

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism
Department of Journalism

Master's Thesis

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CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Journalism

**Who Decides What's News: News Frame Analysis of
China's Covid-19 coverage of *The New York Times* and
*The Washington Post***

Master's Thesis

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Study programme: Erasmus Mundus Journalism

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Year of the defence: 2024

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2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
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In Prague on
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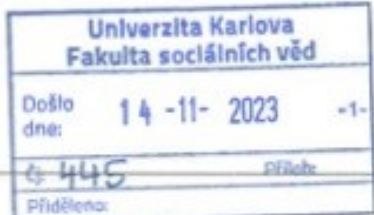
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Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis

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Main research question (max. 250 characters): How did the <i>New York Times</i> and the <i>Washington Post</i> frame the news about China's Covid-19?	
Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters): <p>Framing theory was introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1975. Frames, in his opinion, are "schemata of interpretation" that allow people "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences. Later, Robert Entman (1993) applied this framework to the analysis of mass media. Since then, frame analysis gradually became an important methodology to understand how media structure message delivery and present information. Many factors determine frames. Some lies in the newsroom (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), while others are related to the political and social environment in which news is distributed, such as elites (Gans, 2004) and social movements (Cooper, 2002).</p> <p>The framing of international news, which is mainly produced by foreign news bureaus, is more complicated. Foreign bureaus operate in foreign media systems. Their productions are shaped by national influence and interactions with local fixers ((Brooten & Verbruggen, 2017). This suggests the possibility that different journalistic values meet or even clash within these bureaus. On the one hand, foreign bureaus might be subject to national influence of its base. This is especially true within a competing political system, like U.S. vs China. On the other hand, foreign producers act as the gatekeeper. Their journalistic values decide what types of stories will be told to audiences back home (Gans, 2004:197). Scholars concluded several major influences on journalistic values: political, economic, organization, procedural, professional, and reference groups (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). However, most of the analysis was conducted within the context of domestic news production. The influence of foreign news bureaus, on framing news has not been stressed.</p>	

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

I will take a positivist approach to conduct my research.

I will use framing theory to first identify how China's Covid-19 stories are framed by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well as sourcing patterns.

After determining the frames and sourcing patterns, I would like to further analyze the factors that shape the frames. I would adopt the theoretical framework Herbert Gans developed to examine how news values – the criteria that journalists use to determine which events and stories are considered newsworthy – and journalists' personal backgrounds contribute to the framing.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

I expect to use frame analysis to examine the frame of China's Covid-19 reports by two major U.S. corporate media outlets, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, hoping to identify the frames they use to report China, and sourcing patterns.

Based on the findings, I will category these stories into different news values and profile the foreign correspondents who wrote those them in order to explore the factors that contribute to the framing (e.g., gender, race, education, etc.).

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

I will choose China coverage between December 1, 2019 and April 30, 2020 from both *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for my study. I chose December 1 because that was when rumors about an outbreak began to spread, and the April 30 because the lockdown of Wuhan, the city where the pandemic originated, was lifted on April 8, which was a major turning point of China's Covid policy. I chose two mainstream media outlets from the U.S. because journalistic professionalism took the root there. The industry has formed wide consensus about journalistic ethics, and the content is written by and for people coming from the same political system, making the results comparable by controlling more variables such as political and cultural differences.

After identifying the frames and sourcing patterns, I will design my questionnaire based on my findings and conduct semi-structured interviews with foreign correspondents working for the two media outlets. After that, I will conduct thematic analysis of the qualitative data I collect.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

Introduction

Starting with controversies and biases surrounding foreign correspondence and international news production. Introduce the case of China's Covid-19. Chinese readers' distrust and hostility toward foreign media reporting on China reached its peak during covid-19. How are stories are framed? What are the sources are quoted?

Gans, H. (2004) *Deciding What's News: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek and TIME*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

This study reveals the gatekeeping role news producers/journalists play in news production; their subjective selection of news producers/journalists decides what news audiences will consume.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.

The foundation work for framing theory.

Hanitzsch, T. & Mellado, C. (2011) What Shapes the News around the World? How Journalists in Eighteen Countries Perceive Influences on Their Work. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(3): 404-426.

This study identifies several major influences on journalistic values: political, economic, organization, procedural, professional, and reference groups.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1995). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA18118988>

A classic work on the factors that contribute to the framing of news.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

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KWEI, Quaye-Foli. *A comparison of online news media framing of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict in Ukraine, Russia, the US & China*. Prague, 2022. Diploma thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Security Studies. Supervisor Van Puyvelde, Damien.

KRUHLOVA, Olena. *COVID-19 pandemic in selected Ukrainian media*. Prague, 2023. Diploma thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Media Studies. Supervisor Miessler, Jan.

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Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Sandra Lábová. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.

Abstract

This study analyzes the changes in international newsgathering practices by examining the coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak in China by *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Washington Post* (WaPo), as well as the impacts of these developments on the formats and frames utilized by the two news outlets. The analysis of byline locations revealed that NYT maintained a considerable editorial team in China, whereas WaPo was significantly understaffed on the ground. The impact of this discrepancy is evident. NYT produced a significantly greater number of news stories with first-hand insights. Over half of the coverage produced by WaPo was created in Washington, D.C. The majority of the coverage was at the macro level, focusing on China as a subject of U.S. foreign policy. In general, the coverage was characterized by a prevalence of political commentaries and analysis. The quantity of multimedia coverage is limited in both cases. The study identified five frame dimensions: attribution of responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, severity, and conflict. The observed changes in reporting practices had no impact on the news frames employed. In both instances, the conflict frame was the most pervasive in the news reporting. With regard to opinion and analysis pieces, the conflict frame remained the most prevalent in NYT, whereas WaPo employed attribution of responsibility the most. NYT adopted a more critical stance towards China in its reporting, whereas the WaPo's opinion and analysis sections demonstrated a tendency to favor critical voices on China.

Abstrakt

Tato studie analyzuje změny v mezinárodních zpravodajských postupech prostřednictvím zkoumání zpravodajství o epidemii COVID-19 v Číně v denících The New York Times (NYT) a The Washington Post (WaPo), jakož i dopady tohoto vývoje na formáty a rámce používané oběma zpravodajskými médii. Analýza domicilů odhalila, že NYT si v Číně držel početný redakční tým, zatímco WaPo měl na místě výrazný personální podstav. Dopad tohoto rozdílu je zřejmý. NYT produkoval výrazně větší počet zpravodajských příspěvků s postřehy z první ruky. Více než polovina zpravodajství produkovaného WaPo byla vytvořena ve Washingtonu, D.C. Většina zpravodajství byla na obecné úrovni a zaměřovala se na Čínu jako předmět zahraniční politiky USA. Obecně se zpravodajství vyznačovalo převahou politických komentářů a analýz. Množství multimediálního zpravodajství bylo v obou případech omezené. Studie identifikovala pět rámců: přisouzení odpovědnosti, human interest, ekonomické důsledky, závažnost a konflikt. Pozorované změny ve zpravodajských postupech neměly vliv na používané zpravodajské rámce. V obou případech byl ve zpravodajství nejčastější rámeček konfliktu. Pokud jde o názorové a analytické příspěvky, rámeček konfliktu nejrozšířenější v NYT, zatímco WaPo nejvíce využíval přisuzování odpovědnosti. NYT zaujal kritičtější postoj k Číně ve svém zpravodajství, zatímco WaPo měly tendenci upřednostňovat kritické názory na Čínu v názorové a analytické sekci.

Keywords

Foreign Correspondence, News Frames, Legacy Media, COVID-19, China coverage, U.S. Media, Ideology, Op-Ed, Values

Klíčová slova

zahraniční zpravodajství, zpravodajské rámcování, tradiční média, COVID-19, zpravodajství z Číny, americká média, ideologie, komentáře, zpravodajské hodnoty

Title

Who Decides What's News: News Frame Analysis of China's Covid-19 coverage of the New York Times and the Washington Post

Název práce

Kdo rozhoduje o zprávách: Analýza rámcování ve zpravodajství o epidemii Covid-19 v Číně na stránkách New York Times a Washington Post

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Introduction

Changing Nature of Foreign Correspondence

Foreign correspondence could date back to 1847 when the Mexican War broke out (Hamilton, 2011a). Prior to the advent of digital communication and the invention of social media, traditional news media, encompassing newspapers, magazines, and television, constituted the primary sources of foreign news for the general public. During this era, the media had significant influence over directing public attention towards specific international events. Together the foreign correspondents based at bureaus overseas and editors in the home office determined the framing of international events and the prioritization of issues based on their assessment of news value and the internal pressure for standardization (Cohen, 1967). Within this context, media coverage was identified as a potential factor influencing the formulation of foreign policy.

The Vietnam War provides a classic illustration of this influence. The advent of video and audio reporting, coupled with the proliferation of televisions in the United States, provided news networks with the capacity and motivation to dispatch camera crews for on-site coverage (Ward, 2018). The graphic footage of the conflict that was broadcast on television had a profound impact on the perception of the war among the American public. This was evidenced by the large-scale protests that were held on the streets and the subsequent withdrawal of US troops (Reston, 1975). Then U.S. President Richard Nixon expressed frustration with the manner in which the war was covered by the U.S. media. In his memoir, he wrote, "In each night's TV news and each morning's paper, the war was reported battle by battle, but little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting was conveyed" (Smith & Nixon, 1978, p. 350). Nixon's frustration is a mere side note to the immense role of the media in cultivating strong public anti-war opinions.

The potential link between the shift in U.S. foreign policy in the Balkans during the 1990s and CNN's continued coverage of the civil war in Bosnia could be viewed as a further illustration of the influence of traditional media (Amanpour, 1996). Nevertheless, their influence has gradually diminished since that time. The emergence of more portable technologies has facilitated the diffusion of information across geographic boundaries with greater ease and reduced expenses. This allows new sources, such as amateur bloggers and citizen journalism, to make an appearance in the news business (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). The development of online journalism has challenged the dominance of traditional media and reshaped the field ((Maares & Hanusch, 2022; Eldridge, 2017). While having to compete with these new digital players that are born out of this new media environment, traditional news media also face extra pressure to complete their own digital transformation and adapt their business models to the evolving media landscape (Martens et al., 2018).

