

# The Representation of Foreign Politics Through Media Prism: A Case Study of 2008 U.S. Presidential Election Campaign in Mainland Chinese Newspapers

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As the most powerful nation in the world, the U.S. presidential election campaign drew a lot of attention from the media around the world. This study examines how party-orientation and market-orientation newspapers in China presented 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign to their audience, and how the news serve for the reproduction of domestic dominated ideology and safeguarding domestic political needs. It adopted content analysis and textual analysis as research methods. The results show that Party newspaper tends to serve domestic political ideology, while market-oriented newspapers showed mixed attitude toward political demand. Although market newspapers, out of the concern of political safety, employed some tactic to comply with the demand of dominated ideology to some extent, their cooperation was limited since their main purpose was commercial success and their presentation even destroy the aim of linkage politics for the reasons include acquiring market profit and/or pursuit of professional value. This study is a positive effort to make up the current research gap of studies on international news in Chinese media.

*Keywords:* linkage politics, presidential election campaign, Chinese newspapers

## Introduction

As the most powerful nation in the world, the result of U.S. presidential election has recognizable influence on the other nations particularly for those nations with different ideology. Thus the 2008 presidential election campaign drew a lot of attention from the media around the world. For the Chinese public, Western democratic system has often been interpreted in an abstract manner, while presidential election gives a concrete example to understand how U.S. political system works. During this process, the news media play a crucial role in generating and shaping public opinion on U.S. political system. This study attempts to examine how party-orientation and market-orientation newspapers in China presented the event to their audience and in what sense their presentation embodies the linkage politics of international news, i.e., international news works together with domestic news to serve for the reproduction of domestic dominated ideology and safeguarding civil political needs.

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## Literature Review

### Background of Chinese Media System

In the late 1950s, the mass media in China was generally placed within a system of state propaganda. The orthodox Chinese Marxist theory of journalism claims that the primary value of news is to help to form and cement public opinion in line with party's line, so journalism was perceived playing an important role of "throat and tongue" (hou she) of the Party (B. ZHAO, 1999). As noted by Akhavan-Majid (2004), all media in China were subsidized by the party-state prior to economic reforms. The press consisted of two types of papers: the party organs newspapers and specialized' papers. The former were officially the mouth-pieces of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and operated under the supervision of its propaganda departments, and the latter is associated with China's various mass organizations, government entities, and social and scientific associations.

The media was allowed to accept advertising in 1979, which is a significant media policy opening in China. This policy was intended not to increase media subsidies with economic development (Lynch, 1999). After the early 1980s, Chinese media embraced the market and went through successive phases of commercialization along with the economy development in general (B. ZHAO, 1999). Since the mid-1980s, the "throat and tongue" theory has been shifted to serve for the people, while B. ZHAO (1999) criticized it as a ready-made official rhetoric. The number of non-party papers published began to multiply rapidly, and non-party papers dominated the media market in China during the 1990s (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). The marketization reform reshaped the structure of the Chinese media. Except for major mouthpieces of the Party such as Xinhua News Agency and *People's Daily*, more and more Chinese newspapers had to undertake financial responsibility for their own and thus operate according to market mechanisms (YU, 1994).

Chinese media reform is seen as an extensive commercialization process. The market is seen as a powerful force in news production (Chan, 1993; Pan & Chan, 2003; Y. Z. ZHAO, 1998). This entails reporting soft news, using a personable, intimate, short, and highly readable style of writing. As observed by B. ZHAO (1999), Chinese media as the Party's mouthpiece has been increasingly eroded by increasingly driving force and pressures for commercial success. The resulting tension between state control and market dynamics has become a striking problem. At the process going, the state apparatus managed to accommodate new commercial environment without disturbing social and political stability and have relaxed ideological control in some topic areas. With the success of *Jiaodian Fangtan*, an officially sponsored critical journalism, the authority realized that critical journalism does not always do damage to the state's authority and legitimacy. Rather, it can make propaganda more sophisticated and effective with carefully managed and directed.

However, the party-state still held some political control on the media to some extent. Some areas, such as television journalism, have been considered as having political importance and are still tightly gripped. Thus the market-oriented newspapers have been carefully keeping the party line in its content, but they serve the party state differently from party-oriented papers (Pan & Chan, 2003).

