Indo-Pak Kashmir Conflict: Chinese Media Framing and Evolving Perspective

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Abstract

By adopting framing theory, this study examines the coverage of two English-language Chinese newspapers, namely China Daily and Global Times, on the current happenings in Indian held Kashmir (IHK) and escalations on Line of Control (LoC) to cognise Beijing's official perspective as a third key stakeholder of the valley. Content analysis is employed for a statistical analysis of dominant frames used by the Chinese press vis-à-vis the Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict in news reports from August 5 (annulment of Article 370 of the Indian constitution) to September 30, 2019 (last day of the 74th UNGA's session held at the United Nations). Findings suggest that both newspapers used almost similar frames for the Kashmir problem, nevertheless, with a difference in the ratio of coverage. Leadership frame was frequently used in the mediated texts, followed by conflict, peace, and responsibility frames, with primarily 'episodic' reportage, which echoed that delays in IHK's resolution will have grave implications for regional stability. The study concludes that dominant frames reinforced by the press tow Beijing's current foreign, or say Kashmir, policy.

Keywords: Kashmir, India, Pakistan, Chinese press, framing, content analysis.

Introduction

Since decades, the nature of mass media, its function, and level of influence in world affairs has attracted not just communication experts, but scholars from various disciplines. Although it has been criticised several times by members of civil society, intellectuals, and state and non-state institutions for subtle biases, pro-corporate policy orientation, and covert manipulation of events, yet the media's role and power in impacting, devising, and executing government (foreign) policies, as well as shaping public opinions, attitudes, and beliefs (van Dijk, 2011, Freeman, 2017), have been radically accepted and highly acknowledged worldwide.

From tragedies to fêtes, everyday immeasurable incidents are reported across the world. Direct access to, or personal experience of, every happening is impractical. People, in turn, rely on the media for information (He, 2010) that is communicated within minutes after an event takes place both in a mega city or remote area - for instance, the seemingly coordinated 2018 attacks on the Chinese Consulate in Karachi and a local market in Hangu, Pakistan, or the 2019 Pulwama attack in IHK - regardless of whether it is an isolated event or a series of events. People, thus, create images from the "messages relayed by media" (He, 2010: 34), as it guides them "what" to think about (Cohen, 1963). This endorses Lippmann's (1922) concept of the "outside world" shaped by the media that guides existing "pictures in our heads" about it.

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Studies also reveal that media reduces distances, portrays issues as "our own problems" in our backyard; and unites consumers into one big family (Rehman, 1993: 18), as events occurring in one region tend to affect events elsewhere that may interest states in distant places (Gilboa, 2005: 27). As McNelly and Izcaray (1986: 546) note the media assists in "misunderstanding" and "understanding of each other's nations", Rehman (1993:18) explains that a responsible media can lead to global "understanding" and "harmony", but if "the same media engage into stereotyping and presenting one-sided information, it add(s) to mistrust."

Media Framing & Foreign Policy: In foreign relations context though, Yordanova (2012: 15) declares the media as "international players" only when it "influence" the operations of international system, adding that, this "influence" is "weak" because it is yet "much more dependent on politics". The Vietnam (1965), Gulf (1990), Afghan (2001), and Iraq (2003) wars are ideal examples of how pro-invasion as against anti-invasion discourses dominated U.S. media reports (Gottschalk, 1992; Tallman & McKerns, 2000; Kamioka, 2001; Kull et al., 2003; Ryan, 2004; Hayes & Guardino, 2010). Studies indicate that "unanimous silence" was observed against the conflicts, while dissenting voices were suppressed (Kaye, 2014, 12-13). The latest Kashmir crisis that emerged after the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, annexing its special status, followed by the Muslim world's silence amid the foreign media's restricted exposure of curfews and illegal detentions and the local media's blackout in IHK strongly endorses Kaye's (2014) view on 'gaining personal profit at the expense of others freedom' and state-press power nexus in news framing of foreign policy issues.

The perceptions of 'Other', or 'Us and Them', nevertheless, are greatly inspired by coverage, as it is an age of "omnipresent" media (Tao & Page, 2013). It can develop "certain frames and play a role in how governments react and respond" (Freeman, 2017: 2). But framing and its effects vary in accordance with "micro- and macro-level" environmental changes, and that the phenomenon of an "all-powerful", or "minimal effect", media is not applicable in all situations (Gunther and Mughan (2000: 403, 418). Like the media's 'watchdog' role minimises to 'lapdog' during crises or when national interests are at stake (Robertson, 2004: 477), suggesting that countries largely 'engineer' media content to achieve their desired foreign policy goals. Media systems, and the news media specifically, hence, are powerful devices to create a socially-constructed reality, frame reports according to national interests and ideologies, impact media consumers (Powlick, 1995), sense foreign policies, build images of nations (Seib, 2008; Cissel, 2011), and boost cooperation during war and peace.

Within this backdrop, the recent chaos in IHK is unprecedented in the history of South Asia that has attracted global media attention. All three nuclear powers - China, India, and Pakistan - have territorial stakes in the disputed valley. The two South Asian arch-rivals' foreign and media policies on the issue are 'crystal clear', but China's Kashmir

policy has altered over time. The study, therefore, examines Chinese press coverage of the Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict in view of Beijing's evolving perspective on it, as PRC holds a significant position in the region and world.

