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Same events, two stories: Comparing the photographic coverage of the 2008 anti-China/Olympics demonstrations in Chinese and US newspapers

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Abstract

A content analysis of photos from four major US newspapers and four major Chinese newspapers depicting the 2008 anti-China/Olympics protests revealed significantly different denoted themes. On one hand, the most prominent dominant visual theme in US newspapers was suppression followed by pro-Tibet demonstrations. On the other hand, in Chinese newspapers the most dominant visual theme was the Olympic torch relay followed by riots and restoring order. Overall, the US dailies visually portrayed a more pro-Tibetan independence slant and the Chinese dailies visually portrayed a more pro-Chinese government slant. Further, the US newspapers portrayed the anti-China demonstrators as non-violent while the Chinese newspapers portrayed them as violent. To give their readers a sense of harmony, Chinese dailies limited the number of images showing anti-China protests, while the US dailies highlighted them, communicating to their readers the suppressive nature of the Chinese government and downplaying the voices of people who supported it.

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Chinese newspapers, Olympics demonstrations, US newspapers, visual coverage

Since the internationalization of the Tibetan issue in the 1980s, Tibet vs China related events have constantly made the newspaper headlines in western and international media. The anti-China/Olympics demonstrations and riots in 2008 again caught global media attention. It started as a peaceful demonstration on 10 March by Tibetan monks that turned violent by 14 March. The violence was targeted at public and private businesses, properties as well as Han Chinese, Tibetan and the Hui minority (Block, 2008; Cohen, 2008; *The Economist*, 2008; Wang, 2008). Although the Chinese authorities initially did not resort to force, when the violence started, security forces were deployed in many parts of the Tibetan regions to maintain order (Jiang, 2008; Miles, 2008). The riots in Tibet triggered protests against the Chinese government in other countries and against the Olympics, causing subsequent clashes between protesters and police in these countries.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that news reports of the chain of events were polarized: western media highlighted the heavy presence of Chinese security forces in the Tibetan regions and Tibetan casualties, and the Chinese media focused on the violent actions taken by Tibetans and the death and injuries of civilians, creating two different versions of the story.

Photographic coverage from widely circulated newspapers in China and the United States reflected how these events were defined visually in each country's mainstream media. By content analyzing news photos from four Chinese and four US newspapers regarding the anti-China/Olympics demonstrations in 2008, this study aims to examine whether the Chinese and US media framed the events differently and how. It also addresses the lack of systematic and scholarly analysis of the western media's reporting of the Tibetan issue, adding to the body of visual framing studies on the cross-cultural level.

Visual framing of news events

Since Erving Goffman (1974) proposed the notion of *frame analysis,* it has been widely applied by scholars in media, sociological and political studies that utilized both interpretative and empirical approaches. Scholars have defined framing in a variety of contexts. Entman (1993: 52), for example, explains 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such as way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. Reese (2001: 7) adds that framing is 'the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences'. In other words, how the media frame an issue has its consequences on how the audiences perceive it.

The definition of framing suggests that it is achieved by ways of selection, emphasis and presentation (Gitlin, 1980). First, a frame can be identified by 'the presence or absence of certain keywords' (Entman, 1993: 53); second, a frame is created by highlighting some aspects of an issue while downplaying others; third, it is formed by presenting some items as facts by using words to signify them, while some items as non-facts by excluding them in reporting a specific news event (Miller and Riechert, 2001).

Compared with framing analysis of text, frame analysis of visual images, especially in a quantified fashion, gained popularity only in recent years. Similar to framing of texts in news stories, visual framing is achieved through a particular way of selection, emphasis and presentation. It includes selection (exclusion) of persons/items in a visual frame; the number of photos covering each stakeholder in an event (frequency); the way a person or item is presented (e.g. a low angel empowers a person; Hall, 1973) in an image; and what part of the story is portrayed in a photo.

The significance of visual framing cannot be separated from the nature of images and photos. Messaris and Abraham (2001: 251) suggested that due to images' 'analogical quality, their indexicality, and their lack of an explicit prepositional syntax', visual framing may be less obtrusive and controversial than verbal framing. Since the beginning of the last century, news photos have played an important part in storytelling and what constitutes the 'truth'. Some news stories are not complete without an image as affirmation (Evans, 1997). In the context of China, for example, the power of the *Tank Man* photo from Tiananmen Square told the international audience how to think about the Chinese government. Through this photo's circulation in the news media, it became an icon and symbol of defiance, oppression and freedom. In doing so Perlmutter (1998) explained how this particular iconic image and its symbolic meaning silenced other details of the story and further possible interpretations.

Compared with the voluminous framing analysis of news texts, framing analysis of news photos has been relatively scarce. These studies mainly examined wars, conflicts and disasters such as the visual framing of the first Gulf War (King and Lester, 2005), the 2003 Iraq War (Fahmy and Kim, 2008; Schwalbe, 2006; Schwalbe et al., 2008), the coverage of the Kwangju and Tiananmen Square movements (Kim and Kelly, 2007), the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Fahmy, 2010; Kim and Smith, 2005), Hurricane Katrina (Fahmy et al., 2007) and the Virginia Tech shootings (Fahmy and Roedl, 2010).

Photographs as signs

Many scholars have approached photographs as signs. In their visual communication book Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 5) discussed '... ("signifiers") such as color, perspective and line, as well as the way in which these forms are used to realize meanings ("signifieds")'. Hall (1973) explained that news photos have both denoted and connoted meanings. Denoted meanings in a photo are what a viewer can directly see in it, and connoted meanings are what is evoked by the subject present in a photo and what that subject symbolizes (Moriarty, 2005). For example, an image of the Dalai Lama represents the Dalai Lama himself (the denoted meaning), while the same photo is also evocative of human rights in western countries (the connoted meaning). Connoted meanings are generally created through commonly held values, conventions and common experiences (Scott, 1994).