Within this context, the prevailing economic pressures on traditional media are making it challenging to sustain the old model of international news reporting, which is characterized by high costs and limited revenue streams (Hamilton 2010; 2011). The costs of setting overseas bureaus and dispatching foreign correspondents are fairly high. However, the returns are comparatively less attractive than they were in the old days, when media organizations were able to maintain exclusive and advantageous control of information. Thus, managerial decisions were made to increase 'soft news' and to reduce international news (Moisy, 1996). Consequently, the investment in international reporting has continued to decline, and the number of overseas bureaus and staff has been reduced (Norris, 1995). For instance, *Time* magazine, which had 26 bureaus in 1986, saw a significant reduction in 2008, with the number of bureaus almost halved. Similarly, *Newsweek* has also witnessed a considerable downturn, with its 16 bureaus in 1989 reduced to 11 by 2008 (Hamilton 2011,

464). The legacy media maintained a certain level of international reporting, which was driven by considerations of prestige and influence (Sambrook, 2011:5). Nevertheless, even these organizations, such as NYT, have been observed to rely more on the use of ‘second-hand’ and ‘borrowed news’ to fill their pages (Riffe et al., 1993).

However, as a consequence of the deepening of globalization, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. we are living in an ever-interconnected world. The lines between foreign and domestic news are getting increasingly blurred (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). The scope of international reporting has expanded beyond the mere dissemination of news from distant conflict zones. Instead, it encompasses the foreign events that have the potential to directly affect local communities. Alternatively, local news can adopt an international perspective. One recent example is the global impact of the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in China but resulted in millions of deaths and significant economic losses worldwide. The pandemic has demonstrated the value of journalism and the necessity for reliable information.

COVID-19

In December 2019, an unknown viral pneumonia began to disseminate in Wuhan, China, infecting dozens of individuals (BBC News, 2020). Later, the virus was identified and named the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The spread of this novel coronavirus rapidly developed into a global phenomenon. On 13 January 2020, Thai officials reported the first case outside of China (WHO, 2020a). Since then, the number of infected individuals across the globe had risen exponentially. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (WHO, 2020b). Subsequently, on 11 March 2020, the WHO referred to the outbreak as a pandemic (WHO,

2020c). The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on global health, economies and daily life.

COVID-19 has also become a prominent case study in the field of media and communication. During the pandemic, social media was the primary source of information and communication considering the fact that social-distancing measures such as lockdown were imposed. Misinformation and conspiracy theories spreading on social media across countries became salient (Cuan-Baltazar et al., 2020). *MIT Technology Review* characterized the pandemic as the first major "social-media infodemic" (Hao, 2020), highlighting the phenomenon of misinformation on social media. One way of tackling "infodemics" is believed to be spreading accurate and reliable information through social media platforms (Tsao et al., 2021). News outlets became primary sources for such information, e.g. public health updates, safety measures, and scientific developments. However, COVID-19 has not only highlighted the crucial function of journalism in public health crises but has also brought to light the complexities of reporting on a rapidly evolving global event with embedded political nuances, such as the origin of the virus and different responses, especially in the case of covering China. In the initial outbreak, there was massive coverage, mainly on hiding information from the public and mishandling the crisis (Jia & Lu, 2021; X. Zhang & Shaw, 2020; Y. Zhang & Trifiro, 2022). Therefore, this article seeks to select this particular case study in order to examine, from the perspective of foreign correspondence, how China was covered by the U.S. legacy media.

This article begins by reviewing some of the literatures that have examined the changing field of foreign correspondence, the context of international news flow and media systems, and the domestication of foreign news especially in the U.S media, as well as the case of China. It then compares the COVID-19 coverage of two legacy US media, *The New*

York Times (hereinafter referred to as NYT) and *The Washington Post* (hereinafter referred to as WaPo), during the initial outbreak. This study focuses on three aspects of the production of international news, 1) practices of news gathering; 2) formats; 3) frames of news coverage and opinion pieces. The framing theory is referred as a conceptual framework given its central role in the domestication of foreign news. Based on content analysis, this study aims to reveal how traditional media outlets report on a global health crisis or on a foreign country in general, in the context of the broader decline in international news coverage.

Built upon these observations, it steps further to discuss the impact of different reporting approaches on the framing of international news for domestic audience. The research aims to contribute on two aspects: firstly, to address existing gaps in our knowledge and enhance our comprehension of the practices of foreign correspondence; secondly, to contribute theoretically to the research on the role of the media in influencing public perceptions of foreign countries during periods of crisis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Changing Field of Foreign Correspondence

The role of foreign correspondents in disseminating information about foreign events to the general public is of paramount importance. Historically, the profession has been perceived as one that holds a high degree of prestige. As Cohen (1964, p. 17) described, a foreign correspondent is ‘a cosmopolitan among cosmopolitans, a man in gray flannels who ranks very high in the hierarchy of reporters.’ This prestige can be conveyed in a number of ways. On the one hand, it means that foreign correspondents are more experienced than their domestic counterparts. Only those who have accumulated significant journalistic experience and have remained in their roles for extended periods are selected for posts abroad. On the other hand, foreign correspondents build their own professional network (Wu & Hamilton,

2004, p. 519-521). Lastly, their role extends beyond that of mere journalists; they themselves become stories. Foreign correspondence is the subject of many biographies, autobiographies, and fictions. The exciting narratives of pursuing stories in dangerous or exotic regions lend the profession a romantic glow. For example, Martha Gellhorn (1988), who covered the Spanish Civil War for the *News York Times*, wrote a memoir about her experiences working with Ernest Hemingway and photojournalist Robert Capa, positioning them as the protagonists of the adventurous narrative. In these memoirs, ‘themes related to individual heroism and free-wheeling autonomy recur endlessly’ (Murrell, 2014, p. 25). Such literature serves to “reinforced the romantic one-dimensional view of correspondents” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 5).

The literatures above explored the practices of traditional foreign correspondents. Despite the fact that the term ‘foreign correspondents’ has been referenced in multiple studies and memoirs, there is currently no systematic studies (Self, 2011) or established theoretical definition of this field (Hahn et al., 2017). Hahn and Lönnendonker (2009) conceptualized foreign correspondents as journalists who are not situated in the same country as their commissioning media outlet. However, the deepening of globalization and technological development blurred the lines between foreign and domestic correspondents. Hamilton and Jenner (2004) suggested that ‘the traditional elite foreign correspondent is a yardstick that no longer measures well’. Thus, foreign correspondent, as a profession, should be redefined. Accordingly, they identified seven new forms of foreign correspondents based on distinctive characteristics: ‘parachute journalist,’ ‘foreign foreign correspondent,’ ‘local foreign correspondent,’ ‘foreign local correspondent,’ ‘in-house foreign correspondent,’ ‘premium service foreign correspondent,’ and ‘amateur correspondent’ (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004, p. 313). In contrast, Gross and Kopper (2011) adopted an even more expansive definition of the term. They defined foreign correspondents as individuals who possess the

capacity to shape perceptions of foreign countries, cultures, and policies. This definition, proposed from the perspective of function, is more comprehensive.

The new typology of foreign correspondents put forth by Hamilton and Jenner (2004) is situated within a context of technological change in the industry. This impact is multifaceted, extending to encompass aspects of the work routine. At the individual level, due to technology constrains, journalists historically enjoyed considerable autonomy in shaping their stories and reporting, exercising significant discretion in their work. However, the advent of modern communication technologies has resulted in a more coordinated approach to international reporting (Hamilton, 2011a, p. 216). The results of two surveys of American foreign correspondents published in 2003 and 2004, respectively, supported this assertion (Willnat & Weaver, 2003; Wu & Hamilton, 2004). Willnat and Weaver (2003) found that modern communication technologies, such as email and the Internet, were widely used by journalists. More surprisingly, majority of the respondents indicated that they would even utilize computerized databases or data in their work. Similarly, Wu and Hamilton (2004) demonstrated that journalists would utilize technology for information acquisition, source access and competitor monitoring.

Technological advances have also had an impact at the organizational level, with consequences that may be considered both positive and negative. Traditional media outlets were compelled to adjust their international coverage or, in some cases, their entire workflow or structure, in order to accommodate the emergence of the new informational landscape. The most significant consequence of technological advancement on traditional media is the considerable reduction in the financial burden associated with the dissemination of information. Thus, they have to compete with numerous emerging competitors in this field. In order to reduce expenditure and increase profitability, the news media organizations are increasingly hiring local freelancers or parachuting journalists (Brooten & Verbruggen,

2017). Meanwhile, there has been a notable enhancement in their capacity to leverage technology. For instance, domestic journalists in some German media have assumed responsibility for international business reporting. German scholar Gerd G. Kopper coined the term ‘virtual foreign correspondence’, meaning that international news could be conducted from a news desk at home via Internet technology (Hahn et al., 2017), to conceptualize the changing practices of foreign correspondence. These discussions are situated within the context of the significant economic challenges facing traditional media, with the aim of reducing costs in order to maintain international coverage.

Nevertheless, the impact of abovementioned organizational changes on international reporting remains an understudied topic. In order to fill this gap, this study chose the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study, comparing the coverage of two U.S. legacy media to explore the changing journalistic practices of traditional actors in the field of foreign correspondence. This study adopts the narrow definition of foreign correspondence put forth by Hahn and Lönnendonker, as it focuses on the changes in traditional media organizations. The study seeks to address the following questions: To what extent has international news gathering been shifted back to home offices? What implications might this have for the dissemination of information to domestic audiences regarding foreign events?

The impact is primarily gauged in terms of the diversity of formats and frames employed in the coverage. Before proceeding to further analysis, it is first necessary to review how foreign news is delivered by traditional news organizations to domestic audiences, and the role played by changing practices of international news gathering, particularly in the case of China coverage.

2.2 International News Flow & Media Systems

The term 'foreign correspondent' is typically used to describe journalists from Western countries. It is often the case that they are the ones who travel to impoverished developing countries or regions where war and conflict are ongoing to bring back stories to their home countries. As a result, they occupy a central position within the international news flow. Mowlana (1985) posited that the production and distribution of news is predominantly from wealthier northern countries to poorer southern ones. Despite technological advances giving rise to the growth of non-Western media, Western agencies and organizations continue to exert considerable influence (Chang et al., 2009; Wu, 2007).

However, it should be noted that the media systems in Western countries do not operate in exactly the same way; there are significant differences across nations. Based on four key dimensions of national media systems, development of the media markets, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, role of the state, Hallin and Mancini (2004) identified three models, polarized pluralist model, democratic corporatist model, and liberal model. The United States adheres to the liberal model, which is typified by market-dominated media systems with minimal state intervention. In such a model, public broadcasting system is relatively weak, and privately owned media are entirely free of regulation. The United States is the country that has most advanced market forces within this model, while the government exerts minimal influence on the media (Briggs, 2003). The case of the United States can therefore be considered purely market-based (Sparks & Reading, 1997). In contrast, wealthy democracies in Northwest Europe are characterized by the democratic corporatist model, which encompasses a strong public broadcasting system and considerable state intervention, while ensuring the freedom of press. This model can also be called public-service model.