Background

Kashmir: Locked amidst the great Himalayan mountain ranges from the west-northwest to the east-southeast, such as the Karakorum Range in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), as also the Ladakh Range, the Zanskar Range, the Himalaya Range, and the Pir Panjal Range in Jammu and Kashmir along with numerous lakes and rivers, lies the former British Crown's princely state of Kashmir. Bordered by Afghanistan to the northwest (the Wakhan Corridor); China to the northeast (Demchok District, Aksai Chin/Ladakh and the Trans-Karakoram Tract/Shaksgam Valley); India to the centre and south (Jammu, Kashmir Valley, Ladakh, and Siachen Glacier); and Pakistan to the west (Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan (GB)) (Khalid, 2009: 1007), the state occupies an area of about 86,000 sq mi with all fractions combined. Approximately, China controls 20 percent, India controls 43 percent, and Pakistan controls 37 percent of Kashmir (Orton, 2010: 2). Much of the Kashmiri population in IHK is Muslim, followed by Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus. Apart from its beauty, glaciers, and natural resources, Kashmir's strategic location makes it equally important for China, India, and Pakistan. Its occupation by one of these states can pose a threat to the survival of the other two.

Figure 1: *Map of Kashmir*

Source: British Broadcasting Company (BBC)

The Indo-Pak Kashmir Dispute: The core issue that has hindered the normalisation of Indo-Pak ties is Kashmir. Seventy-two years of historical bitterness that overshadows their relationship is deep-rooted and an ongoing dilemma, until a viable option is agreed upon by all stakeholders, especially Kashmiris. The conflict that started after a misconstrued step taken by Maharaja Hari Singh to accede to India against Kashmiris' will, and an unfortunate decision by the British rulers, in 1947, has

led to decades of bloodshed. Besides ceasefire violations, the two nuclear-armed countries have fought several wars for the possession of the disputed land.

Over the years, multiple internal and external dimensions, such as human rights abuses, religious extremism (Muslim *vs.* Hindu), national interests (RSS ideology), national security, nuclear proliferation, regional hegemony (China *vs.* India), and cross-border terrorism, have been added to a crisis that had initiated as a territorial dispute, stimulating discourses from different perspectives in the international media. For Mukherjee (2013: 44), a key issue is that "Kashmir is one of the most militarised conflict zones in the world. The stationing of Indian military in the region has only exacerbated the situation, since it is the security personnel who cause much of the problem."

Against this backdrop, the recent annulment of Article 370 has led to detention and torture of Kashmiri leaders and people, military deployments, curfews, and communication blackouts. Sino-Pak concerns have increased on the situation amid Islamabad's downgrading of diplomatic ties with Delhi and escalations at LoC. Peace-making efforts, and international conferences at significant forums, in the past have failed to resolve the conflict for varying reasons: This time, notwithstanding, the domination of economic interests and the *Ummah's* silence (Malaysia and Turkey excluded) *vis-à-vis* human rights violations in IHK. Till today, Kashmir and Kashmiris suffer from an unfinished agenda left in the lurch by British colonialists.

China's Kashmir Policy & Indo-Pak Conflict: Not just India and Pakistan, China, too, has geopolitical and geostrategic interests in South Asia, including Kashmir, although it is neither a regional neighbour, nor SAARC member-state. Moreover, it has trade and security links with several regional countries, including India, which is a focal point of Beijing's South Asia strategy - for instance, building of seaports in Nepal and Pakistan, and transport networks in Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan (Chellancy, 2013: 54).

Within the Indo-Pak context, China forms a strategic triangle with convoluted relationships and regional security is shaped by the intertwining policies of the Asian powers. Policies adopted by one country have an immediate impact on and response from the other two (Ali, 2003). China and Pakistan possess friendly relations and cooperate in all matters of mutual concern, while mistrust and suspicion looms large over China-India relations *albeit* several trade agreements. Yet, Sino-Indian trade greatly exceeds Sino-Pak trade. Kashmir, thus, is a hotspot for the actions and counteractions that take place between the three nuclear heavyweights. Sino-Indian rivalry over Kashmir is not a new phenomenon, but much more covert and complicated than Indo-Pak rivalry and Sino-Pak partnership.

As for Kashmir, China "occupies one-fifth of the original princely state" (Chellancy, 2013: 54). Beijing now is far more interested to maintain good relations with India and Pakistan and, equally interested in both sides of Kashmir (Garver, 2004; Chang,

2017). Earlier, PRC's approach on the dispute has varied by adopting either the role of a neutral observer and mediator, a silent third party, or favouring either of the two rivals. In sharp contrast, Delhi and Islamabad Kashmir policies remain undeterred since partition in 1947 and focus on one-point agendas respectively: "*Bharat's Atoot Ang"* and "*Pakistan's Shahra'ag"* oratory.

"In recent decades, China has played an important third-party role to help deescalate tensions between its nuclear-armed neighbours…in stark contrast to its foreign policy in the 1960s (of supporting Pakistan)," maintains Chang (2017: 1). Al Jazeera reports that Beijing's revised Kashmir policy ensures that it has openly detached "itself from both sides" and wants improved ties with Delhi, despite supporting "Pakistan…during the Cold War" (2003: para. 4). Dissenters, however, voice that it has traditionally sided with Islamabad over Kashmir (Iqbal, 2010) because Pakistan's survival is vital for China's growth, since it can act as a counterforce against India (Malik, 2001/2010; Chellancy, 2013; Panday, 2019). From Singh's perspective,

"Beijing's position has always reflected its evolving equation with India and Pakistan. Openly favourable to New Delhi in the fifties, (PRC) became supportive of Pakistan in the wake of the 1962 Indo-Chinese War. After keeping a careful balance between the South Asian adversaries for most of the last three decades, China now appears to implicitly question the legitimacy of Indian claims on Kashmir, in line with its alliance with Pakistan and its own designs for using Pakistan occupied Kashmir as a transit route between Xinjiang and Pakistani ports on the Arabian Sea" (2012: 100).

