBC, 2011/12/15).

2) Narratives on police: “police launched brutally into the village and hurt people”

The descriptions of the police crackdown are similar in both organisations. The only difference is the timing of reports. In the BBC’s reports, police was reported as “stormed” the village from the first article (2011/12/15) but then gradually waned in the mid time, mainly because the reports at that time focused more on reasons of riots, descriptions of protests, and censorship of the media, intertwining with the Chinese political background, but the last report ended as “the democratic experiment of Wukan” died with the police cracking down the riots (the BBC, 2016/9/13). However, CNN didn’t mention details of the police in the beginning. The reports concentrated on conflicts between protesters and authorities. The descriptions of armed police only came after the Wukan election, and there is no mention of why the police rushed into the village after the election. The most “natural” or “stereotypical” interpretation, considering the large amount of background information on the regime, is that there is no tolerance for democratic elections in China, which contradicts the fact that the election itself was granted by the provincial government. However, neither of the news outlets’ narratives mentioned police were sent by which level of the government. It could be the village officials, the city government or the provincial government. The lack of investigations and news sources, however, did not confuse the audience, since it’s quite natural to foreground that “police were sent by authorities.”

3) The result of protests: “the Chinese government finally retakes the village. The Wukan experiment died”

Although there are certain amounts of reports on how villagers and protesters took to the streets, drove out local officials, and set up road barriers to prevent police from entering, the initiative ended with the government’s crackdown. The

reports described Wukan as “a symbol of democracy” (the BBC, 2016/7/21) even when “the Wukan experiment is about to die” (the BBC, 2016/6/26). The vocabulary choices reveal an emotionally sympathetic tone for Wukan while condemning the government that ended the democracy there.

4) Inconsistent descriptions of authorities—are all Chinese authorities equivalent to the central government or the CPC?

Apart from the inconsistent descriptions of who sent the police, neither news outlet specified which level of officials initiated the actions. It seems that “police” is a group that was automatically sent to the village whenever there was a riot. In fact, most actions from the government are generalised as “authorities”. Descriptions such as **“This week the villagers” fury reached a new pitch after they alleged that the authorities had beaten to death one of their own** (the BBC, 2011/12/15) are common in the majority of articles from both news outlets. However, the specification of which level of government should be included, considering China’s political structure is looser than what the majority of the news portrays. According to FerdiFebianno & Salam’s analysis (2013) on the decentralisation of the Chinese government, top-level officials such as the central government or the CPC cannot spare the attention to directly involve themselves in some lower-level government affairs [68]. It is unclear if the central government has ever been involved in the affairs of the city government, and a village committee’s affairs in this case. Although it is not excluded that Wukan’s protests drew some attention from the central government, a more specific description that is more accurate and authentic is needed.

5) Seemingly contradictory descriptions of protesters—why is “long live the CPC” on the banner?

One of the most interesting discursive discourses is slogans on protesters’ banners. According to the pictures and accurate translation from the BBC, language such as “long live the The Communist Party” held by villagers seems out of context. According to the BBC’s journalists, **“Where else could you see virtually the entire population of town or a village filling the streets in support for their Communist Party Secretary (while protesting)?”** (the BBC, 2016/7/25).

The discrepancies between the Wukan protests and “general” protesters cast some doubts and confusion even if the reports and translations are very authentic, mainly because Wukan protesting slogans do not fit into the audience, especially Western “common sense” of what protests should be. For example, protesters should chant slogans that are against the authorities or organisations, instead of complimenting them like Wukan protesters did. As for CNN, there is seldom any mention of those slogans. Therefore, because of political and cultural differences between reporting and reported countries, it is highly likely that journalists and audiences from the reporting countries are capable of understanding international news based on what once happened in their own countries in similar contexts, and cannot decipher behaviours that are not related to their cultures or experiences, or in a word, their common sense.

6) One-sided quotes of interviews from pro-protest villagers—How about those who disagreed with the protests?