The nature of news is markedly distinct under the market-based and public-service models. The differences between the two models have been compared in various academic studies, with a particular focus on elections and political campaigns (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Schoenbach, 1994; Semetko et al., 2013). From an economic perspective, in the United States, defined as a market-dominant media system, media organizations have accorded undue significance to ratings and traffic, which are key indicators of advertising revenue. A recent and illustrative example of this phenomenon is the fact that mainstream media outlets have provided a platform for Donald Trump's non-democratic views for entertainment and profit purposes, benefiting from his provocative rhetoric while amplifying it (Waisbord et al., 2018, pp. 30-31).

When it comes to foreign news, Hamilton (2011a, p. 212) argued that the mass media model effectively subsidized niche news that otherwise would not be able to sustain. However, as technology advances and sources proliferate, advertisers have demonstrated a waning interest in these high-investment but low-audience niche news segments. As a result, legacy media outlets have been compelled to reduce the amount of foreign news they provide. A Carnegie Corporation report revealed that network coverage of foreign news in 1995 was one-third its 1975 level (Gorney, 2002: 49). Several studies showed the shrinking newshole of newspapers and network news, and the increase of borrowed news (Riffe et al., 1993; Riffe et al., 1994; Riffe & Budianto, 2001). The war in Iraq has prompted a brief resurgence of interest in foreign news by U.S. mainstream media, but it was short-lived (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004, p. 302).

The contrast between market-based and public-service oriented media systems is particularly apparent in their approach to international news coverage. In the public-service model, media are less subject to market pressures, which results in a more robust

international news presence (Dimock & Popkin, 1997). In contrast, market-based systems frequently adapt their reporting to align closely with perceived audience interests, which resulted in a reduction of international coverage. This distinction was clearly demonstrated by Elliot's (1981) comparative study of European and American broadcast coverage. Over a five-day period, Elliot identified 55 world news items that were covered by European broadcasts but omitted from U.S. media outlets. Furthermore, when U.S. radio did include international news, it predominantly focused on stories with clear domestic connections or those that could be readily localized for American audiences.

The disparity in international coverage between these two media systems raises important questions about the breadth and depth of information available to audiences in different contexts, and the potential implications for public understanding of global affairs. Given these considerations, this study focuses on two legacy media outlets from the United States to examine how news organizations in the market-oriented media system approach international news coverage and frame foreign news to domestic audiences.

This study chose two legacy media from the U.S. for two key reasons. Primarily, the media operate within a market-oriented media system is more responsive to changes in the industry due to profit-oriented concerns. Out of similar concerns, U.S. media outlets are more willing to frame foreign news in a way that would attract readers, especially domestic one. Prior to undertaking a more detailed examination, it is essential to undertake a review of the how the U.S. media deliver international news to domestic readers.

2.3 Foreign News & Domestic Audiences

2.3.1 Foreign News in the U.S. Media

A number of surveys and studies have suggested the low interest of US readers in foreign news (Pew Research Center, 2012; Aalberg et al., 2013). However, Sambrook (2011)

posited that readers demonstrate less interest in top-down foreign news but evince a pronounced interest in wars and conflicts, particularly those with a direct bearing on US interests. Wanta and Hu (1993) identified four categories of news coverage that would typically be prioritized: international conflicts involving the United States, terrorism involving the U.S., crime and drugs, and military and nuclear arms.

Within this context, the delivery of foreign news to audiences in the United States is subject to a process of 'domestication', whereby the news is tailored to align with the local preferences and interests of the audience. This process encompasses the selective emphasis placed on specific aspects, the exclusion of others, and, on occasion, the portrayal of events in a manner that is perceived to be stereotypical (Alasuutari et al., 2013; Clausen, 2004). While audience preferences play a significant role in shaping this process, numerous other factors also exert influence.

Despite the complete market dominance and minimal government regulation of the US news media, as well as the high degree of professionalism observed across the industry, with well-established professional norms and standardized work processes, it can be inferred that these media organizations are not entirely autonomous, operating within the broader political and social systems that shape their actions to some extent, meaning that some interdependence between media and government exist (Merrill, 1974), and it has an impact on framing foreign news. Cassara's (1998) research revealed that U.S. media coverage of human rights issues in Latin America mirrored Carter's human rights policy. Another significant criterion in relation to this is national interests. In general, the prioritisation of national interests is regarded as a key factor in influencing foreign news coverage (Lee & Yang, 1996). Yang (2003) conducted a comparative analysis of Chinese and American media coverage of the NATO airstrike and found that both sides emphasised their respective

national interests. This implies that the presence of this factor is ubiquitous and that there is no distinction between ideologies and political systems.

In the United States, foreign news coverage is profoundly shaped by a multifaceted interplay of economic, political, and societal forces. Ahern (1984) emphasised that economic and political factors exert a significant influence on the coverage of foreign news, which is frequently presented through the lens of specific ideologies. This tendency has its roots in the broader societal context, in which dominant social and political ideologies play a pivotal role in the formation of news frames (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1979). American journalists, influenced by these prevailing ideologies, tend to present international affairs in a manner that aligns with U.S. perspectives (Gans, 1979; Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998). This inclination, in conjunction with the impact of governmental agendas and national interests, gives rise to a complex and multifaceted landscape with regard to foreign news coverage. The resulting narrative presented to domestic audiences is thus shaped by an intersection of cultural proximity (Johnson, 1997), organisational constraints, and societal ideologies.

As observed by Peng (2004), the U.S. news media frequently presents foreign news stories in a manner that reflects certain political and ideological biases. The case study that Peng discusses is the coverage of China in the United States media. This presents a unique case study, given the significant differences between the two nations in terms of political systems, ideologies, and global influence. The following section will provide a detailed elaboration on this topic.

2.3.2 The Case of China

As a rising global power with a government structure and values that are frequently at odds with those of the United States, China's portrayal in American media is shaped by

underlying tensions and competing national interests (Arsenault & Castells, 2008; Peng, 2004).

A review of historical literature reveals that there has been a notable fluctuation in the media frames utilized for coverage of China in the United States during different historical periods. From the 1930s to the 1940s, Henry Luce and his Time empire espoused a robust anti-communist stance, exerting a significant influence on public opinion in favour of the emerging Cold War (MacKinnon & Friesen, 1990: 177). Over time, there has been a gradual shift in this regard. Notwithstanding the prevailing negative tone of stories about China, particularly in terms of political and ideological frames, research indicates that economic and financial progress, as well as China's contribution to global peace, are presented in a more positive light (Peng, 2004; Wang et al., 2023).

In the context of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, China received extensive international media coverage. In the UK, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and *The Guardian* presented the news in a more impartial manner, whereas *The Guardian* would be more inclined to emphasize human rights concerns. The popular tabloid, the *Daily Mail*, presented China stories in a manner that is generally perceived as negative (Zhang & Shaw, 2020). In the case of the United States, the advent of the novel coronavirus further intensified the existing tensions between the two countries, thereby introducing a new layer of complexity to the media narrative. The coverage of the pandemic became highly politicized. The portrayal of China in U.S. media during this period was characterized by an emphasis on themes of authoritarianism, lack of transparency, and global responsibility (Jia & Lu, 2021; Zhang & Shaw, 2020; Zhang & Trifiro, 2022). This was accompanied by a grappling with domestic political rhetoric that sought to shift blame or deflect criticism

(Zhao, 2021). In their analysis, Chinese scholars Jia & Lu (2021) identified a number of rhetorical techniques, including 'naming, shaming, blaming, and taming'.

This complex interplay of factors – including long-standing perceptions of China (Xie & Page, 2013), current geopolitical tensions, and the unprecedented global health crisis – created a unique context for media framing, making the coverage of China and the pandemic a particularly rich area for analysis of how U.S. media construct narratives around foreign news of significant domestic impact (Brewer et al., 2003; Peng, 2004). The resulting media representations not only reflect but also potentially shape public opinion and policy attitudes towards China in the United States (Xie & Page, 2013).

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the nature and patterns of China's representation in U.S. media, a more structured approach is required to conduct a systematic analysis of this topic. The concept of framing theory, which focuses on the manner in which issues are presented and interpreted, provides a valuable analytical lens through which the nuances of China's portrayal in U.S. news coverage can be examined. It offers a sophisticated analytical tool for understanding the ways in which media shape public perception and discourse. By employing this theoretical framework, it is possible to move beyond mere descriptive accounts of media content and delve into the underlying mechanisms that influence how China is framed in American media discourse. Prior to undertaking further analysis, it is first necessary to undertake a review of the theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 News Frames

Framing has a long history as a theory of media effect (Scheufele, 1999; Watson, 2007; Wicks 2005). It was introduced in 1974 by the sociologist Erving Goffman. his view, frames are "schemata of interpretation" that allow people to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman 1974, 21) events. Later, Robert Entman (1993) applied this framework to the analysis of mass media. Since then, frame analysis has gradually become an important method for understanding how the media structure the delivery of messages and the presentation of information.

The role of news frames in influencing public perception and understanding of issues is a key point highlighted by Scheufele (1999). Entman (1993) posits that these frames not only determine the prominence of an issue but also shape how news consumers perceive, comprehend, process, and retain related information. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) introduced the concept of "media packages," which they defined as clusters of frame-related ideas that form the basis of public discourse on an issue. They argued that these packages evolve over time and compete for dominance in the media landscape, ultimately shaping public opinion.

In their seminal study published in 2000, Semetko and Valkenburg identified five dominant news frames that have since become widely recognized in media research: the conflict frame, the human interest frame, the economic consequences frame, the morality frame and the responsibility frame. These frames represent the prevailing structural and presentational patterns observed in news stories. The conflict frame emphasizes the existence of opposing viewpoints, whereas the human interest frame personalizes issues by focusing on individual narratives. The economic consequences frame emphasizes the

financial implications of events, the morality frame interprets events through an ethical or religious lens, and the responsibility frame attributes causation or the solution of problems to specific actors.

The process of identifying frames in news content can be approached through two main methods: inductive and deductive coding. This is in accordance with the approach outlined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The deductive approach entails the utilization of pre-defined frames based on extant research. This method allows researchers to evaluate the manner in which these established frames are manifested in news coverage across different sources. This approach is particularly valuable for comparative studies of news content across a range of outlets, as it allows for the creation of standardized indices. The indices thus facilitate direct comparisons of the ways in which different media sources frame issues, thereby providing insights into patterns and variations in news framing across the media landscape. The deductive approach is particularly effective in that it allows for the systematic analysis of large volumes of news content using consistent criteria, thereby enhancing the reliability and comparability of findings in media framing research.

