


Media Ecology and the Politics of Dissent: Representations of the Hong Kong Protests in *The Guardian* and *China Daily*

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Abstract

The phenomenon of protests, currently on the rise in worldwide democracies, is made known to citizens mainly through representations in the media. This article, responding to the need for a broader view of protest media coverage in an international context, examines the ways the 2014 Hong Kong (HK) protests were covered by the online versions of two highly influential and appealing newspapers, belonging to contrasting media systems: *The Guardian* and *China Daily*. By revising a typology of previously used frames and inventing new ones, this study conducts a quantitative content analysis of news articles with the view to (a) highlight similarities and differences in the media coverage of protests within the above-mentioned media systems, (b) find out whether the media coverage of such events with political ramifications is affected by the geopolitical interests of the countries. Based on our analysis, this study suggests the need for revising the protest paradigm as important factors—the protests' momentum, the media systems, the new information communication technologies, and certain geopolitical interests—are involved in the dynamics surrounding media coverage of protests and as such they greatly influence the framing process. Moreover, our findings demonstrated that the media coverage of the 2014 HK protests by the two newspapers was reflective of both the media systems in which they function and the distinctive national standpoints.

Keywords

protest, media framing, content analysis, comparative study, Hong Kong protests

Introduction

From the Egyptian revolution to the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street, to mention but a few, 2011 signaled an unprecedented wave of riots and protests of various political demands and magnitude around the world. To make their voices heard and to convey their messages to wider audiences, social movements and protesters rely heavily on the news media. More specifically, media can serve protests in three possible ways: (a) mobilization of political support, (b) legitimization (or validation) in the mainstream discourse, and (c) broadening of the scope of conflicts (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Although contemporary media ecology offers new ways for political activists to communicate independently and in many cases to bypass traditional news media (Bennett, 2003; Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Della Porta, 2005), the mainstream media remain among the main news providers for a greater audience. Although the impact, that emerging forms of journalism have on traditional journalistic practices, is an indisputable fact (Alejandro, 2010; Peters &

Broersma, 2013), there is still much disagreement with regard to the nature and the extent of this impact. While scholars such as Hermida (2010) among others pinpoint the positive impact of new social media technologies on traditional journalism, there are also those more hesitant regarding the extent and the implications of this impact (Jha, 2007, 2008). As such, various studies have stressed the importance of the news mainstream media in defining reality and consequently shaping public perceptions of protests (Corrigall-Brown, Snow, & Vliegthart, 2007; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

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Moreover, much research has indicated that mainstream news media tend to adopt negative coverage of protests and demonstrations through the employment of various marginalization devices. Such coverage, which primarily includes extensive reporting of violent events between protesters and the police (McLeod & Detenber, 1999) and the presentation of protesters as politically deviant groups (Shoemaker, 1982), has a negative impact on people's perceptions of protests and demonstrations (Arpan et al., 2006; Dardis, 2006). Additionally, media coverage of protests may vary based on the diverse political, economic, and cultural systems within which news media function. A limited yet important number of comparative studies of media systems on protest coverage have provided significant data regarding disparities in the use of framing devices by different media systems as well as regarding overall news media performance (Dai & Hyun, 2010; Peng, 2008). The results of these studies illustrate the need for further examination of protest media coverage in an international context.

To address this need, this study examines the 2014 Hong Kong (HK) protests' coverage through content analysis of the online versions of two newspapers, *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom and the *China Daily* in China. We hypothesized that the comparison between two particularly different media systems could endow us with new perspectives on the mechanisms determining the coverage of protests and demonstrations. Although we do acknowledge that a decision to focus on mainstream media (excluding new forms of journalism) limits the breadth of our analysis, the decision was made on the grounds that (a) despite disparities traditional news media have consistently focused on the spectacular and the violence that might burst out on the fringes of a protest (Xu, 2013), and (b) this focus allows us to address our research objectives (as described below) and provide a more in-depth analysis.

Although we were mostly drawing on frames used by previous studies—something that facilitates cross-study comparisons—we also revised and adapted certain frames in order to better address the scope of this research. Moreover, further than just examining similarities and differences in the media coverage of protests within the above-mentioned media systems, this study also seeks to explore whether geopolitical interests within the selected countries, namely, the United Kingdom and China, affect and inform the respective media coverage of the HK protests. Such an examination includes an assessment of the extent to which media coverage of the protests is reflective of the historical ties of each country to HK as well as a review of the judgmental reports by both newspapers.

The Case Study: The 2014 HK Protests

The 2014 HK protests, widely known as the Umbrella Movement, was characterized by sit-in protests in the city of

HK lasting from September 2014 to December 2014. The protests were a response to a decision regarding reforms of the HK electoral system supported by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC).

Following the 1984 agreement between China and the United Kingdom, commencing on the 1 July 1997, former British colony HK became the first Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, under the principle of "one country, two systems." HK's political system is different from that of mainland China. The HK Basic Law (a constitution drafted by the Chinese government based on the Joint Declaration) directs the political system, specifies HK's autonomy in particular issues, and outlines individual rights (Ghai, 2000). Until 2014, the leader of HK (called as Chief Executive) had been elected by a 1,200-member Election Committee (Ghai, 2000).

Although China announced that HK residents would be able to vote for the next Chief Executive in the 2017 elections through universal suffrage, the candidates would be vetted by a 1,200-member panel. This latter decision spurred the so-called Umbrella protests with protesters demanding open nominations as they believed that under this tight control on the electoral process, only pro-Beijing candidates will be allowed on the ballot. The HK protests were primarily initiated by students and afterward were supported by the Occupy Central movement, coordinated by Benny Tai Yiu-tung, Associate Professor of Law at the University of HK. The protests began outside the HK government headquarters and gradually occupied several areas of the city.

