Framing in the Chinese Media: Who Framed Bo Xilai and How?
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Abstract: The Bo Xilai scandal was arguably one of the most significant Chinese domestic news events of 2012, and the way that the government used the media to frame and control the coverage was indicative of the Chinese political and social structure as a whole. This research project analyzed the following research questions: How does the Chinese government use problem definition and cause identification to frame events in its media for US audiences? How do the frames reinforce the Chinese government’s legitimacy? This work builds on theories of framing and “frame building”, and the research question will be answered through a content analysis of Chinese government sponsored English-language coverage on CCTV. Framing has implications in this case for China’s foreign policy as well as their domestic policy. The framing of CCTV’s coverage reinforced the government’s legitimacy, linking social and political order with the stability of the Chinese Communist Party. The frame also drew on China’s Confucian roots, emphasizing ethical and legal obligations as the foundations of social harmony.
The Bo Xilai incident began in November 2011, with the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood in a hotel room in Chongqing. However it was not until January 2012 when Bo was unexpectedly removed from his post as the mayor of Chongqing that anything appeared to be wrong. Then, when Wang Lijun, the Police Chief and Vice Mayor of the city of Chongqing, sought political asylum at the US Consulate in Chengdu in February 2012 the international and domestic media became fixated on the Bo Xilai case. Some Western media outlets framed Bo Xilai and his wife as manipulative politicians, while others framed the scandal as the tip of the iceberg of Chinese Communist Party officials’ corruption. The Chinese media’s cautious coverage became a news story in itself, especially in the wake of several high-profile censorship cases that had occurred within the last year.

When the Bo Xilai case broke, the Chinese government was going through a time of delicate transition in leadership from the 110th Congress to the 111th Congress. With the appointment of Xi Jinping to replace Hu Jintao as the Communist Party General Secretary came questions of Xi’s legitimacy and capacity to reform the Chinese political system which cast doubt on the Chinese Communist Party’s ability to rule effectively. Confronting a political scandal of the scale of the Bo Xilai case ran directly counter to the CCP’s goals, and it was in their interest to control their own reputation.

Framing is a strategy to manage and manipulate messages in order for an audience to perceive an issue a certain way. A frame can obscure or highlight elements of a story, depending on what message the audience should receive. The news media is a powerful tool that can be used to publish frames created by others, or can publish frames they create. As a result, the news media hold power over its audience whether they are
conscious of it or not. Framing has been studied in many disciplines; however, framing research in communications and news analysis is still relatively recent. Most research has studied framing in the American or Western context, which includes a free press and a democratically engaged public. However, the Chinese media environment is entirely different.

Exactly how much the Chinese government controls the news media is still unknown, but there is no dispute that in spite of reported reform the Chinese media remains under the influence of the Chinese Communist Party and serves its strategic purposes. This research paper examines the following research questions: How does the Chinese government use problem definition and cause identification to frame events in its media for US audiences? How do the frames reinforce the Chinese government’s legitimacy? These research questions will be answered using case study and content analysis methodology, building on framing theory. This research project will analyze the media coverage of the Bo Xilai incident as a case study to add to the limited in-depth research on framing in the Chinese media. The case study will focus on the coverage by CCTV News, which is the English-language news station that is broadcast in foreign countries.

*The Fall of a Party Star—A Brief Overview of the Bo Xilai Incident:*

The details of the case started emerging slowly after Wang’s trip to the US Consulate on February 6th 2012. According to Wang, Bo Xilai’s wife, BoGu Kailai, had murdered a British businessman named Neil Heywood in a hotel room in Chongqing. The death was blamed on a heart failure as a result of excessive alcohol consumption, and
Wang conspired with Bogu Kailai to cover up the evidence. No autopsy was done, and the body was quickly cremated. However, unbeknownst to Bogu Kailai and the other police involved, Wang had taken hair and blood samples from the body before it was cremated.

The month before he brought himself to the US Consulate Wang had a change of heart and tried to expose the case to Bo and was sharply rebuffed. The United States denied Wang political asylum, and Wang gave himself up to the Chengdu police. By this point, the story had attracted the attention of members of the international media, and the Chinese government could no longer ignore it. On April 11th, the government-run Xinhua News Agency issued a press release that was posted by the major national news outlets.¹

Bo Xilai was the charismatic mayor of the Northwestern city of Chongqing, a metropolis with upwards of 30 million residents. As with many prominent public officials, Bo came from Communist pedigree. His father, the elder Bo, was jailed in the Cultural Revolution (reportedly by Bo Xilai himself), but he rose back into political prominence during the post-Mao era and brought his son with him.² Bo Xilai then worked his way up the political ladder, instituting modernization policies and widespread anti-corruption campaigns in Dalian before being appointed the Party Secretary of the city of Chongqing in 2007.