In the context of health crises, the manner in which an issue is framed plays a pivotal role in influencing public response and shaping policy decisions (Shih et al., 2008). In a comparative study of SARS news coverage in China and the United States, Beaudoin (2007) synthesised the frames that were more relevant to reporting on health issues and those that had been discussed in previous studies. Subsequently, he adopted four frames for analysis: attribution of responsibility, economic consequences, human interest, and severity. The framework proposed by Beaudoin (2007) provides a robust basis for examining the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in China. As respiratory diseases with a global impact that

originated in China, SARS and covid-19 exhibit numerous similarities. Accordingly, this study is informed by the framework proposed by Beaudoin.

However, in contrast to SARS, the global impact of COVID-19 was more significant, and the outbreak saw a greater degree of political and ideological confrontation, with China's authoritarian nature representing a particularly noteworthy exception. In light of the distinctive geopolitical context of this pandemic, this study builds upon Beaudoin's work by incorporating an additional frame, conflict, in order to more accurately reflect the heightened political tensions.

Among the various news frames that have been the subject of media research, the conflict frame has attracted considerable attention. This frame, which emphasises discord between individuals, groups, or institutions in order to capture audience interest, has been the subject of extensive study (Patterson, 1993). Neuman et al. (1992) discovered that, within a restricted set of central frames employed in U.S. news reporting across a range of issues, the conflict frame was the most prevalent. The prevalence of the conflict frame often results in the oversimplification of complex political debates. For example, Patterson (1993) observed that presidential election campaign coverage is frequently framed in terms of conflict, which reduces substantive policy discussions to more straightforward oppositional narratives. This proclivity for focusing on conflict in news reporting has the potential to influence how the public perceives and engages with political issues. The repeated use of conflict frames across different news topics, as identified by Neuman et al. (1992), indicates the presence of a consistent pattern in U.S. media. This prevalence gives rise to significant questions regarding the impact of such framing on public discourse and political understanding, underscoring the necessity for a critical analysis of news consumption and media literacy.

This study analyses five distinct news frames: attribution of responsibility, economic consequences, human interest, severity, and conflict. These frames were operationalized in order to reflect the specific context of China's initial outbreak of the COVID-19 which originated in Wuhan, Hubei province. The conflict frame encompassed disagreements between the Chinese regime and its citizens regarding the implementation of containment measures and the transparency of information, as well as tensions between China and Western countries and specific conflicts with the US concerning the origin of the virus and the efficacy of the response strategies employed. The economic consequences frame concentrated on the repercussions for China's domestic economy, the consequences for global trade, and China's economic aid initiatives. The attribution of responsibility frame addressed the issue of the Chinese government's accountability and the question of blame that had been attributed to it by other countries. The human interest frame emphasized the impact of the virus on individuals and their daily lives, whereas the severity frame focused on the gravity of the situation, including the virus's potential for spread, mortality rates, and the necessity for preventive measures. This expanded framework allows for a nuanced analysis of media coverage, acknowledging the complex interplay of health, economic, social, and geopolitical factors that characterized the early stages of the pandemic in China. By examining these frames, we can better understand how the media constructed narratives around the outbreak, potentially influencing public opinion and policy responses both within China and internationally.

3.2 Determinants of Foreign News Frames

The construction of news frames, as described by Scheufele (1999), is the result of a complex process influenced by a multitude of factors both within and outside the newsroom. Within media organizations, the personal attitudes, ideologies and values of journalists exert

a considerable influence, as do the organizational environments in which they work. This is a view that has been expressed by scholars such as Shoemaker & Reese (1996), Gans (1979) and Hanitzsch & Mellado (2011).

Nevertheless, the impact of framing is not confined to the boundaries of the newsroom. The broader political and social environment in which news is distributed exerts considerable pressure on the manner in which stories are framed. This encompasses the influence of interest groups, the dynamics of political economies, and the preferences of ruling elites, as elucidated by Gans (2003). Furthermore, social movements can also influence the way in which media content is framed, as Cooper (2002) has observed. Perhaps most crucially, Herman and Chomsky (1988) posit that structural factors and elite interests exert a dominant influence on the manner in which news is presented to the public. It is therefore essential to gain an understanding of this complex network of influences if one is to engage in critical analysis of media content, enhance media literacy and work towards more balanced and ethical reporting practices. As the media landscape continues to evolve, particularly with the advent of digital platforms and the growth of global interconnectedness, the study of frame-building processes remains a crucial area of research in media and communication studies.

The framing of foreign news is a complex process that is shaped by a multitude of factors. As Yang (2003) observed, national interests frequently serve as an overarching framework through which international events are interpreted. As Cassara (1989) has observed, government policies and agendas also exert a significant influence on the narrative framework within which foreign news is presented. Cultural backgrounds serve as an additional lens through which events are framed, resonating with or contrasting against domestic norms, as observed by Starck and Villanueva (1992). The production process itself

represents another layer of framing, with foreign news bureaus acting as the primary source. In this context, the interactions between journalists and local fixers, as examined by Brooten and Verbruggen (2017) and Bishara (2006), play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of the story. They influence which aspects are emphasised, downplayed, or contextualized for the domestic audience.

As previously stated, the advent of new technologies and the evolution of the media landscape have introduced a number of variables that have yet to be fully examined. As foreign correspondents increasingly employ remote reporting methods, such as working from home offices or utilizing internet resources, the potential impact on news frames remains largely unexplored. This article seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between these evolving news-gathering practices and the frames employed in foreign news coverage. This study investigates whether the physical displacement of journalists from their subject matter affects the framing of international events. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to our understanding of how modern journalistic practices may shape the lens through which global news is presented to audiences. the following research question were articulated:

RQ 1: How did the practices of international news gathering and production of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* change when covering China's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak?

RQ 2: If any, how did these changes in practices affect the format the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* present the news of China's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak?

RQ 3: If any, how did these changes in practice affect the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* frame the news of China's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak?

RQ 4: In general, in which light did the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* cover the news of China's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak? Positive or Negative?

4. Data and Methodology

4.1 Case Selection

This study selected two legacy news media from the United States due to the fact that two media outlets that operate within the same media system allows a more direct comparison. Plus, the U.S. media operates within a market-based media system, which renders the mass media organizations particularly sensitive to changes in the news industry. Therefore, changes of some reporting practices due to the prevailing media environment could be identified.

To ascertain the distinctions in news frames between NYT and WaPo, this study employs a design-based approach to initially discern the variations in pivotal variables and subsequently ensures their consistency. In this way, the two cases, which are similar in nature, are comparable (Labovitz et al., 1971).

NYT and WaPo are 'the most prestigious and trusted sources of daily international news' (Liss, 2003, p. 300). The two instances are comparable due to a number of significant similarities. Both are long-established, nationally circulated newspapers, with the NYT founded in 1851 and WaPo in 1877. They are the second and third most circulated newspapers with a national audience, respectively. The respective print circulations are substantial, with 296,329 and 139,232 copies distributed. In previous studies, Melissa (1997) demonstrated that circulation size is the sole indicator of the length and source of articles.

Additionally, the size of their editorial teams is comparable, with the New York Times employing 1,700 staff writers and the Washington Post having 1,050 journalists. The aforementioned manpower and resources allow extensive coverage and in-depth reporting. As subscription-based media outlets operating behind paywalls, they target similar audience segments. Moreover, an assessment of their political leanings by AllSides Media Bias Rating indicates that both outlets are situated on the left side of the political spectrum, with the New York Times rated as "lean left" and the Washington Post as "left". Faris et al. (2017) posited that media outlets with a left-wing orientation tend to be more firmly anchored in the traditions and practices of journalism. Besides, both organizations established bureaus in China and are characterized as belonging to the 'negative school' in their coverage of China (Liss, 2003, p. 300).

The selected media event, namely the global pandemic of the COVID-19, is of international significance and have global ramifications. The event was selected for three reasons. Firstly, in contrast to issues that receive global attention but which pose a risk only to a single country, such as the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, the outbreak of the COVID-19 has resulted in a pandemic that has transcended national boundaries, affecting countries across the globe. As a result, this has provided both international and domestic dimensions for analytical investigation. The global scale enables the use of a comparative case study approach, which is especially pertinent for examining intricate phenomena within real-world contexts (Yin, 2017).

Secondly, the pandemic prompted an unparalleled global effort in news production, providing a vast and varied corpus of material with which to analyze how different news media outlets present a complex, evolving crisis. This abundance of data is particularly beneficial for the comprehensive collection of data in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994).

A rich dataset allows researchers to enhance the validity and reliability of findings in content analysis studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Lastly, China has invested considerable resources in both capital and human capital with the objective of establishing a network capable of effectively disseminating information about China's narrative over the past decade (Gill, 2020). In the initial outbreak of the pandemic, the system was activated with the objective of mitigating the negative impact of the crisis on the Party's reputation. The current pandemic has marked the first occasion on which global events have highlighted the ideological confrontations. During the pandemic, debates have been centered on the origins of the virus and the efficacy of various strategies employed in response to the outbreak, including the implementation of lockdown measures. These tensions illustrate the significant influence of political factors on the formation of international news narratives, particularly within the context of US media framing. Gans (1980) posited that US journalism is characterized by the presence of ideologies and values that are deeply rooted in American society. The pandemic has thus served not only as a global health crisis but also as a lens through which to examine the extent to which national ideologies influence media coverage of international events. The ideological dimension of news reporting during the pandemic provides a rich context for studying the construction and dissemination of media frames in times of global crisis.

In light of these tensions, COVID-19 is an ideal context for analyzing news reporting practices during periods of crisis. The multifaceted nature of the pandemic as a research subject allows a comprehensive and detailed examination of research questions from a variety of perspectives (Maxwell, 1996).

4.2 Sampling

This study analysed news entries on the outbreak of the COVID-19 in China published in NYT and WaPo between 1 January 2020 and 30 April 2020. This approach was taken to ensure that the sampling period was clearly defined and relevant (Krippendorff, 2018). The starting date was selected on the basis of the emergence of news reports concerning the appearance of a novel, mysterious virus in China, which commenced at this time and subsequently gained global media attention. The end date was set at 30 April 2020, as this was the date on which the lockdown of Wuhan, the city where the virus originated, was lifted. This was a significant turning point in China's policy response to the pandemic during the first wave. Towards the end of the month, the central government set the date for the Congress, thereby indicating that the initial phase of the pandemic had, in the view of Chinese officials, been brought under control. A four-month window was deemed sufficient for data collection (Neuendorf, 2017). As a news event of significant global consequence, this period allowed for the collection of a comprehensive dataset for analysis of the manner in which China was covered during the outbreak.