According to the tables and analysis, voices of “pro-protest” that are supportive of and sympathetic to protesters and villagers are dominant throughout reports in both news outlets. Meanwhile, the upholding of democracy seems to be a major solution to not only the Wukan protests, but also a series of protests around the country. What are marginalised or ignored are those who might have different opinions and actions. For example, apart from authorities and police, there might be some villagers who did not approve of the protests or the election, considering there are banners like “long live the Party” among protesters, but their voices are absent in the reports. Neither the BBC nor CNN ever interviewed these villagers who seemed “not angry with the central government but local authorities.” (the BBC, 2011/12/15) as mentioned by the BBC only as a suggestion.

8) Conclusion and implications for further research

The imbalance of international news has long existed between the South and North. It is mainly because developing countries, especially those in Africa and Asia, lack professional knowledge of news production, funds, infrastructure, as well as language advantages. The international news is largely produced by news outlets that are located in the West, and it has gained benefits from the Western market. The limitations of the global information flow, especially news in major Western media outlets, are shown as domestication and framing of news by displaying voices unevenly in the coverage of the Wukan protests in this case.

The predominance of one voice and absence of another has produced hegemony in the reports, which could be analysed as techniques of reporting, including vocabulary choices, rhetorical devices, and moral and emotional basis. Firstly, Chinese media is considered to be propaganda, thus the majority of quotes from the platform is used as “awkward facts” to contrast protesters’ messages. Secondly, the generalisation of authorities blurs the administrative levels, which needs clarifying, considering Wukan’s affair might not be a direct concern of higher levels of administration compared to a large amount of backgrounding of the Central government and CPC’s tight reigns in the reports. Lastly, the messages from protesters should be interpreted based on the political opportunities they could garner. Why did the protesters hold banners of “long live the Party” and “topple down corruption” side by side? What is the relation between protesters and the government? In what way can protesters use their political opportunities to appeal? Are there any other sides to the opinions about the protests? These questions are not fully answered or considered in the reports, but are worth further exploration.

9) Limitations

The limitation of the research is that there is an absence of comparison of the Chinese media regarding the protests. Due to the censorship of the Chinese media, the samples of individual outlets are very rare. Furthermore, the translation of the Chinese texts might lead to some distortions of the original meaning. China Daily

(the English version) has been considered to be one of the sources, but blatant propaganda such as “HK journalists fairly treated in Wukan” (China Daily, 2016/9/18) and “Peaceful life in Wukan village in the Mid-Autumn Festival” (ibid., 2016/9/17) would not contribute another side of the story to the framing analysis. Further studies should compare other international media outlets with leading Western media organisations, if there is any other voice throughout the protests.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Connell, I. (1980) Television News and the Social Contract. In: Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, P., Eds., *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, 139-56.
- [2] Qi, X. (2014) Globalized Knowledge Flows and Chinese Social Theory. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315882710>
- [3] Qi, X. (2012) A Case Study of Globalized Knowledge Flows: Guanxi in Social Science and Management Theory. *International Sociology*, **27**, 707-723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580912453729>
- [4] Wu, X. (2009) Between Public and Professional: Chinese Sociology and the Construction of a Harmonious Society. *ASA Footnotes*, **37**. http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/mayjun09/intl_0509.html
- [5] Gamson, W.A. (1990) The Strategy of Social Protest. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- [6] Chan, C.K. and Ngai, P. (2009) The Making of a New Working Class? A Study of Collective Actions of Migrant Workers in South China. *The China Quarterly*, **198**, 287-303. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305741009000319>
- [7] Chen, F. (2006) Privatization and Its Discontents in Chinese Factories. *The China Quarterly*, **185**, 42-60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030574100600004x>
- [8] O'Brien, K.J. and Li, L. (2006) Rightful Resistance in Rural China. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511791086>
- [9] Qi, X.Y. (2017) Social Movements in China: Augmenting Mainstream Theory with *guanxi*. *Sociology*, **51**, 111-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516656993>
- [10] Cable, J. (2016) Protest Campaigns, Media and Political Opportunities. Rowman & Littlefield International.
- [11] Meyer, D.S. and Minkoff, D.C. (2004) Conceptualizing Political Opportunity. *Social Forces*, **82**, 1457-1492. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2004.0082>
- [12] Sireau, N. (2009) Make Poverty History: Political Communication in Action. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [13] Cammaerts, B. (2012) Protest Logics and the Mediation Opportunity Structure. *European Journal of Communication*, **27**, 117-134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323112441007>
- [14] Yang, Y. (2016) How Large-Scale Protests Succeed in China: The Story of Issue Opportunity Structure, Social Media, and Violence. *International Journal of Communication*, **10**, 20.
- [15] McAdam, D. and Su, Y. (2002) The War at Home: Antiwar Protests and Congress-