Previous studies of visual framing used different terms to describe what is present in images, such as 'manifest content' (Huang, 2009; Kim and Kelly, 2007), 'topic' (Fahmy and Kim, 2008) and ‘content’ (King and Lester, 2005). From a semiotic point of view, these studies referred to the denoted meaning or objects in photos. On the other hand, connoted meanings such as popular frames in terms of slant (e.g. pro-war/anti-war, positive/negative, pro-Tibet/pro-China) and issue orientation (e.g. economic issue, political issue, human rights issue) were examined from what is not present in news photos (Fahmy, 2007). Both denoted and connoted meanings are important in the study of visual framing.

Studies that looked at visual framing in a comparative context have found that when the media visually report events, they construct frames in support of the foreign policy of their own country. Kim and Kelly’s (2007) study of news photos of the Kwangju and Tiananmen Square movements, for example, found that despite the similarity between these two movements, the movement in China was framed positively and the movement in South Korea was framed negatively. Fahmy (2010) found that the *International Herald Tribune*’s photographic coverage of 9/11 emphasized photos of victims, and its coverage of the Afghan War focused on the technical aspects of the conflict such as arsenal and weaponry. In their analysis of Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs from 1942 to 2002, Kim and Smith (2005) found that photos for international news events were focused on war and coups, while photos taken in the United States covered a wider variety of themes.

Comparative analysis of events covered by Chinese and international media includes the following issues: the debate between China and Japan over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands (Ostini and Fung, 2002), the NATO air strikes on Kosovo (Yang, 2003), the 2001 Spy Plane Crisis (Hook and Pu, 2006) and the Chinese product crisis (Li and Tang, 2009). Scholars also compared how different regions of ‘Greater China’ (Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) portrayed the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 differently (see Pan et al,, 1999). Regarding the issue of Tibet, however, despite the wide coverage of the issue in the western news media in recent years, empirical analysis of news content about international news coverage has been limited. Huang (2009) content analyzed photographic coverage of the 2008 anti-China/Olympics demonstrations in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and found that the events were framed positively in spite of the civilian casualties and the disruption of the Olympic torch relay. However, the study did not investigate how the Chinese media comparatively reported these events.

The media systems in the United States and China

Siebert et al.’s (1956) book on the four theories of the press has played an important role in journalism education and laid out a classical framework to understand the world press system. The *Four Theories* best explained the press systems at the time of the book’s publication and specifically the press systems in western countries. Since the 1980s, scholars have criticized this normative approach, however. They criticized the lack of the following: awareness of the autonomy of an individual journalist; collaboration with the Cold War ideology; and a comprehensive understanding of Marxism (Nerone, 1995; Ostini and Fung, 2002; Yin, 2008).

In the context of China, the major challenge for these theories is that they cannot explain the changing media structure that has been going on in recent decades. In several aspects, China has significantly departed from the Soviet Communist theory. For example, the market-oriented media reform in 1992 has brought a commercial mechanism to the country's newspaper industry. Although the state still owns the press, the press is financially independent from the government (Zhao, 1998, 2000). In fact, Chinese newspapers today, especially local ones, do not lack the sensationalism and fabricated stories that are common in a free press system. Further, with the increasing role of the Internet and foreign investment in various media sectors in China, the current Chinese press has many characteristics that do not fit into the Soviet system (Yin, 2008). That said it is important to note that for events that are associated with national security and public health, the government exercises a higher level of control. For example, a draft law on emergency management, —including public health and security issues— stipulates that news outlets will be fined if they report the situation without authorization (Yin, 2008).

In some Asian countries, cultural values play an important role in explaining the press system, defying the notion that they could represent a single classification (see Yin, 2008). In countries under the Confucian influence, such as Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and China, 'collective well-being' is considered more important than individual freedom. In Japan, for example, while democracy and market capitalism characterize Japan's political and economic system, its press does not function as a watchdog of the government. In China, harmony has been an important value shared by the common people and promoted by the government. It is therefore reasonable to predict that Chinese media are overall less likely to emphasize conflict and chaos than to emphasize the restoration of order in news coverage.

Regarding the press system in the United States, under the classical four theories of the press it belongs to the social responsibility theory, built on the idea of the freedom of the press (Siebert et al., 1956). However, several scholars have criticized that the US media are not truly 'responsible', citing the concentration of media ownership and the influence of commercial interest and advertising on media content (Nerone, 1995), as well as the influence of foreign policy on media coverage.

Sino-American relations and US foreign policy toward Tibet

Past studies suggest that media coverage of foreign affairs is largely influenced by and reflects a country's foreign policy (see Chang, 1988; Louw, 2004). Thus, the US coverage of China and the Tibetan issue is likely influenced by US foreign policy toward that region. In other words, Sino-American relations are likely to be transferred to the media agenda, specifically in how the media report news events regarding that part of the world.

Historically, the news coverage of China by the US media has been characterized by 'wild swings between positive and negative imagery' (MacKinnon, 1999: 11; Xu and Parsons, 1997), with sympathetic reporting specifically during the following: the Second World War; after Nixon's visit to China in 1972; and when China started its open door policy in the 1980s. Overall, however, news reporting about China has been by and large negative: portrayed as the enemy in the 1950s and 1960s (Chang, 1988); as 'repressive' after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 (Mann, 1999: 103); and even after 9/11,—when the major enemy shifted from ‘Communist China’ to terrorism (Tao, 2004).

The policy of the US administration toward Tibet has been largely influenced by its relations with the Chinese government over time. During the Guomindang’s rule, the US administration unambiguously admitted that Tibet was part of China (Grunfeld, 1996). However, since the Communist Party rose to power, Washington’s policy has shifted: officially recognizing Tibet as part of China, while unofficially encouraging campaigns for its independence (Goldstein, 2005; Grunfeld, 1996). For example, in the 1950s and 1960s during the Cold War era, the CIA covertly supported the guerrilla movement in Tibet and gave an annual stipend to the Dalai Lama and his cause. Since the internationalization of the Tibetan issue in the 1980s, the western media have started to give more attention to Tibet. As Grunfeld (2000: 2) noted, ‘US public diplomacy skirts the independence issue, focusing on criticism of human rights abuses’ and the western media have framed the human rights practice in Tibet and Tibetan independence as one issue.