Framing Protest: The "Protest Paradigm," Geopolitics and Media Systems

The process of framing is associated with presentation and communication of themes and issues in patterns highlighting a specific interpretation of the message, by elaborating and accentuating selected aspects of real events while marginalizing and overshadowing others (Entman, 1993). Several researchers have agreed that social movements, which contradict the existing status quo, tend to receive adverse media coverage (Shoemaker, 1984) largely as a result of the media's relationships with political and economic elites (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). As the "protest paradigm" indicates, violence and crime are some of the main frames in protest-related media coverage as vehicles of marginalization and delegitimization of the protests (Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Such coverage focuses on protester confrontation with the police, juxtaposing the troublemaker protester with the agent of authority, who safeguards the public order. In these cases, peaceful actions on behalf of the protesters are skillfully overlooked together with protesters' demands and causes of such actions (Boykoff, 2006). McLeod and Hertog (1999) developed several categories of

violent activity, and their ideas have been revised and updated ever since. Based on McLeod and Hertog's paradigm, McFarlane and Hay (2003) presented a segregation of the concept of violent activity, namely, (a) general lawlessness or disruption and (b) confrontation with police. Dardis (2006) in his study of U.S. press coverage of the Iraq War used the above typology to conceptualize general lawlessness as including lesser violations. Since we consider that general lawlessness is a rather convoluted frame, in this study, we employ the following two frames: (a) a *conflict frame* which does not necessarily involve violent acts, but rather incorporates any state of dispute between the protesters and other groups (such as the government, police, other protesters, etc.), and (b) *violent confrontations* which specifically refers to any kind of violent actions that take place between the protesters and any other group of people (police, other protesters, etc.).

Moreover, many scholars have discussed the use of several framing strategies in order to marginalize protesters' actions and beliefs. Such frames tend to belittle the representativeness of the movements, casting doubt on their effectiveness and emphasizing the potential threats which they might represent to society (Gitlin, 1980). In the same line, McLeod and Hertog (1992, 1999) identified a number of ways in which through the careful direction of public opinion, protesters are presented as a marginal group compared to the general public. This outcome can be achieved through the use of negative polls regarding protests, generalizations about catastrophic activities during the protests, and witness commentaries about protesters' deviant behavior. In this study, we use the *marginalization frame* in order to examine such portrayals of the protesters by the two newspapers.

In addition, marginalization of protest groups can occur in media coverage through extensive focus on the appearance or performance of the protesters. According to several studies, appearance-based coverage focuses on protesters' dress codes, hair, and age rather than on the aim and causes of the protest (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Gitlin, 1980; McFarlane & Hay, 2003). Media focus on such issues may well have assisted so as to "empty out the political" in many protests and demonstrations around the world (Murdock, 1981, cited in Cottle, 2008, p. 864). Moreover, quite a few studies have examined the media coverage of protesters' dramaturgical activities. Once again, various framing devices were employed such as "carnavalesque" by McLeod and Hertog (1999); "protest as performance" by McFarlane and Hay (2003); "carnival" by Dardis (2006) who also includes references to celebrities at protest events; and more recently, Xu (2013) who used the term "show" and included theatrical activity, youth, funny dress, and immature appearance. While these studies share a rather pessimistic approach regarding the media's stance toward protesters' performances, other studies have argued that protesters' dramaturgical activities might well be embedded within positive news narratives and even enhance in this way protesters' aims and actions

(Alexander, Giesen, & Mast, 2006; Cottle, 2008). Taking this into consideration, although we follow Xu's rationale, we adopt a more neutral term for such a frame, namely, *appearance and performance*.

Several studies have demonstrated that mass media rather often rely on official sources mainly in order to delegitimize protests and reinforce status quo norms (Jha, 2007; McFarlane & Hay, 2003). From a journalistic point of view, the use of authoritative and official sources enhances the validity of the news item and adds prestige to the story (Xu, 2013). Studies have shown that while the media often solicited the views of official sources—such as politicians, the police, and lobbyists on the protests—they tend to ignore or selectively present protesters' viewpoints (Brasted, 2005; Dardis, 2006). Following the example of previous studies (Dardis, 2006; Xu, 2013), we also examine the use of *official sources*.

Furthermore, media's predilection for dramatization of events unfolds in sweeping presentations of protests as public nuisance and actions that disrupt commercial exchanges and trade in general (Di Cicco, 2010). Within this rationale, protests are also presented as a threat to community values and unpatriotic regarding their ideological background (Boykoff, 2006; Di Cicco, 2010). Boykoff (2006) examined the media coverage of the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999 and the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (IMF) protests in Washington, DC, in 2000, and he came across five key frames among which an amalgamation of grievances (the other four being: violence, disruption, freak, and ignorance). As Xu (2013) argues, "by highlighting the negative aspects of the protest, news reports framed the protest as a disruption to social order" (p. 2416). In the same line, Batziou (2015) focuses on news photographs of the 2008 protests in Greece and uses the frame images of destruction to refer to the aftermath of violent activities (damaged buildings, cars, etc.). Based on these findings and discussions, we employ the *social and economic disruption* frame to elucidate civil disturbance regarding everyday routine and broader economic circumstances.

According to Hackett and Zhao (1994), media use historical comparison in order to delegitimize protesters by comparing them with groups of the past whose activities have not been embraced by the public. Such examples can be found in media coverage of contemporary antiwar protesters in relation to the Vietnam era (Beamish, Molotch, & Flacks, 1995). Although we partly embrace Hackett and Zhao's comparative perspective, we are also interested in identifying any references to national narrations related to HK. Consequently, we employ the *historical reference* frame to code any possible reference (self-references and hetero-references) to the political-historical-social background and interrelationships of the countries involved (i.e., HK, China, and United Kingdom). Through this prism, we seek to elaborate through a comparative framework the presentation and discussion of particular geopolitical and historical themes in the media coverage of these two countries.