The NYT news entries were collated via the LexisNexis database, utilising a keyword search methodology as recommended by Riffe et al. (2019). The search keywords 'China' and 'virus' yielded 1,780 pieces from NYT. The samples were then refined (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013) by the excluding replicated entries and those that were solely U.S. domestic news, including stories about racism against Asian Americans. Only those entries that either took place in China (including Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions) or were U.S. domestic and international news with China playing a significant role were included in the collection. The aforementioned refinement process yielded a total of 161 entries from NYT. In the case of the WaPo, it was not well indexed in the Lexis-Nexis

database. In order to enhance the comprehensiveness of the data set, additional data sources were utilised (Bowen, 2009). The news entries were collected directly from the official website using the same keywords. A total of 61 entries were collated from WaPo.

The disparity in the number of articles between the two sources (161 from NYT vs. 61 from WaPo) is acknowledged as a limitation. Nevertheless, as Patton (2023) posited, in qualitative research, the depth and richness of the data are often considered to outweigh numerical equivalence. The combined sample of 222 articles provides a substantial corpus for analysis, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the framing of the COVID-19 outbreak in China by these two legacy media during this critical period.

4.3 Content Analysis

This study employed a multi-dimensional content analysis approach, which permits a comprehensive examination of the manner in which the WaPo and the NYT framed the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in China. By analyzing the location, format and frames employed, the study seeks to provide insights into the practices of international reporting and to identify any potential correlations between reporting approaches and the framing of a global crisis. This approach is consistent with Van Gorp's (2007) proposition that frame analysis in the context of news media should take into account both the explicit content and the underlying contextual factors that shape news production.

The objective of the location analysis was to examine the practices employed by foreign correspondents in gathering news. In line with the hierarchical model of influences on media content put forth by Shoemaker and Reese (1995), this study identified that journalists' physical locations exert a considerable influence on their access to sources, cultural understanding, and, consequently, their news output. This analysis is particularly

pertinent in light of the evolving nature of foreign correspondence in the digital age, as discussed by Livingston and Asmolov (2010) and Hamilton and Jenner (2004). In order to evaluate the relative positioning of the reporting locations of the New York Times and the Washington Post, this study categorized locations based on bylines into three groups: The categorization of reporting locations can be divided into three distinct groups: Bureau, Home Office, and Hybrid. The term 'Bureau' is used to describe articles written by journalists who are physically present in the country or region being reported on. The term 'Home Office' is used to describe articles written by journalists based in the media organization's home country. These articles combine inputs from both overseas correspondents and home office journalists. The objective of this scheme is to facilitate an analysis of the changes that have occurred in international reporting practices. The comprehensive coding scheme for the location analysis is presented in Appendix 1.

Format analysis was employed to compare and contrast the news presentation styles of NYT and WaPo in order to evaluate the impact of changing reporting practices. This aspect of content analysis is crucial as it reflects how media organizations structure and deliver information, potentially influencing audience perception and engagement (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2013). Format analysis categorized the news entries into three types: news articles, opinion/column/analysis pieces, and multimedia reporting (including photo and video reports). Their analysis highlighted the increasing importance of diverse content formats in engaging audiences and adapting to changing media consumption habits. By applying this framework, this study aimed to evaluate the richness and diversity of the final reports produced by the two media. The detailed coding scheme for the format analysis is presented in Appendix 2.

Frame analysis, a central component of this study, provides a structured method for identifying and comparing the framing techniques used by NYT and WaPo in their news coverage. This analysis employed a deductive approach inspired by Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) work and further informed by Van Gorp's (2007) insights on frame construction. This study categorized the news entries into five frame dimensions: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and attribution of responsibility. This framework was applied to evaluate how NYT and The WaPo frame their news stories, potentially influencing public perception and understanding of the outbreak of COVID-19. By examining these framing patterns, this study aimed to reveal the approach NYT and WaPo potentially shape public discourse. The detailed coding scheme for the frame analysis is presented in Appendix 3.

The coding mechanism for frame analysis of COVID-19 news coverage was developed based on Matthes and Kohring's (2008) systematic approach to frame identification. Each frame dimension was operationalized through a set of variables that could be reliably coded in the context of the pandemic.

For instance, the conflict frame was identified by the conflict frame was identified by the presence of presence of disagreements between the Chinese regime and its people over containment measures and information transparency, tensions between China and Western countries regarding the outbreak's handling, and specific conflicts between China and the US over virus origin and response strategies.

The economic consequences frame was coded when the article focused on the impact of the outbreak on China's domestic economy, its effects on global trade and supply chains, and China's economic aid and donations to other countries.

The attribution of responsibility frame was coded when articles suggested Chinese government accountability for mishandling the outbreak or concealing information, as well as instances of the US or other countries blaming China for the pandemic's spread.

The human impact/interest frame captured personal stories of those affected by the virus in China, experiences of healthcare workers, and how the virus changed every-day life.

The severity frame was identified through emphasis on the seriousness of the virus, its potential for rapid spread, high mortality rates, and the urgent need for strong preventive measures.

Multiple frames could be present in a single article about the pandemic, but only the dominant frame based on its prominence and frequency within the text will be identified, as suggested by Tankard (2001). Following Van Gorp's (2010) recommendations, a codebook was developed that provided clear definitions, examples, and coding instructions for each COVID-19-related frame. This ensured consistency in the coding process and enhanced reliability in analyzing media coverage of the pandemic.

This rigorous coding mechanism allowed for a systematic and reliable identification of frames in the news coverage, providing a solid foundation for comparing and contrasting the framing approaches of WaPo and NYT in their coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak in China.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 Two Approaches to International Newsgathering

After examining the location of bylines, this study found that the two media outlets have adopted disparate approaches to international newsgathering. As presented in Table 1,

NYT has largely retained the traditional approach, with approximately 70% of its stories sourced from the Beijing bureau (including the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions). In contrast, WaPo is more aligned with the emerging approach of digital journalism, utilizing technology to produce more than half of its content domestically. Although both cases have some stories that are the result of a joint effort between the bureau and the home office, the overall percentage is relatively low, which may suggest that the encouragement of collaboration afforded by technology is limited.

Table 1 Distribution of reporting locations

	WaPo		NYT	
	(N = 37)		(N = 133)	
	N	%*	N	%
Bureau	12	32	90	68
Home Office	20	54	27	20
Hybrid	5	14	16	12

*Percentages are rounded off to nearest whole numbers

Despite the fact that both media outlets have established bureaus in China, there is a significant discrepancy in the size of the two editorial teams. NYT's coverage is attributed to nine journalists based in mainland China and two in Hong Kong, with an additional six researchers included. Due to legal restrictions, Chinese nationals are not permitted to work for foreign media. The term "researchers" is another name for local fixers (International Press Center, MFA, PRC, 2009). In contrast, WaPo is severely understaffed. Its coverage is attributed to only two journalists. A significant portion of the reporting is conducted or at least collaborated with journalists in the home office. This finding confirms Hamilton's (2011a, p. 217) assertion that NYT represents an exception to the general rule, still maintaining impressive-sized editorial teams overseas. WaPo, in turn, reflects the unfortunate trend of media organizations and foreign correspondents alike. Due to financial

pressure, media organizations are compelled to reduce the number of foreign correspondents and foreign coverage in order to cut costs (Hamilton, 2010; Moisy, 1996).

The superior size of the editorial team enables NYT to produce a significantly greater number of stories than WaPo. In terms of content, NYT has the capacity to deploy journalists to Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus, who can then report back with insights from the heart of the news story. Additionally, it has the capacity to document the experiences of individuals from a range of backgrounds who have been affected by the virus, foreign students in China (Stevenson, 2020a), delivery drivers (Wang, 2020), expecting mothers (Stevenson, 2020b), medical professionals on the frontline (Wee & Wang, 2020) due to its extensive resources and well-maintained network. Adams (1966) argued that the deployment of correspondents on the ground would have a significant impact on the coverage, leading to an increased number of international news stories of considerable depth, with sources that are more detailed in their information. The findings of the present study indicate that, despite advances in digital technology, the original conclusion remains pertinent, and it expands upon the that conclusion, demonstrating that having correspondents on the ground during a health crisis such as COVID-19 can facilitate access to authentic individuals and capture a more nuanced perspective. This could result in the humanization of a story, which can be an effective method of capturing the interest of readers (Bennett, 1983).

In contrast, WaPo, where over half of the coverage is shifted back to the home office, lacks this emotional angle. Furthermore, the quality of the coverage is compromised by the lack of support from local interpersonal networks, which hinders the balanced choice of sources. An explanatory piece on the Wuhan lockdown, entitled 'Here's how the unprecedented quarantine of one of China's largest cities could play out' (Iati & Thebault, 2020), was written by two journalists based in Washington, DC. One of the journalists works

at the General Assignment News Desk, while the other covers national and breaking news. All of the sources cited in this article are based in the United States. It is notable that there are no sources from China, whose insights are crucial for developing a complete and accurate understanding of the outbreak. To adjust to this model, with reporting being largely informed by research on the Internet from home office, the majority of WaPo's reporting on China pertains to foreign policy, with articles offering insights from a macro perspective on China's domestic policy. Adam Taylor, a DC-based journalist with a focus on foreign affairs, contributed two articles wrote a piece entitled 'China's Coronavirus Has No Links to Weapons Research, Experts Say' (Taylor, 2020), which countered the conspiracy theories that were prevalent on social media (Cuan-Baltazar et al., 2020).

Although WaPo's reporting style may have detracted from the quality of its international reporting in this instance, an analysis of the content revealed that it already adjusted to this new reporting approach by incorporating more U.S. political elements and broader geopolitical analyses. In this context, COVID-19 were frequently framed within the framework of U.S-China relations and domestic political strategies. The country's own interests were extensively discussed. This approach particularly appealing to domestic audiences (Sambrook, 2011). The role of foreign correspondents has evolved beyond that of a mere reporter of events in a timely manner. As Seib (2002) observed, contemporary foreign correspondence is increasingly oriented towards the provision of cultural and ideological context, with the objective of assisting audiences in the comprehension of complex global issues. In this sense, NYT and WaPo appeared to have pursued divergent strategies, with each newspaper seeking to appeal to a distinct target audience.

Another potential explanation for the differences in approach and style between NYT and WaPo may be found in the unique attributes of their home bases. Despite their national

and international reach, both newspapers exhibit characteristics reminiscent of local publications. This phenomenon aligns with Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model of influences on media content. NYT, rooted in the cultural capital of New York City, tends to adopt a more humanistic and cultural approach in its coverage. In contrast, WaPo, based in the political epicenter of Washington D.C., often emphasizes political angles in its reporting. This distinction can be understood through the lens of "news geography" (Gasher & Klein, 2008), which suggests that the location of a news organization influences its news values and framing choices. Thus, while both newspapers maintain a global outlook, their content remains indelibly marked by the socio-cultural and political environments of their respective urban centers, demonstrating how local contexts can shape even internationally-oriented media outlets.