¹ The press release said: “Comrade Bo Xilai is suspected of being involved in serious discipline violations. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has decided to suspend his membership of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau, and the CPC Central Committee, in line with the CPC Constitution and the rules and the rules on investigation of CPC discipline inspection departments. The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC will file the case for investigation.” David Bandurski, “Bo Xilai Scandals Top Today’s Headlines,” China Media Project, Journalism and Media Centre at the University of Hong Kong, April 11, 2012, http://cmp.hku.hk/2012/04/11/21195/.
Bo embraced the leftist ideals of egalitarianism, which implicitly critiqued the rising levels of income inequality resulting from the capitalist economic system supported by Party General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. However, Bo also had a host of enemies. Bo’s municipality-wide anti-crime and corruption campaign which targeted major organized crime bosses; however, critics allege that a few of Bo’s political enemies were integrated into these “purges” as well. Reports of his son’s and wife’s extravagant lifestyles, including his son’s attendance at Oxford and Harvard Universities, as well as reports of relatives with valuable real estate holdings that surfaced after Bogu Kailai’s trial showed that Bo himself was not the bastion of socialism that he purported himself to be. Having the Bo Xilai case erupt at a time when the micro-blogs such as weibo are reporting officials and their families driving expensive cars and sending their children to expensive private schools abroad, was extremely inopportune for the government, especially during such a delicate transition time.

Bogu Kailai was charged with intentional homicide in August 2012 by the Intermediate People’s Court of Anhui province, and in September Wang Lijun was charged with “bending the law for selfish ends, defection, abuse of power, and bribe taking.” According to a Xinhua News Report, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission determined that Bo had also committed discipline violations, including

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bribery and abuse of power, and had borne major criminal responsibility in his wife’s case. At the time of this study, the trial date had not yet been announced.

A Brief Introduction to CCTV and the Chinese Media System:

In spite of rapid reform over the past twenty years, the media in China has remained largely confined by an institutional and ideological framework. The Propaganda Department representatives control media and ideology, and are integrated into the Politburo, which is the ideological and political heart of the Chinese Communist Party. Journalists working for media organizations have been characterized as “dogs on a leash”, because there is simultaneously an expansion of investigative journalism and an increased recognition of journalism ethics, while still being heavily controlled by the government. The national media relies on licenses that are distributed by the Central government, and many media outlets still rely on government funding in order to compete effectively in the market. As a result, journalists working for government-owned organizations like CCTV have little incentive to improve content or challenge the government frame.

State-run media have become one of the most important elements of the Chinese soft power system; however, the Chinese media’s expansion into foreign markets is

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8 Lawrence and Martin, 24
10 Lawrence and Martin, 24
relatively recent. The Chinese government enthusiastically embraced Joseph Nye’s conception of soft power during the government of Jiang Zemin, inspiring them to expand their international media beyond the relatively defunct China Radio International. In 1991, the CCP developed the State Council Information Office (SCIO) to be the foreign face of the CCP’s Propaganda Department, with the goal of “explaining China to the world.” In 2002, the Chinese Communist Party initiated a program designed to “mak[e] media big and strong”, and have media that could compete in a global market. As was stated in a Xinhua News Release in 2009, “the Chinese government has begun to realize the importance of soft power, [and] hopes to strengthen China’s international influence through television and the Internet.” After the success of satellite media organizations like Al-Jazeera, the Chinese government began to expand their state-run broadcast television organization CCTV (China Central Television). CCTV-9, or China Central Television’s 24-hour English-language channel, began to broadcast over satellite in 2000.

Even though media organizations like CCTV have expanded and benefited from market-based reforms, their expansion into international markets is a result of the government’s push for international influence rather than an international demand. The first programs on CCTV-9 were cultural programs aimed to increase an international awareness of China’s cultural and political history, thus trying to capitalize on China’s cultural power for soft power gains. CCTV-9’s initial target audiences were foreign

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13 Edney, 902
15 Edney, 905
16 Zhang, 66
audiences and Chinese nationals living overseas; however, their market penetration was minimal.\textsuperscript{17}

In 2010 the channel was re-named CCTV News, and the number of news shows expanded, including targeted regional programs like Biz Asia America and Africa Live. The CCTV News website says that its stated goal is to contribute “greater diversity and wider perspectives in the global information flow” and provide “international audiences with a window into understanding China and the world at large.”\textsuperscript{18} The channel has hired foreign broadcasters, and has tried to imitate other international broadcasting giants like BBC News, Al Jazeera and CNN through their graphics and online resources. Currently, CCTV claims to cover over 85 million subscribers in more than 100 countries around the world.\textsuperscript{19} However, this statistic is misleading when placed in the context of their distribution strategy in the United States. CCTV News provided their programs and channel free of charge to cable providers in over 30 US cities, thus reaching their reported 85 million subscribers, although their actual viewership is much lower.\textsuperscript{20}