This interesting mix of ideological orientation aroused quite a number of discussion. Some researchers suggest that the party-state have been successful in keeping the commercialized media within its "orbit", while others argue that state has lost some of the control over the mass media system (see summary by

Akhavan-Majid, 2004). Unsatisfied with the dual conceptual frame of the state and market, Akhavan-Majid (2004) argued that there were multifaceted and complex dynamics of change in China's mass media system; in particular, non-state actors (e.g., citizens, journalists, and entrepreneurs) have made many of the changes in China's mass media system during the post-MAO period. Akhavan-Majid (2004) argued that social actors creatively renegotiate and expanded of new policy openings initiated by the state and thus push the initial boundaries of reform.

Related to the tension between the state and market, the debate also exists in the development of professionalism. The influence of professionalism is on the rise. Some researchers argued there is a division between professional journalism, which emphasized on the disseminator role of the media, and party-journalism paradigm, which is characterized with the interpretive and popular advocacy roles (Pan & Chan, 2003). YU (1994) noticed that the general social environment is contemplating material well-being, and paid news, advertisements in the form of news stories, and sponsored columns and pages have rampant in the Chinese press. Therefore, YU argued that professionalization of journalism was no guaranteed in China. In contrast, HUANG (2007) emphasized market competition constitute the base of more professional media system.

Having introduced the background and ongoing arguments on Chinese media system, followed is the discussion on linkage politics which is the focus of this study.

### **Linkage Politics of International News**

U.S. presidential election is an international event. Researchers found that the production of international news usually go through a domestication process. Cohen, Levy, Roeh, and Gurevitch (1996) suggested the idea of "domestication", which refers to the phenomenon that local journalists turn foreign events into international news by adopting domestic ideology. Some researchers emphasized that contextual factors are important for the production of international news. For instance, WANG (1992), and Pan, Lee, Chan, and So (1999) analyzed political ideology, and YANG (2003) suggested that national interest is the most critical factor in framing international news. Further, Lee, Chan, Pan, and So (2000) defined domestication as the way by which domestic journalists strengthened the relevance between foreign events and local audience and put international news into the narrative of a nation state. They also found that the main factors affected domestication are political authority in international stage, mainstream ideology and cultural backgrounds, and some minor factors include media types, market location, organization constraints, and the understanding of the place in which events happened also affect domestication. Nevertheless, researchers indicated that although considerable research has demonstrated that news coverage of international events tends to favor government voices, not all of the news media consistently support the government's foreign policy (Fahmy & Kim, 2008).

Besides, B. H. ZHOU (2010) argued that the concept of domestication has not explained how international news becomes the means of reproduction the ideology of a specific nation state. Adopting the concept of "linkage politics" from politics, B. H. ZHOU (2010) questioned the assumption that local news and international news exist independently, while he suggested they are linked and interaction. Thus, he proposed that researchers should go beyond studying local news and international news separately, and analyze how they are constituted by each other. In the case of China, he thought that news people have to timely report the important events around

the world on the one hand, and serve for domestic stability instead of playing the role of a destroyer, challenger, or potential menace of civil political system on the other hand.

There are a large number of studies that discussed how Western-led English-language media reporting Chinese events or issues (e.g., Leung & HUANG, 2007; X. ZHOU, 2008), but surprisingly little systematic attention to examine international coverage in Chinese news media except for some cross-national studies mentioned earlier. B. H. ZHOU's (2010) study is one of the exceptions. He conducted a content analysis of CCTV (China Central Television) *Network News Broadcast (Xinwen Lianbo)* and found that there are three tactics existed in the coverage of international news from Chinese TV programs. These three tactics include: (1) self-prioritization. It means putting self in a privileged position in term of the number, space, and time length of news reports; (2) comparison between inside and outside. It refers to the vivid contrast between the positive situations inside presented by domestic news and negative situations outside presented by foreign news; and (3) minimization of "sensitive" news. It concerns the limitation of certain topics in international news which may influence on domestic politics. The democratic election system is one of the topics he mentioned. In sum, international news with above tactics worked together with local news to undertake the common function of serving for party nation dominated ideology, consolidating of legality of established regime and promoting national identification and society unitary.