Kashmir, thus, holds a significant position in China's foreign policy mainly for two reasons: Economy and defense. On the economic front, it has heavily invested in energy and infrastructure projects in GB, while the Karakorum Highway (a.k.a. Friendship Highway) has served as a trade route between the two countries and Siachen as stronghold against India. China has also invested in India - not in IHK though, but it accompanies "greater geopolitical rivalry and military tensions" due to Washington-Delhi nuclear agreement and India's ties with other Central and Far Eastern Asian states (Chellancy, 2013: 53).

On the security front, Sino-Pak strategic cooperative partnership has deepened amidst Indian apprehensions of extensive Chinese (military) presence in GB (Bansal, 2013; Chellancy, 2013). The depth of China-Pak nexus "threatens to present India with a two-front theatre in the event of war with either country" and that "India faces Chinese troops on both flanks of its portion of Kashmir" (Chellancy, 2013: 54).

To sum up, Beijing's evolving perspective on India's move is unprecedented. It has explicitly "cautioned" New Delhi on its attempt to "unilaterally" alter IHK's demography. Previously, China had urged both India and Pakistan to "avoid war and solve the Kashmir issue *via* bilateral negotiations (Garver, 2004: 12). But its recent stance to 'internationalise' the dispute by taking India to UNSC has added a new

dimension to China's Kashmir policy. The question asked is: How will Chinese media frame the crisis considering Beijing's latest position on IHK?

Theoretical Framework

As a conceptual basis, framing theory is used to analyse how the Indo-Pak Kashmir issue is treated in the Chinese press. Often, it is next to impossible to print, or air, news content without the matter passing through gatekeeping and story selection mechanisms. But the nature and degree of control varies according to countries and news outlets. Framing, hence, in news construction and dissemination is unavoidable.

The concept of framing that was introduced by sociologist Goffman (1974) has provided an array of opportunities for many researchers from different disciplines to analyse a broad range of perspectives that indicates its importance in social science research (Gitlin, 1980; Entman,1993; van Gorp, 2007; Reese & Lewis, 2009; *et al.*). As for media studies, it is often used to understand how media highlights, or presents, some aspect and downplays the rest when stating a problem to influence elites, or masses, and/or emphasise on issues of public interest.

Scholars studying framing define it as an approach to organise data that permits people to "govern" shared or societal events (Goffman, 1974: 232), since they establish a specific "conceptualisation of, or reorient, their thinking about" them (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 104). For Entman (1993: 52), it means to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described", while frames are "mental structures that shape the way we view the world" (Lakoff, 2004). By organising the "world" (Gitlin, 2003) or "everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978: 193), media "frames act as themes" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993: 63) uniting story elements to form a cohesive whole, but with inclusions and exclusions, and, thus, creating sense of an "unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987: 143).

Selection and salience are the premise of framing and frames, wherein the more an issue is repeated / reported, the more it is bound to catch public eye, influence interpretative choices, and retain data for longer periods. In fact, both framing and frames are parallel to and, at times, add weight to the way circumstances are made salient, yet not without the much-needed social tool of power: Language. Various studies recognise frames operating as "metacommunicative structures" that are embedded in keywords or reasoning devices, such as "metaphors, catchphrases, depictions, images, lexical choices, and actors", (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 3) that hint at hidden ideas or texts for media consumers. They have agenda-setting power to shape public discourse on social issues and conflicts by promoting specific interpretations and opinions by cueing in certain thoughts (de Vreese, 2005).

Frame-building, however, is influenced by several factors, such as organisational routines; newsrooms creations; editor and reporter routines and biases, external

factors, etc. Calling frames as "cognitive schemata", Norris (1995) maintains that journalists mostly use them to "simplify, prioritise, and structure the narrative flow of events." Whereas, Entman (1993: 51-58) argues that frame-building occurs as reporters follow the process of 'selecting some aspects and ignoring others'. Towing Entman, Wolfsfeld (1997) argues that reporters, as part of a bigger social network and organisational routines, facilitate elite policies in the name national interests by consciously selecting 'suitable narratives' that fit between received information and existing frames either to highlight, or undermine, a news story completely or parts of it. The media not only directs the recipients mind to 'certain issues', but also presents them in accordance with "a certain interpreting framing" that helps to "select and emphasise some features…of the object in question" (Borges, 2010). For this study, therefore, the functioning of the Chinese media system also needs to be briefly examined.

Chinese Media System: With an advancing economy, the Chinese communication network is equally advancing amid ample mass media outlets now operating across the country that include newspapers, radio, and television stations, as well as search engines and networking websites that "reflect growing pluralism" (FlorCrux, 2001: 36). To Liu (2013), Rohrhofer (2015), and Zhang (2016), however, all are state-owned and controlled.