Sympathetic reporting about Tibet in the western media has also been related to the romantic portrayal of Tibet in western popular culture. In James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon* and the movie *Seven Years in Tibet*, Tibet was portrayed as a paradise and classless society, where Tibetan people lived a spiritual and free life before the Communist Party destroyed their culture and oppressed them. This version of Tibet, however, concealed the conflict between different classes and problems within the Tibetan society (Huang, 2009).

Compared with the ambiguous stance of US policy toward Tibet, the Chinese government has consistently claimed Tibet as part of China. Historically, during the Yuan and Qing Dynasties, both Chinese and Tibetans were under the central Mongol and Manchu governments’ rule (Bajoria, 2008; Wang, 2008). During the Republic of China era under the Guomindang, China was referred to as ‘the Republic of Five Nationalities’, with one of the nationalities being Tibetan (Mackerras, 1994). In fact, the current Chinese government claims Tibet to be an inseparable part of China since its army took over Tibet in 1950.

A review of the literature on foreign policy and media coverage shows that some media scholars have focused on the relationship between foreign policy and visual reporting, suggesting that media from different cultural and political perspectives create different images of news events (e.g. Fahmy, 2010; Kim and Kelly, 2007). For example, in visually reporting the first Gulf War, Griffin and Lee (1995) suggested that the US media failed to report the human suffering of Iraqis and images of death. Meanwhile, Ayish (2001) found that the Arab media showed images of suffering to gain public support for the Iraqi people. Thus, because of the impact of visuals on foreign policy and in shaping public opinion (see Perlmutter, 1998) in the case here, it is likely that the US’s and China’s policies toward Tibet would influence each country’s visual coverage of Tibetan-related issues and events.

Research questions and hypotheses

Studies of visual framing on ‘pro-democratic’ demonstrations in China used ‘manifest content’, which summarized the action or the consequence present in a photo (Huang, 2009; Kim and Kelly, 2007). Previous studies suggested that when reporting foreign affairs, a country's foreign policy and ideological positions are strong predictors of news coverage. Since the Chinese and US governments have distinct policies and positions toward Tibet, this study predicts that Chinese and US newspapers will frame the anti-China/Olympics demonstrations differently in terms of denoted visual themes of coverage (i.e. pro-Tibet demonstrations and pro-China demonstrations). Based on the above the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: In visually reporting the anti-China/Olympics demonstrations, the denoted themes in US newspapers will be significantly different from the denoted themes in Chinese newspapers.

When examined at the more interpretive level, particular types of denoted themes imply support for certain ideological positions. For example, showing a picture of the demonstrators in violent actions (riots theme) implies the delegitimization of the anti-China demonstrations, and showing a picture of a politician criticizing the Chinese government's handling of the Tibetan issue (refutation theme) implies support for Tibet.[1] Hence the following hypothesis is also proposed:

H2: In visually reporting the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations, the dominant slant in Chinese newspapers will be pro-Chinese government, while the dominant slant in the US newspapers will be pro-Tibetan independence (reflecting US foreign policy toward Tibet).

Previous studies of public demonstrations have investigated the portrayal of conflict and violence. Luther and Miller's (2005) analysis of the 2003 Iraq War demonstrations showed the US media framed the pro-war demonstrations as harmony, while the anti-war demonstrations as conflict. Hertog and McLeod (1995) studied news coverage of anarchist demonstrations and noted that in reporting radical protests, vandalism of property was framed as violent, while actions taken by police, such as using tear gas, were not framed as violent. Thus, past literature suggests that portraying a group of people as violent helps delegitimize that group's action (Luther and Miller, 2005). And because the US government supports the cause of Tibetan independence, it is expected that US newspapers would be more likely to show images of the anti-China/Olympics demonstrations as non-violent, while the Chinese newspapers would be more likely to show protestors in violent actions during the event. Hence, the following is also stated:

H3: In visually reporting the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations, the US newspapers will be significantly more likely to show non-violent images than Chinese newspapers will.

In visual framing inclusion/exclusion of certain stakeholders contributes to the framing of a news event. In a complicated event in which multiple parties are involved, showing images of one party more often has the potential to exaggerate the activity this party has been engaged in (Fahmy, 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Lang and Lang, 1971). In the case of the Tibetan unrest and anti-China/Olympics demonstrations, it is important to know how the different parties involved were portrayed to support the government's perspective of the event. Based on that, we propose the following set of research questions:

RQs: Are there significant differences between US and Chinese newspapers in running photographs depicting (1) pro-Tibet demonstrators; (2) pro-China demonstrators; (3) pro-Tibet spokesperson/s; (4) pro-China spokesperson/s; (5) crackdown victim/s; (6) demonstration victim/s; (7) police/crackdown; (8) police/maintaining order; (9) Olympic torch relay participant/s; (10) rioter/s; (11) pro-Tibet civilian/s; and (12) pro-China civilian/s?

Method

Several scholars have advocated for the use of content analysis of news photographs. Rose (2001) and Theo (2001), for example, examined different approaches to examine visual culture from a multidisciplinary social science perspective that included content analysis. Thus, based on past literature, this study used a content analysis of news photographs that ran in US and Chinese newspapers to examine the coverage of the 2008 anti-China/Olympics demonstrations. The photos were content analyzed from 14 March 2008 to 14 April 2008. Although the selection of the time period was arbitrary, it covered the period from the starting date when the demonstrations turned violent to the date when major protests against the Olympic torch relay occurred.