Although B. H. ZHOU (2010) suggested that most of journalists in mainland China complied with the operational requirements of linkage politics in their daily practices, he also mentioned it might be possible that alternative type of linkage politics exist, i.e., the purpose of international coverage is to promote foreign advanced ideas and practices in order to pursue the local system transformation and social progress. He explained that the appearance of alternative linkage politics is a result that some of market-oriented newspapers subscribed professionalism values, and they are willing to serve for public benefits and to promote the development of civil society in China. He suggested that *Oriental Morning Post* in Shanghai and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* in Guangzhou are two of the examples.

B. H. ZHOU's analysis of linkage politics suggests a new perspective on exploring international news; however, his observation needs more support from empirical evidence with different types of media. Moreover, one thing missed in B. H. ZHOU's analysis is that news production is not only under political pressure, but is heavily influenced by the power of market as well. It is seen that his discussion on linkage politics draws little attention to the differences between political-oriented media and market-oriented media.

Moreover, it is often seen that researchers (e.g., Chiang & Duann, 2007; FANG, 2001; PENG, 2008; YANG, 2003; YIN, 2007; B. H. ZHOU, 2010) tend to employ Party news organ, *People's Daily* and CCTV in particular, to examine the characteristics of Chinese newspaper in the study of comparative research or international news. Though *People's Daily* is representative example of the authoritative media system of China, it hardly embodies the market-oriented newspapers in China.

Above all, this study identifies the research gap of little attention on international news and limitation of type of newspaper to party-oriented newspaper, and examines the interaction between political and market factors in the coverage of 2008 U.S. presidential election in two different type of newspaper. That is to say, the research object is both market-oriented and party-oriented newspapers. The following discussion shifts to account of framing analysis, the analytic frame employed in this study.

### **Framing Analysis**

Frame analysis is widely adopted by communication researchers to analyze news content. As pointed out by YANG (2003), the concept of framing is proposed on the basis of the fact that all news is subjected to ideological, political, socio-psychological influences, which has been well identified by previous research (e.g., Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Gans, 1979). The literature of framing analysis is considerable rich. Goffman (1974), an early researcher, proposed that a frame is “schemata of interpretation”, which consists of a specific set of expectations that are used to make sense of a situation. Differently from Goffman’s perspective, Gitlin (1980)’s definition shifted the focus from the function of frame to the process and purpose of framing. He stated that frames are “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (p. 6). That is to say, framing means a process of inclusion and exclusion, and this process implies news values as well as news bias. Later, Entman (2004)’s explanation further clarified the purpose of framing as he put: Framing is “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (p. 5). In addition, Entman (1993, 2004) proposed frames can perform four functions: define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and endorse remedies.

Some research discussed the process of framing. For instance, Entman (1993) suggested that framing was generated during the initial interactions between sources and journalists in breaking news. Researchers (McQuail, 1992; Wanta, 1997) indicated that sources play an important role in framing process of the news media and influence the information flow, particularly when the source is powerful. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued that news frames reflect and sustain the official view as subscribing the perspective of officials. Reese and Buckley’s (1995) study supported pro-officials point as showing that the media used frames to support administration policy.

The presentation of content is recognizably important in term of framing. Entman (1991) argued that salience is closely related to “sizing”; that is, to give more space to talk some aspects of an event or an issue while drawing less attention to other aspects. Entman (1993) suggested another way to increase salience is to place or repeat certain information or association with familiar symbols in a story. Moreover, skipping certain information also implies frame salience, and these omissions can be associated with receiver’s responses in some way (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Entman, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). In case that the media do not provide certain angles or frames of stories or evaluate related events or issues, audience members will be framing the news with their own understandings (Entman, 2004). Thus, the same event could be covered in different news frames.

Furthermore, researchers emphasized that how to frame is based on the issue relevance with domestic society. For example, Gordon, Deines, and Havice’s (2010) research indicated that since Mexico’s high vulnerability to the consequences of global warming, Mexico’s coverage deviates from the international relations as the most popular frames. Instead, Mexico’s newspaper more employs ecology/science and consequences of frame. In conclude, agreed with YANG (2003), the framing perspective can help to illustrate the influential factors of media text with more conceptually solid and empirically systematic method and then to analyze the reasons for the presentation of media texts. The following literature review further discusses framing analysis in the studies of specific political news.