The Chinese government suffers from a perception of bias that is supported by its strong suppression of its domestic media.\textsuperscript{21} While the Chinese media has expanded and become more daring, censorship incidents like the Guangdong Province \textit{Southern Weekly} incident in early 2012 show that the Chinese government does not take direct opposition lightly.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17} Zhang, 60
\textsuperscript{19} CCTV News
\textsuperscript{20} Zhang, 62
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 65
\textsuperscript{22} In January 2012 the Guangdong newspaper Southern Weekly refused to run a government editorial, instead running an editorial of their own on government transparency. The Chinese
Although the Chinese government is heavily investing money into CCTV and other media like it, there have been no results to show that the frames are actually penetrating the global market. While these results can be argued of other media that is government-sponsored (platforms like Voice of America come to mind), China does not have credible independent media organizations like BBC News. The government is realizing that it has a credibility problem, but expanding its state-run media has not proven effective at legitimizing its news frames.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Literature Review: Approaching Framing Theory}

In approaching Chinese media frames, it is first important to trace the development of framing theory and examine the debate about how frames are created. Many scholars have argued that there is a much greater emphasis on the effects of framing, while in reality the process involved in frame creation is more important.\textsuperscript{24} There are three main schools of thought regarding the creation of frames: media organizational process, constructionist, and political power.

“Frame” is a term that has been applied in many different fields beyond communications including psychology, sociology, and political science to name a few. Specifically in media analysis and communications, framing is an analytical tool that can be used to explain “how messages are created, how they are processed, and how the
government pressured the editors to pull the story, which ignited a flurry of resignations, strikes and protests on the internet and nation-wide.
\textsuperscript{23} Zhang, 65
effects are produced.” Robert Entman defines framing in the media as “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] 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 for the item described.” This is primarily achieved using syntax, rhetoric, themes, scripts, images and labels.

It is also extremely important, especially when examining a topic as ambiguous and contested as media framing, that the terminology remains consistent throughout the process. A media frame has been connected to, but differs from, concepts such as “script” or “message”, which are tools used exclusively by the media as a simplification device when reporting news events. While scripts and messages are usually event and topic specific, frames represent “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion.” Therefore, frames are less obvious, but have a greater impact on the audience, than a message or script. It should also be separated from the term “bias”, which is the manifestation of systematic preferences of the media in favor of a political purpose.

Frames evolve to become schemas, which is “a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes.” According to scholars, frames are most effective when they tap

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25 Scheufele and Tewksbury, 12
28 Gitlin 1980, as cited in Scheufele 1999
29 Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." Journal Of Communication 57, no. 1, 2007, 166
into existing schemas and knowledge networks.\textsuperscript{31} Long-lasting and wide reaching schemas become entrenched in society’s culture and consciousness, becoming “paradigms”\textsuperscript{32} or “cultural phenomena”.\textsuperscript{33} The main debate between the media model and the other two schools of thought is whether an audience has the agency to affect the creation of the media frames through the acceptance or rejection of media frames that do not fit their schemas. The political power school of thought argues that this influence is limited, while the constructionist school of thought is founded on the concept of an audience- and culture-created framing pattern.

\textit{“Second-Level Agenda Setting” and the Media Organizational Process:}

Framing evolved as an offshoot of agenda-setting theory, which is the when the media makes topics salient in the public agenda.\textsuperscript{34} For example, when stories are highlighted on the front pages of newspapers or repeated multiple times over the course of a broadcast. According to these scholars, framing is considered “second-level agenda setting” because it is a tool used by the media to make news more salient through framing.\textsuperscript{35} In Ghanem’s model, the first level of agenda-setting theory is the transfer of an object’s salience from the media to the public agenda. Then in second level agenda-setting attribute salience (characterized by framing mechanisms, affective and cognitive elements) is transferred to the public agenda either in the form of object salience or

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\textsuperscript{32} Entman 1993
\textsuperscript{33} Gameson & Mogdiliani 1989
\textsuperscript{35} Ghanem 1997, Weaver, McCombs & Shaw 2004
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attribute salience.\textsuperscript{36} In simpler terms, Ghanem’s model asserts that framing incorporates both the transfer of objects to the public agenda, as well as how the coverage of the issue affects public attention to the topic or object.\textsuperscript{37}

The two main actors in the “second-level agenda setting” model are the media organizations and the audience, thus leading to the media organizational process school of thought. According to this school of thought, frames are made up of topic, presentation, and cognitive and affective attributes.\textsuperscript{38} Because the main actor involved in the creation of the frame is the media, there is an emphasis on the presentation (such as location, timing in a broadcast etc); however, the cognitive and affective attributes differentiate frames from first-level agenda setting. These cognitive and affective attributes access the public’s pre-existing knowledge networks and cognitive reasoning. Without this access, a frame will not make sense to the public and the topic will lose its salience. For example, a cognitive or affective attribute such as word choice or imagery will lead the viewer to connect a news story to a moral conclusion. It also important to note that the communication model is linear, not symmetrical, therefore the audience has no agency over the creation of the frames.