Hallin and Mancini (2012: 296) maintain, "The state plays a more central role in China" and the media is partially "an integral part of the state itself." While agreeing that "censorship is vital in this system", Luo (2015: 54) counterargues that not every media source is CCP-owned, but the Party through its Propaganda Department, and branches at local levels, monitors all media content to "retain ideological control" and "use it for its own dictatorial ends" (Sparks, 2008: 16-17). But Lee *et al.* (2006) add, "The dialectic of political and economic has transformed party-state from an omnipotently coercive apparatus into a less intrusive administrative instrument that seeks to manage its interests, images, and national consciousness in different guises" (pp. 598-9). Yet, the media recaps government line on foreign policy reportage (Zhang, 2016: 4) with journalistic 'language' possessing 'strong ideological colour' (Liu, 2013), as coverage patterns are majorly directed by national interests (Yue & Yu, 2016).

Conversely, Shiming (2008: 1-2) posits that China's views on global affairs form in a "more open, diverse, and commercialised information environment" and less "decentralised" due to economic independence (Sukosd & Wang, 2013). But this newly-acquired media freedom faces "constant threat" (FlorCrux, 2001: 39-40) from apparatchiks and, thus, is "caught in the crosscurrents" (Lee, 2003: 1) to improve China's national position and respect while reassuring "nationalism" (Luther *et al.*, 2005: 859-867). One way or the other, apparently the media system's compliance with CCP-state continues in the face of socio-economic liberalisation and press' commercialisation, although its consumer loyalty has narrowly led to a bold press.

Chinese Media Framing & Foreign Policy: Various scholars have voiced that economic reforms resulted in the opening-up of Chinese media and simultaneous adoption of Western news values (Luther *et al.*, 2005), but with inclusions and exclusions to the pre-existing frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) - for instance, 'factual' (Zillmann *et al.*, 2004; Zhou, 2008), 'leadership' (Luther *et al.*, 2005; Kuang & Wei, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2017); 'remedy' (Liu, 2014); 'action' (Ji *et al.*, 2018) frames and more. Kuang and Wei (2017) speculates that 'leadership' *vis-à-vis* other frames, especially conflict, human interest, and responsibility, is mostly used because the "three latter frames" would be problematic for the administration due to their traits. 'Leadership' frame, however, focuses on a leader's statements, opinions, attitudes, or actions of a "nation, group, government agency, or an institution"; or "the discussion and assessment of leadership are highlighted" (Luther *et al.*, 2005: 860; Yang, 2012: 68). Scholars also argue that state and non-state owned developed frames will be similar for foreign policy news, but different for local issues (Pan & Chan, 2003; Yang, 2009), implying that ownership matters in the coverage of issues besides other factors (Luther *et al.*, 2005).

Contrasted with party-sponsored media, commercial news organizations are characteristic of more freedom in content production and economic operation. Such changes in the media industry have led to a "selectively diversified media environment" (Sukosd & Wang, 2013, p. 100) in China. Contrasted with party-sponsored media, commercial news organizations are characteristic of more freedom in content production and economic operation. Such changes in the media industry have led to a "selectively diversified media environment" (Sukosd & Wang, 2013, p. 100) in China. Contrasted with party-sponsored media, commercial news organizations are characteristic of more freedom in content production and economic operation. Such changes in the media industry have led to a "selectively diversified media environment" (Sukosd & Wang, 2013, p. 100) in Chinaome scholars voice that economic reforms have resulted in the opening-up of the Chinese media and simultaneous adoption of Western news values (Luther *et al.*, 2005; Sukosd *et al.*, 2013), but with inclusions and exclusions to the pre-existing frames (Neuman *et al.*, 1992; Valkenburg *et at.*, 1999; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) after a thorough analysis of the relevant news topics or themes - for instance, 'factual' (Zillmann *et al.*, 2004; Zhou, 2008), 'leadership' (Luther *et al.*, 2005; Zhou, 2008; Kuang & Wei, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2017); 'remedy' (Liu, 2014); 'collaboration', 'environmental and human impact' (Han *et al.*, 2017), 'action' (Ji *et al.*, 2018) frames and more. Kuang and Wei (2017) speculates that 'leadership' *vis-à-vis* other frames, especially conflict, human interest, and responsibility, is mostly used because the "three latter frames" would be problematic for the administration, due to their traits described above. Leadership frame, however, focuses on a leader's "activities", "opinions/comments", "actions", or "speeches" of a "nation, group, government agency, or an institution" (Luther *et al.*, 2005: 860; also see Zhou: 2008: 120; Yang, 2012: 68; Han *et al.*, 2017: 2898).

Framing Kashmir & Indo-Pak Conflict: Apart from Indian, Pakistani, Kashmiris, several Western scholars from different disciplines, such as history, political science, communications, international relations, etc., have produced research articles on the Kashmir issue from different angles and with different frames, theories, and methodologies. Most of the literature reviewed on the Indo-Pak Kashmir dispute in media research indicates the use of conflict frame (Semetko *et al.*, 2000) against other generic frames, especially during comparisons between Indian and Pakistani newspapers. Other widely used framing approaches include Iyengar's (1991) episodic and thematic frames, and Galtung's (1970s) war and peace journalism.

With multiple stakeholders directly involved in the conflict, several individual or comparative media studies - for instance, India *vs.* Kashmir or India *vs.* Pakistan - highlight state-press nexus as also media-foreign policy relations. In Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani media, to a certain degree, it is by choice based on a country's national interests, but the rules of business differ for the local Kashmiri media. Senior Indian journalist Gupta's statement that India's media has "never been honest" to Kashmir, as "truth was considered against national interests" (cited in Raafi, 2015: para. 1) speak volumes of the situation of both national and local media's projection of the valley. After analysing three newspapers, namely Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, and Kashmir Times, Riaz *et al.* (2018) reveal that "a significant number" of printed "news stories originate from official sources"; the brutalities of Indian army hardly appear; and opposing views are scarce, while official statements are highlighted barring the Kashmiri press from exposing ground realities (p. 57). In a qualitative analysis of 400 news articles on the 2016 Kashmir conflict in three New Delhi-based and three J&K-based English newspapers using Semetko and Valkenburg generic frames along with diagnostic/prognostic frame, Joseph and Barclay (2018) found that J&K newspapers focused on human interest frame, while their competitors relied on conflict frame.