### **Framing Analysis of Political News**

Political news refers to news that provides political information related to public interest and has important social implications. For instance, the attitude of future U.S. president, noted by Thorén (1971), may affect the politics of other countries around the world. In election research, noted by Oates and Roselle (2000), important issues are about societal concerns, such as providing useful information for the voter on party platforms, ideology, or policies. In addition, legal cases, general campaigning, candidate characteristics, the role of the media in the campaign, and electoral financing can be viewed as important electoral issues as well. The news that focused on presentations for voting is classified as minor presentation.

Frame analysis was employed to investigate the election coverage in different media types in a number of studies (e.g., Stromback & Luengo, 2008; Stromback & van Aelst, 2010). There are two metaframes, namely game and issue, identified by Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) in political news stories. Game frame refers to treat political activities as a kind of game, reporting personal contest, strategies, or personal relationship in political actions which may not be relevant to the standpoint of issues. Issue frame which refers to the focus of a story is on an issue or the standpoint of an issue (Stromback & van Aelst, 2010).

Though political news is viewed as hard news, previous research (e.g., Jamieson & Cappella, 1997; de Vreese, 2003; Stromback & Kaid, 2008) showed that a common tendency toward political news is to employ game frame rather than issue frame among different media systems in various countries. Patterson (1980) found in the research of U.S. election coverage that the main frame employed is strategic racing horse. A later study showed that more and more soft news took place traditional hard news, i.e., news tends to sensitiveness, character centered and human interest oriented (Patterson, 2000). Patterson (2000) pointed out that there is a causal relationship between game frame and media commercialization. Some comparative study of cross-country also showed that commercialization is a driving force of adopting game frame (Stromback & van Aelst, 2010).

### **Research Questions**

Based on the above literature, three research questions are formulated as below: RQ 1 (Research question 1): What are frames employed in mainland Chinese newspaper?; RQ 2 (Research question 2): How is linkage politics in relation to different type of newspaper in mainland China?; and RQ 3 (Research question 3): Why is the way that linkage politics in relation to different type of newspaper in mainland China?.

### **Method**

#### **Research Method**

This study employed content analysis and textual analysis to identify the specific frames in the news content of party-oriented newspaper and market-oriented newspapers in China. Framing analysis is to identify the salient aspects of the event in news stories. When discuss the frame employed by a news story, the author read the whole story and then decided the dominant topic in the reporting. In Stromback and Dimitrova (2006)'s study, they defined the following six specific frames: (1) Sensationalism frame refers to a news story with "breathlessness" quality; (2) Horse-racing frame focused on winning or losing in election campaign; (3) Politicians as individuals frame are that the news story is about politicians as persons with different attributes, characters, and behaviors

rather than as spokespersons for political issues; (4) The political strategy frame is about how the parties or candidates act in order to win the election; (5) The news management frame refers to that the news story focused on how parties or candidates manage their media image; and (6) The conflict frame is that the news story is mainly about conflict. This study took this literature as a reference but identified the frames adopted in these newspapers based on the texts.

Two tactics proposed in B. H. ZHOU's (2010) study is discussed. These two tactics refer to "setting foreign news as comparison" and "minimization of 'sensitive' news". Since another operational tactic (i.e., self-prioritization) is measured by comparing the international news and domestic news, which is not applicable to this study. The reason is that election news is a specific type of coverage while there is no counterpart coverage in domestic news.

The tactic of minimization of "sensitive" news was examined at first in order to see if this strategy is embodied in different media types. It is to test whether this tactic can be found not only in TV program but also in newspaper as this study concerned. This tactic is measured by comparing the number of coverage of four representative newspapers respectively in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. These three areas are cultural and geographic approximation but they are situated in diversified political and media systems. Based on the result of number of coverage in different newspapers, this study examined the percentage of "sensitive" frames employed, which includes three issues: (1) election as important practice on democratic politics, (2) money cost of election campaign; and (3) image-building of U.S. with regard to race, foreign policy, and domestic public opinion.

Since the topic of U.S. presidential election per se is neither negative nor positive, the tone of coverage embodies the tendency of individual newspaper. The tone of newspapers was analyzed with three categories: positive, neutral, or negative. The tone is analyzed in term of the attitude toward the above three "sensitive" issues. If the article does not touch above issues, then this paper was seen as neutral. Thus, for the tactic of "setting foreign news as comparison", the comparison means the general difference in term of domestic news with positive tone and international news with negative tone.