Because the main actor in the creation of frames in the media organizational process school of thought is the media, this approach to framing is not relevant to the Chinese media system. The media organizational process theory does not incorporate government influence at all, which is clearly not the case for the Chinese media system. Chinese journalists still consider themselves “journalists on a leash” and while they have the autonomy to consider design choices, the Chinese government still has the ability to

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\item[36] Ghanem, 4
\item[37] Ibid, 4
\item[38] Ibid
\end{itemize}
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establish topics off-limits or revoke publishing licenses for media organizations that try to oppose the mainstream news frame.\(^{39}\)

Many scholars also contest the characterization of framing as an extension of agenda setting theory, and argue that it should be explored using a separate research approach.\(^{40}\) Second-level agenda setting theory denies actors or influences beyond the members of the media and its organizational structure, as well as implies a lack of agency on the part of the audience that is consuming the frames.\(^{41}\) Scholars also argue that schemas are not only accessed by media frames, but are also constructed by media frames.

After distancing framing theory and research from agenda-setting theory, scholars focused on two different ways that frames can be created after accepting outside influence: political power, and constructivism. Although both of these approaches emphasize different factors, they agree that the creation of a frame involves competition and the struggle between different levels of analysis.

**Constructivism and Frames in Culture:**

According to the constructivist school of thought media frames can be viewed through three different levels of analysis: the textual level (created by the media), the cognitive level (created by the audience and existing cultural schema), and the extramedial level (created by frame sponsors).\(^{42,43}\) Therefore, frames are created as a

\(^{39}\) Pan, 99
\(^{42}\) While Gamson and Mogiliani (1989) attribute the term “frame sponsors” purely to commercial interests, other constructivist scholars have included other elites as frame sponsors.
\(^{43}\) Gamson & Mogiliani 1989, Van Gorp 2007
result of the dynamics and discourse between audiences and members of the news media.\textsuperscript{44} For example, if a frame resonates in a particular cultural context there will be more discussion in the public agenda and the frame will become self-reinforcing.

According to the constructivist school of thought, frames are made up of three parts: the manifest frame device (the words, images, presentation etc. that activate the schema), the central organizing theme (script or theme which gives the frame its structure), and the cultural phenomenon (that allows the audience to apply the frame to an existing archetype, myth or schema).\textsuperscript{45} The most important of these aspects is the cultural phenomenon, and together they form a “frame package.”\textsuperscript{46}

The constructivist school of thought assumes that the media has a relatively high level of influence on frame creation through media norms and practices; however, public discourse between an audience and the media is the most important factor in the creation of frames.\textsuperscript{47} It also assumes that an audience with agency is incorporated into the construction of the frame, and if presented with a dissonant frame the audience will reject it.\textsuperscript{48} The concept of news discourse and its effect on framing is a bridge point between constructivism and the political power school of thought; however, it only applies in a political system where unrestricted political discourse occurs.

Although CCTV-9 is technically broadcast to countries that operate with free speech, the audiences are not empowered enough to engage in a discourse directly with the frame sponsors and members of the media that create the text of the frame. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{44} Gamson & Mogdiliani 1989, Van Gorp 2007, Pan & Kosicki 1989
\textsuperscript{45} Gamson & Mogdiliani 1989
\textsuperscript{47} Gamson & Mogdiliani 1989, Pan & Kosicki 1993
this element of constructivism is not necessarily applicable to a case study in the context of the Chinese media system. Otherwise, the constructivist system would be applicable in this context because both the Chinese political system and the Chinese social system draw on historical cultural norms like Confucianism.

Also when placing a Chinese media source in an American cultural context, there is an element of cultural competition that is not evident when American media is released to an American audience. There are different cultural paradigms at work, and because Chinese culture and American culture are so different they naturally compete. Thus, the audience discourse cannot directly impact the media frames as the constructivist theory suggests.

*Political Power and Frame Competition:*

According to the political power theory, frames are emblematic of the greater power dynamics between elites, ideologies, the government, journalists, and the public. All the groups have agency in this school, however their power is distributed unevenly, which is shown in media frames. Entman directly establishes framing as a device used by political actors in competition by claiming frames are distinguished “by their capacity to stimulate support or opposition to sides in a political conflict.” The two models most often associated with frame creation in the political power school of thought are the “cascade network activation model,” and the “frame building” model.