Unlike the Kashmiri media, various studies prove that media news follow national interests on foreign affairs. Marking differences between Indian and Pakistani press on Kashmir, Ali (2017) found that editorials appearing in The Hindu were episodic in nature, with an 'internal law and order' frame, while Dawn used a thematic approach with 'bilateral' and 'human rights' frames. Likewise, Riaz *et al.* (2018) disclosed that Pakistani press published more opinion pieces on the Kashmiri freedom struggle with positive frames (friend), while the Indian press gave less coverage with negative frames (foe). Earlier, Sreedharan's (2009) analysed propaganda and war rhetoric in the Indian and Pakistani media. By adopted Galtung's war and peace journalism, Khan (2019) proposed that Dawn mostly employed war frames in its Kashmir news.

Apart from Semetko *et al.* (2000), Iyengar (1991), and Galtung's pre-existing frames, several studies have adopted varying sets of frames through inductive approach to analyse the issue. Durga's (2004) study of the Kashmir conflict in New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times, covering a 15-year period revealed that

warfare and religion frames were mostly used, besides military and civilian establishment, nuclear risk, etc. Using a different set of eight frames (history, legality, nation state, law and order, democracy, human rights, international relations, and conflict resolution), Imran's (2013) study revealed that only 12 percent of the editorials published in Times of India, Hindu, and Indian Express between 2000 to 2002 referred to Kashmir. 'International relations' and 'law and order' emerged as high import, or frequently used, frames; 'conflict resolution', 'democracy', 'legality', and 'nation state' emerged as medium import frames; whereas, 'human rights' and 'history' emerged as low import, or least used, frames. Also, 'cross-border terrorism' was the key phrase before 9/11, while 'jihadi', or 'Islamic', terrorism after 9/11.

International studies, too, present an amalgam of perspectives on the Kashmir dispute. In his study, Joseph (2000) identifies how the Indian press undermines the human rights violations committed by the Indian army deployed in IHK by focusing on official sources, avoiding critical opinions, declining prominence to important issues, etc.

Hypothesis and Research Questions: In view of the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis and research questions are developed: -

Hypothesis

H1: China Daily will give more coverage to the Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict as compared to Global Times.

Research questions

RQ 1: What is the extent of news coverage given to the Kashmir conflict by Chinese press?

RQ 2: What are the frames used in the Chinese press coverage of the Kashmir conflict?

RQ 3: What is the nature of sources used in the Chinese press coverage of the Kashmir conflict?

RQ 4: What is the overall tone of the Chinese press coverage of the Kashmir conflict?

Methodology

Media Choice: Two Chinese papers, China Daily and Global Times, have been selected for this study to analyse Beijing's current stance on the Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict. Both newspapers cater a wide range of readership in China as well as abroad. Established on June 01, 1981, *China Daily* (a.k.a. "voice" of, or "window" to, China) is one of PRC's most authoritative and largest circulating English language newspapers. Launched to "assist China's open-door policy", it has "always been allowed to exhibit degrees of 'openness and boldness' that normally would be frowned upon in other newspapers" (Luther & Zhou, 2005: 862), although it still

operates under the aegis of CCP. Operationalised in 1995, its e-paper serves as an important tool of information on state "politics, economics, society, and culture" (Lihua, 2010: 217); also, a reference paper for other publications and comparative studies to understand the government's policies, state-press nexus, and media-foreign policy relations.

An offshoot of the People's Daily, *Global Times* started as a Chinese language publication in 1993, followed by an English language version in 2009. Monitored by the global media, Times is internationally labelled as CCP's "mouthpiece" (Tam, 2016), for printing hostile news and commentary on global events, even when the outsourced Party official statements are well-guarded.

Timeframe: The study duration begins from August 5, the day India revoked Article 370, to September 30, the last day of UNGA's session.

Research Design: By using content analysis as the primary research technique for both qualitative and quantitative evaluations, rather than just relying on either one of the two approaches, this study examines the coverage and framing of all Kashmir crisis-related news stories. A separate method, however, is not used for this study. Add to this, the digital media, or say e-papers or websites, as against the traditional print media contain more photographs besides the content. But accompanying photographs, here, were excluded as the study solely focused on textual presentations. A keyword search (i.e. Kashmir) was used to retrieve the data from the newspapers' archives. The term 'Indo-Pak' was deliberately avoided to exclude irrelevant data and repetition. Some of the content related to the earthquake that occurred in the Pakistan-administered Kashmir almost during the same timeframe was also discarded, as the focus was only on the IHK crisis. Then, the data was carefully categorised based on a qualitative judgement to identify the volume of news, frames, sources, and tone.

Content Analysis: All the news stories, covering various aspects of the dispute in China Daily and Global Times within the selected timeframe, were retrieved as the *unit of analysis*.

Considering the study period, the *sample population* comprised all the news stories. Whereas, opinion pieces (i.e. editorials and columns) were retrieved simply to compare the volume/extent of news published on the issue in the Chinese papers.