In addition, news headlines were used to give examples in need. The reason is that newspaper headlines can effectively summarize the content and tone of the stories (Haskins, 1966) and thus can avoid lengthy discussion.

### **Data Description**

Four representative newspapers in mainland China were selected for this study. These newspapers include: *People's Daily*, *The Beijing News (Xin Jing Bao)*, *Oriental Morning Post (Dongfang Zaobao)*, and *Southern Metropolitan Daily (Nanfang Dushi Bao)*. *People's Daily* is a Party-organ paper, serious and quality newspaper in China. It is generally seen as the most representative of Party's mouthpiece newspaper and political wind vane. The other three newspapers are respectively located in three media highlands in China: Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. All these newspapers survive well by market competition, and they enjoy a noticeable huge circulation and influences on local citizens and even gain considerable popularity in the whole country through online news editions. These newspapers are representative examples of market newspaper in mainland China. Besides, four Hong Kong newspapers and Taiwan newspaper respectively were chosen for the purpose of comparing the number of coverage of the same topic. The chosen Hong Kong newspapers include: *Ming Pao*

*Daily News*, *Oriental Daily News*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *Apple Daily*. The chosen Taiwan newspapers are: *China Times*, *Taiwan Apple Daily*, *The Liberty Times*, and *United Daily News*. The above newspapers all enjoy considerable high popularity and influence in the societies they are situated.

The time frame of this study is January 3, 2008 when the initial election began (Beijing time) to November 10, 2008 when the election result was announced after one week. Stories from the above four newspapers were all located by searching the WiseNews database with the keywords of “U.S. presidential election” (meiguo zongtong xuanju) or “The biggest election in United States” (meiguo daxuan). Repeating reports and reports which did not focus on election are deleted after data cleaning. This procedure yielded a total of 1367 stories, with four from *The People’s Daily*, 54 from *Beijing News*, 31 from *Orient Morning Post*, and 57 from *The South News*.

Since electronic data search may generate a considerable number of articles containing the search keywords while these keywords are just mentioned casually. The author’s initial search displayed many articles touch upon U.S. election campaign but do not focus on the topic, particularly in the editions on entertainment, physics, stocks, and finance. To deal with this issue, the samples are collected from news or international news, editorials, analysis, and comments, and special topics on 2008 U.S. presidential election while other articles containing the keywords from other editions were excluded. Secondly, articles with little relevance with election were discounted in order to have a more accurate picture of the election coverage.

### **Results and Findings**

With regard to RQ 1, two metaframes, “game frame” and “issue frame” are identified with these news stories. It should be noted that this study does not incorporate the news stories into predefined frames; rather, they were classified based on fitness after carefully reading the texts and for the purpose of keeping in line with research tradition. As Kuhn (1970) indicated, we can make progress with current research by convergent efforts.

Compared with Stromback and Dimitrova’s (2006) research, this study found that the news management frame and the conflict frame are not well applicable to the texts of Chinese newspapers. In terms of the news management frame, there is no certain news story particularly focused on this topic. In term of the conflict frame, it is seen that this frame is overlapping with political strategy frame which is more salient. Nevertheless, the other four frames (the sensationalism frame, the horse-racing frame, the politicians as individuals frame, and the political strategy frame) are fit for describing the new stories. In addition, while the sensationalism frame emphasizes on the effect of news content, this study replaces it with human interest frame. The change was made, because human interest frame is consistent with other frame in terms of focusing on the news content and better covered this kind of news stories. In brief, game frame is one of main metaframes adopted by the coverage of mainland Chinese newspapers, and four often employed frames under this metaframe include: (1) horse-racing frame; (2) the politicians as individuals frame; (3) the political strategy frame; and (4) human interest.

On the other hand, issue frame is quite often employed by mainland Chinese newspapers as well. Five specific frames are identified based on carefully analyzed the texts of news stories. These frames include: (1) the election analysis frame. The news stories focus on analyzing the political interests reflected in the election campaign process; (2) the election influence on Sino-US relationship frame. The news stories mainly talk about

how the election result can affect Sino-US relationship; (3) the election influence on international relationship frame. The story theme is about how the election result can affect Sino-US relationship; (4) the democratic politic frame. The news stories focus on the election as a kind of democratic practices including financial sources and expense of the election; and (5) the election process/knowledge frame. The news coverage provides knowledge and rules of U.S. presidential election.