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50 Entman, 2004, 6  
51 Entman 2004  
52 Scheufele 1999
The Cascade Network Activation Model approaches the creation of frames as a struggle between political elites and the media, in which the political elites often win as a result of the organization of the media structure. This model categorizes frames as information that originates in the executive branch, is then transferred to elites, then media, which creates news frames and then transfers them to the public. There are ways for the different levels to interact and create feedback that influences the frame; however, this influence is very limited. This model emphasizes the idea of “spreading network application”, which means that earlier frames that have become part of schemas are likely to influence all subsequent frames.

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53 Entman 2004, 12
54 Entman 1993, 2004
55 Lodge & Stroh as referenced in Entman 2004
While the dynamic between elites in frame creation, especially the top-down system evidenced in the cascade of information model, is the most applicable to the Chinese media system, there are multiple problems with applying it to this research question. First, the model is specific to the United States and the interaction between the Executive Branch and the US news media, while the Chinese government is structured very differently. Secondly, there is no feedback loop between the public and the government in the way that is displayed in the cascade model.

“Frame building” integrates elements of elite political influence, as well as schemas (which are characterized in the model as ideologies or attitudes). The Scheufele model (shown below in Figure 2) is a tool used to trace the creation of frames as well as the effects of frames, and is split between the macro (the media) and micro (audience) levels. For the purposes of this study only the macro level is relevant, because the effects of framing will not be addressed.

![Figure 2: Frame Building (Scheufele 1999)](image)

According to the model, frames are given to the media by external sources, which include organizational pressures within the media industry, ideologies and attitudes, as
well as by elites. The media then construct the frame as the audience sees it through the use of images, rhetorical devices etc, which is a process called “frame building.” Then after the frame has been set in audience frames through “frame setting”, framing is applied to the individual audience member’s cognitive reasoning, leading to the application of attitudes, attributions of responsibility, causal interpretations. These applications can then be transferred back to the journalists, creating a cycle of participation in the framing process.

What makes this framing model useful is its emphasis not only on power held by political actors and elites, but also the power of political and elite ideologies and attitudes. However, for the purposes of this study, only the frame building process will be examined, rather than looking at the individual effects of framing. In the Chinese context the media has very little agency in frame creation, therefore this study will also not incorporate Scheufele’s “journalists as audience” process.

Applying Theory to the Chinese Media Context:

Analyzing frames in the Chinese context requires a different approach than these schools of thought have defined because these schools of thought are based on Western (specifically US) media systems, while the Chinese media system is very different. Therefore, this study (and studies following it) requires a new approach to understanding frames in international media. Studies that have analyzed news frames in the Chinese media have largely assumed the political power approach to the creation of news frames,

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56 Scheufele 1999, 4
but argue that cultural paradigms and ideology also factor into the creation of news frames.\(^{57}\)

Some scholars argue that as a result of the rising number of journalists in China receiving training at US universities, and subsequently receiving Western-style ethics training, these frameworks can be applied to the Chinese context.\(^{58}\) Other scholars argue that the government has less control than it has in the past, but ideology is still the most important influences on news frames in the Chinese media, thus ascribing to the political power school of thought.\(^{59}\) However, the fact still remains that the Chinese State Radio and Television Administration can mandate the release of press releases and remove the licenses of news organizations that it thinks are failing their duty to the Party.

This study will incorporate ideas from constructionist theory, including the concept of cultural paradigms and archetypes, because they are common in the media frames associated with China. Confucianism is still very influential in Chinese culture, as is Maoist communist rhetoric. However, the dynamic between political forces and the media is particularly applicable in the current Chinese media system as it goes through its slow transition from an authoritarian system to a market-based system, therefore the political power and competition frameworks are the most applicable in this study. Ideology and political power are expected to be very influential and apparent in media frames.


\(^{58}\) See Luther and Zhou, 859

\(^{59}\) Luther and Zhou, 859
Methodology: Case Study and Content Analysis

Case study methodology focuses on a selected event with the intention of making it a representation of a larger theme.\textsuperscript{60} It is a valuable methodology when approaching narratives, making it the ideal methodology to analyze a news event. Drawing from the theories above, frames that are presented to a Chinese audience are very different than frames presented to an American audience because they are presented in a different political and cultural context. Therefore, rather than using Chinese news media sources to reach conclusions about the interaction between Chinese society and the Chinese government, as other Chinese framing studies have done, this case study will focus on texts from CCTV News which are intended for foreign audiences and Chinese nationals immersed in a foreign culture. Therefore, the case study will analyze the Chinese government’s use of the media to reach their foreign policy goals rather than their domestic policy aspirations.