The *variables* selected for this study are volume/extent, frames, sources, and tones. The volume/*extent* of news was measured in terms of the frequency of Kashmir-related news appearing in the newspapers.

As for *frames*, both inductive and deductive framing approaches were used. Inductive frames were derived after a qualitative analysis of the news stories. 'Peace' *vis-à-vis* 'conflict' frames are the most uncommon news frame used universally. Hence, a textual analysis of the news was made for the visibility of 'peace' frame through incidents that would advocate the dividends of peace and "hope to revive" better

relations between nations/stakeholders. This is in line with China's much projected policy of 'peaceful coexistence', as the above literature indicates that Chinese media operates in a controlled environment and tows, to a certain degree, Beijing's official line, particularly on foreign policy issues.

Following previous studies (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Zhou, 2008; Kuang & Wei, 2017), the 'leadership' frame was included that highlighted statements, opinions, and activities of key leaders/actors (presidents, prime ministers, etc.) on New Delhi's move, IHK's situation, Sino-Pak concerns and cooperation, and Indo-Pak conflict. It largely focuses on calls by various dignitaries, Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani, for either the 'restoration of peace in IHK'; mutual collaborations for such efforts; 'resolution of the matter through U.N. charter'; and support for Other's concerns (e.g. China's support for Pakistan's sovereignty and concerns was often reiterated). Otherwise, the severe consequences of the move.

For deductive approach, four (conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and responsibility) out of a total of five generic frames were selected. Morality frame was excluded after a textual analysis of the news since a mention to religion was not made at all. In addition, Iyengar's (1991) episodic and thematic framing categories were also included, as the former lowers "complex issues to the level of anecdotal evidence" (p. 136), making it easy for media consumers to derive the most appropriate and meaningful inferences.

The entire story was used as *contextual unit* for frame selection that may comprise of multiple frames. Each news item was analysed to identify the existence and non-existence of all six frames. The most dominant frame in a news item was coded as binary data - i.e. (1) presence or (0) absence (also see Table 1 for details), while ensuing frames were marked separately with different items for an in-depth qualitative analysis and discussion.

Table 1: Guiding Questions for Frames

Frames	Questions	Yes	No
Conflict	Does the news mention about the disagreement, or conflict, between two or more than two sides (nations, governments, groups, or individuals)?		
Human Interest	Does the news try to personalise, dramatize, or emotionalise the Kashmir conflict?		
Leadership	Does the news refer to speeches, opinions, or activities of different leaders?		
Economic Consequences	Does the news mention about the financial consequence of the Kashmir conflict for governments, groups, or individuals?		
Responsibility	Does the news implicate some party, group, or nation as responsible for the Kashmir conflict?		
Peace	Does the news focus on peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict, especially through the U.N. Charter, and the dividends of peace?		
Episodic	Does the news story mainly use episodic frames?		
Thematic	Does the news story mainly use thematic frames?		

Note: Adapted from Han, Sun, and Lu (2017) and Liu (2014), the scale is altered by the researcher as a requirement for this study.

The study further explored the news *sources* used in the coverage of Kashmir dispute. The sources were categorised as Xinhua (a state-run newswire service), newspapers staffers/local reporters, special correspondents, trans-national news agencies, such as Reuters and AFP, and Unknown. The last category includes all news stories in which the sources remain unidentified. Like the frame index, the sources were coded as (1) presence or (0) absence for each news item.

The overall *tone* was based on subjective analysis of news stories through the lexical choices made by newspapers. Findings for this category were not backed by statistical data. Reports were read and re-read to examine the nature, presence or absence of (+1) positive, (-1) negative, and (0) neutral content (i.e. words and phrases). As part of the coding scheme, every paragraph was used as a *recording unit* to signify the tone. In case, the paragraphs possessing diverse opinions were equal, then news headlines were used to identify the tone.

The researcher and one independent coder jointly coded about 10 percent of the reports to determine *intercoder reliability* by using Holsti formula (1969). Reliability coefficient was found at 0.90 for an overall average, with 0.89 for frames and 0.88 for sources.

Data analysis was conducted through frequency distribution to generate cross-tabulation comparisons of different variables as also assess the differences between China Daily and Global Times.

Findings & Analysis

The figures in Table 1 indicate the extent of coverage as also similarities and differences (RQ1) recorded in the exposure of the Kashmir conflict amidst ensuing incidents in both newspapers during the specified timeframe. In total, 74 crises-related articles appeared in the Chinese papers. Out of which, findings show that the extent of news reports (n = 57; 77.0 %) far exceeds the number of published editorials (n = 3; 4.0 %), and columns (n = 14; 18.9 %). This shows that key focus was to highlight the issue on a regular basis that led to a higher score of news items. The scarcity of editorials and columns on the Kashmir issue, however, needs to be reconsidered by the publishers.

Table 1: Overall Comparison of China Daily *vs.* Global Times

Newspapers	News Stories		Editorials		Columns		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	N	(%)
China Daily	21	(84.0)	2	(8.0)	2	(8.0)	25	(34.2)
Global Times	36	(73.4)	1	(2.0)	12	(24.4)	49	(66.2)
Total	57	(77.0)	3	(4.0)	14	(18.9)	74	(100.0)

Note: 'n' refers to the number of news, editorials, and columns in their respective categories (followed by the percentages). N* refers to the total number of news on the Kashmir issue.