A total of 423 photos covering the events were collected from four US and four Chinese dailies. The four US dailies (*The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*) are published in the English language and were selected based on their wide scope of international coverage, geographic representation and wide circulation. The four Chinese dailies (*People's Daily, Xinmin Evening News, Yangtse Evening Post* and *Guangzhou Daily*) are published in the Chinese language and were selected based on their national influence, geographic representation and wide circulation.[2] Moreover, because photos for the US dailies were obtained from microfilms, and photos for the Chinese dailies were obtained from PDF versions of the print newspapers, information on the relative size and color of the images from the US photos specifically could have been lost. As a result, the researchers decided to remove the size and color variables from this analysis.[3]

The US sample comprised 42 photos from *The New York Times*, 32 from *The Washington Post*, 38 from *The Chicago Tribune* and 35 from *The Los Angeles Times*. The sample from the Chinese dailies comprised 64 photos from *People's Daily*, 45 from *Xinmin Evening News*, 72 from *Yangtze Evening Post* and 95 from *Guangzhou Daily*. The unit of analysis was the photograph, and the context unit was the complementary caption and the accompanying news story. The literature suggests in the process of visual framing, captions can often play a crucial role in directing the readers what to know and what to think about. Messaris and Abraham (2001) explain that images by themselves can be ambiguous, but their meanings could be informed by their captions. For example, an image of Chinese police standing in front of Tiananmen Square could be indicated in the caption as suppressing freedom, or attempting to maintain national security. Indeed, captions can sometimes change the meaning of the photo by adding information that is not present in an image.

Categories of our denoted themes were developed both deductively and inductively. The literature review suggests that the Chinese and US governments have polarized views regarding Tibet-related issues; therefore when developing our categories, we had in mind how the presence of a particular theme contributes to a pro-Chinese government slant or a pro-US government slant. According to Entman (1989) slant becomes apparent when two similar stories are compared. Thus in this study slant was defined as the inclination of a newspaper to be pro or against actions taken by the demonstrators, police and the Chinese authorities.

Overall our categories were borrowed from previous studies (e.g. Kim and Kelly, 2007). Moreover, frames and categories were further developed by preliminary examination of the data from both countries. As Berelson (1952) stated, adaptation to the problem and content under study is an important criteria for good categories in content analysis. For example, the theme of riot emerged as a distinct category after examination of the Chinese photos. The categories for human subjects were developed likewise.

Thus after careful examination, all the photos were coded for the following 16 variables: (1) country of newspapers (China vs United States); (2) denoted theme; (3) slant; (4) pro-Tibet demonstrator/s; (5) pro-China demonstrator/s; (6) pro-Tibet spokesperson/s; (7) pro-China spokesperson/s; (8) demonstration victim/s; (9) crackdown victim/s; (10) police/crackdown; (11) police/maintaining order; (12) Olympic torch relay participant/s; (13) rioter/s; (14) pro-Tibet civilian/s; (15) pro-China civilian/s; (16) and violence.

In terms of denoted theme, each photo was classified into one of the following 11 categories: (1) *Pro-Tibet demonstrations:* defined as photos showing people (including Tibetans and non-Tibetan activists) protesting against the Chinese rule over Tibet and its hosting of the Olympic Games; (2) *Confrontation:* defined as conflict with no obvious winning party, whether with or without weapons between the police and the demonstrators or between pro-Chinese and pro-Tibetan groups; (3) *Suppression:* defined as photos showing police using force to contain demonstrators and depictions of Tibetan suffering under the Chinese rule; (4) *Refutation:* defined as showing a spokesperson defending his/her own position and denouncing the other side's position; (5) *Restoring order:* defined as photos showing the return to normal life; (6) *Olympic torch relay:* defined as photos showing the torch relay being carried out successfully, including showing people waiting for, performing, or celebrating the Olympic torch relay without the interruption of anti-China/Olympics demonstrator/s; (7) *Tragic consequences:* defined as photos showing death or injury of people, or the aftermath of the demonstrations and riots, such as burned down properties; (8) *Riots:* defined as people looting or destroying properties, and killing or beating civilian/s (excluding those related to the Olympic torch relay); (9) *Maintaining order:* defined as showing police rescuing civilians, maintaining order during the Olympic torch relay and normal social order without the use of force; (10) *Pro-China demonstrations:* defined as people demonstrating to support Beijing's rule over Tibet and its hosting of the Olympic Games (excluding those in the Olympic torch relay); and (11) *Other:* defined as photos showing themes that do not fall into the previous 10 categories.

Regarding slant,[4] this was operationalized differently for photos that ran in the US dailies than those that ran in the Chinese dailies. For the US photos, slant was operationalized as a frame that supports the US foreign policy toward Tibet. Hence the frame would imply pro-Tibetan independence (including the denoted themes of pro-Tibet demonstrations, suppression and refutation) and other (the rest of the denoted themes). For the Chinese photos, slant was operationalized as a frame that is pro-Chinese government (including the denoted themes of the Olympic torch relay, riots, tragic consequences, maintaining order, pro-China demonstrations and refutation) and other (the rest of the denoted themes).

Modifying Kim and Kelly's (2007) categories for 'subject matter' and Huang's (2009) category for 'human subject', human subjects were coded for their presence or absence according to the following 12 categories:[5] (1) *Pro-Tibet demonstrators:* defined as individuals or groups who are shown as protesting against the Chinese rule over Tibet and/or China's hosting of the Olympic Games without being engaged in violent actions; (2) *Pro-China demonstrators:* defined as individuals or groups who are shown as supporting Chinese rule over Tibet and/or China's hosting of the Olympic Games; (3) *Pro-Tibet spokesperson/s:* defined as commentator/s, columnist/s of a newspapers and/or official/s who support the independence of Tibet and/or the demonstrations; (4) *Pro-China spokesperson/s:* defined as commentator/s, columnist/s of a newspaper and/or official/s who support China's crackdown of the demonstrations and/or China's rule over Tibet and/or China's hosting of the Olympic Games; (5) *Crackdown victim/s:* defined as individual/s suffering physically or emotionally from the crackdown of the riots and/or people arrested by Chinese or foreign authorities (victim/s of police); (6) *Demonstration victim/s:* defined as individual/s suffering emotionally or physically from the violent anti-China demonstrations (victim/s of demonstrators/rioters); (7) *Police/crack down:* defined as police who are shown using force to contain the demonstrators and/or rioters; (8) *Police/maintaining order:* defined as police who are trying to maintain order caused by pro-Tibetan protestors, such as rescuing victims and putting out fires; (9) *Olympic torch relay participant/s:* defined as individual/s who are shown participating in the Olympic torch relay; (10) *Rioter/s:* defined as Tibetan protester/s who are engaged in violent actions, such as looting, destroying property, beating and/or killing people; as well as images of protesters depicted as criminals by the Chinese authority; (11) *Pro-Tibet civilian/s:* defined as civilian/s (excluding demonstrator/s, commentator/s and columnist/s) who are shown in support of Tibetan independence, being anti to China's hosting of the Olympic Games and criticizing human rights abuses in Tibet (e.g. an image of Tibetans forced to study the Chinese language); (12) *Pro-China civilian/s:* defined as civilian/s (excluding demonstrator/s, Olympic torch relay participant/s, commentator/s and columnist/s) who are shown in support of the Chinese rule over Tibet and China's hosting of the Olympic Games (e.g. an image of Tibetans satisfied with their current life).