In order to answer RQ 2 that how linkage politics is in relation to mainland Chinese newspapers, the author compared the four mainland Chinese newspapers with four Hong Kong and Taiwan newspapers respectively. The result is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Number of Election Coverage in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*

Location	Mainland		Hong Kong		Taiwan	
	Name	Number	Name	Number	Name	Number
	<i>Southern Metropolitan Daily</i>	80	<i>Apple Daily</i>	96	<i>Apple Daily</i>	130
	<i>The Beijing News</i>	65	<i>Ming Pao Daily News</i>	50	<i>China Times</i>	58
	<i>Orient Morning Post</i>	43	<i>Oriental Daily News</i>	45	<i>United Daily News</i>	18
	<i>People's Daily</i>	14	<i>Sing Tao Daily</i>	31	<i>The Liberty Times</i>	7
Total		202		222		213

As the result shows, there is no evident difference among newspapers in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in terms of the number of reports on U.S. presidential campaign. However, comparing party-oriented *People's Daily* with other three market newspapers in mainland China, the number of coverage in the first newspaper type is much less than the second newspaper type individually. This result suggests that party-oriented newspaper tend to minimize the number of coverage of sensitive topic.

To see whether linkage politics can work in party-oriented newspaper, we need more observations other than the number of coverage. Another tactic, making a contrast between domestic and foreign situations is examined in the study. Since this study doesn't include domestic news, the discussion focuses on the tone of *People's Daily* presented in the coverage. It shows that six (43%) reports are neutral while the rest eight (57%) news stories are all negative. Thus, the negative image of United States implies the social superiority of China which always enjoys more positive national image in domestic news.

The tactic of self-prioritization is not tested in the study since the study focuses on a specific event. Instead, a tactic, namely opinion-leading, is identified in the coverage of 2008 election campaign in *People's Daily*. First of all, *People's Daily* plays an interpretative role rather than information-provider. In its coverage of sampling, only two (14%) are straight news in contrast with 12 (86%) analysis articles. Secondly, the dominated topic in its coverage is that "change" is not only an important but also urgent issue. Five (35.7%) news stories are directly related to the topic, and two of them are embodied in titles as "The Choice of Change" (November 10, 2008) and "Looking Through the 'Change' Topic in the Election Campaign of United State" (June 3, 2008). The reasons accounted for the necessity of change including the dissatisfaction of general public with present economic situation in United States, the Iraq War, neo-conservatism foreign policy, and bloated federal government. In brief, *People's Daily* avoids the "sensitive" democratic politics topic on the one hand, and leads the audience to understand this event from a critical perspective on the other hand.

In addition, a tactic of self-value expression is also found in the coverage of *People's Daily*. For instance, in an article titled "Obama, Walking Out of Hawaii" on November 4, 2008, the day when the election result was disclosed. The author wrote:

This is the place where he learned how to cooperate with the others. The "experience of lonely island" in Hawaii was exactly compromise and cooperation. The strong way of "Entering Westwards" in Continent of United States was not applicable. (November 4, 2008)

The message implies here is the concern of Chinese national ideology. The appeal of compromise and cooperation expressed China's wish rather than the thought came from Obama himself. This similar appeal can be seen in other news stories as well. Therefore, this tactic also serves for the need of domestic politics.

Different from *People's Daily*, market-oriented newspaper represented by *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, *The Beijing News*, and *Orient Morning Post* cannot support the hypothesis of minimization of "sensitive" news in term of the number of coverage. As showed in Table 1, the number of coverage is close to newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan. This result can be explained with two reasons: First, the political control of news topic is not very rigid in Chinese newspapers particularly for market-newspapers. Secondly, linkage politics does not solely influent newspapers' performance, and market could exert counterproductive force with regard to the number of coverage.

Nevertheless, it will simplify the question by concluding the linkage-politic does not work in the market-oriented newspapers. We need to take a close look at how these newspapers presented the election campaign. As showed in Table 2, the most adopted tone in market-oriented newspapers is neutral (more than 90% respectively), which makes an obvious contrast with *People's Daily* (43% neutral and 57% negative news reports). Since the tone analyzed focuses on three issues directly related to linkage politics including presidential election as democratic politics, the waste of money in election campaign, and public unsatisfactory with U.S. government, this result suggests that market-oriented newspapers tend to go around the sensitive or opinion-leading topic of presidential election campaign. Thus a new tactic of linkage politics, called minimization of domestic political-relevant news frame, can be proposed.