Next, the overall news coverage in Global Times (N = 49; 66.2 %) is more than China Daily (N = 25; 32.4 %), although the latter is amongst the oldest newspapers printed in China. From this perspective, the findings of the study reject the basic hypothesis (H1) that anticipates the opposite, considering the ratio of coverage on the disputed territory to be more in the decades-old China Daily *vis-à-vis* Global Times. Evidence shows that Times pursued the Kashmir crisis more aggressively as compared to Daily.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 measure and compare the total number of news stories using different frames and framing patterns, providing answers for RQ2. Table 2 comprises statistical data on episodic *vs.* thematic framing. It is, however, important to mention that only news reports have been selected for an in-depth quantitative content analysis. This decision has been taken keeping in view the quantity of published editorial and columns in both newspapers. By excluding opinions, the total number of stories collected is 57.

Table 2: Episodic *vs.* Thematic Framing Comparison

Newspapers	Episodic		Thematic		Total
	n	(%)	n	(%)	N
China Daily	19	(90.4)	02	(9.5)	21
Global Times	28	(77.7)	08	(22.2)	36
Total	47		10		57

Out of 21 news stories that appeared in China Daily 19 (90.4%) were episodic and 2 (9.5%) thematic in nature. Comparatively, Times carried 28 (77.7%) episodic and 8 (22.2%) thematic news reports. By and large, the results showed that episodic frames dominated in both newspapers. An interesting revelation was that the highest

percentage of episodic news appeared in Daily, but numerically Times had scored more episodically framed content.

The statistics in Table 3 reveal the nature of frames present in the news stories. In both newspapers, the leadership frame was found to be most dominating (47.3%) among the rest. Another finding was that press covered the opinions and activities of both Chinese and Pakistani high-ups more than Indian dignitaries. It was followed by conflict (29.8) and peace (12.2) frame that was somewhat visible individually, while responsibility (5.2), economic consequences (5.2%), and human interest (1.7%) frames were present but scarce. Only one story appeared with human interest frame in Times.

Table 3: Frames by Newspapers

NEWSPAPERS	FRAMES												TOTAL
	Conflict		Human Interest		Leadership		Economic Consequences		Responsibility		Peace		
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	N
China Daily	07	(33.5)	00	(0)	10	(47.6)	00	(0)	01	(4.7)	04	(19.4)	21
Global Times	11	(30.5)	01	(2.7)	17	(47.2)	02	(5.5)	02	(5.5)	03	(8.3)	36
Total	17	(29.8)	01	(1.7)	27	(47.3)	02	(5.2)	03	(5.2)	07	(12.2)	57

In a newspaper-wise analysis, the leadership frame in China Daily (47.6%) scored more than Global Times (47.2%). A similar pattern was observed in peace frame, wherein Daily (19.4%) printed more stories than Times (8.3%). Although both newspapers differed by one story, the variation in the percentages was high due the difference in the total number of stories. This signified the Chinese press' effort to reinforce Beijing's evolving narrative of a 'peacefully settlement of the Kashmir issue through the U.N. charter'.

Sourcing patterns in Table 4 suggests that Chinese media depends more on local news agencies as compared to foreign sources. The data showed that Xinhua News Agency, a state-run newswire service, individually served as the main news supplier for both China Daily (n = 8) and Global Times (n = 15) with a total of 23 (41.0%) news items. Whereas, in collaboration with other trans-national news agencies, such as AFP and Reuters, the figure sums up to 5 (8.9%), with a grand total of 28 (50.0%).

Table 4: Sources by Newspapers

NEWSPAPERS												SOURCES	TOTAL
	Xinhua		Special Correspondents		Local-Foreign Agencies		Reuters		AFP		Unknown		
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	N
China Daily	08	(38.0)	07	(33.3)	02	(9.5)	01	(4.7)	00	(0)	03	(14.2)	21
Global Times	15	(50.0)	07	(19.4)	02	(8.3)	05	(13.8)	6	(16.6)	01	(2.78)	36
Total	23	(41.0)	14	(25.0)	05	(8.9)	06	(10.7)	06	(10.7)	06	(10.7)	56

The newspapers' special correspondents was the next highest category (n = 14). Three news stories that appeared in Global Times news were authored by two correspondents that, however, have not been included in the table. Otherwise, the total number of Times correspondents would be 11. A higher score for this category is because the Kashmir crisis during the selected timeframe was at its peak, besides the UNGA session at the U.N. Among the transnational news agencies, the aggregate outcome of Reuters and AFP in both newspapers was the same (n = 6) scored the same results. However, most of the stories published in China Daily were collaborated ventures between Xinhua and AFP, but not a single story was independently produced by AFP. The last category comprised of news items that either had no source mentioned, or generally referred to 'Agencies', or the newspaper itself, such as Daily and Times, as a replacement for sources. Nevertheless, mostly news items with unidentified means are broadly considered to have generated from foreign sources.

Discussion & Conclusion

Besides editorials and columns, news stories widely contribute to expand people's knowledge about state-press nexus and international relations, with special reference to different countries' changing foreign policies towards the 'Other', or 'Us and Them', based on national interests and dominant ideologies. News stories are not just restricted to "reality judgements" but comprise "values" and/or "preference statements", implying that "there is, underlying the news, a picture of nation and society as it ought to be" (Gans, 1979: 39).

Indo-Pak Kashmir Conflict: Chinese Media Framing and Evolving Perspective

The main objective of this study, hence, was to measure and compare Chinese press coverage and framing of the Kashmir crisis amidst internal unrest, Indo-Pak border violations, and other related events after the scrapping of Article 370 of the Indian constitution on August 5, 2019, through framing theory. Findings revealed that portrayal of Kashmir and Indo-Pak conflict in the papers was strongly state-led, mirroring Beijing's policy and evolving perspectives on the issue, as the Chinese news media has a propensity to follow the government's political agendas (Wu, 2009).