As indicated by the above discussion, there is a prominent media bias for delegitimizing and marginalizing protests by employing various frames. Nevertheless, the discussion above does not suggest that protests always receive or will be receiving negative media coverage. Several factors, such as the momentum of the protest, the political circumstances, the media system, and the changing technologies among others, play a crucial role in the media coverage of protests and demonstrations. With regard to the latter, the Internet has considerably affected journalism and in particular on protest framing (Cottle, 2008). The new digital environment brought about three important changes that have influenced the coverage of protests and demonstrations: (a) the creation of alternative news media sources, (b) a bulk of information emanating from citizen-journalists providing real-time reportage of civic unrest (Allan, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), and (c) new communication opportunities for activists and protesters (Bennett, 2003; Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Vicari, 2013).

Moreover, research on demonstrations regarding broader political interests and global issues such as environmental protests (Allan, Adam, & Carter, 2000) and antiracist campaigns—such as the protest against the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence (Cottle, 2004)—demonstrates a shift from the traditional delegitimizing media coverage of protests. Obviously, the aims and demands of some protests are more politically acceptable to some news media than others. As Dai and Hyun (2010) argue, “the globalization process has created a contradiction in news-making about international events that occur locally but exert their impacts globally” (p. 299). Such cases are the post-2010 protests such as the Arab Spring, Indignados, and Occupy Wall Street to name but a few. These protests have had an international appeal which was further enhanced by the digital revolution as evidenced by various studies (Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Joyce, 2010)

In addition to being an alternative communication tool for activism, the Internet has brought along new patterns of doing journalism discomfiting the dominant news economy. Despite suspicion over credibility issues (Jha, 2008), blogs and other online news sources have gained considerable momentum among a larger audience openly competing with the mainstream media. Such case is best illustrated in the analysis of Harlow and Johnson (2011) of the Egyptian protest coverage by *The New York Times*, the Twitter feed of *Times* reporter Nick Kristof, and the citizen media site Global Voices. According to their findings, first-hand accounts of the events provided by hundreds of volunteer authors for Global Voices and distance from the traditional delegitimizing paradigm appeal to a mass audience. In the same vein, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) have articulated the concepts of networked gatekeeping and networked framing to capture the changes that have occurred in traditional journalistic practices through the advent of new and social media. They argue that their findings indicate “new directions for hybrid and fluid journalisms that rely on subjective pluralism, cocreation, and

collaborative curation” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, p. 7). Within this context of intensive media competition, mainstream media reconsider traditional practices of framing protest carried away by increasing consumer-driven politics (Milne, 2005). Such observations are also reflected in the coverage of the Greek Indignados (*Aganaktismenoi*) by the Greek TV news bulletins. According to the research findings, the overall rather positive coverage of the *Aganaktismenoi* was attributed to the movement’s international impact and powerful momentum along with the media’s attempt to incorporate a populist profile in order to maintain their audiences (Veneti, Poulakidakos, & Theologou, 2012).

Nevertheless, national politics and culture are still important in defining and shaping such events. Government influence over the news media is of key importance as Cottle (2008) aptly argues that “models of media–state interactions highlight how changing political dynamics inform media interactions with political elites and the representation of major issues” (p. 857). In particular contexts, news media are confined by the presence of a specific ideological context which unavoidably brings forward the introduction of coverage conforming to state policies and political vested interests (Peng, 2008, p. 365). From a comparative perspective, this is clearly demonstrated in Peng’s (2008) analysis of antiwar protest coverage by *The New York Times* (United States), *The Times* (United Kingdom), and the *People’s Daily* (China). Peng (2008) argues that the coverage of all three newspapers “echoed the policies and stands of their respective government” (p. 375). In the same line, Dai and Hyun (2010), in their comparative framing analysis of the North Korean nuclear test by the US *Associated Press* (AP), the Chinese *Xinhua*, and the South Korean *Yonhap* news agencies, advocated that “in all three cases, national political interests exerted an important impact in sponsoring the construction of specific frames.” First, they argued that a common “threat” frame was adopted by all news agencies adapted to a narration reflecting the geopolitical interests of the respective countries. Second, according to their findings, the issue was domesticated in the news coverage in the following way: AP connecting the issue with the “War on Terror,” *Xinhua* endorsing a negotiable strategy, and *Yonhap* presenting the issue within a Cold War context.

In the context of our research, the sample of news stories derives from two contrasting media systems. On one hand, the British media system is characterized by a strong tradition of relatively independent journalism. The press sector includes quality newspapers of high professional standards, a fact that does not negate the existence of influential tabloid newspapers as well. A considerable asset of the press sector lies in its independence from state regulation since the limits of journalistic autonomy is mainly determined by the “proprietary power” (Humphreys, 2009, p. 198). On the other hand, the Chinese media have been characterized by strong authoritarian elements, derived from intense governmental control, at least in the beginning. This state control was reduced through the 1980s, however strict regulation returned after

the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and Hu Jintao's presidency, characterized by the growing influence of the web and the rise of dissident movements (Oyeyinka, Olalere, Lateef, & Omolayo, 2013). Since the early 1980s, the growing economic system of China has adopted a series of market-oriented characteristics, affecting the evolution of media (Huang, 2007; Yang, 2012). In short, China is governed by a very special feature, not found in the British case: although the economic system has undergone changes, the political system has retained its old habits. As a result, the press sector "is still shaped by an authoritarian political system, yet enticed by a vigorous market" (Winfield & Peng, 2005, p. 266).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As the aim of this research is to examine the 2014 HK protests' media representations in two different media systems and the possible implications of national and geopolitical interests expressed in the media coverage, our research questions are formulated as follows:

RQ1. Which are the key characteristics regarding HK's protests coverage in *China Daily* and *The Guardian* in terms of the use of conflict, legitimization, and marginalization framing devices?

RQ2. Are different geopolitical interests reflected in each country's media coverage of the HK protests?

Based on our literature review, we may well expect to find similarities and differences between the media coverage of HK protests in the Chinese and the British news media based on specific ways of coverage. Therefore, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H1. Both newspapers are expected to make extensive use of official sources.

H2. We expect that there will be significant differences between *China Daily* and *The Guardian* regarding the overall tone of media coverage of these protests.