Table 2

*The Distribution of Different Tones in Four Newspapers (%)*

Newspaper/Tone	PD	BN	OMP	SMD
Positive	0(0)	1.5(1)	2.3 (1)	6.3 (5)
Neutral	43(6)	90.7 (39)	90 (72)	98.5(64)
Negative	57(8)	0 (0)	7 (3)	3.7 (3)

Note. PD refers to *People's Daily*, BN refers to *The Beijing News*, OMP refers to *Orient Morning Post*, and SMD refers to *Southern Metropolitan Daily*.

Though the percentage is quite low, it is interesting to note that three market newspapers have positive tone with the above linkage politics issues (see Table 2). For instance, a comment article acclaimed the well-developed civil society in United States ("The Civil Society in U.S. Presidential Election", *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, November 5, 2008); an analytic article discussed why the money spent in election campaign is a necessary condition for democratic practice ("Why Burning Money in Presidential Election", *The Beijing News*, February 23, 2008).

Two characteristics are seen in his kind of news: First, the title of news articles tends to be neutral or ambitious. As showed in the above two titles, the stands are not evident from the perspective of titles. In addition, some title is seen with unclear meaning. A title “Come Back, Those Disappeared Young People” (*Southern Metropolitan Daily*, November 8, 2008) is an example. However, in the article, the author admired for democratic right of U.S. citizens and called for political passion of Chinese young people. Secondly, these news articles were carefully put on the edition of personal comment, which implies individual author instead of the newspaper is responsible for the stand in the articles. As suggested by B. H. ZHOU (2010), these news articles represent an alternative linkage politics, i.e., news coverage is to report foreign advanced political theories and practices in order to promote domestic systematical change and social progress.

However, the number of coverage of 2008 U.S. presidential election is considerable large in market-oriented newspapers. And these newspapers have enjoyed a high popularity among the local citizens and beyond. The large number surely has an effect on the audience of these newspapers at least, and an expected influence through further personal communications. In a news article, an author called the presidential election of United States as a political blockbuster, by which he indicated that the election played a role of national propaganda and achieved such good effect that no propaganda activity was comparable. He continued:

The eyeball contest is just the contest of the popular sentiment. Like a film, when the camera repeatedly focused on a character, the character turned to be the protagonist. The audience then tends to understand and accept the logic of this protagonist’s actions. Thus turning one into the protagonist may cause the positive effect. Similarly, even all the value judgment is excluded, election will become the popular sentiment when it occupies the focus of more eyeballs. (LIU, 2008, p. A31)

Furthermore, the author argued that large number of reports on presidential election will lead to the result that general public favors U.S. political system and then the political culture around the world can be changed as well. When we follow this argument, it is seen that large number of coverage causes a negative effect on linkage politics. It is hard to say this is the original intention of these newspapers, and this effect is more likely to go back on their intention for the purpose of political safety. The most possible reason is the driving force of the market-profit. The market is highly competitive, while U.S. presidential election is still a fresh topic as a considerable limited “sensitive” topic and an “abnormal” topic compared with Chinese political system and a significant topic in term of the influence of election result on the global politics.

In these market-oriented newspapers, a striking feature is the news headlines with soft tendency or sensational expression. It can be seen from some news stories that employed human interest frame or game frame. Below are three of the representative headlines: (1) “Their Celebrity Fans” (*Southern Metropolitan Daily*, February 1, 2008); (2) “The Contest of First-lady” (*Southern Metropolitan Daily*, May 23, 2008); and (3) “It doesn’t Mean Awarded Mark for the Pretty Girl to Join in the Camp” (*The Beijing News*, August 31, 2008).

In above headlines, it is seen that “fans” was borrowed from entertainment to refer the politicians’ supporters, the topic of “first lady” is out of private interest instead of public issues and calling vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin as “pretty girl” has nothing with political meanings except the purpose of eye attract.