The Bo Xilai case is very useful for analyzing frames because it references both social and political conflicts that are relevant in modern Chinese society. At the time of writing there had not been any academic research published on this case study. The case also illuminates elements of China’s political system that are being discussed both within China and from an outside perspective. China’s rapid economic transition has created class divisions and tensions, which also come in direct conflict with Communist social influences and rhetoric. There is a perception, which the Chinese government is actively combating, that corruption among Chinese officials is a serious problem.\textsuperscript{61} Bo Xilai and his wife were considered to belong to an upper-class that had experienced both economic

\textsuperscript{60} John Gerring, "What is a case study and what is it good for?" \textit{American Political Science Review} 98, no. 02 (2004): 341.

\textsuperscript{61} Lawrence and Martin
success in the traditional capitalist method (through Bogu Kailai’s law firm), as well as political success through their Communist Party pedigree. However, Bo’s expansive campaigns against inequality established him as a populist, and made him nationally more well-known than the majority of the Communist Party officials.

The case study will focus on content released by CCTV News, in particular six English-language news shows: News Update, Biz Asia, China 24, News Hour, and Asia Today. CCTV News is one of the most important elements of the Chinese government’s soft power strategy, and their goal is to use CCTV News to compete with other international news media outlets. After the success of Al Jazeera, both Russia and China have tried to replicate their success through expansion of their broadcast media, however it has not met the same success. Therefore, if the Chinese government were to advocate for a frame that contrasts with the accepted US frame broadcast over the traditional broadcast news outlets (ABC, CBS, NBC), CCTV News would be the outlet that it would appear on. The use of only one media outlet does limit the number of texts that can be analyzed, but it also allows for an in depth look without having to integrate structural elements like media organizational structure, funding discrepancies or discrepancies in broadcast location.

The most popular approach to analyzing media frames is through a content analysis, although discourse analysis is also popular. According to Entman, content analysis discourages the researcher from “treating all negative or positive terms or utterances as equally salient and influential.” Content analysis also allows the researcher to focus on one textual context, narrowing the actors and the goals involved in

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62 Zhang
63 Borah 2011, 255
64 Entman 1993, 57
the frame building process. Although content analysis can be quantitative or qualitative, this project will focus on qualitative methodology, specifically using the software NVivo as a tool to facilitate qualitative coding.

Broadcast media frames incorporate both visual frames and rhetorical frames. Depending on the framer, the emphasis can be on visual media or it can be on the text itself. Therefore, the visual results will be briefly discussed before going into greater detail with the textual analysis.

Sixty video clips within an eleven-month period (January to November 2012), ranging from thirteen seconds to eight minutes in length were transcribed and then coded using the NVivo software. The video clips were found in the CCTV News online archives, using the keyword searches “Bo Xilai”, “Wang Lijun”, and “Bogu Kailai”. Eleven of the stories were repeated and recycled with no changes; however, because these taped segments were used on four of the six different television shows, with six different broadcasters they were deemed salient. Repetition is also considered a tactic by the media to reinforce frames, therefore the news clips can be analyzed as separate news stories. Therefore, although the content and frames are the same, the fact that they were used multiple times is still pertinent to the research.

Qualitative content analysis is an approach whereby a researcher summarizes and codes a text in order to ascertain meaning. There were three stages of analysis used in this research: syntactical content analysis, thematic content analysis, and referential content analysis. In this case, the content coded first used syntactical content analysis to find latent meaning through tools such as a word frequency search, which evaluates the use of rhetoric. Then, those frequently used words were coded by the research in order to

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ascertain the manifest meaning (or thematic elements) of the work. When placed in a larger political and cultural context through the process of referential content analysis, these manifest meanings form frames. Referential content analysis is used to specifically evaluate frames, as it references existing normalized language.\(^{66}\)

It is important to note that the NVivo software does not play an active role in the last two steps. Rather, it acts as a tool to organize the information gathered in the first step. The researcher designs the coding structure and methodology themselves. Therefore, themes developed after a period of experimentation. In this case, NVivo was used to search all sources for specific words and phrases, and then organize them in nodes, which represented the themes.

One of the most challenging parts about engaging in a content analysis is that it can be very subjective, as the analysis is not necessarily based on numerical data or regressions, but rather on subjective codes that are identified by the researcher. Therefore, the researcher must keep in mind that another researcher should be able to approach the same texts and coding structures and reach the same conclusions.\(^{67}\)

However, some advocates of content analysis argue that qualitative coding can sometimes be more accurate than quantitative coding because the researcher has the ability (usually through modern software) to return to their results and revise their coding schemes without having to re-start their analysis.\(^{68}\)

There are limitations with this methodology, the most significant being the potential for bias coming from the researcher. Qualitative content analysis can only work effectively when the researcher comes in with no preconceptions, otherwise the

\(^{66}\) Franzosi, 558
\(^{67}\) Ibid, 572
\(^{68}\) Ibid, 575
researcher will clearly see what they wish to see. When analyzing a text using a method that relies on emphasis or de-emphasis of textual elements in order to form a hypothesis, a researcher’s personal biases and preconceptions will have a greater impact on results than quantitative methods will. If a researcher becomes fixated on only one theme because of a preconceived hypothesis, more important conclusions can be lost in the effort to study a text in depth. The propensity to focus on only one theme in a certain text or group of texts is also a limitation in content analysis research.