The study also found that both newspapers, especially Global Times, gave more coverage to Pakistani as against Indian official policy on the disputed territory, while cautioning New Delhi on its "unilateral" and "illegal" move to alter Kashmir's geography. Notwithstanding similarities, irreconcilable differences also exist between China Daily and Global Times on the coverage and framing of the Kashmir conflict.

Global Times *vis-à-vis* China Daily reported on IHK's internal situation and ensuing Indo-Pak dispute in a forceful manner. Even the number of articles (reports, editorials, and columns) that appeared in Times was more as compared to Daily that reflects the paper's agenda and interest on the crisis (see Table 1). It is, however, suggested that both papers need to frequently publish opinions pieces on the Kashmir issue, as the power of editorials and columns cannot be undermined.

In both quantitative and qualitative evaluations, the news in Global Times *vs.* China Daily repeatedly projected the Chinese and Pakistani government and leaders concern over the Kashmir crisis; IHK's 'resolution according to the U.N. charter' supporting Pakistan's lifelong stand; its resolve to "uphold Pakistan's territorial sovereignty" and "national dignity" chiefly through the leadership frame. Even calls for 'peace' were integrated within the leadership frame, wherein top leaders in China specifically, besides U.N. Secretary and U.S. President, through their speeches and attitudes openly advocated a non-violent resolution of the issue. Key national narratives related to Pakistan, such as "all-weather friends", "cooperation", etc., in both newspapers were frequently highlighted through speeches, statements, and specific activities of Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi and other dignitaries at various forums, including the 74th UNGA session in both papers.

Moreover, reports on Islamabad's concerns over the crisis were strongly presented and reiterated through the leadership frame that included statements and decisions made by Pakistan's civil and military heads. On the contrary, the reports that used responsibility frame held Indian move directly liable for the unrest in IHK and any misadventure that would destabilise the region in future; though an insignificant number of news items contained this frame. Conflict frame was more visible in LoC violations and Ladakh conflict-oriented reports. Interestingly, almost similar news framing patterns, especially on leadership and conflict frames, were employed in China Daily and Global Times. Finally, news items consisting of peace frame focused more on a particular event rather than statements - for instance, the meeting held between India and Pakistan.

In addition, much of the news carried by both newspapers employed episodic frames (Iyengar, 1991) as the focus was primarily on the incident, while the larger historical details were excluded. For instance, reports on cross-border violations between India and Pakistan included both conflict and episodic frames - particularly in Global Times. It is, however, suggested that thematic frames should also be used by the press to provide its readers with a contextual background of the issue.

Also, both papers rarely projected the opinions and desires of the Kashmiri people directly regarding the issue within the selected timeframe that is a drawback. One reason, however, perhaps is the inaccessibility of the local and foreign media to IHK.

Another significant finding was the difference in the overall tones through language or lexical choices made in the news framing by both newspapers. Global Times, to a certain degree, framed news that comprised harsh words, like "jeopardy", "encroach", "deadlock", (for example, "India's Kashmir move to backfire", "India should give up its contradictory China policies", or "Delhi's move to encroach on Chinese territory"), setting a negative, or an aggressive, tone towards the issue. Whereas, China Daily framed news rather moderately. A contrastive analysis of lexical choices made by both newspapers can be gauged from the headings that appeared in the papers immediately after New Delhi's move:

"India issues presidential order revoking special status to Indian-controlled Kashmir" (China Daily; 2019, August 8)

   "Kashmir 'special status' in jeopardy" (Global Times; 2019, August 5)

Further, sourcing patterns reveal that both newspapers depend on Xinhua news agency, followed by their special correspondents and/or local reporters for most of the crisis-related news stories. This clearly indicates the media's inclination towards Beijing's perspective on Kashmir, as Xinhua is the government's newswire service.

While towing Beijing's line assertively, Global Times has played a rather satisfactory role in vehemently projecting the complexities of Kashmir conflict; the LoC cross-border violations; the downgrading of Indo-Pak economic relations; and Pakistan's policy on Kashmir. Contrastingly, China Daily somewhat treated both parties even-handedly, while following the CCP-led government's stand on Kashmir.

In a nutshell, both newspapers unambiguously backed China's evolving perspective to internationalise the Kashmir dispute and resolve it through the U.N. charter. The study, therefore, supports previous findings that news media on foreign affairs, especially during the emergency situations, based on national interests mostly echo and emphasise its government's official policies (Entman, 2003). As said earlier, it also endorses that news stories have underlying 'agendas' and are not only limited to "reality judgements" (Gans, 1979: 39).

As a final word, China has played a positive role in the Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict by calling for a closed-door session of the UNSC, and, thus, internationalising the issue

as also supporting life-long Pakistan's stance on it. The international community also needs to recognise and take notice of the rapidly deteriorating situation in IHK. The implications of sleeping over the Kashmir issue are too grave. Kashmir has become a nuclear flashpoint and cannot to be ignored. A plebiscite under the UNSC resolutions is a must and the only option for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir conflict.

The limitation of this study is that it focuses only on news stories. Future studies on New Delhi's Kashmir move, and the Indo-Pak conflict, may be conducted on opinions by employing a two-pronged methodological approach by using the electronic media and new digital technologies.

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