Method

To investigate our research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis on the data collected by the online versions of the British newspaper *The Guardian* (<http://www.theguardian.com/uk>) and the Chinese newspaper *China Daily* (<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/>). The selection of the articles was made through a research adapted to the peculiarities of the search engines and the archives of the two websites. In each site's search engine, we used the keyword "Hong Kong protests" in order to find the most relevant articles to these protests. Therefore, the selection of the articles was conducted mainly based on qualitative rather than quantitative criteria, due to the restrictions of the

archives and the relevant search engines of each site. Regarding *The Guardian*, we collected all 100 articles that were available and relevant to the topic under examination. With regard to *China Daily*, we employed a systematic random sampling strategy by selecting every sixth unit from the total population of articles within a particular period of time. The data collection occurred in March 2015 and covers the period from September 2014 (26 September was the official kickoff of the protests) to December 2015 (15 December 2015 was registered as the last day of the protests).

Newspaper Selection

Since we were interested in examining whether and how geopolitics affect the media coverage of an issue with political ramifications (such as protests), the selection of the particular media—bearing historical—political connections to HK and at the same time representing two completely different media systems—seems rational. Moreover, the popularity (even out of their national borders) and the prestige of both newspapers were complementary but equally important reasons that led to the final selection. Specifically, *The Guardian* is a British center-left national daily newspaper, known for its extensive presentation and analysis of such issues (protests and demonstrations). Furthermore, *The Guardian* is a newspaper with an international appeal evidenced by the fact that the newspaper's online edition was the third most widely read in the world as of June 2012 (Stripp, 2012). *China Daily* is an English language daily newspaper published in China since 1981 aiming both at a Chinese and an international audience. The newspaper is published by satellite in HK, the United States, and Europe and has the biggest circulation of any other English-language newspaper in China, while its online edition (established 1995) is among the most visited ones (Wikipedia, 2014).

Coding Procedures and Coding Book

The unit of analysis for this research was the article. The article has been frequently used as the coding unit by several researchers on social movements and protests such as Dardis (2006), Armstrong and Boyle (2011), and Xu (2013). The full text of each article was examined and coded by three coders. All coders participated in coding training sessions and prior discussions on the framing devices in order to achieve a consensus for the final coding scheme.

Generic coding procedures included the identification of the newspapers' sites, date of article, size of the article (small: 1–500 words, medium: 501–1,000, and large: 1,001+) and the existence of photograph and/or video. Although this research does not examine the visual framing of the protests, it does count the presence of the visual and its content in terms of the depiction of conflict- or peaceful-oriented imagery. Moreover, we examined the overall tone of the article toward the protest (neutral, positive, and negative) based on

Table 1. Main Conflict Frames Appearing in the Articles of *China Daily* and *The Guardian*.

Conflict frames	Total (n=201)	<i>China Daily</i> (n=102)	<i>The Guardian</i> (n=99)	Fisher's exact test (two-sided)
Conflict (discourse)	176 (87.6%)	84 (82.4%)	92 (92.9%)	0.031
Violent confrontations (discourse)	94 (46.8%)	45 (44.1%)	49 (49.5%)	0.481
Violent confrontations (photograph or video)	33 (26.8%)	4 (12.5%)	29 (31.9%)	0.038

examples by previous research (Dardis, 2006; Xu, 2013). To study the delegitimization and marginalization of the HK protests in the selected media coverage, we developed a typology of eight framing devices, as discussed above: conflict frame, violent confrontations, illegal character of protest, social and economic disruption, devaluation of the causes and aims of the protests, marginalization, appearance and performance, and official sources. This typology was largely based on McLeod and Hertog's (1999) "protest paradigm" and Dardis' (2006) research, but other elements were also culled from relevant research.

Finally, in order to be able to examine possible connections of the media coverage with regard to geopolitical interests, we also employed two more case-specific framing devices. First, we examined the absence or not of *institutional critique by journalists* and in case of an affirmative answer, we examined the main target (i.e., government or political system, police, West, China, and Other). Second, we developed the *historical reference* frame as presented in the literature review. Based on our pilot coding and the relevant literature, we included possible categories that could be detected (No, Yes, regarding HK's history; Yes, related to China; Yes, related to United Kingdom; and Yes, related to other (similar) events). The data entry for the quantitative content analysis and the elaboration of the results was conducted with the use of SPSS 22.0.

Intercoder Reliability

The intercoder reliability between the three coders of the current research was measured using Cohen's kappa. Each one of the three coders coded the same 20 articles randomly selected from the two news sites of our research (10% of the total number of articles examined for the current research). The articles were coded for the basic variables of the current research (conflict frame, violent confrontations, legitimization or illegal character frame, marginalization frame, social or economic disruption frame, devaluation of causes and aims of the protesters, reference to appearance or performance of the protesters, and overall tone), and the reliability results are .89, .95, .92, .83, .97, .84, .86, and .81, respectively.

Results

A total of 202 articles (100 from *The Guardian*, 102 from *China Daily*) were collected and analyzed. RQ1 inquired

about the key characteristics of HK protest coverage in the online versions of the two newspapers in terms of the conflict, legitimization, and marginalization framing devices. Table 1 shows that the conflict frame characterizes the articles within both *China Daily* and *The Guardian*, since 82.4% of the *China Daily* articles and 92.9% of *The Guardian* articles refer to conflict between the protesters and the HK authorities. Moreover, a significant part of the conflict, described in the articles, is violent confrontations. In 94 articles (46.8%), one can find references to violent confrontations. This percentage is almost equally divided between the two newspapers. The chi-square test statistic reveals the absence of a statistically significant difference between the articles in *China Daily* and *The Guardian*. Moreover, the difference in the percentages between the two media regarding depiction of violent confrontations in photograph or video (*China Daily* 12.5%, *The Guardian* 31.9%) is due to either the almost total lack of images (only 30.4% of *China Daily* articles include a photograph or video) or the depiction of mostly nonviolent instances in the Chinese newspaper. *The Guardian*, however, by relying far more heavily on images and videos (91.9% of the articles include a photograph or video as well), chooses to present the violent confrontations in the streets of HK more frequently.