Another limitation in this study is the reliance on content that is posted on the CCTV site. That content is limited by the site administrators, who could have removed content they found offensive or objectionable. In a perfect situation there would be another source for the same material; however, availability of international media content outside official or sponsored sources is very difficult to find. Therefore, these conclusions will be based on the material available.

*Step 1: Frame Elements-Rhetoric, Imagery and Structure:*

Six English language shows were analyzed: Biz Asia America, China 24, Asia Today, News Hour and News Update. Six9 News Update had the most stories because their coverage followed an hourly news cycle. As a result, certain stories were repeated multiple times a day on select days to reinforce their message. The coverage also came in cycles, with certain stories covered for a small time span and then not covered in depth again. (See Table 1) Because the shows were separated by time, it was easier for the narratives to be clearly separated from each other and have clearly indicated frames. As a result, the coverage of the Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun cases were separated from the

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69 See Appendix A for full breakdown of video clips by time and show.
coverage of the Bogu Kailai case almost entirely. In order to clarify the results, the Bogu Kailai coverage was separated from the Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun coverage in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th># of Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/15/12-03/22/12</td>
<td>Jiang Dejiang replaces Bo Xilai as Party Chief of Chongqing Municipality</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/10/12-04/18/12</td>
<td>Bo Xilai charged with violations of Party discipline</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/26/12-07/27/12</td>
<td>Bogu Kailai and Jiang Zemin have been charged with the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/09/12-08/11/12</td>
<td>The ongoing trial of Bogu Kailai and Jiang Zemin.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/20/12-08/21/12</td>
<td>Bogu Kailai received a death sentence with a two-year reprieve for the murder of Neil Heywood.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/18/12-09/19/12</td>
<td>Wang Lijun stood on trial for “bribe taking” and “bending the law for personal gain”.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/24/12-09/25/12</td>
<td>Wang Lijun sentenced to fifteen years in jail.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/28/12-09/29/12</td>
<td>Bo Xilai was expelled from the Communist Party of China.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26/12-10/27/12</td>
<td>Bo Xilai was expelled from the CCP and an investigation began for his alleged criminal offenses.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the visual coverage of the Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun incident, and the Bogu Kailai case was confined to a very strict structure. The reports would start with either an introduction from an anchor at a news desk or an anchor standing in front of a screen. There were approximately twelve different broadcasters, including three non-ethnically Chinese reporters (two British and one American). The Western broadcasters were likely used to increase CCTV’s credibility with foreign audiences, who would be more likely to identify with and trust a Western face.

Sometimes the screen would feature a photograph relating to the case, but more often the screen simply provided the broadcaster with a non-descript background. The coverage was much more likely to use photographs of Bogu Kailai, Wang Lijun and Neil Heywood, while in twenty-eight stories that focused on Bo Xilai he was not pictured once. The photos of Wang Lijun were all of him at or leaving the courthouse, while there were four different photos of Bogu Kailai shown, only one of which were during the trial
time. This shows that the coverage of the Bo Gu Kailai trial was much more open, because there was simply more information given on the trial that an audience could interpret.

During the longer clips (more than thirty seconds) the broadcaster would shift to either a narration over a film clip or to a taped story from a contributor. For example, the April 11th coverage was so scripted that four shows, six broadcasters and eleven news clips said exactly the same thing, with no significant changes in rhetoric. These types of repeated stories were still considered significant because, according to framing theory, repetition reinforces the frame for an audience.

These taped segments were recycled through the six shows; however, the narrator would sometimes vary depending on the show. For example, on August 20th News Update aired a segment that included a long taped segment narrated by a female, Chinese reporter. On August 21st, the same segment was aired on Biz Asia America, narrated by a female American reporter. This was probably also meant to increase credibility for audience watching Biz Asia America.

With a few exceptions in the Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun coverage, quotes were narrated rather than recorded, and displayed on a plain blue screen. For example, on April 15th, a story aired on China 24 and News Update aired quotes from “citizens of all walks of life.” Rather than recording citizens saying the quotes, the quotes were displayed on a blue screen as the correspondent delivered a voice-over. Because these citizens were not portrayed, this contributed a lack of credibility to the authenticity of the quotes.