In addition to the broader challenges facing the news industry, the context of China introduces a further layer of complexity. The Chinese government has established a series of restrictions with the objective of limiting the number of foreign journalists who are permitted to enter the country. During the selected time of this research, the Trump administration limit the number of Chinese citizens who could work in the United States for the five state-run Chinese news organizations. In retaliation, China expelled 13 U.S. journalists working for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* (Yang, 2020). Gerry Shih from WaPo and Paul Mozur from NYT were on the list. Later, NYT correspondent Chris Buckley, who reported the Covid-19 from Wuhan, was also expelled. After returning to the U.S., Mozur said in an interview with *The Daily*, "And now that avenue is cut off to us. And so we're going to be reliant on filings and government documents. And we're just going to have a vaguer picture, a far less precise picture of what's going on in the place" (*Kicked Out of China*, 2020).

While having correspondents to report from the ground is the optimal scenario, even if a news organization such as NYT is still inclined to allocate resources to foreign news coverage exceptions, they will encounter further limitations in terms of access when reporting on countries like China. Should China implement more stringent controls on foreign news organizations, NYT may also have to adopt a similar strategy to that employed by WaPo, ‘being reliant on filings and government documents’, at least in part.

5.2 Less news, Less Visuals, More Opinions

A comparative analysis of the formats of the two media outlets revealed that, while NYT had considerably more coverage overall, the number of the opinion/column/analysis from two media outlets were relatively similar. As presented in Table 2, opinion/column/analysis pieces took up 34% of WaPo’s whole coverage, constituted 34% of WaPo's total coverage, a figure that is twice that of NYT. The maintenance of international coverage, particularly in the context of health crises such as COVID-19, is an indicator of prestige and influence (Sambrook, 2011, p. 5). However, in the case of WaPo, with limited personnel and resources, opted to supplement the lacking news reporting with additional political commentaries and analyses in order to maintain its overall presence.

Table 2. Distribution of formats

	WaPo		NYT	
	(N = 61)		(N = 161)	
	N	%	N	%
News	36	59	133	83
Multimedia	4	7	4	2
Opinion / Column / Analysis	21	34	24	15

In comparison to other formats, the two news organizations demonstrated a high degree of consistency in their editorial decisions pertaining to multimedia reporting. As illustrated in Table 2, a mere fraction of the entries comprises photo and video stories. In point of fact, there are four pieces in each case. Furthermore, the majority of these few works either utilized images and footage sourced from news agencies or were created by local freelancers.

In WaPo, an infographic work entitled 'Maps Show Where Coronavirus Started and Why Officials are so Worried' (Karklis & Meko, 2020) is the only original work produced by the staff. However, it was created by the staff in the home office, rather than the bureau in Beijing. The photo essay, entitled 'See How the Coronavirus Is Upending Daily Life in China' (Laurent & Murphy, 2020), employed images sourced from the Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Getty Images. The video story, entitled 'A Wuhan Family Tries to Keep Its Beijing Restaurant Afloat in the Age of Coronavirus', was produced by a local freelance journalist, Fu (2020).

Of the four multimedia stories published by the NYT, the video story entitled "I Feel Abandoned: How Residents in Wuhan Are Coping with Coronavirus" is the sole original work produced by the staff (Xiao et al., 2020), and was created by those working from home office instead of the bureau in Beijing. The video story, entitled 'Drone Footage Shows Wuhan Under Lockdown' (Anonymity, 2020), was created by an anonymous journalist working for ChinaFile, an online magazine that is affiliated with the Asia Society. The photo essay, entitled 'China's Battle with a Deadly Coronavirus, in Photos' (The New York Times, 2020), comprises a curated collection of photographs sourced from a range of contributors, including Chris Buckley, a foreign correspondent based in the Beijing bureau, two freelance photographers, and news agencies such as Getty Images, AFP, Reuters, AP, and EPA.

Compared to the 1960s, when the Vietnamese War happened, practices of foreign correspondence and the media environment have changed significantly. The invention of social media allows photos and videos taken by anyone from any corner of the world to be disseminated globally in real time. When major breaking news events occur, those at the center are often closer to the site than the news organizations, and are able to upload first-handed updates before the media can respond, especially during crises. Since news organizations are no longer the only source for the public to know about what is happening afar, the returns on sending crews overseas to bring back exclusive on-site coverage are no longer appealing enough, considering the high costs of photo and video reporting. Therefore, the usual practices would be to hire local freelancers for certain assignments or to redistribute authorized content. This findings in this study are consistent with the conclusions of previous studies on ‘borrowed content’ (Riffe et al., 1993). It also aligns with the observed trends in the practices of foreign correspondence (Brooten & Verbruggen, 2017). NYT, in its capacity as an exception, is nevertheless subject to the same rule.

In this particular study, China's heavily regulated media environment, especially during Covid-19, adds another layer of the discussions. Under Chinese law, foreign media are not allowed to directly hire Chinese nationals for reporting work (FCCC, 2021). Photographers and video producers are relatively in the grey zone of these regulations. However, taking photos and videos in public bears higher risk than regular reporting, especially for Chinese nationals, which might lead to severe political and legal consequences (McCarthy & Liu, 2023). The significant political risks that Chinese nationals face make it more challenging for foreign news organizations to recruit freelancers willing to work for them in China. The attribution for one video essay published by the New York Times is 'a

journalist working for ChinaFile'. The choice of anonymity on the part of the journalist may shed light on this issue.

5.3 Frames of News Reporting and Opinions

Upon examination of the format of the coverage in NYT and WaPo, it became evident that a significant proportion of the WaPo's samples were opinion pieces. Consequently, it was deemed necessary to conduct a separate analysis of the frames employed in the news and opinion sections. When conducting the analysis of frames, the study divided the collected data into two groups: news reporting and opinion/column/analysis.

In order to comply with the standards of objectivity that are expected in news reporting, journalists are required to present a more pluralistic and neutral perspective. In contrast, the opinion sections are not as limited by established practices and norms of objective journalism (Fowler, 1991; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008). Indeed, the sections are intended to serve as a platform for the articulation of competing ideas on salient issues, where the ideological perspectives of journalists and news organizations are most clearly manifested. It is therefore anticipated that a strategy of diversity is pursued. In contrast to the practice of news reporting, opinion writers are allowed to explicitly express their personal perspectives on matters of interest and to advocate for specific policy positions (Golan, 2013). Although the opinion pieces and the work of foreign correspondents is not directly related, the analyses and commentaries constitute an important role in the framing of foreign news (Golan, 2013; Ha, 2017) when news reporting is limited.

5.3.1 News Reporting: Conflict Frame

The study revealed that the frames employed by the two news organizations were distributed relatively evenly. As illustrated in Table 3, the three most prevalent frames were human interest, severity, and conflict, with conflict being the most common one. This lends further support to the conclusions of previous studies that the U.S. media tend to use conflict frames to attract readers (Neuman et al., 1992, p. 61–62). This indicates that changes in the practices of news gathering do not impact the use of frames in international news reporting, since this is primarily attributable to the market-oriented and profit-driven nature of the two media outlets (Sparks & Reading, 1997).

Table 3. Distribution of frames in news reporting

	WaPo		NYT	
	(N = 41)		(N = 137)	
	N	%	N	%
Attribution of Responsibility	5	12	3	2
Economic Consequences	4	10	23	17
Human Interest	8	20	35	26
Severity	11	29	37	27
Conflict	12	29	39	28

Although the conflict frame is the most common occurrence in the coverage of both media outlets, NYT and WaPo exhibited slight differences in emphasis. WaPo placed greater emphasis on the conflicts of U.S. domestic politics or the power struggle between China and the United States, or between China and the West, in international relations. Eight out of the 12 pieces in this category are related to these angles. Here names two examples, ‘China’s Coronavirus Public-Relations War Is Backfiring in the West’ (Shih, 2020) and ‘Fox News Hosts Echo Trump, Blaming China for Coronavirus Pandemic’ (Chiu, 2020). This emphasis can be attributed, at least in part, to the observation that the WaPo has strategically

incorporated more domestic political elements into its reporting in order to attract readers. This is also in line with the view expressed by Hamilton and Jenner (2004) that there is a need to redefine foreign correspondence by including the impact of international events on local communities and adding the international angle in local news. The geographic proximity to the White House and the State Department may also be a contributing factor. Moving gathering back to Washington might 'leave news content much more subject to the conventional wisdom around Washington' (Sigal, 1999, p. 277).

While WaPo's coverage of China tends to prioritize either the United States' policy towards China or the impact of China on the United States, NYT's coverage of China aligns more closely with the conventional definition of foreign news. NYT wrote overwhelmingly about China's domestic news. Twenty-nine out of the 39 articles that employ conflict frames emphasize the authoritarian nature of China and the conflict between a repressive regime and its people, particularly in relation to the suppression of free speech. The following examples illustrate this point: 'A Quarantine, Mao-Style, of 760 Million People' (Zhong & Mozur, 2020) and 'China's Internet Police Crack Down on Outrage' (Mozur, 2020).

Additionally, the conflict frame is a prevalent feature of the printed edition. China-related front-page stories were primarily concerned with China's authoritarian measures or leadership, with a particular focus on the internal and external tensions inherent in China's political system. These tensions were often highlighted in relation to the country's role as a repressive regime and the wellbeing of its own citizens, as well as in the context of confrontations between Chinese and American political systems. One example of this can be seen in the article 'China Blocks Ally in Virus Fight: Its Own People' (Yuan, 2020). This topic will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section on the representation of China in the U.S. media.

5.3.2 Opinions: Limited Diversity

In regards of diversity in sources and issues, this study found that both media allowed diversity in sources, but differed in issues. Table 2 profiled ‘in-house’ columnists and guest columnists. As presented, both media demonstrated a balanced approach, with an equal representation of contributions from in-house staff or columnists and guest contributors. Additionally, the backgrounds of these columnists are also diverse. While American experts and journalists were prominent contributors, some of the scholars selected by the Washington Post were born and raised in China, whereas Ian Johnson, who wrote for NYT, lived in China for an extended period. Furthermore, the WaPo included a Chinese activist among the selected contributors. It is also noteworthy that two Chinese officials are represented as contributors to the opinion sections of NYT, and two former officials of the U.S. government, both of whom worked at the White House, wrote for WaPo.