Some new stories covered the topic with issue frame or political strategic frame, but the headlines seem to be too unclear for the audience to get the idea about the inside of the stories. Here are three examples from: (1) “How

Much Love May Come Back” (*Orient Morning Post*, February 28, 2008); (2) “Obama Intend to Grab Bush’s Dearly Loved Person” (*The Beijing News*, October 27, 2008); and (3) “Love and Grievance of a Yiwu Merchant to U.S. Presidential Election” (*Orient Morning Post*, November 5, 2008).

The repeatedly appeared words of “love”, “dearly loved”, and “love and grievance” in the headlines make the news very sensational. These news stories actually concerned with certain issues, but one is likely getting lost until he or she read the text particularly for the first and the third headlines. Then it turns out that the first news is an analysis of voters’ attitude change and the third news is about the possible influence of election result on Chinese foreign trade.

What the sensational headlines in relation to linkage politics are both sides. On the one hand, these headlines draw audience’s attention from rational issues to emotions and feelings. The political concerns were weakened and thus have a positive effect on the purpose of linkage politics. On the other hand, the sensational feature can arouse audience interest in the Western election system, and came to know and understand democratic practices. That may lead to a negative effect on the aim that linkage politics intend to realize.

The third research question is about the reasons for linkage politics in relation to different type of newspaper in mainland China the way they are. This question has been explained in details. To summarize the points above, Table 3 illustrates the relationship between newspaper type and linkage politics is further summarized as below:

Table 3

*The Relationship Between Newspaper Type and Linkage Politics*

Newspaper type	Tactic adopted		Driven forces	Effect on linkage politics
Party-oriented newspaper	Direct	Minimization of “sensitive” news	Political needs	Positive
		Opinion-leading	Political needs	Positive
		Self-value expression	Political needs	Positive
	Indirect	Comparison between inside and outside	Political needs	Positive
Market-oriented newspapers	Direct	Minimization of political-stand frame	Political safety	Positive
		A small number of pro-democratic coverage	Pursuit of professional value	Negative
	Indirect	A large number of “sensitive” news	Market profit	Negative
		Adoption of sensationalism frame headlines	Market profit & political safety	Positive & negative

The two considerably different distributions of dominant topics between the U.S. newspapers and the Chinese newspapers suggest topics had a significant association with the papers.

### Conclusion Remarks

In conclude, this study extended the discussion of linkage politics between domestic and international news from Chinese TV newscast to Chinese newspapers. Furthermore, this study compared different type of newspaper, which goes beyond previous research on Chinese media on a whole which limited the research object to party-oriented media. The result shows Chinese newspapers in relation to linkage politics is more complicated than simply focusing on party-oriented newspaper. Party-oriented newspaper tends to meet the demand of linkage politics because of political needs. Compared with party-oriented newspaper, market-oriented newspapers showed mixed attitude toward linkage politics. Although market newspapers,

out of the concern of political safety, adopted some tactic to comply with the demand of linkage politics to some extent, their cooperation was limited since their main purpose was commercial success and their presentation even destroys the aim of linkage politics for the reasons include acquiring market profit and/or pursuit of professional values.

This paper can be regarded as a case study in the discussions of international news around the world. Since there is little research on international coverage in Chinese media, this study can be seen as a positive effort to make up this research gap. With the findings in this study, further insights may be gained by comparing cases in different social systems. For instance, the shift of news value from information to entertainment is not solely embodied in election coverage. HONG, LIAO, and LIN (2008) observed that Taiwan media coverage about WTO (World Trade Organization) often employed tabloidization strategy. Wang, Chow, and Lo (2010) pointed out that tabloidization is a noticeable tendency in international coverage. With more and more empirical evidence, we can develop a complete explanation of the influence of commercial factor on media in different societies.

There are some interesting points identified in this study for future research. One is the organizational factors of media on the presentation of same topic. Though *The Beijing News*, *Orient Morning Post*, and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* are all market-oriented newspapers and share many similarities in term of the relationship with linkage politics, the favorite frames they employed in their coverage are diversified instead of the same. Such research will advance our understanding of content differences within certain media type. Another point is related to how the domestic social cultural factors exert function in domestication of international news. Though this point has been discussed generally in previous research (e.g., Pan et. al, 1999), more focus and deeper analysis of particular cases are expected. And this kind of study may advance the research of cultural influence on international news from a macro-perspective. Last but not least, today news coverage, international news in particular, are situated in a larger context of globalization. Discussion on globalization factor on the production of international news may gain new insights.

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