In addition, photographs of pro-Tibet demonstrators ($n = 78$) were further coded for violence (violent vs non-violent). An image was coded as violent if it showed people in violent actions, such as beating or hitting, yelling at other people, or destroying property. An image was coded as non-violent if the content did not fall into the first category, for example the image did not include people being beaten by the police.

A primary coder coded all 423 photos. A second coder coded a random sample of 43 photos, about 10 percent of the total for all variables except violence. For violence, 20 photos, about 20 percent of the 78 photos coded for violence, were coded by a second coder. Using Cohen's kappa the intercoder reliability was .943 for denoted theme; .860 for pro-Tibet demonstrators; .788 for pro-China demonstrators; 1.00 for pro-Tibet spokesperson/s; .788 for pro-China spokesperson/s; 1.00 for police/crackdown; .876 for police/maintaining order; .944 for torch relay participant/s; .896 for rioter/s; 1.00 for pro-China civilian/s; and .818 for violence. For the variables for which Cohen's kappa could not be calculated,[6] the Holsti's formula was used. Results were as follows: 1.00 for crackdown victim/s; .977 for demonstration victim/s; and 1.00 for pro-Tibet civilian/s, — which were acceptable reliability levels according to Neuendorf (2002).

Table 1. Frequency and percentages of denoted themes in pictures that ran in four Chinese newspapers and four US newspapers regarding the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations and riots ($N = 423$)

Denoted theme	US dailies		China dailies		Total	
Pro-Tibet demonstrations	38	25.9%	1	.4%	39	9.2%
Confrontation	9	6.1%	6	2.2%	15	3.5%
Suppression	39	26.5%	5	1.8%	44	10.4%
Refutation	12	8.2%	21	7.6%	33	7.8%
Restoring order	1	.7%	28	10.1%	29	6.9%
Olympic torch relay	14	9.5%	149	54%	163	38.5%
Tragic consequence	11	7.5%	23	8.3%	34	8.0%
Riots	7	4.8%	38	13.8%	45	10.6%
Other	16	10.9%	5	1.8%	21	5%
Total	147	100%	276	100%	423	100%

$\chi^2 = 2.132E2$, d.f. $= 8$, $p = .000$.

Note: Because of the low frequencies in the 'Pro-China demonstrations' and 'Maintaining order' categories for both US and Chinese newspapers, the 'Pro-China' category was collapsed with 'Olympic torch relay' and 'Maintaining order' was collapsed with 'Other'.

Findings

Overall, our analysis showed there were about twice as many photos of the events in the four Chinese dailies (*People's Daily*, *Xinmin Evening News*, *Yangtse Evening Post* and *Guangzhou Daily*) than in the four US dailies (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*) (276 vs 147 photos). Both US and Chinese dailies used a variety of sources to report the events under study, including photos from their national and international news agencies, photo services, as well as photos taken by staff photojournalists. In addition, a few of the US photos were taken by tourists, and some Chinese ones were taken from stills from Chinese television news.[7]

The first hypothesis, which predicted that in visually reporting the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations the denoted themes in US newspapers would be significantly different from the denoted themes in Chinese newspapers, was supported. As shown in Table 1, when the newspapers in each country were combined, overall the denoted themes in US newspapers were significantly different from the denoted themes in Chinese newspapers.

By and large, the Chinese newspapers ran photos that focused on fewer themes than photos that ran in the US newspapers. The dominant denoted themes in the photos that ran in the US newspapers favored the foreign policy of the United States. As shown in Table 1, for the US newspapers the most prominent theme was suppression (26.5 percent), followed by pro-Tibet demonstrations (25.9 percent). These two themes combined constituted more than half of the photos that ran in the US dailies analyzed. And as expected, the dominant denoted themes in the Chinese news photos favored the position of the Chinese government toward Tibet. For the Chinese newspapers the Olympic torch relay alone constituted more than half of the themes of the photos that ran in the Chinese dailies examined (53.3 percent), followed by riots (13.8 percent) and restoring order (10.1 percent).

Table 2. Frequency and percentages of slant in pictures that ran in four Chinese newspapers and four US newspapers regarding the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations and riots ($N = 423$)

US dailies ($N = 147$)		Chinese dailies ($N = 276$)	
Pro-Tibetan independence frame		*Pro-Chinese government frame*	
Pro-Tibet demonstrations	38	Olympic torch relay	147
Suppression	39	Riots	38
Refutation	12	Tragic consequence	23
Total	89 60.5%	Maintaining order	4
Other	58 39.5%	Pro-China demonstrations	2
		Refutation	21
		Total	235 85.1%
		Other	41 14.9%

$\chi^2 = 6.527$, d.f. = 1, $p = .011$.$\chi^2 = 1.364E2$, d.f. = 1, $p = .000$.

Table 3. Frequency and percentages of pro-Tibet demonstrators in terms of violence in pictures that ran in four Chinese newspapers and four US newspapers ($N = 78$)

		US dailies	China dailies	Total
Non-violent	Observed	56 91.8%	6 35.3%	
	Expected	48.6	13.5	
Violent	Observed	5 8.2%	11 64.7%	
	Expected	12.5	3.5	
		61	17	78

Note: Because cell frequencies were smaller than five, a Fisher exact test was performed ($p = .000$).