- sional Voting, 1965 to 1973. *American Sociological Review*, **67**, 696-721.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240206700505>
- [16] Lipsky, M. (1968) Protest as a Political Resource. *American Political Science Review*, **62**, 1144-1158. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953909>
- [17] Eisinger, P.K. (1927) The Conditions of Protest Behaviour in American Cities. *American Political Science Review*, **67**, 11-28.
- [18] Hafez, K. (2007) *The Myth of Media Globalisation*. Polity.
- [19] Crook, S., Pakulski, J. and Waters, M. (1992) *Postmodernization: Change in Advanced Society*. Sage.
- [20] Habermas, J. (1992) Further Reflections on the Public Sphere. In: Calhoun, C. and Hafez, K., Eds., *The Media Globalisation*, Polity Press, 444.
- [21] Garnham, N. (1990) *Capitalism and Communication: Global Culture and the Economics of Information*. Sage.
- [22] Held, D. (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Stanford University Press.
- [23] Samuel-Azran, T. (2009) Counterflows and Counterpublics. *The Journal of International Communication*, **15**, 56-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2009.9674744>
- [24] Tomlinson, J. (1999) *Globalisation and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- [25] Waters, M. (1995) *Globalisation*. Routledge.
- [26] Thussu, D.K. (2009) *Internationalizing Media Studies*. Routledge.
- [27] Boyd-Barrett, Oliver and Rantanen (1998) *The Globalization of News*, Thousand Oaks, Califo. Sage.
- [28] Sparks, C. (1998) *Communism, Capitalism, and the Mass Media*. Sage
- [29] Rantanen, T. (2005) *The Media and Globalization*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221198>
- [30] Gurevitch, M., Levy, M.R. and Roeh, I. (2005) The Global Newsroom: Convergences and Diversities in the Globalization of Television News. In: Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C., Eds., *Communication and Citizenship*, Routledge, 195-216.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203977880-9>
- [31] Haarsager, S.L. (1993) Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age. *American Journalism*, **10**, 144-145.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.1993.10731525>
- [32] Thussu, D.K. (2006) *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. 2nd Edition, Hodder Arnold.
- [33] Sparks, C. (2005) Media and the Global Public Sphere. In: de Jong, W., Shaw, M. and Stammers, N., Eds., *Global Activism, Global Media*, Pluto Press, 34-49.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183q4qr.8>
- [34] MacBride, S. and Abel, E. (1984) *Many Voices, One World: Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow: (the MacBride Report)*. International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. UNESCO.
- [35] Solarz, M.W. (2012) North-South, Commemorating the First Brandt Report: Searching for the Contemporary Spatial Picture of the Global Rift. *Third World Quarterly*, **33**, 559-569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.657493>
- [36] Singh, I.B. (1982) *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World*: Anthony Smith. Oxford University Press.
- [37] Bell, A. (1991) *The Language of News Media*. Blackwell.