Analyzing the conflict frame, Table 2 demonstrates that the most widely used conflict frame was between the protesters and the HK government (*China Daily* 64.7%, *The Guardian* 67.7%) followed by the confrontation between the protesters and HK police (*China Daily* 45.3%, *The Guardian* 40.2%). The use of conflict frame although fairly close in quantitative terms, it was significantly different in qualitative terms. In the majority of its articles, *China Daily* attributed full responsibility to the protesters, while *The Guardian* tends to "rationalize" the conflict in favor of the protesters.

Table 3 summarizes our analysis of framing devices regarding the legitimization and marginalization of the protests. A total of 82 articles (40.8%) stress the illegal character of the protests, 64 articles (31.8%) make use of the marginalization frame, 94 articles (48.7%) refer to the socially and economically disruptive character of the protests, 56 articles (28%) refer to the causes and aims of the protests in a belittling way, and 49 articles (31.4%) refer to the appearance or performance of the protesters. Nonetheless, it is important to note that *China Daily* stresses in 73 of its articles the illegal character of the protests, while *The*

Table 2. Analysis of the Conflict Frame in the Articles of *China Daily* and *The Guardian* (Chi-square Cannot Be Implemented Since Variables Are Multiple Response Sets).

Conflict analysis	Total (n=201)	<i>China Daily</i> (n=102)	<i>The Guardian</i> (n=99)
Conflict against Hong Kong government	133 (66.2%)	66 (64.7%)	67 (67.7%)
Police	91 (45.3%)	41 (40.2%)	50 (50.5%)
Political system	28 (14%)	11 (10.8%)	17 (17.2%)
China	54 (26.9%)	6 (5.8%)	48 (48.5%)
Other protesters	3 (1.5%)	3 (2.9%)	0 (0%)
Media	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Other	17 (8.5%)	10 (9.8%)	7 (7.1%)

Table 3. Legitimization and Marginalization Frames.

Legitimization and marginalization frames	Total (n=201)	<i>China Daily</i> (n=102)	<i>The Guardian</i> (n=99)	Fisher's exact test (two-sided)
Legitimization (illegal character)	82 (40.8%)	73 (71.6%)	9 (9.1%)	0.000
Marginalization	64 (31.8%)	64 (62.7%)	0 (0%)	0.000
Social and economic disruption	94 (48.7%)	73 (73%)	21 (22.6%)	0.000
Devaluation of the causes and aims of the protests	56 (28%)	56 (55.4%)	0 (0%)	0.000
Reference to appearance or performance of protesters (discourse)	49 (31.4%)	15 (22.7%, in a negative way)	29 (32.2%, in a positive way); 5 (5.6% in a negative way)	0.000

Guardian does so in only 9 articles. *China Daily* overtly characterizes the protests as illegal (see Table 4). Moreover, it is worth noticing that the marginalization and the devaluation of the causes and aims of the protest frames were solely used by *China Daily*. Additionally, the social and economic disruption frame appears to be a fundamental element of *China Daily*'s journalistic narration. *The Guardian* appears to be more moderate in its description of the disruption of everyday life by the protesters, acknowledging at the same time that protesters have made efforts to minimize this disruption. Finally, references to the appearance and performance of the protesters were rather limited by both newspapers (15 articles in *China Daily* and 34 in *The Guardian*). These few articles by *China Daily* focused on the potentially harmful effects of the umbrellas (22.7%), while *The Guardian* approached the issue in a rather neutral or even positive way (32.2%). These results reinforce findings of recent studies that appearance and protesters' performances can sometimes be presented as part of a positive news narration (Alexander et al., 2006). Table 4 highlights the above results through the presentation of textual examples from the news articles.

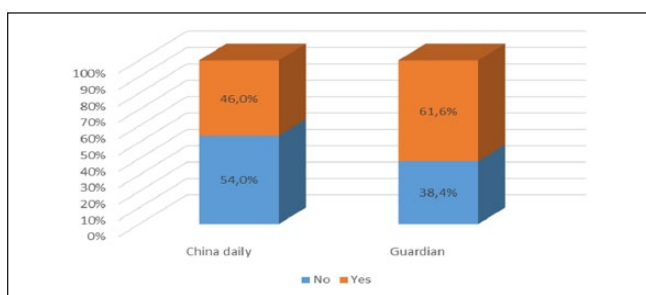
Moreover, H1 states that based on the protest paradigm, both newspapers will make extensive use of official sources. As shown in Graph 1, *The Guardian* makes more intense use of official sources compared to *China Daily* (61.6% and 46%, respectively), although in a statistically nonsignificant way. This observation is grounded in the fact that *China Daily*'s articles are in most cases comments on the HK

protests, presenting the governmental (a.k.a. Chinese) view on the protests. *China Daily* mainly includes Chinese and HK political sources to comment on the protests, while *The Guardian* uses more diverse official sources such as international academics and representatives from various political realms. Moreover, *The Guardian*'s journalistic narration is enriched by protesters' testimonials. Based on the above-mentioned findings, although we reject our first research hypothesis in relation to the extensive use of official sources by both newspapers, we do observe a relatively significant use of official sources by *The Guardian*.

RQ2 explores whether the different geopolitical interests of the two countries are reflected in the coverage of the protests. To answer this question, we specifically focus on the examination of (a) the *institutional critique* frame and (b) the *historical reference* frame. Table 5 displays the critique expressed by the articles toward specific institutions and countries related to the protests. Our findings show that each newspaper appears to criticize countries and governments which somehow engage either with the HK protests or other geopolitical interests. *China Daily* in more than one third of its articles challenges the Western ideology by accusing mainly the United Kingdom and the United States for being the direct or indirect instigators of the protests. However, *The Guardian* accuses, in a more moderate way, the HK government and the Chinese leadership (12.1% and 15.2%, respectively) for being intolerant toward the rights of the people to protest and their claims for a more democratic procedure with regard to the election of HK government.

Table 4. Textual Examples of Conflict, Legalization, and Marginalization Frames in News Articles.

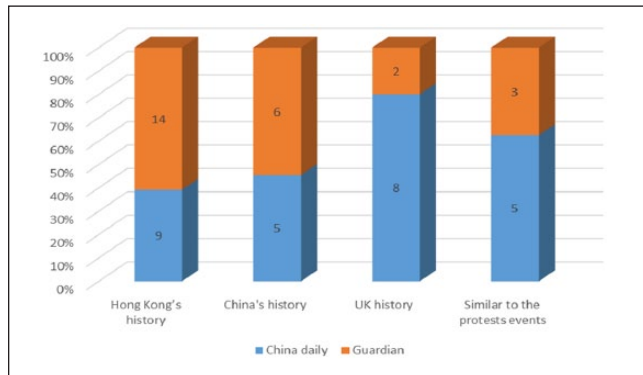
Frames	Text
Violent confrontations	<i>China Daily</i> : The protests have hardly been peaceful, and therefore police actions have been entirely justified. (30 September 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : On Sunday, protesters held their hands in the air each time they confronted police. (29 September 2014) Police fired volleys of teargas into the crowds at least three times on Sunday afternoon, according to reports posted online, sending protesters running and pleading for water and paper towels. (28 September 2014)
Legitimization (illegal character of protest)	<i>China Daily</i> : the illegal “Occupy Central” campaign. (29 September 2014) illegal movement. (2 October 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : Pro-democracy activists. (4 October 2014) pro-democracy protests. (11 December 2014)
Marginalization	<i>China Daily</i> : Tai has achieved something—he has attracted quite a number of unscrupulous followers, especially among the youth. (29 September 2014) “tyranny of the minority.” (8 October 2014) bunch of radicals are holding HK hostage. (9 October 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : The marketing employees, who had bags full of crackers, plastic ponchos and water for protesters, had not planned to become involved, but said they felt they had to support them after seeing the scenes of billowing teargas on television. (29 September 2014) Tens of thousands of HK residents—young and old, rich and poor. (30 September 2014)
Social and economic disruption	<i>China Daily</i> : The blockades manned by protesters [. . .] are creating serious disruptions to the lives of ordinary people all over the city. (30 September 2014) have led to serious traffic disruption, temporary closure of schools and banks. (3 October 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : Banks, shops and offices were closed in protest areas, bus lines were suspended and civil servants sent home early. (29 September 2014) Demonstrators created safe passage lines so that vehicles could get through. (3 October 2014)
Devaluation of the causes and aims of the protests	<i>China Daily</i> : The fact it took the organizers a year and a half to finally launch their campaign indicates their lack of confidence in their political appeal. (29 September 2014) the call for civil disobedience was just an excuse for unjustified protests. (1 October 2014) unreasonable political demands of the protesters. (2 October 2014) The ongoing political farce that is “Occupy Central.” (8 October 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : Democracy is the living, breathing product of struggle: of people organising together and using their collective strength to drive back the power of those above, often at great personal cost and sacrifice. This is the drama now being played out on the streets of HK. (15 October 2014)
Reference to appearance or performance of protesters	<i>China Daily</i> : The fact is that many protesters brought umbrellas with metal poles and spokes that can easily injure, or even kill another person. [. . .] it has been suggested that many protesters used umbrellas as weapons to attack police officers first. (8 October 2014) <i>The Guardian</i> : Participants held up their smartphones to create a glittering sea of lights and joined in a mass rendition of Do You Hear The People Sing—the revolutionaries’ song from the musical <i>Les Misérables</i> . Many in the overwhelmingly young crowd wore black and sported yellow ribbons. (29 September 2014) With his floppy hair, baggy shorts and stripy T-shirt, accessorized with a yellow ribbon around each skinny wrist, the only thing distinguishing the 17-year-old from the other teenagers on Wednesday was the bank of television cameras facing him. (1 October 2014)

**Graph 1.** Use of official sources (significance = .033).

In addition, each newspaper sought to present its own view on the protests through references to the past or to the countries affecting the political situations in HK. According to Graph 2, most references were made to the history of HK (23 articles in total), followed by references to Chinese history (11 articles), U.K. history (10 articles), and 8 articles referring to other similar protest events. Apart from the quantitative dimension, which appears to be quite similar between the two sites, the qualitative dimension appears to be more interesting. On behalf of *China Daily*, the references to either HK, or China, or the United Kingdom aim at praising the

Table 5. Institutional Critique.

Institutional critique	Total (n=201)	China Daily (n=102)	The Guardian (n=99)
Government or political system	12 (6%)	0 (0%)	12 (12.1%)
Police	5 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	5 (5.1%)
West or United Kingdom or United States	37 (18.4%)	36 (35%)	1 (0.5%)
China	15 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	15 (15.2%)
HK university	4 (2%)	4 (4%)	0 (0%)
Other	14 (7%)	9 (9%)	5 (5.1%)

**Graph 2.** Historical references (chi-square not valid).

democratic present of the city in contrast to the strict colonial past as a British territory. However, *The Guardian* focused on Beijing's intention to overthrow HK's previous autonomy and erode its freedoms. Table 6 presents some indicative textual examples that support the above results.

H2 predicted that there will be significant differences between *China Daily* and *The Guardian* regarding the overall tone of media coverage of these protests. Graph 3 demonstrates that the two newspapers adopted a very different overall tone regarding the protests. The vast majority of *China Daily* articles (92.2%) refer to the protests in a negative way, whereas *The Guardian* mainly adopts either a neutral (59.6%) or a positive stance (26.3%). Therefore, we accept our second hypothesis on the significant difference of the overall tone between *China Daily* and *The Guardian*.

Discussion

This study examined media representations of the HK protests, as formulated in the online versions of the *The Guardian* and *China Daily*. Through the media coverage of HK protests, we sought to understand a combination of issues related to the framing devices, adopted by different media systems, as well as to the potential reflection of the dissimilar geopolitical interests of the engaged countries. Following our findings, we argue that the main principles of the "protest paradigm" could be re-approached and reexamined as the process of framing protests is perpetually in *flux*, mainly due to the protests' identity, momentum, changing technologies,

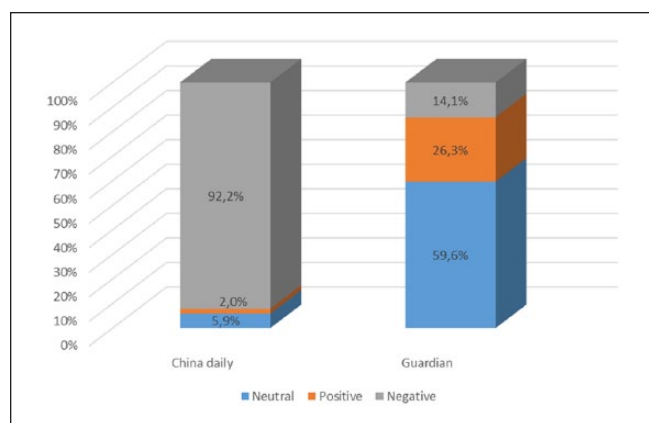
and the geopolitical interests as reflected in the examined media systems.

More specifically, the "protest paradigm" framework is still valid regarding media's dedication to conflict. The fact that in both newspapers, media coverage was deluged by the element of conflict should have come as no surprise, given that in the case of protest events the conflict with authorities is where newsworthiness emanates from (Di Cicco, 2010; Veneti et al., 2012). As previous studies (Boykoff, 2006; Dardis, 2006; McLeod & Hertog, 1998) have acknowledged conflict and violent confrontations are widely used frames in protest coverage. In the news stories of both media outlets, HK government, police, and the political system in general are the main fields where the criticism of protesters' is directed. However, this conflict-oriented overreporting is not identical within the two news websites. In *China Daily*, the highly confrontational picture of protesters with various pillars of society (such as the government, the rule of law, and the statutory system) is accompanied by an overemphasis on the protesters' "mistakes," presented in the context of an illegal behavior versus the public interest. Moreover, extensive references by *China Daily* about the protesters as perpetrators of violent acts and as of working in tandem with foreign forces aimed to deconstruct and demystify the Umbrella movement's objectives and present its members as lacking representativeness within the HK society. However, *The Guardian's* coverage, expressing strong skepticism on China's policy, tends to provide a rationalized impression of conflict in favor of the protesters. Despite extensive reports on violent confrontations with specific references to the unsettled relationship between protesters and the police, *The Guardian* adopts a more moderate approach toward the protesters by referring as well to the police brutality and HK and Beijing politicians' rigidity.

Another stark contrast between *China Daily* and *The Guardian* relates to the *social and economic disruption* frame. The Chinese newspaper's reports were considerably more negative compared to the British newspaper. Our findings are consistent with Boykoff's (2006) results regarding the presentation of protests as a menace to community values and with Batziou's (2015) and Dardis' (2006) discussions about extensive references to economic disruption (closed banks and schools, traffic jams, etc.). Titles such as "'Occupy Central' has damaged the rule of law" (11 December 2014)

Table 6. Textual Examples of Institutional Critique and Historical References in News Articles.

Frames	Text
Institutional critique	<p><i>China Daily</i>: many reports on HK made by the Western media were untrue and biased to China. (5 October 2014)</p> <p>The US will benefit as it could halt the continuing rise of China. (1 October 2014)</p> <p>One cannot deny the possibility of political interference and manipulation by US intelligence agencies to destabilize HK. (2 October 2014)</p> <p>Internationally, outsiders seem determined to interfere in local affairs. British lawmakers are planning special debates in their parliament on the SAR's political development. (6 October 2014)</p> <p><i>The Guardian</i>: Underlying the immediate dispute are growing fears that China is eroding the region's freedoms and culture. (11 December 2014)</p> <p>state media has taken a hardline on the protests and censors blocked or scrubbed clean social media. (30 September 2014)</p>
Historical reference	<p><i>China Daily</i>: HK had no democracy, and the British simply treated HK as the goose which laid the golden egg. Many aspects of society were unfair and unjust. (9 October 2014)</p> <p>Just because HK is a capitalist economy and former British colony doesn't mean it can become a "mini India" or any independent political entity for that matter. HK is an inseparable part of China, which has been a unitary state for thousands of years. There is only one China. (10 October 2014)</p> <p><i>The Guardian</i>: The former British colony returned to China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula that gives it some autonomy from the mainland and a promise of eventual universal suffrage. (14 January 2015)</p> <p>Britain and China have solemn obligations to the people of HK to preserve their rights and freedoms, under the terms of the Joint Declaration signed in 1984 by prime minister Margaret Thatcher. (30 September 2014)</p>

**Graph 3.** Overall tone (significance = .000).

denote clearly the disruptive effect of the movement on HK society.

China Daily is based on fact-oriented reporting and articles which embody the values of interpretative journalism. The journalists are highly critical of the ways protesters act, adopting a series of negative characterizations and opinions in the form of denouncement. More specifically, *China Daily* describes the movement as illegal and lacking moral credibility. Moreover, the journalists direct their criticism to other directions as well in the form of reviews or commentaries against the West. In this regard, we confirm the presence of the "protest paradigm" in *China Daily*'s attempt to delegitimize the protests and devalue its causes. This approach was

further enhanced by a moderate but vital use of official sources and by overreporting a strong dissatisfaction on the part of the public, based on opinion polls. The official sources used in *China Daily* mainly supplemented journalists' negative commentaries and reflected Beijing's views. This stems from the dual role to be played by Chinese media today: on one hand, they are "ideological apparatuses," representing the government's voice, and on the other hand, they are "commodities in the market," which must ensure the interests both of advertisers and audiences (Winfield & Peng, 2005, pp. 261–262).