The second hypothesis predicted that the dominant slant in photos in US newspapers would be pro-Tibetan independence (reflecting US foreign policy toward Tibet), while the dominant slant in photos in Chinese newspapers would be pro-Chinese government. Table 2 shows that among the photos that ran in the US dailies, 89 of them showed pro-Tibet independence vs 58 that were coded as other. The difference was statistically significant. Regarding the photos that ran in the Chinese dailies, 235 of them showed pro-Chinese government frames vs 41 that were coded as other. Again, the difference was statistically significant. These findings show support for the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis predicted that in visually reporting the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations, US newspapers would be significantly more likely to show non-violent images than Chinese newspapers would. Table 3 shows the frequencies of pro-Tibet demonstrators in terms of violence and significant results of a Fisher exact test of association ($p = .000$). As shown in Table 3, among the 61 photos that ran in the US newspapers showing pro-Tibet demonstrators, more than 9 in 10 (91.8 percent) portrayed the demonstrators as non-violent, while about two-thirds of the photos that ran in the Chinese newspapers showed them as violent (64.7 percent). Again these findings show support for the third hypothesis.

Table 4. Frequency and percentages of human subjects regarding the anti-China/Olympic demonstrations and riots in pictures that ran in four Chinese newspapers and four US newspapers ($N = 423$)

Human subjects	US dailies 147		China dailies 276		Comparison tests
Pro-Tibet demonstrator/s	61	41.5%	17	6.1%	$\chi^2 = 79.637^{**}$
Pro-China demonstrator/s	7	6.2%	38	13.8%	$\chi^2 = 8.184^{**}$
Pro-Tibet spokesperson/s	23	15.6%	0	0%	$\chi^2 = 45.667^{**}$
Pro-China spokesperson/s	4	2.7%	14	5.1%	$\chi^2 = 1.302$
Crackdown victim/s	4	2.7%	0	0%	Fisher exact test***
Demonstration victim/s	6	4.1%	11	4.0%	$\chi^2 = .002$
Police/crackdown	39	26.5%	10	3.6%	$\chi^2 = 49.142^{**}$
Police/maintaining order	9	6.1%	13	4.7%	$\chi^2 = .388$
Olympic torch relay participant/s	11	7.5%	117	42.4%	$\chi^2 = 55.385^{**}$
Rioter/s	8	5.4%	37	13.4%	$\chi^2 = 6.399^{*}$
Pro-Tibet civilian/s	3	2.0%	1	0.4%	Fisher exact test***
Pro-China civilian/s	0	0%	28	10.1%	$\chi^2 = 15.864^{**}$

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

*** For crackdown victim and pro-Tibet civilian, more than 20 percent of the cells had expected frequencies of less than five, and thus violating the requirements for conducting a chi-square test. Therefore, Fisher's exact tests were conducted for these two variables: p value for crackdown victim was .014 (< .05) and for pro-Tibet civilian p value was .123 (> .05).

Research questions 1 through 12 asked whether there will be significant differences between US and Chinese newspapers in running photographs depicting (1) pro-Tibet demonstrators; (2) pro-China demonstrators; (3) pro-Tibet spokesperson/s; (4) pro-China spokesperson/s; (5) crackdown victim/s; (6) demonstration victim/s; (7) police/crackdown; (8) police/maintaining order; (9) Olympic torch relay participant/s; (10) rioter/s; (11) pro-Tibet civilian/s; and (12) pro-China civilian/s. Table 4 shows the frequency of presence of human subjects in the news photos analyzed. As shown in Table 4, results show that the presence of the following: pro-Tibet demonstrators, pro-China demonstrators, pro-China spokesperson/s, police/crackdown, Olympic torch relay participant/s, rioter/s and pro-China civilian/s, were significantly different between pictures that ran in the US dailies vs the Chinese ones. Meanwhile, there were no significant differences in terms of the depiction of pro-China spokesperson/s, demonstration victim/s, police/maintaining order and pro-Tibet civilian/s between the photos that ran in the newspapers of the two countries.

Discussion

Overall, our results are consistent with previous studies. Our research showed that government policy plays an important role in visually reporting news events. Although terrororism, instead of Communism, became the biggest enemy of the United States after 9/11, the United States has not changed its stance toward the Tibetan issue and its view regarding China's human rights practices.

The Chinese and US governments' distinct policies regarding Tibet were translated into significant differences in the denoted themes analyzed. Themes in the Chinese newspapers focused mainly on the Olympic torch relay, riots and restoring order. The dominant theme in photos that ran in the Chinese newspapers, the Olympic torch relay, was in sharp contrast with the photos that ran in the US newspapers. Only 12 photos that ran in the US dailies (8.2 percent) showed the Olympic torch relay being conducted successfully. The large number of Olympic torch relay images in the Chinese dailies mainly ran in a special section devoted to the Olympic Games in three of the four Chinese newspapers (which the US newspapers did not have). This helped divert public attention toward positive images of China when there were protests taking place in many of the cities where the relay was run around the world. It also helped make a clear distinction between the Olympic torch relay and the anti-China demonstrations, suggesting they were two separate issues – one a sports event, and the other a political one. In addition, the lesser coverage of the torch relay event in the US dailies – as compared with the Chinese dailies – can also be explained by the fact that the United States was not the host country of the Olympics and thus the event did not matter as much for the average US reader,[8] until the Olympic torch relay became a venue of conflict.