- [38] McNair, B. (1988) *Images of the Enemy: Reporting of the New Cold War*. Routledge.
- [39] Spilsbury, M. (2022) *Diversity in Journalism: An Update on the Characteristics of Journalists*. National Council for the Training of Journalists.
- [40] Roach, C. (1997) Cultural Imperialism and Resistance in Media Theory and Literary Theory. *Media, Culture & Society*, **19**, 47-66.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/016344397019001004>
- [41] Sánchez Narvarte, R.E. (2014) Comunicación y política en Antonio Pasquali. Una lectura de Comunicación y cultura de masas en el actual contexto latinoamericano. *Punto Cero*, **19**, 45-52.
- [42] Beltran S., L.R. (1976) Alien Premises, Objects, and Methods in Latin American Communication Research. *Communication Research*, **3**, 107-134.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027600300202>
- [43] Reyes Matta, F. (1977) *La información en el nuevo orden internacional*. Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales.
- [44] Schiller, H.I. (1976) *Communication and Cultural Domination*. Pantheon Books.
- [45] Tomlinson, J. (2002) *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*. Continuum.
- [46] Mirrlees, T. (2013) *Global Entertainment Media between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Globalisation*. Routledge.
- [47] Aguiar, L. (2009) Framing a Global Crisis: An Analysis of the Coverage of the Latest Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Al-Jazeera and CNN. *Estudos em Comunicacao*, **6**, 1-17.
- [48] Kuhn, R. (1985) *The Politics of Broadcasting*. Croom Helm.
- [49] David, N. (2008) *Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*. Chatto & Windus.
- [50] Chomsky, N. and Barsamian, D. (2015) *Propaganda and the Public Mind: Conversations with Noam Chomsky*. Heymarket Books, Chicago.
- [51] Paterson, C. (1998) Global Battlefields. In: Boyd-Barrett, R., *The Globalization of News*, Sage, 82.
- [52] Veneti, A., Karadimitriou, A. and Poulakidakos, S. (2016) Media Ecology and the Politics of Dissent: Representations of the Hong Kong SAR, China Protests in the Guardian and China Daily. *Social Media + Society*, **2**, 10-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116662175>
- [53] Wang, G. and Ma, X. (2021) Were They Illegal Rioters or Pro-Democracy Protestors? Examining the 2019-20 Hong Kong SAR, China Protests in China Daily and the New York Times. *Critical Arts*, **35**, 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2021.1925940>
- [54] Brunner, E. and Li, H. (2018) Fragmented Arguments and Forces Majeure: The 2007 Protests in Xiamen, China. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, **54**, 287-304.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511431.2018.1509596>
- [55] Liu, M. and Li, C. (2017) Competing Discursive Constructions of China's Smog in Chinese and Anglo-American English-Language Newspapers: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study. *Discourse & Communication*, **11**, 386-403.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481317707379>
- [56] Sun, X., Huang, R. and Yip, N. (2017) Dynamic Political Opportunities and Environmental Forces Linking Up: A Case Study of Anti-PX Contention in Kunming. *Journal of Contemporary China*, **26**, 536-548.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2017.1274818>
- [57] Brunner, E. (2017) Wild Public Networks and Affective Movements in China: Envi-

- ronmental Activism, Social Media, and Protest in Maoming. *Journal of Communication*, **67**, 665-677. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12323>
- [58] Brunner, E. (2019) Environmental Activism, Social Media, and Protesting China: Becoming Activists over Wild Public Networks. Rowman & Littlefield.
- [59] Li, Y., Liu, Y. and Koppenjan, J. (2019) Government Strategies in Addressing Three Protests against PX Plants in Urban China: Comparing Cases Using a Most-Similar-System Design. *Policy Studies*, **43**, 464-482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2019.1624710>
- [60] Hauf, A. (2015) Affluent Activists and New Tactics: The Changing Face of the Chinese Environmental Movement. *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal*, **40**, 40.
- [61] Gunter, M. (2015) The Dalian Chemical Plant Protest, Environmental Activism, and China's Developing Civil Society. In: Hager, C. and Haddad, M.A., Eds., *Nimby Is Beautiful*, Berghahn Books, 138-160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qcsmj.11>
- [62] Yang, Y. (2022) Environmental Activism, Social Media, and Protest in China: Becoming Activists Over Wild Public Networks: Elizabeth Brunner. Lexington Books, 200.
- [63] Entman, R.M. (1993) Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of European Journal of Communication*, **27**, 117-134.
- [64] Scheufele, D. (1999) Framing as a Theory of Media Effects. *Journal of Communication*, **49**, 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/49.1.103>
- [65] Gamson, W.A. and Lasch, K.E. (1983) The Political Culture of Social Welfare Policy. In: Spiro, S.E. and Yuchtman-yaar, E., Eds., *Evaluating the Welfare State*, Elsevier, 397-415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-657980-2.50032-2>
- [66] Pan, Z. and Kosicki, G. (1993) Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse. *Political Communication*, **10**, 55-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963>
- [67] Bell, A. (1998) The Discourse Structure of News Stories. In: Bell, A. and Garrett, P., Eds., *Approaches to Media Discourse*, Blackwell, 64-104.
- [68] Ferdi Febianno and Salam (2013) The Role of Decentralization in Wukan Village Protest, Mainland of China. (publish No.1681231753430171648). Thesis and dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada.