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## **International Media Framing of China's Domestic Politics: An Analysis of Aljazeera English and BBC News**

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This study is a comparative content analysis of news content of Aljazeera English (AJE) and BBC News on China's national political affairs in their online news editions from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2014 after the assumption of power by Chinese president Xi Jinping. The study compares the patterns of news coverage by two international broadcasters in the context of Framing Theory as well as political and economic events of the times. The study followed the structural pattern of media content analysis - mass media structure their content as an interpretation of reality for audiences, and the media content is created by a variety of factors that result in different versions of reality, such as political and economic factors. Two frames were identified in the news coverage by both the channels. AJE used cooperation frame to present news related to China's trade and investment deals, while confrontation frame was applied by BBC to show conflicts and disputes of China to global audience.

**Keywords:** China, communication, media framing, china politics, political news, China bashing, soft power, BBC, Aljazeera

People's Republic of China (PRC) is an East Asian country, and modern socialist state that emerged on world map on October 1, 1949. Geographically, China tops the list sharing border with neighboring countries. China shares border with 14 countries on the land, 6 countries on the sea. China, having 5000 years civilization, is the third largest country area wise. Present day's China is the world's most populous country having 1.3 billion people. This multi-cultural state has 56 ethnic groups. China, which means the middle kingdom, had also faced a century of humiliation at hands of colonial powers of the West in 19<sup>th</sup> century after the opium wars.

China's political structure is based on collectivism, harmony theory and communism opposite of the Western political values of individualism, free market and democracy. It is ruled by socialist-communist ideology, led by Communist Party of China, a group of revolutionary people who brought PRC out of ashes of World War II, and transformed it into world's second largest economy in 2010 (IMF 2013). Communist Party of China (CPC), established in 1921, had 88 million members in 2016. It is the ruling political party whose policies resulted in tremendous agriculture transformation, ended feudalism in the country, led the country out of depression after cultural revolution (1966-76), it lifted 800 million

people out of poverty during the last four decades, and has transformed China into a prosperous society and an emerging superpower of the world.

Today's China is a country with a rich cultural heritage and an internationally competitive economy. It has influenced the world with its outstanding economic progress that resulted due to the opening and reforms policy of late leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979. China's enormous economic potential and trade opportunities are allowing it to start developing free trade internationally (Demurger, 2001). China's double-digit economic growth of 9.4 per cent of annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remained one of the highest growth rates in the world for a decade (Zheng, 2005, p.18). China has a huge market driven by its potential workforce, power of consumption and economic advantages which bring a great contribution and impact to the world's economic development (Barboza, 2010).

In today's globalized world, China has become a more important news story and it has become harder for local and foreign correspondents to ignore Beijing in the contemporary political, economic and cultural scenario (Schlesinger, 2012). The influence of China in the world politics, economics and other issues has been observed increasing many-fold in the recent years.

The advent of China on the global stage is believed to be full of opportunities in terms of economic cooperation, political influence and challenging too, especially for the existing world order dominated by the Western countries. Put it in another words, the hegemonic unipolar world order seems to be replaced with more multi-dimensional, where power is shared among many nations. Presentation of China's economic rise has created contradictory perceptions in the minds of public in the West and developing countries of Asia, Africa and America too. The more China's hard power and economy is increasing, the more other nations are becoming suspicious of her intentions and role in the world politics.

China has become a major political power in global affairs since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992, but there is a very limited research on how this socialist state is presented in the international media. This is an important area to explore because in the contemporary age, media is our ears and eyes which influence the perceptions of other countries. News coverage of development issues like trade and economy create opportunities for cooperation while conflicts or catastrophic issues pave way for confrontations between countries. In order to better understand China's domestic political events through media coverage, it is critical to analyze the methods that the international media use in their news coverage to portray foreign countries like China with different political and economic system. One such approach is to study how mass media frame the news coverage of issues in the developing countries like China.

News websites, especially those related to satellite television networks with global coverage, are playing an increasingly important role in today's internet age. In the last few years, news site of the Qatar-based news network Al-Jazeera English and BBC news have emerged as a main source of news and information on China related events.

The aim of the current investigation is to find the news coverage of two networks regarding China's domestic politics and related issues. As both news channels are editorially distinct, and target the news reports on China from different perspective for the global audience.

Most of the previous researches on news coverage of China in international media are focused on "traditional" media such as television and print. For example, Willnat and Luo (2011) examined the global television news stories about China while Liss (2003) worked on representations of China in the print media. Some researchers have examined how China is portrayed in the media of one particular country. For example, Peng (2004) investigated the news coverage of China in the US media, specifically the *New York Times*

and *Los Angeles Times*. Other scholars have explored how the media covers a specific incident or issue involving China. For example, Huang (2005) examined international media coverage of China during the SARS crisis in 2003 while Yang (2003) analyzed how the American media has projected China as threat or partner.

In this study, framing analysis has been used to examine the news coverage of China's domestic political affairs in the online news editions of AJE and BBC.

## Problem Statement

China's emergence on the global stage as the world's second-largest economy has grabbed the attention of media worldwide. Since the country has become important player in global affairs, its economic and technological achievements have opened discussions attracting significant attention of news outlets particularly from the international media outlets (Willnat & Metzgar, 2012; Hernandez, 2012: X). Therefore, the news stories emanating from China have an unprecedented spot on the media agenda. The confluence of China's size, its economic might, the world's fear of rising dragon and fascination about China besides a seemingly never-ending stream of economic, political, social and diplomatic events in Chinese cities has made the editors and readers screening for more and more information about China (David, 2012).

The news media not only inform us about the world at large, giving the major elements for our pictures of the world, they also influence the prominence of those elements in these pictures. Journalists do strive to report news objectively, but in an effort to quickly comprehend and organise news material in a systematic and efficient manner, they tend to engage in a process of framing. In the process of constructing frames, journalists simplify, highlight and make more salient certain aspects of reality, while obscuring others (Luther & Miller, 2005: 78-9).

To explore broader understanding how China is presented by international media in terms of its domestic political affairs, this research work would offer a fresh perspective. The Framing Theory is used to understand the frames being used by these news outlets while reporting on China's domestic politics.

## Research Objectives

This research study is theoretically linked to Framing Theory and study has been designed to achieve the following goals:

- (i) To investigate different frames employed by AJE and BBC to portray China's political affairs in their online news editions.
- (ii) To find out news framing patterns of AJE and BBC.
- (iii) To analyze the nature and extent of China-related news coverage in the news websites of AJE and BBC.

## Research Questions

- RQ1: How Aljazeera English and BBC cover China's domestic political affairs in online news editions?
- RQ2: What is the slant in news of both channels for China?
- RQ3: Which frames are more prominent in the coverage of China?
- RQ4: What are the differences and similarities in framing China in political news?

As a fast growing economy of the world, China is boosting its relationship with the developed and developing countries through cultural exchanges and economic cooperation. This has been proved by the fact that China has become the top most trading partner for the majority of African economies and several countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and South America, which shows China's expanding horizon of national policy for engagement and partnership with the world.

This research into news coverage of China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC will be helpful to promote understanding about China's political scenario at home, and will be catalyst in enhancing its multi-lateral relations with the world in the 21st century because it's an acclaimed fact that the mass media can promote understanding between nations through exchange of information and ideas. This research would also offer greater insights for media academics regarding the subject related to representation of China's political matters in the Eastern media outlets; AJE, and the Western media outlet BBC. This study will also be useful in understanding China from the political perspective through the eyes of global media.

### **Rational for AJE and BBC**

Aljazeera English and BBC News in terms of reach, operations and mandate, fall within the purview of the global media. The main reason why these specific news outlets are selected is that both are representative of an influential and leading news sources in the global mediascape. The main news pages of each of the network show China pages where content related to China's politics is displayed. AJE's website has a dedicated section for China related news stories, features and opinions. BBC News has also similar content section dedicated for China.

Both news channels have a strong professional reputation covering almost all of the important issues of the world. They have engaged a sufficient number of highly qualified senior and professional journalists in their organizational structures. Additionally, both utilize numerous bureaus and correspondents across the globe for the specific purpose of providing international news coverage.

Aljazeera and the BBC both originate in regions that are very different in terms of their political, social and economic models, which could potentially result in interesting findings regarding the comparative analysis aspect of this study. Both AJE and BBC are chosen because the news networks represent the Eastern perspective and the Western perspective regarding international news events and issues. Both networks publish news and information on their websites in English language for the global audience, policymakers, political leaders and business community. Finally, AJE and BBC News might rely on same sources of information while reporting on China but have different political ideology and model of journalism that could impact the news coverage and patterns of framing.

### **Aljazeera English**

Aljazeera English (AE) is owned and operated by Qatar's royal family in the Middle East. AJE is an international news channel, headquartered in Doha, Qatar which was established in 2006. Since then it has rapidly grown in popularity and become particularly well known for its coverage from underreported regions. It is available through satellite, cable and online in more than 250 million homes in 130 different countries and territories (Wikipedia, 2008). The mission of Al Jazeera English is "to provide accurate and impartial news with a

global, international perspective" (Al-Jazeera). Al-Jazeera consists of more than twenty channels, for instance Al-Jazeera Sport, Al-Jazeera Documentary and the Arabic version of Al-Jazeera which broadcasts all news reports in Arabic. ([www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com))

### British Broadcasting Corporation

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), funded by the British government, is a global media network which enjoyed a weekly global audience of some 166 million in 2010/2011. The BBC is a Britain's leading broadcast service that broadcasts via radio, television and the Internet in more than 200 countries. It was founded in 1922, and the international news channel, that is the BBC World News, was introduced in 1991. Their mission is to "enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain" (Wikipedia, 2008). They also strive towards being the most innovative and creative news Service Company in the world. According to their values, trust is the foundation of the organization. The company is promoted as independent, impartial and honest". The BBC is available in approximately 300 million homes across the globe. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

## Literature Review

### Framing

As this study's focus is on the presentation of the China's domestic political matters in the international media, it draws its conceptual framework from the Framing Theory. The major premise of the Framing Theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or judgments. Through the framing process and influenced by the "framing effect," people develop a particular perception of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

The theory consists of two methods. The first is the formation and dissemination of frames through various communication channels, particularly through the ubiquitous mass media. The second is the process through which the targeted audience's evaluative orientation is influenced. Pertinent to this study is the first process. The mass media frame various issues by emphasizing some aspects and presenting them through an evaluative perspective. Entman (1993) defined this process as follows:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. (p. 52)

A large amount of research works on the formation of "media frames" has been conducted by the use of analysis of content selectively presented by the media. Examples include such studies as those of the frame of the affirmative action (e.g., Gamson & Modigliani, 1987), support for war (Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005), and cynicism toward government (Brewer & Sigelman, 2002). Those research works also show that framing is best conceptualized as a process that evolves over time. But Reese (2007), challenged Entman's definition of framing for not being capable of explicating how the frames are organized "in such a way as to promote" their effects. Reese (2007) proposed to examine frames beyond the manifest stories in the media and investigate in an interpretative way that "captures a more dynamic process of negotiating meaning, and highlights the relationship within discourse" (Reese, 2007, p. 152). He proposed a much broader definition of frames:

Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent overtime, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world (Reese et al., 2001, p. 11).

As the current study attempted to examine the framing of China's domestic politics, which is manifested in specific stories but surpasses the scope of particular issues and actors, it posited that the framing of the overall portray of a country in the media is constructed not only in the coverage of selective aspects of specific issues/actors but also in the aggregated presentation of the selected problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. Therefore, it adopted a conceptual framework that incorporated the "micro-level" attention to the evaluative undertones manifested in specific news stories about various issues and the "macro-level" interpretation of the "larger meaning" reflected in the sum of the specific undertones regarding the aggregated presentation of the China's domestic politics.

The first stage of the study would be the quantitative analysis in which a content analysis would be conducted for all the articles selected. Content analysis involves systematic reading of a body of texts, images and symbolic matter where one makes valid inferences from the given texts (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 10; Weber, 1990, p. 10). According to While & Berelson (1952), content analysis is a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (MacNamara, 2005). The distinction between manifest and latent content would also be important to be highlighted as it shows what one set out to measure. Manifest content refer to the physical contents in which one can point out in the text of the story while latent content doesn't have the same concrete cues and therefore requires interpretative reading to the physical data present (Lynch & Peer, 2002).

The research work on framing highlights key features of media frames. First, media frames can play a vital role in stimulating opposition to or support for an event or issue. Secondly, media frames provide moral judgment, causal interpretation and remedy/solution for media-focused problems. Thirdly, media frames generally represent specific ideology. Fourthly, media frames including attractive words, metaphors, phrases etc. also help to determine the "tone" of media coverage of an event or issue. Therefore, quantitative and quality analysis will be important to find out the framing patterns applied by AJE, BBC on China's domestic politics during the study period.

### News Coverage Patterns of China in the Western Media

The previous academic research shows that international news coverage in the media seldom promoted a favorable image of China. The current common arguments on China's representation in media by scholars Cheng (2011), Mattimore (2010) and Mawdsley (2008) suggest that the Western press has portrayed China in a negative way by associating it with typical stereotypes thus creating an unfavorable opinion among the audiences towards the country. Some previous research studies have also found that China is distortedly represented by the western media (Zhang 2007; Li & Liu 1999; Xia, 2004).

Media researchers like (Lee & Yang, 1996; Wang, 1991; Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Perlmutter, 2007) have identified the Cold War frame used in China related news coverage. Lee and Yang (1996) found that news coverage of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations through the Cold War frame, a struggle for human rights against a repressive Communist regime (p. 14). According to Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (2000), an underlying emphasis on the theme of oppression has long been part of news coverage of China as a Communist state (p. 53).

By the turn of the new century, Lee found in his research work that in *The New York Times'* coverage of China that the emphasis was on globalization as a tool to promote democracy (p. 352). At a time when China's entrance into the WTO was being debated, the WTO was "idealized as a key to triggering political democracy (p. 352), and "global capitalism instead of trade sanctions [was seen] as the best instrument of promoting human rights in China (p. 353).

Numerous other research studies support the idea that U.S. media coverage views China as "the other", an incomprehensible, threatening entity that would benefit from conforming to American values. This Orientalism frame can be observed at work in studies of Liss (2003), Wang (1998), and Yin (2007). The human rights frame has been applied by the U.S media to discuss China's affairs, according to Yin (2007).

### Coverage of Chinese Government in Media

Yang (2012) conducted comparative analysis of *The New York Times* and *China Daily's* 2011 news coverage regarding the portrayal of the Chinese government. The researcher employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: content analysis and discourse analysis. Some 252 news articles from the *China Daily* and 324 from *The New York Times* during 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011 were selected for the content analysis. The findings revealed that although the two newspapers share some similarities regarding the portrayal of the Chinese government, differences can obviously be observed. He noted that *The New York Times* tended to apply an anti-Chinese government frame while a pro-government frame was common in the *China Daily*. He concluded that the Chinese government was represented as "other" by *The New York Times* and as "us" by the *China Daily*.

### Coverage of China's Political Issues in Media

Negative news coverage on China in the Western media is common. Seib and Powers (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of the China coverage in three international broadcasters: BBC World Service, CNN International and Deutsche Welle (DW). Following a quantitative and qualitative content and framing analysis, they identified three different approaches to covering China-related news. The scholars stated that although all three broadcasts produced a similar number of China stories in terms of a percentage of its overall news agenda, each focused on different types of stories and utilized different frames in reporting China news. CNN International's coverage on issues seemingly important to CNN International's agenda and audience -US- Sino conflict over Taiwan, trade, and Tibet—the network failed to provide balanced or thorough coverage of current events, the research report stated.

At the same time, on the issues of Tibet, political rights in China, and China's role in international politics, BBC's coverage was rather one-sided, highly critical of China and promoting the Western frame that underscored the importance of human and political rights and democracy in domestic and foreign affairs. Moreover, BBC paid rather scant attention to China's role in international politics—dedicating as much time to the state of political rights.

The available literature states that, media plays an important role "on the production and reproduction of stereotypes, prejudices, opinions, beliefs and ideologies" (Wodak & Busch, 2004). They explained, it was found that misunderstandings and mistrust between China and the West have historical roots. However, Western mass media played a significant role in this trust deficit due to China being a communist state. Previous studies



showed that the dominant mass media tend to marginalize the 'other' and misrepresent the events regarding China.

Literature accounts revealed less bright but darker side of China-related news stories making headlines in international news media, owned and operated by the Western world. As we have seen anti-China news stories appearing in traditional media such as television and print. For example, Willnat and Luo (2011) looked at global television news stories about China while Liss (2003) examined representations of China in the print media. Some researchers have examined how China is portrayed in the media of one particular country. For example, Peng (2004) looked at coverage of China in the U.S. media, specifically *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*.

Some scholars have considered how the media covered a specific incident or issue involving China. For example, Huang (2005) examined international media coverage of China during the SARS crisis in 2003 while Yang (2003) analyzed how the American media has portrayed the question of whether China represents a threat to the US. Zhang (2010) explored how media perceptions of China may affect broader international politics.

Adopting different approaches such as Orientalism, framing analysis, ideological square and critical discourse analysis, previous research studies proved that the Western news media tried to portray a negative image of China. Hence it is significant to conduct a new research to find out how the Eastern and western media outlets are framing China's domestic politics in their online news edition targeting global audience.

## Methodology

This research study conducted a comparative content analysis of Aljazeera English and BBC News', news coverage of China between January 2013 and December 2014. News reports on China from online news editions of two news channels ([www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com), [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)) were selected for analysis:

### Population and Time Period

The universe for this study constituted of the news stories published in online editions of AJE and BBC from January 2013 to December 2014. News reports on China's politics were the unit of analysis. News programs, features, opinions were not included in samples. In the first phase; data was collected from websites of AJE to identify the frequency of the news coverage on China's politics. This period has been chosen because China's new leadership assumed power. New changes in national politics were witnessed by the world. Then the key words "China" was input in the search boxes of AJE and BBC. The database yielded 28 and 25 news stories of the AJE and the BBC, respectively. All news stories mentioning China's domestic politics during the two years were included as the sample. Thus, total number of 53 news stories were selected from both the channels for analysis. The analysis proceeded in two phases:

In Phase I, a team of three coders coded news stories related to China's domestic political matters. A detailed listing of content categories identified is included in *Appendix A*. Each of the 53 stories mentioning China's domestic politics were then re-examined and divided into sub-topics of China-related news: Chinese parliament session, political system, geopolitics, economy, political rights, Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet, and other. After the identification of major themes, slant and frames were identified by observing the use of metaphors labels applied by AJE and BBC to describe China's domestic politics. Each paragraph in the news story was analysed textually.

In Phase II, a framing analysis was completed to identify whether coverage was favorable, unfavorable, or neutral and their ways of representation. News stories were examined to identify if the story included any criticism on China or Chinese political system, policies and politicians.

Finally, all China stories were then qualitatively analyzed. Each news story was reviewed and themes were further examined textually. Comparative qualitative content analysis provides an important layer of analysis in that it helps to comprehend what stories, stakeholders and frames are included and excluded by each news channel and to what effect. The qualitative analysis is also helpful in contextualizing and explaining the findings from the quantitative analysis (Phase 1), as well as identifying particularly troubling.

**Slant and Frame:** Framing and slanting is an important factor in agenda setting effects. It means how a news story was framed. The frames of the news stories were evaluated in terms of reforms, political rights, oppression and assertiveness, corruption, etc. These were measured on the basis of the contextual unit because the whole news story was a contextual unit.

## Key Terms

*China's domestic politics:* The content on China's domestic politics includes stories on the political scene in China, such parliamentary session, congress session, politicians' statements, parliament's debates, political rallies, ministers' portfolios, the law and order situation, government institutions, administrative issues, political interviews, political corruptions, misuse of government power, political mismanagement, etc.

*Favorable:* A story on China's internal politics will be coded as favorable slant if it is about: (i) Statement praising the present Chinese government policies, its progress, developments, democracy, good governance, etc.; and (ii) Election, social new amenity laws, attendance of government's official in seminars, forums and their speeches and writings.

*Unfavorable:* A story on China's domestic politics will be coded as unfavorable slant if it is about: (i) Statements criticizing policies of the present Chinese government; (ii) Stories showing peoples of Pakistan dissatisfaction with government; and (iii) Stories that portray the government as weak, corrupt, manipulative, mismanagement of funds and relief efforts.

*Neutral:* A news report which places no clear emphasis on either the favorable or unfavorable aspects of the topic will be coded as neutral. If a story may carry 8 paragraphs in which 4 carry favorable tones while the other 4 carry unfavorable tone, such story will most likely be coded as neutral. However, in this case the story should be coded as favorable or unfavorable if the headline contains such slant.

## Frame Definition

*Communist state frame:* If news items covering the events and actions of Chinese are associated with the failures, weaknesses or dictatorship, odds of communism.

*Political reforms frames:* News items carrying sympathetic, supportive tone, stance, comments on China or Chinese government.

Findings

This section presents results of news coverage of Aljazeera English and BBC news, evaluation and interpretation the outcomes of study over the reporting on China's domestic politics. The findings of the study include major themes and dominant themes attained by content analysis method. It includes major topic theme analysis, frequency analysis, and percentage analysis. This section answers the questions concerning the major topic themes, underlying tone and frames presented by AJE and BBC to global audience during the study period. The section includes comparative analysis of the news channels over coverage of China, similarities and differences in reporting, and the application of different media frames.

Comparison of News Coverage on China's Domestic Politics

Table 1 shows, only 53 (4.57 per cent) news reports covered the China's domestic political events and issues that included annual sessions of National People's Congress, China's Parliament, changing leadership of Communist Party of China (CPC), assumption of power by new leadership and communism, corruption issues, political rivalries in CPC, Chinese dream of new President Xi Jinping calling for renaissance of the Chinese nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Table 1. Comparison of news coverage of China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC

Online plat form	Frequency	Percentage
AJE	28	52.83
BBC	25	47.16
Total	53	100

During the study period from January 2013 to December 2014, AJE published 28 (52.83 per cent) news reports on China's national political matters. While BBC published 25 (47.16 per cent) news reports related to China's domestic political affairs. The light difference in frequency of news reports shows a little variance in news agenda of AJE and BBC as seen in Table 2. Similarly, there was not much difference noticed in patterns of the news coverage on political issues of China in the two news channels. Besides the minor difference in news frequency, news topics were diverse and treatment was mixed in both news outlets. The major emerging themes of both channels had similarities and differences.

AJE's major news themes included Chinese government affairs, one-child policy problem, narrowing income gap between the rich and the poor, tackling corruption issues, Taiwan conflict and politics, new leadership's assumption of power, rural Chinese discrimination, political reforms, APEC Summit 2013, overhauling of judicial system, Dalai Lama row and Communist party's political rivalries like trial of Bo Xilai, one of the top communist leaders. Majority of AJE's news on national politics discussed the transfer of power in China, arrival of new leadership in China led by new president Xi Jinping and new premier Li Keqiang.

While BBC's major news themes focused on China's parliament session and parliamentary meetings, Wen Jiabao's legacy, Xi Jinping's appointment as new leader of China, modernising the political system, key economic reforms, economic future of China, trials of leaders of China's Communist party, Chinese dream and struggle for renaissance, Xi's achievements in one year, flaws in current political model of China, changes in immigration laws, need for strengthening the 'rule of law' and people's welfare. Arrival of new leadership in China, changing political system and parliamentary debates of key economic reforms were dominant issues which made headlines in the online edition of BBC news.

Chinese president Xi Jinping and his call for renaissance was the most discussed issue in the BBC's news coverage of domestic political affairs of China during the study period. The word 'Xi' was the most frequently used word in news headlines. Almost all news headlines related to domestic politics carried the word China or Chinese.

- Famous trials of China's Communist Party (BBC, 2013)
- Communist Party's Su Rong sacked (BBC, 2014)
- China media expect party to strengthen 'rule of law' (BBC, 2014)
- Comparison of Tone in News Coverage on China's Domestic Politics

Both channels used the word 'communist' to refer to China's political party and political system. AJE in its coverage highlighted negative aspects of China's one-child policy, policy of security forces in Xinjiang/Tibet, corruption while BBC's negative tone was focused on overall reforms in political system, political rivalries, judicial, and economic affairs. In AJE's news coverage, political issues like death penalty, China's one-child policy, and riots in Xinjiang China, 'uprooting of Tibetans', discrimination of rural Chinese, and trial of Bo Xilai received negative coverage.

- China may scrap death penalty for nine crimes (AJE, 2014)
- Rural Chinese complain of discrimination (AJE, 2013)
- China to ease decades-old one-child policy (AJE, 2013)
- Dozens killed in riots in western China (AJE, 2013)

Table 2. Comparison of news and tone of coverage on China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC

Comparison of news coverage on China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC			Comparison of tone of news on China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC		
Frequency	Aljazeera	BBC	Tone	Aljazeera	BBC
News	28	25	Positive	15	7
			Negative	10	10
			Neutral	3	8

In the news coverage of China's political affairs by AJE English, out of 28 news reports on China, 15 news items received positive tone, 10 reports got negative tone and 3 were neutral in their presentation. Similarly out of 25 news items reported BBC, 10 news reports had negative tone, while 7 items carried positive tone and 8 stories had showed neutrality. AJE was more positive than BBC as regards tone on news related to domestic political matters of China. Data shows BBC and AJE were equally critical on China's political issues especially on affairs of clashes in Communist Party of China. AJE's negative coverage was directed at issues of corruption, matters of Taiwan, Tibetan politics, Dalai Lama and human rights violations in China.

Though BBC news reports had less positive tone than AJE, but it gave positive coverage to Chinese dream, opening of China's parliament session and arrival of new leadership, Xi Jinping's appoint as president, efforts for reforms and policies of modernization of socialist state. While issued related to Communist Party of China like trials of communist leaders and party's internal conflicts, failure and flaws of communist political system, weaknesses of 'rule of law' party corruption, received negative coverage by BBC.

Comparison of Framing of China's Domestic Politics

In March 2013, AJE's news headlines on change of political power in China, not only welcomed the new leadership but also discussed Chinese president Xi Jinping's 'Chinese

Dream' in a positive tone that aimed at revival of Chinese nation. The news channel discussed the key features of philosophy of President Xi, and foreign policy initiatives of the new government under Xi.

Xi Jinping and his 'China Dream' (AJE, 2013)

New China leader to usher in 'renaissance' (AJE, 2013)

Few of news headlines are presented as a snapshot review of topics on China's politics. Majority of the headlines has positive tone except issues of corruption, Taiwan crisis and western China's challenges. Xi and Li's assumption of power was believed to usher in 'renaissance' or revival of China. The headline titles give quick understanding about China's internal politics, especially the change of power which takes place once in every tenth year.

AJE in its news coverage on China's domestic political affairs informed to global audience about changing power in China. China was presented as possible partner of world as the new leadership can offer opportunities of mutual development for world community. The message sent to readers was that new government in China wants to engage with the world. Besides internal political issues, AJE also covered an international foreign policy event like APEC Summit 2013. AJE News coverage dubbed the political activity as a platform for Chinese government to showcase Xi Jinping's potential as new president and leader of communist China. The summit was discussed as an effort to attract the world community. The news was treated positively, and sent positive message to audience about China's engagement in the world affairs.

APEC 2013: The Xi show (AJE, 2013)

AJE also reported China's one-child policy but was treated negatively. Reports gave message to global audience that more population means more labour camps for industrial units of China,

China's one-child policy still breeds dissent (AJE, 2013)

AJE's news coverage also focused on income gap and discrimination issues in rural China. These news headlines show the AJE's editorial policy to cover diverse issues of China giving space to issues of urban China and rural China. These news headlines show this diversity.

China pledges to narrow income gap (AJE, 2013)

Rural Chinese complain of discrimination (AJE, 2013)

China seeks overhaul of judicial system (AJE, 2014)

Looking at AJE's news coverage of thorny issues of China like Tibet unrest and Dalai Lama, Tibetan self-exiled leader, Tibet issue was seen through the lens of human rights violations.

China urged to stop 'uprooting Tibetans (AJE, 2013)

China summons US official in Dalai Lama row (AJE, 2014)

Most of the news reports by BBC, almost 40 per cent, carried negative tone on China's Communist Party (CPC). In its commentary on NPC meeting in Beijing, BBC wrote "meeting is a crackdown on China's political reformers and the imprisonment of some of the country's most prominent leaders". BBC News also discussed 'Chinese Dream' of Xi Jinping, with experts' statements from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong but the major focus of news reports remained fixed on political reforms and human rights issues.

While reporting on the legacy of President Xi in 2014, BBC wrote “China also has a new vision in the form of Mr Xi’s “China Dream”, the idea that Chinese citizens can attain national glory if they work as a collective. A campaign to eliminate government waste and bureaucracy makes daily headlines”

On president Xi’s foreign policy, BBC wrote “Mr Xi’s assertive foreign policy has spread mistrust among China’s neighbours, particularly states involved in territorial disputes in the South and East China seas”. BBC concluded by saying “In just over a year, he (Xi Jinping) has reshaped China’s political structure, bringing it back to its early Communist roots. Once again, one man sits at the top”. BBC also critically highlighted China Communist Party’s internal clashes and rivalries.

China Communist Party investigators tried over drowning (BBC, 2013)

In the news coverage on Bo Xilai’s court trial, a connection was established between trial of Gang of Four in 1980 and Bo Xilai. BBC’s news coverage also critically highlighted: battles of elite infighting and power battles inside the CPC.

Famous trials of China’s Communist Party (BBC, 2013)

## Discussion

Though frequency of news reports on China’s political matters was limited in both news channels but most of the news stories were treated positively by AJE. China’s political matters were framed positively in the overall coverage of AJE except issues of corruption and internal political rivalries like trial of Bo Xilai, a senior leader of the Communist Party of China.

AJE applied ‘China Changing or Reformer’ frame to show China’s domestic political matters to global audience in its online news platform but BBC used traditional ‘Communist Regime’ frame with authoritarian rule in place to present China’s political events to the global audience.

AJE informed to global audience about changing political system in China after the assumption of power by new leadership under president Xi Jinping. China was presented as possible partner of the world as the new leadership announced to introduce political reforms and offered opportunities of cooperation and collaboration for mutual development for the world community. The message sent to the readers was that new government in China wants to engage with the world for peace, stability and prosperity.

The message presented by BBC News was that China was under the rule of authoritarian party, the Community Party of China (CPC), and party has corruption, weak political system and numerous internal rivalries and clashes weakening the communist state.

The results of the study pointed out that both media outlets criticised Chinese government policies on Xinjiang/Tibet crisis but this criticism was marginal and issue specific in nature, and depended upon the interests of the media organizations.

Noshina (2000) in her research work stated media organization’s ideological stance, government manipulation, corporate and ownership influence, and media personnel stereotypes and prejudices also play a vital role in shaping foreign countries image in Western media. This trend of presentation of China as an authoritarian regime in Western media has been observed in previous studies (Chang, Lau, & Hao, 2000; Huang & McAdams, 2000; Seib & Powers, 2010; Wu, 1998).

For Instance, Ye (2012), in his study on the portrayal of the Chinese government in *China Daily* and *The New York Times* in 2011 found that *The New York Times* tended to apply

an anti-Chinese government frame while a pro-government frame was observed in the *China Daily*. The study also found that *The New York Times* applied "human right abuser," "dishonesty" frame to present Chinese government. The reason for anti-Chinese government fame is due to framing techniques, which have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by historical stereotypes and the conventional fear of communism expressed in Western media in the past. This trends of news coverage on China can be further elaborated by the statement of a media professional with extensive reporting experience on China who says "Events occur or happen in China, and media shapes these events according to their interests and policies," (David, 2012).

The negative coverage of China might be due the fact that journalists 'have to fit new situations into old definitions. It is in their power to place people and events into the existing categories of hero, villain, good and bad, and thus to invest their stories with the authority of mythological truth' (Bird & Dardenne, 1988: 82). Since they have to meet deadlines, they make these judgments quickly by 'inevitably resorting to existing frameworks'.

In this regard Poornananda (1998) analyzed that US media generally portray third world countries in negative stories based on crimes, disasters, conflicts, and failure of governments while areas including science, arts and culture were significantly marginalized.

The negative accounts about China in this study may be understood within the context of the larger picture of China. China is ruled by Communist regime but the country has made tremendous progress in the last four decades. In this context, Griffin (2004) states that media reinforce those versions of events that have already been established in public discourse, therefore, media uses old frame: Communist regime frame to present China's domestic political affairs. It seems China has seen much transformation but the media frames to portray China have not changed.

It can be stated that that while reporting on China's domestic politics, BBC's approach was consciously selecting China's issues and events related to confrontation, conflict, corruption, problems and disasters, treating them critically and presenting those issues with a specific angle to global audience. But AJE's reporting approach on China was little different. AJE also consciously selected conflicting issues but did not ignore events and activities in China creating with cooperation, development, engagement, mutual benefits for the nations around the world.

This research study found that both AJE and BBC structured their news content as an interpretation of reality and presented two different versions of reality on China's domestic politics for global audiences in the internet age.

The negative portrayal, however, results from historical stereotypes of China and conventional fear of communism in the West and positive presentation results from the need of world to know more about China, and build cooperative links through trade and commerce as Chinese economic development offers abundance of opportunities of collaboration.

## Conclusion

This review of news coverage of China's domestic politics by AJE and BBC reveals important differences in news themes, tone, and framing as regards two broadcasters' daily news agenda on China. News themes on political affairs had similarities as well differences too. BBC's China coverage was not broad and in-depth, exemplified both by the diversity of issues discussed in relation to China's domestic politics, than either AJE. BBC reported on 'Chinese Dream', Xi Jinping's calls for renaissance, modernising the political system,

Wen Jiabao's legacy, key reforms in the political structure, establishing 'rule of law' in party and society and Chinese parliamentary sessions in 2013 and 2014. Though majority of news reported by BBC carried positive on issues of reforms, development, well-being for people but negative news were focused on political rivalries and clashes of China's Communist Party such as expulsion of former Nanjing mayor.

'Chinese Dream', a President Xi Jinping's political philosophy which called for renaissance and rejuvenation of Chinese nation, received positive tone BBC. BBC's news agenda focused instead mostly on key political events happening during the period under review. BBC's coverage was rather one-sided, highly critical of China Communist Party, looking China's political matters from the Western frame that underscored the importance of political reforms and democracy. Overall, BBC was the most likely to challenge information provided by stakeholders in a news story, in its China coverage, those challenges were more likely to target the Chinese government politicians and policy-makers.

AJE's coverage of China's domestic politics was more than BBC in terms of frequency of news. Though frequency of news with negative tone was equal (10) in both channels but AJE's reports carried more positive news on China's political matters. Issues such as one child policy, corruption, and weaknesses of party, discrimination issues carried negative while political matters related to power transfer from Wen Jiabao to Xi Jinping and new leadership's goals for development received positive tone by AJE.

AJE reported China's positive contributions to political development at home with emphasis on domestic reforms, but it also provided a critical assessment of China's political policies, showing both sides of Chinese political affairs to the audiences.

BBC focused on the weakness of China Communist Party but AJE focused on the problems of ordinary citizens such as discrimination issues, one child policy, income gap issue, Impact of China's policy in Tibet such as resettlement of Tibetans.

Findings show differing news agenda of two broadcasters as regards reporting on China's domestic politics. BBC looked at Chinese politics from the Western point of view and values such multi-party system, democracy, freedom of expression. But AJE focused on from development perspective such as positive changes taking place in China's political structure, system and policies.

This review of news content related to China's domestic politics provides important insights into how each broadcaster reports on China, it is just a small window into how coverage of China trends across different media system, where AJE represents eastern world's developing countries and BBC represents Western world's developed countries.

This trend of news coverage leads to the argument that journalists, consciously or unconsciously, select issues and events, and present them to audience to support the interests of particular holders or seekers of political power (Entman). Besides this argument, western media looks and treats China issues from the Oriental Frame or 'Us Vs Other'.

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Appendix

Timeline of China's political news events reported by AJE and BBC  
(January 2013 - December 2014)

AJE	BBC
January 11, 2013: China's one-child policy still breeds dissent	January 2, 2013: Is there a 'Chinese Dream'?
February 7, 2013: China pledges to narrow income gap	February 22, 2013: New China leaders focussing on 'putting people first'
February 20, 2013: China leader vows to tackle corruption	March 5, 2013 : Wen Jiabao 'well-being' vow as China parliament opens
February 26, 2013: China's Xi vows peaceful path on Taiwan	March 5, 2013: Wen Jiabao opens China parliament
March 4, 2013: China prepares to usher in new leadership	March 6, 2013 : China media: Wen's mixed legacy
March 5, 2013: Xi Jinping and his 'China Dream'	March 13, 2013: China media: Political models
March 5, 2013: China outlines plans ahead of power transfer	March 14, 2013: Xi Jinping named president of China
March 14, 2013: Xi Jinping named president of China	March 17, 2013 : Chinese President Xi Jinping calls for renaissance
March 15, 2013: Li Keqiang named as China's prime minister	

March 17, 2013: New China leader to usher in 'renaissance'

March 17, 2013: Chinese parliament appoints new leadership

June 26, 2013: Dozens killed in riots in western China

June 27, 2013: China urged to stop 'uprooting Tibetans'

August 23, 2013: Bo rejects wife's accusation in China trial

September 4, 2013: China arrests over 'forced drowning'

September 18, 2013: Chinese billionaire hurt in 'revenge attack'

November 9, 2013: China Communist party kicks off reform summit

November 9, 2013: Rural Chinese complain of discrimination

November 11, 2013: APEC 2013: The Xi show

November 16, 2013: China to ease decades-old one-child policy

December 25, 2013: Mao's achievements 'outweigh' mistakes: poll

December 26, 2013: China marks muted 120th birthday of Mao

December 28, 2013: China loosens grip on one-child policy

February 14, 2014: China summons US official in Dalai Lama row

August 22, 2014: China marks Deng's 110th birth date in style

August 22, 2014: China uses Deng's birth date to glorify Xi

October 23, 2014: China seeks overhaul of judicial system

October 27, 2014: China may scrap death penalty for nine crimes

July 8, 2013 : 'Chinese Dream' of a young couple in Chengdu

August 21, 2013: Famous trials of China's Communist Party

September 17, 2013: China Communist Party investigators tried over drowning

November 8, 2013 : China's leaders meet to decide on the country's economic future

November 8, 2013: Why China's Third Plenum matters

November 12, 2013: China Third Plenum: Leaders unveil key reforms

December 17, 2013 : China media: Kim Jong-il's death anniversary

December 26, 2013: 11 slogans that changed China

January 24, 2014: China media: Xi's Chinese New Year greetings

January 30, 2014: China's Communist Party expels former Nanjing mayor

February 18, 2014: China media: Modernising the system

March 9, 2014: China's Xi Jinping: What has he achieved in his first year?

June 3, 2014: China media: Immigration laws

June 25, 2014 : Communist Party's Su Rong sacked

August 12, 2014 : China media: Xi Jinping

October 20, 2014: China Communist Party plenum begins in Beijing

October 20, 2014: China media expect party to strengthen 'rule of law'

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