While the US newspapers ran only a small number of pictures showing the Olympic torch relay theme, they focused more on the pro-Tibet demonstrations in a way that helped relate the Olympic torch relay with the pro-Tibet demonstrations, suggesting they were one issue. These pictures thus merged the disruption of the Olympic torch relay with anti-China demonstrations and the familiar human rights issue. Specifically, it is important to note that in photographs that showed the Olympic torch relay without the presence of protesters, the protesters' presence was still implied in the captions, thus making Olympic torch relay inseparable from the anti-China demonstrations theme. For example, *The Washington Post* on 14 April ran a photo that showed the Olympic torch relay being carried in Tanzania (see Figure 1). However, besides telling the readers what was depicted in the photo, the caption also offered information that a Kenyan Nobel Prize winner had pulled out of the Olympic torch relay to protest against China's human rights record, hindering the success of the Olympic torch relay in Tanzania. Indeed in this case, the caption helped relate the human rights frame to the Olympic torch relay frame despite the fact that the action of the Nobel Prize winner had no direct relationship with the photo that ran in *The Washington Post.*

The Chinese newspapers also showed proportionally more images of demonstrators and rioters (13.8 percent vs 4.8 percent) than in the US newspapers. These images included the demonstrators in extremely violent actions, or photos of the rioters as wanted criminals. This type of visual reporting helped define the anti-Chinese government protest as an internal affair, suggesting it was a crime to demonstrate.

What also stands out is the difference in pictures that showed the restoration of order between the Chinese and US dailies (10.1 percent vs 0.7 percent). In the US newspapers the photographic coverage of the Tibetan unrest started by showing images of the violence in the Tibetan regions and covered little of the lives of the people there, — i.e. people's lives returning to normal in Tibet. In contrast, the pictures that ran in the Chinese newspapers highlighted the restoration of order in that region, showing images of people leading normal lives, even before showing images of the riots in Tibet. In fact, the first few news photos that appeared in the national newspaper *People's Daily* were those images showing restored order. These visuals reflected the fact that maintaining social stability has been one of the top priorities

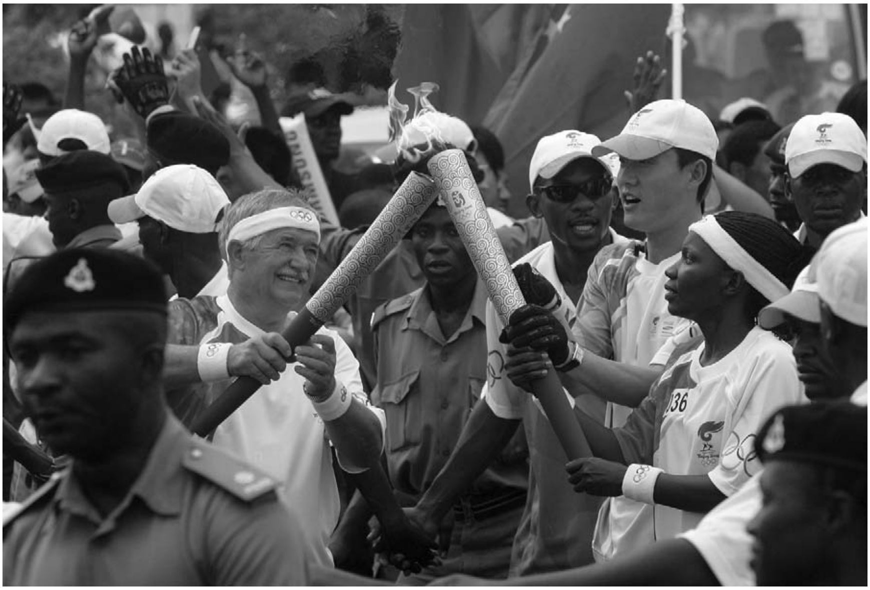
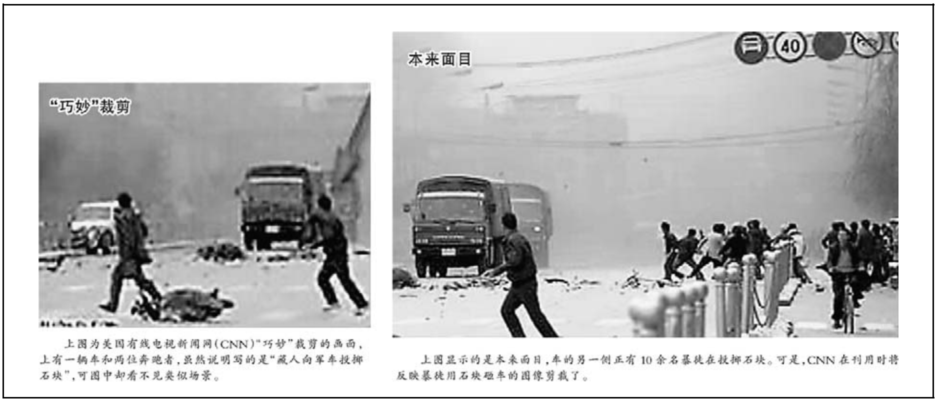


Figure 1. 'Under the protection of Tanzanian riot police, the Olympic torch is carried in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, Sunday April 13, 2008. Officials have said that they do not expect any of the disruptions that have hit other torch runs in the world. Kenyan Nobel Peace laureate Wangari Maathai, however, pulled out of the relay in Tanzania to protest China's human rights record.' Copyright @ 2008 AP Photo/Jerome Delay.

of Chinese officials, one in which the Chinese newspapers obviously also played an important role. It is generally understood that when a national crisis arises in China, the media try to show things under control, even at the cost of not informing the public about what is actually taking place (news reports on the SARS pandemic is an extreme example). In the case here, it was only after reports from the western media turned out to be unfavorable to the Chinese government that Chinese media outlets started to show images of violent actions by anti-China demonstrators. In other words, reporting in the Chinese newspapers was a response to refute reports from western media (see Figure 2). In the four Chinese newspapers under investigation, the first date of photos published depicting the demonstrations and riots was 21 March, almost a week after the demonstrations turned violent (14 March). In the US newspapers, images of the violence started to appear on 15 March, despite the claim that western journalists were not allowed into Tibet at that time. Thus, the timing of the visual coverage in the Chinese press showed that the Chinese government exercised considerable control over news reports of highly sensitive issues.