Table 4. The backgrounds of columnists

		NYT (24 articles)		WaPo (21 articles)	
		Columnists	No.	Columnists	No.
Staff Writer	Ben Smith, David Leonhardt		2	Philip Bump, Ishaan Tharoor	2
Newspaper columnists	Li Yuan (8), Nicholas Kristof (2), Elisabeth Rosenthal (1), Bret Stephens (1)		12	Josh Rogin (6), David Ignatius (2)	8
Chinese officials	Xie Feng (Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China in the Hong Kong SAR), Cui Tiankai (Chinese Ambassador to the U.S.)		2	N/A	

Ex-U.S. officials	N/A		Marc A. Thiessen (Former White House Director of Speechwriting), Dan Kaszeta (former US Secret Service and White House Military Office advisor)	2
American scholars	John Allen Paulos (Temple University), Maria Repnikova (Georgia State University), Geremie R. Barmé (editor of ChinaHeritage)	4	Dali L. Yang (University of Chicago), Rui Zhong (Program associate, Wilson Center), Dan Chen (University of Richmond), Jessica Chen Weiss (Cornell University), Max Brooks (American author), Haifeng Huang (Ohio State University)	6
Journalists	Rosie Spinks (Global tourism reporter, Skift), Kiki Zhao (former NYT journalist), Ian Johnson	3		
Chinese activists			Chen Guangcheng	1
Editorials	Editorial Board	1	Editorial Board	2

Although the sources are diverse, both outlets exhibit a concentration of multiple articles by specific authors, which may indicate a narrowing of viewpoints and potentially impact the breadth and depth of analysis presented to readers. In the four-month period under review, WaPo in-house columnist Josh Rogin authored six of the 21 pieces. Li Yuan was responsible for eight of the 24 pieces published in NYT.

Josh Rogin's contributions consistently adopted a critical stance towards the Chinese government, focusing on political, diplomatic and security concerns. The repetition of a single voice may serve to reinforce a particular narrative, which could potentially exclude or marginalize more varied interpretations or alternative viewpoints. Some of his articles were of particular concern. One of his articles, entitled 'State Department Cables Warned of Safety Issues at Wuhan Lab Studying Bat Coronaviruses' (Rogin, 2020b), presented a controversial

perspective on the origins of the virus that challenged the scientific consensus of that time. Although it did not explicitly promote a conspiracy theory, the article was characterized by a strong element of speculation. The author was aware that the evidence was circumstantial and that there was no proof; however, it could be misleading for readers that are not sufficiently critical. Faris et al. (2017) proposed that right-wing media outlets engage more frequently with conspiracy theories, polarizing and argumentative issues than other media outlets. However, this discovery may indicate that this pattern can be explained by the mass model, rather than merely by political leaning.

Li Yuan's articles for NYT presented an interesting case. While they are labeled as columns, they bear similarities to news reporting in their style and content. This hybrid approach, sometimes referred to as "column-reporting" or "interpretive reporting" (MacDougall & Reid, 1987; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001), blends factual reporting with personal analysis. It allows for a more nuanced exploration of complex issues, potentially offering readers insights that go beyond straightforward news coverage. However, the heavy reliance on a single author for this type of content may still limit the diversity of perspectives.

In terms of issues, NYT allows for a greater degree of diversity. The divergence of views is exemplified by the following two articles: In the article 'Coronavirus Spreads, and the World Pays for China's Dictatorship' (Kristof, 2020), the columnist presented a critical analysis of the authoritarian regime in China and its impact on global health. In contrast, the article entitled 'China Bought the West Time. The West squandered it' (Johnson, 2020) presented a completely different perspective that the West failed to capitalize on the opportunity. The two opposing opinions illustrated the possibility, as described by Entman (2009), of journalists challenging the prevailing frames and constructing their own counter-frames in the post-Cold War era. WaPo, however, exhibited a notable lack of diversity, with

the majority of pieces being critical of China. This topic will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent part, which addresses the portrayal of China in the US media.

With regard to the frames employed, the distinction between the WaPo and NYT is more pronounced. As illustrated in Table 5, WaPo predominantly employed the attribution of responsibility and conflict frames, whereas NYT exhibited a relatively balanced utilization of the five frames. However, it is important to note that in comparison, the conflict frame is the single most frequent frame. The results demonstrated that, as with the news reporting, conflict is the most frequently occurring frame. Although attribution of responsibility is the frame employed by WaPo the most frequently, it is important to acknowledge that some of the newspaper's discussions about responsibility in fact represented an attempt to mask ideological conflict. The article 'Don't blame 'China' for the coronavirus' (Rogin, 2020) is an example of this attempt. The politicization of discourse during the pandemic resulted in a blame game (Horsley, 2020), which further obscured the distinction between responsibility and conflict.

Table 5. Distribution of frames in opinions pieces

	WaPo		NYT	
	(N = 21)		(N = 24)	
	N	%	N	%
Attribution of Responsibility	12	57	5	21
Economic Consequences	1	5	1	4
Human Interest	0	0	2	8
Severity	0	0	3	13
Conflict	8	38	13	54

The comparative analysis of source and issue diversity in the opinion sections of NYT and WaPo revealed a limited range of perspectives, albeit with slightly divergent opinions. Both media predominantly relied on elite sources, academics, and pundits, which

significantly narrowed the spectrum of viewpoints presented (Page, 1996; Day & Golan, 2005). This constrained diversity reflects the broader ideological parameters of American society (Gans, 1979) and underscores the media's role in propagating dominant ideologies (Carragee & Roofs, 2004). Consequently, the opinion sections of these legacy media outlets largely operated within established societal and ideological boundaries, limiting the breadth of discourse on various issues.

This finding suggests that even in coverage of international events, domestic ideological frameworks play a substantial role in framing the narrative. Regarding framing, the results indicate that the conflict frame was the most common, not only in reporting but also in opinion pieces. This prevalence of the conflict frame corroborates earlier research by Neuman et al. (1992) and Patterson (1993), who identified conflict as a dominant frame in news media. The extension of this frame to opinion sections underscores its pervasive influence in shaping discourse around international events.

5.4 Portraying China in a Negative Light

A comparative analysis of the content from the two media outlets revealed that NYT adopted a more critical stance towards China in its reporting, whereas the WaPo's opinion and analysis sections demonstrated a tendency to favor critical voices on China.

NYT has an impressive number of journalists based in China, and therefore has the capacity to devote more resources to the coverage of this country. This allows it to catch the nuances of China's domestic politics. However, when domesticating the news about China, many of the nuances were lost. Instead, the stories were put into predefined frames. For example, one of the headlines used the term 'Mao-style' (Zhong & Mozur, 2020), which carries strong connotations of totalitarianism, to draw parallels with China's responses to the pandemic, is indicative of a clear political bias.

This tendency is even more pronounced in the headlines presented on the front page of the NYT print edition. Front page is the most important page of a newspaper. Editors use a set of criteria, such as impact, timeliness, and conflict, to evaluate potential stories and determine which stories deserve front-page coverage and prominent headlines. This process reflects not only the perceived importance of the stories but also the news organization's judgments about what will capture reader attention and drive engagement (Gans, 1979). Despite the fact that it was an election year, during which election-related content was given precedence, China's COVID-19 coverage still managed to gain traction. In the 29-day period between 22 January and 19 February, China was featured on the front pages of 17 editions. Of the 24 instances in which China was featured, only a few instances that employed economic or human-interest frames, such as 'Two Women Fell Sick. Only One Recovered' (Wee & Wang, 2020), a feature story on two female medical professionals, were relatively neutral or provided an emotional angle. The remainder of the front-page articles painted China in a negative light. The front-page stories encompassed a plethora of subjects, extending beyond the domain of public health to encompass geopolitical rivalries, ideological divergences, and economic competition. The prevalence of negatively framed headlines about China's handling of the outbreak suggests that NYT editors consistently judged stories highlighting problems and criticisms as more newsworthy than potentially positive developments.

This process is also what Entman (1993) called as framing through selection and salience. This editorial choice likely played a significant role in shaping public perception and policy discourse regarding China's role in the pandemic, demonstrating the power of media framing in influencing public opinion on international affairs. In this case, NYT consistently emphasized China's governmental failures, crisis management issues, and systemic weaknesses, while downplaying or omitting more positive aspects of the country's

response. This selective framing is not merely a reflection of events, but a result of editorial decisions about what is newsworthy.

While some reports from the WaPo adopted a more critical or politically charged tone, particularly when discussing China's handling of the outbreak or the United States' response, others maintain a more neutral stance. The political responses were more neutral in tone overall. In their reporting on China, they focused on factual reporting of developments and local experiences, taking a more global or US-centric perspective. From this centric perspective, the broader implications of the pandemic are analyzed.

In the case of WaPo, its opinion sections paint a predominantly critical picture of China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak. The issues covered a range of topics including government transparency, international relations, scientific collaboration, and the implications of China's political system. The majority of headlines suggested that China's response was inadequate or even harmful, with several drawing parallels to historical events like Chernobyl or discussing potential legal ramifications. While a few headlines offer more neutral perspectives, the overall tone is decidedly negative, focusing on alleged cover-ups, safety concerns, and the global impact of China's actions. These opinions pieces and analyses reflects a period of intense scrutiny and criticism of China's role in the early stages of the pandemic, particularly from Western media sources. It is reasonable to conclude that the critical stance adopted by the Washington Post in some of its opinion pieces is likely influenced by its decision to incorporate elements of US politics elements. There is a clear appeal in attracting readers by engaging in the critique of official enemies (Herman & Chomsky, 2010).

The negative coverage of China in the New York Times and the Washington Post displayed a number of shared characteristics. One such commonality is the repetition of similar criticisms, for example those pertaining to freedom of speech and press, which Chong

and Druckman (2007) termed 'frame strength'. It seems reasonable to posit that the consistent portrayal of China in a negative light is likely to reinforce public perceptions. Furthermore, both media outlets approach this event from a multitude of perspectives, including governmental failures, crisis management issues, and systemic weaknesses. This results in a "media package," as defined by Gamson and Modigliani (1989), which presents a coherent narrative portraying China's handling of the outbreak as problematic and threatening. It seems reasonable to suggest that this consistent negative framing has contributed to the shaping of public opinion and policy discourse regarding China's role in the pandemic.

NYT's opinion sections appeared to display an inclination to favor China, offering a diverse array of perspectives that even encompassed contributions from Chinese officials such as Chinese Ambassador to the United States Tiankai Cui (2020), who advocated for collaboration between the United States and China. Nevertheless, this inclusivity must be contextualized within the context of US domestic politics. The pandemic unfolded during the administration of the Republican Party, and U.S. President Donald Trump consistently accused China of responsibility and demanded compensation. Given its liberal-leaning stance, the New York Times would typically display some degree of 'anti-incumbent' sentiment (Puglisi, 2011). The diverse range of opinions that challenged the Trump's narrative appeared to align with this definition.

It is also important to recognize that even in a media system such as that of the United States, which is subject to minimal regulation, the media still bears a certain degree of responsibility to the government (Merrill, 1974). This implies that media reports on policy over division among political elites. In 1987, Hallin put forth a model comprising three spheres of reporting: consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance. He argued that news reports predominantly reflect the consensus or legitimate controversy, with minimal coverage of deviance. The apparent diversity of voices can be seen to represent a 'legitimate

controversy' between elites representing different interests within the United States. This indicates that the media permits the expression of divergent opinions, but also serves to delineate and defend the boundaries of acceptable conflict (Hallin, 1987, p. 117).

The findings of this study, particularly those in conjunction with NYT, confirm the conclusions previously posited by Gans (1980) in his analysis of US network news and magazines. He argued that despite claims of impartiality and objectivity, US journalism is observed to manifest ideologies or values that are deeply rooted in the US. In a later study, Campbell et al. (2012) identified some of these values, 'ethnocentrism', 'responsible or benign capitalism', and 'individualism' (390).

Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing debate about the future of foreign correspondence in the context of technological advancement and financial pressures. Although some scholars have forecast the waning of the foreign correspondent profession, this research illustrates that during significant global crises such as the Coronavirus pandemic, the importance of on-site foreign correspondence becomes self-evident.

The analysis of the initial coverage of the outbreak of COVID-19 in China by the NYT and WaPo revealed significant differences in their approach to international reporting, which in turn affected the framing and content of their coverage. NYT, with its greater resources and commitment to on-the-ground reporting, was able to provide a more nuanced and humanized perspective on the unfolding crisis. This is consistent with the argument that, despite technological advances, the presence of journalists at the scene of major events remains indispensable, particularly during health crises. In contrast, the strategy adopted by the WaPo of resuming some reporting from the home office represents

a compromise necessitated by financial constraints. This shift resulted in an increased focus on domestic framing of the pandemic and a greater emphasis on U.S.-China relations through political commentaries and analyses. Although this approach enables the WaPo to retain a presence in international reporting, it also gives rise to concerns about the possibility of biased reporting, as evidenced by Jonathan Randal's experiences during the initial Iraq War (Randal, 2000).

The study identifies a significant challenge currently facing the field of journalism: the need to balance the pursuit of cost-effective reporting methods with the depth and accuracy that can be achieved through on-site coverage. The potential for a drift away from ground realities when reporting from home offices represents a significant concern, particularly in light of the reduced autonomy experienced by many modern journalists in comparison to their predecessors. Moreover, the profit-driven nature of both media outlets appears to exert an influence on their portrayal of China's handling of the pandemic, with a tendency to frame it in conflictual terms. This proclivity, when coupled with ideological divergences, frequently culminates in a pejorative portrayal of China, prompting inquiries into the objectivity of such portrayals and the impact of home country bias in international reporting.

These findings have significant implications for the future of foreign correspondence and international news coverage. The findings indicate that while technological advancements offer new possibilities for remote reporting, they cannot fully supplant the value of on-site journalism, particularly during complex global events. The challenge for news organizations in the future will be to identify innovative solutions that reconcile financial constraints with the necessity for accurate and nuanced international reporting.

Given the time constraints and feasibility of the study, two US-based legacy media were selected for analysis. Despite some notable differences in reporting practices, these outlets exhibited a similar political leaning, offering a limited representation of the political spectrum in the United States. Faris et al. (2017) posited that there is a stark contrast in practices and bias between left-wing and right-wing media. Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on market-driven U.S. media, and it can be expected that the practices and frames used by European countries, where media functions as a public service, may differ (Iyengar et al., 2009).

In addition, Gitlin (1979) suggested that news frames would undergo a process of change over time. The present study offers a preliminary insight into the prioritization of China coverage on the front page of NYT print version during the initial four-month period of the outbreak. From the end of January onwards, the outbreak in China was the subject of extensive coverage on the front page. From 22 February, 2020 onwards, with an increase in the number of cases in the United States, the focus shifted back to domestic news. In March, China was featured six times, whereas in April, it was absent from the front page almost entirely. At the outset, several of the measures introduced by the Chinese government were portrayed in an authoritarian light. However, as the disease evolved in the US, the implementation of lockdown and the controversy surrounding the mandatory mask rule may result in a shift in the news frames of the China coverage. However, due to time constraints, this study only considers the initial stages of the outbreak and is therefore unable to reflect the alteration of the frame over time.

This study employed content analysis to investigate the potential correlation between the observed changes in international news gathering practices and the formats and frames of new coverage. Further research could combine surveys and interviews with both foreign

correspondents and editors to gain a more nuanced understanding of the work process, beyond the mere enumeration of figures. This study also reinforced the assertion that the conflict frame is the most prevalent news frame employed in U.S. media for the purpose of attracting readers. This is a consequence of the distinctive characteristics of the U.S. media system. The distinction between market-oriented and public service-oriented media systems, along with the contrasting natures of news in these two contexts, has been touched upon in previous discussions. Future research could adopt a comparative research framework to gain further insight into how news reporting in these two models influences public perceptions of international affairs and creates social consensus.

Furthermore, this study encompassed not only the changes currently being experienced by the news industry and foreign correspondence, but also the highly regulated political and media environment in China, such as the expelled foreign correspondents. It could be argued that an authoritarian state such as China would be a valuable case for the research on foreign correspondence. Future researchers could further explore the theorizing of the reporting on closed political systems in situations where access is very limited, such as the role of local hands (Murrell, 2014; Brooten & Verbruggen, 2017) and technology.

Finally, a number of studies and surveys (Wilhelm, 1963; Kliesch, 1991; Wu & Hamilton, 2004; Sambrook, 2011) have highlighted the increasingly diverse backgrounds of those working as foreign correspondents, both in terms of gender and ethnicity. This trend is also confirmed in this study. For instance, Asian-American female correspondents wrote stories detailing the challenges faced by female nurses combating the virus at the front line and the distress experienced by waiting mother, a very different perspective from traditional international news selections. Future research may further explore how ethnicity and gender may affect the frame of international news coverage.

Summary

Tato studie analyzuje změny v mezinárodních zpravodajských postupech prostřednictvím zkoumání zpravodajství o epidemii COVID-19 v Číně v denících The New York Times (NYT) a The Washington Post (WaPo), jakož i dopady tohoto vývoje na formáty a rámce používané oběma zpravodajskými médii. Analýza domicilů odhalila, že NYT si v Číně držel početný redakční tým, zatímco WaPo měl na místě výrazný personální podstav. Dopad tohoto rozdílu je zřejmý. NYT produkoval výrazně větší počet zpravodajských příspěvků s postřehy z první ruky. Více než polovina zpravodajství produkovaného WaPo byla vytvořena ve Washingtonu, D.C. Většina zpravodajství byla na obecné úrovni a zaměřovala se na Čínu jako předmět zahraniční politiky USA. Obecně se zpravodajství vyznačovalo převahou politických komentářů a analýz. Množství multimediálního zpravodajství bylo v obou případech omezené. Studie identifikovala pět rámců: přisouzení odpovědnosti, human interest, ekonomické důsledky, závažnost a konflikt. Pozorované změny ve zpravodajských postupech neměly vliv na používané zpravodajské rámce. V obou případech byl ve zpravodajství nejčastější rámeček konfliktu. Pokud jde o názorové a analytické příspěvky, rámeček konfliktu nejrozšířenější v NYT, zatímco WaPo nejvíce využíval přisuzování odpovědnosti. NYT zaujal kritičtější postoj k Číně ve svém zpravodajství, zatímco WaPo měly tendenci upřednostňovat kritické názory na Čínu v názorové a analytické sekci.

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Appendices

Appendix - 1: Code Book of the Location of Bylines

Code	Definition	Examples: NYT	Examples: WaPo
1. Bureau	Journalist is based in China (including Hong Kong and Macau SARs)	China Appears to Corral Threat, at a Steep Cost	Coronavirus tests Xi's 'heavenly mandate,' but proves a godsend for his surveillance state
2. Home Office	Journalist is based in the U.S.	As Virus Spreads, China and Russia See Openings for Disinformation	China's coronavirus has no links to weapons research, experts say
3. Hybrid	Journalists are from multiple locations	W.H.O. Heads to China as Virus Deaths Surpass Those in SARS Outbreak	As coronavirus spread in critical early weeks, Chinese officials failed to raise the alarm

Appendix - 2: Code Book of the Format

Code	Definition	Examples: NYT	Examples: WaPo
1. News	Text-based news reports	Virus Lockdown Stifles Economy In a Wary China	Wuhan: The Chinese mega-city at the center of coronavirus outbreak
2. Multimedia	Photo & video works	Wuhan Reopens After Coronavirus Lockdown	Scenes from China's deadly coronavirus crisis
3. Opinion / Column / Analysis	Articles belong to columns or opinion sections	Coronavirus Crisis Exposes Cracks in China's Facade of Unity	How and why did local officials hide the truth in Wuhan?

Appendix – 3: Codebook of Frames

Code	Definition	Examples: NYT	Examples: WaPo
1. Attribution of responsibility	(a) Does it suggest Chinese government accountability for mishandling the outbreak or concealing information? (b) Does the US or other countries blame China for the spread of virus?	China Mounts Aggressive Defense to Calls for Coronavirus Compensation	As coronavirus spread in critical early weeks, Chinese officials failed to raise the alarm
2. Economic consequences	(a) Does it focus on the impact of the outbreak on China's domestic economy, or its effects on global trade and supply chains? (b) Does it have anything to do with China's economic aid and donations?	China Stopped Its Economy to Tackle Coronavirus. Now the World Suffers.	China factory shutdown impact on U.S. businesses in wake of coronavirus outbreak
3. Human interest	(a) Is it about how individuals are affected by the virus? (b) Is it about the changes in everyday life?	Foreigners Airlifted From Chinese City at Heart of Coronavirus Outbreak	Schools in China are closed indefinitely because of the coronavirus, so students are taking classes online
4. Severity	(a) Does it suggest the seriousness of the virus, or its potential for rapid spread? (b) Does show high mortality rates or urgent need for strong preventive measures?	China Foresees 'Test' as World Shuts Its Doors	
5. Conflict	(a) disagreements between the Chinese regime and its people over containment measures and information transparency, (b) tensions between China and Western countries regarding the outbreak's handling, (c) specific conflicts between China and the US over virus origin and response strategies.	As China Cracks Down on Coronavirus Coverage, Journalists Fight Back	For China's leaders, pop-up hospitals are about politics as much as health