On the contrary, the "protest paradigm" fails to adequately explain the mainly positive coverage by the *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* not only hosts a wider range of official sources, but it also tries to clearly define the demands of the protesters through a series of statements, made by the main figures of the movement. As discussed above, even in light of discomforting situations (social and economic disruption, violent confrontations, etc.), *The Guardian* tends to distance itself from any direct attack toward the protesters.

As a result of this mainly positive stance toward the protesters and their aims, the overall tone adopted by *The Guardian* is positive as opposed to *China Daily* which mainly adopts an unfavorable attitude toward them. Given that in the Chinese press, a spirit of authoritarianism still exists, it is reasonable that journalists cannot disseminate to the audience news that opposes the established authority or undermines its political values. This subordination of news media coverage to the established authority is also reflected in the persistence of *China Daily* to adopt a merely negative

tone as to the description of protest events. In an authoritarian system, such as the Chinese, the maintenance and enhancement of state power necessitates media representations of an infallible government that holds the absolute truth as opposed to the fault of protesters. In contrast, *The Guardian* functions in a more polyphonic media environment where alternative online open-access information sources abound (Cottle, 2008; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Pressures and deviations on traditional journalistic practices, stemming from such a competitive media milieu (Milne, 2005), are inevitably imprinted on the mainstream media's coverage of protests and demonstrations (Bennett, 2003).

Last but not least, we could argue that the *institutional critique* and the *historical reference* frames work in synergy; on one hand, the institutional critique frame sets the ideological context, and on the other hand, the *historical reference frame* provides cases to support and enhance that context, enriching it with historical validity. Based on our analysis of the *institutional critique* frame, *China Daily* identifies two main camps of “enemies” that can be distinguished in external and internal, respectively: (a) Western governments (mainly referring to the United States and United Kingdom) and the Western media and (b) HK university, the Civic Party (opposition party) and other local instigators and participants of the protests. The newspaper's main narration resonates in an alleged international anti-China campaign which comes into effect through the interference of foreign governments in local affairs (many references to US intelligence services) and the spread of untrue and biased reports on the HK protests by the Western media.

To support such critiques and arguments, *China Daily* made extensive use of *historical references* basically regarding HK's present democracy with reference to China's and United Kingdom's rule (“Hong Kong's 150 years of colonial rule when Britain denied the colony any democracy. It is the Basic Law which enshrines and guarantees universal suffrage” [29 September 2014]) and to HK's contemporary economic success. Based on the latter, *China Daily* expands its agenda by setting forward an indirect threat to the “external enemies” by suggesting that “American and British businesses have a considerable stake in the growth of Hong Kong's economy and the city's increasing economic ties with the mainland. They will also suffer losses if Hong Kong's central business district is paralyzed by protests” (30 September 2014).

Furthermore, the newspaper built on the demonization of the US government, by emphasizing its involvement and negative repercussions in other social uprisings such as those in the Middle East and Ukraine. Overall, *China Daily* attempted, on one hand, to persuade the audience of the presence of secret agendas on behalf of the West, and on the other hand, it sought to highlight China's growth and development in the realms of political power and supremacy in cross-national affairs. The following quote somehow encapsulates this perspective: “Beijing did not accede to then British

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during negotiations over Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in the 1980s. Do the ‘Occupy’ perpetrators really believe they can do a better job than the Iron Lady?” (9 October 2014).

However, *The Guardian*'s main rhetorical framework derives from the Sino-British Joint Declaration which framed the United Kingdom as one of the main creators of HK's fundamental rights and freedoms under the “one country, two systems” principle. Under this rationale, *The Guardian*'s main critique targets the Chinese government through a two-fold narrative focus: (a) extensive historical references to HK's autonomy as a British colony and (b) portrayal of Beijing's aggressiveness toward independence movements including references to past—Tiananmen Square—and recent—Tibet and Xinjiang—cases. These findings confirm previous studies that posit that national political interests are reflected in news coverage (Dai & Hyun, 2010; Peng, 2008).

Conclusion

This research built on previous studies regarding the marginalization devices used in the coverage of protests and demonstrations by investigating two different media systems. Its merit lies in the fact that it is one of the very few studies that engaged with national interests and geopolitics as reflected in the media coverage of protests by introducing and empirically testing the frames of *institutional critique* and *historical reference*.

Based on our analysis, the “protest paradigm,” which has been the milestone for most studies of protest framing (including this one), needs to be thoroughly reexamined and revised as important factors such as the protests' momentum, the media systems, the new information communication technologies, and certain political and social resources that are involved in the dynamics surrounding media coverage of protests greatly influence the framing process. More specifically, our findings demonstrated that the media coverage of the 2014 HK protests by the two newspapers was reflective of both the media systems in which they function and the distinctive national standpoints. On one hand, *China Daily*'s main narration was based on the triptych: delegitimizing protests, the West as accomplice, and safeguarding the government's interests. On the other hand, *The Guardian* adopted an overall positive stance toward the protests by insisting on the protesters' just demands and by highlighting the British contribution to HK's democratic heritage.

Finally, this study demonstrated how the same protest can receive different media coverage by different media outlets in diverse media cultures. More important, it urges us to consider that as geopolitical interests constantly change, traditional political affiliations evolve and emerging global issues come into the play, the patterns that national news media frame either local or overseas protests will be diversifying and, therefore, need constant examination. Although this study constitutes an appropriate example of such an approach,

further research should overcome the limitations of this study by including, for instance, more media outlets, more countries within the comparison, and various historical periods. In addition, future research should also consider how changing technologies and digital journalism have possibly affected the imprint of the national standpoints and geopolitical interests on protest coverage. Although not in the scope of this study, more empirical research is needed to unfold the various ramifications that web communications have in the disruption of the protest paradigm.

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