Interestingly, the most frequent theme in the photographs that ran in the US newspapers is suppression. It constituted more than a quarter of all photos analyzed (see Table 1). The Chinese police in these photos were shown as heavily armed, suggesting they were ready to suppress the demonstrations. Although images of police could have been



上图为美国有线电视新闻网（CNN）“巧妙”裁剪的画面，上有一辆车和两位奔跑者，虽然说明写的是“藏人向军车投掷石块”，可图中却看不见类似场景。

上图显示的是本来面目，车的另一侧正有10余名暴徒在投掷石块。可是，CNN在刊用时将反映暴徒用石块砸车的图像剪裁了。

Figure 2. Two photos published side by side ran in *People's Daily* on 27 April 2008. They showed the CNN.com photo cropping the rioters out of the picture (left) in comparison with the 'original' photo (right), which included a wider view of the event with the rioters throwing stones at the Chinese military truck.

Copyright © 2008 *People's Daily* (fair dealing for criticism and review).

interpreted as security, the captions implied that they were a threat to Tibetan activists and to people fighting for religious freedom and human rights.

This study also focused on slant, to imply meaning that was not immediately manifested in the photos per se but as something that is derived from the denoted themes examined.

Entman (1989) proposed that slant becomes apparent when we compare the reporting of two similar stories. Thus, in this case slant became visible as we compared the visual reporting of the same events in Chinese and US newspapers. After collapsing denoted themes based on which side they favored, our findings showed the dominant slant in Chinese newspapers was pro-Chinese government, and the dominant slant in the US newspapers was pro-Tibetan independence.

For human subjects present in the photos analyzed, eight categories showed significant differences between US and Chinese newspapers. For US newspapers, the pro-Tibet demonstrators were present in 41.5 percent of news photos, which is consistent with the dominance of the pro-Tibet demonstrations theme. Olympic torch relay participants were present in 42.4 percent of the Chinese photos, which is consistent with the dominance of the Olympic torch relay theme in the Chinese newspapers. What is worth noting, however, is that the US newspapers showed images of the Dalai Lama in 14 photos while the Chinese newspapers showed none. After the Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, he became an icon of peace and human rights advocacy in western societies. His image alone may have been enough to suggest a slant for pro-Tibetan independence.

In sum, in visually reporting the 2008 anti-China demonstrations, the four US and four Chinese newspapers showed different interpretations of the same events. With regard to the Chinese newspapers, they exercised control and ran a limited number of images showing the anti-China protests so as to give the public a sense of harmony. The fact that none of the sampled Chinese newspapers featured any 'pro-Tibet independence' photos, or photos that showed chaos or destruction of property on the front pages suggests the value that harmony played in the selection of news photos. Meanwhile, the US newspapers focused on highlighting the suppressive nature of the Chinese government and on downplaying the voices of people supporting China's rule over Tibet.

Limitations and future research

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the Chinese and US media visually framed the 2008 anti-China/Olympics demonstrations and riots differently and how. The eight newspapers analyzed represent a purposive sample of US and Chinese dailies that were selected based on their national influence, circulation and geographic representations. Therefore, results from this study cannot be generalized to other newspapers and other types of media in these two countries. Further studies, based on a random sample of newspapers and visual analyses of TV coverage in China and the United States, would give us a more comprehensive approach to each country's visual representation of these events. Also, the inclusion of photo size, color and placement in comparative visual studies on the cross-cultural level appears to be another fruitful area of research.

Employing the concepts of denotation and connotation in semiotics, this study has examined both denoted and connoted themes (pro-Tibet independence and pro-Chinese government). However, the connoted themes examined here were limited. Therefore additional connoted themes, such as those related to issue orientation (e.g. human rights issues, economic issues and public relations issues) could be an interesting area for future research. Further, a combination of verbal and visual framing could be helpful in examining additional connoted themes regarding the framing of Tibetan related issues.

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Notes

1. Note the difference between the demonstration theme and the riot theme is whether the demonstrators are depicted acting violently or shown in non-violent actions.
2. *People's Daily* is the official mouthpiece of the Chinese government and provides the views of the Communist Party. The *Xinmin Evening News* is the most popular metropolitan newspaper in Shanghai. The *Yangtse Evening Post* is published in Nanjing, the second largest metropolitan region in the eastern part of China next to Shanghai, and is the third largest newspaper in China in terms of circulation. The *Guangzhou Daily* is published in the city of Guangzhou, the biggest city and commercial center in southern China. According to the World Association of Newspapers, these four Chinese newspapers had a combined average daily circulation of 7.296 million in 2008.
3. Furthermore, we did not code for photo placement for good reasons. The locations where the events took place were not of equal importance to China and the United States. For example the initial demonstration/riot in Tibetan regions would be considered domestic news for

Chinese newspapers and international news for US newspapers. In addition, newspaper sections in both Chinese and US newspapers are partially categorized based on geographic locations (e.g. local news, domestic news, international news).

4. Pro-Tibet independence and pro-Chinese government are both slant. They are considered connoted themes in this study due to the fact that they are derived from denoted themes.
5. There were several reasons to code the human subjects according to their presence or absence. First, for some photos, it was difficult to determine one single dominant subject matter, such as the images showing confrontation between the demonstrators and police. Second, even in photos where one main subject was easy to determine, the secondary subject present in the image also gave impressions to the viewers (see Huang, 2009). Third, from the framing perspective, the frequency or sheer presence of a subject/issue may contribute to the salience and importance of that subject/issue (King and Lester, 2005).
6. For example when one or both coders used only one value for all items, Cohen's kappa could not be computed. For example, when '1' and '0' were the possible values for crackdown victim/s, or when one or both coders used '0' to code all the photos.
7. Chinese newspapers receive their photos from both Chinese (Xinhua News Agency) and international news agencies, Chinese photo service (China Foto Press), as well as photos taken by their photojournalists on staff, and sometimes photos taken by photojournalists from other Chinese newspapers and stills from TV news.
8. For instance, US dailies likely covered the torch relay more frequently before the Salt Lake or the Atlanta games, because the games were considered 'local' and thus more relevant to US readers.

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