The official statement the CCP released to Xinhua News Agency was also treated as a quote, and would appear on the screen with a voice-over. This statement was aired eleven times overall, over the 11th and 12th of April. Because the statement was aired
without any commentary from the media or outside parties, this reinforced the CCP’s authority and conveyed that the government was in control of the story.

The lack of video support for the quotes leaves the audience with no context to judge whether or not the quotes are credible, which leaves all the interpretation of the news story in the hands of the framers. The standardized format of the news coverage and imagery also suggest that the news stories are not meant to contradict each other, or even add anything new to the story. In fact, the anchors did not appear exclusively with a single program, leaving the impression that the coverage of the Bo Xilai incident was highly centralized. Because there was very little discernable difference or evolution in the visual framing of the Bo Xilai case, rhetoric was emphasized more than imagery.

When looking at the quantitative results of a word frequency search in the coverage of the Bo Xilai incident it is important to first address the issue of significant and non-significant words. For example, “central” and “party” are both prominently featured in the coverage; however, the word “central” was most often used to refer to the Central Communist Party of China, and other government bodies. In the end, names of people, departments, bureaus and court systems were removed in order to focus on rhetorical choices rather than focusing on references to the actors involved. The tables below show the top twenty most frequently used words in the coverage of Bo Xilai’s case, and the top twenty most frequently used words in the Bogu Kailai case. (See Tables 2 and 3)

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70 For a complete record of the word frequencies, see Appendix A.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Weighted Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Similar Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>investigations</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>investigate, investigated, investigating, investigation, investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>law</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>law, laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>discipline, disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>case, cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crime</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>crime, crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violations</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>violated, violates, violation, violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rules</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>rule, ruled, rules, ruling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspected</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>suspect, suspected</td>
</tr>
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<td>murder</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>murder, murdered, murdering</td>
</tr>
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<td>decision</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>decision, decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>serious</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>serious, seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involved</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>involved, involvement, involves, involving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuse</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>abuse, abused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authority</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>authorities, authorities', authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defection</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>defected, defecting, defection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constitution</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>constituted, constitution</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Weighted Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Similar Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>defendants</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>defendant, defendants, defendants’, defended, defendants, defenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>case, cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>sentence, sentenced, sentences, sentencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trial</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>trial, trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murder</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>murder, murdered, murdering</td>
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<tr>
<td>verdict</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>verdict, verdicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotel</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poison</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>poison, poisoned, poisoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>former</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>former</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intentional</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homicide</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charges</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>charge, charged, charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crimes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>crime, crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investigation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>investigate, investigating, investigation, investigators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>announced</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>announce, announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victim</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>victim, victims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun’s actions were both defined as “discipline violations”, by the CCTV coverage. The word “discipline” was repeated both in statements by the CCP, and broadcasters themselves. Words such as “severe”, “important”, and “serious” were used nine, ten, and twenty-three times respectively when referring to the crimes. There was also a large emphasis on legal rhetoric such as “crime” and “law”. The coverage also re-introduced socialist and communist rhetoric. Bo Xilai was referred to as “Comrade” Bo Xilai nine times, and “socialist” was used to refer to the Chinese society, government and legal system ten times.

Step 2: Manifest Meaning and Frames:

Two distinct frames emerged from the coverage, which were much easier to distinguish once the coverage of Bogu Kailai was separated from the coverage of the Bo Xilai case. The Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun incidents were framed as “discipline violations”, which implies a dereliction of duty and emphasis on ethical responsibilities. In contrast, Bogu Kailai’s actions were framed as criminal actions. By defining the problems as such, the frames also justified their solutions: that Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun should be removed from their posts, and that Bogu Kailai should be brought to justice through the legal system. Both of these solutions identify a different authoritative body, and legitimize the outcomes of the case because they were appropriate means of addressing the problem at hand.

In the coding process, four themes emerged: ethics, law, power, and social harmony. These themes are based on the most frequent words that were extracted from

71 For a complete record of nodes and the coding structure, see Appendix A.
the data during the first step. The words were grouped into themes, and expanded to accurately describe the coverage as a whole. (See Table 4) Because the themes were drawn from the existing rhetoric, ethics and law do not necessarily conform to strict definitions but are placed in their cultural and political context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Node</th>
<th>Search Terms Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Discipline, ethics, duty, responsibility, violated, bent, bribe-taking, abuse, selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Law, crime, sentence, verdict, rules, trial, arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Rights, removed, suspended, expelled, will, power, interests, deprived, punishment, serve, system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Harmony</td>
<td>Rule of law, order, harmony, socialist, citizens, selfish, society, threat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethics was approached as a set of behavioral expectations that an individual in the Chinese socio-political context is expected to ascribe to. These ethical guidelines draw on Confucian themes of “duty”, emphasis on the society rather than the individual’s “selfish” needs, and “discipline”, which correlate to the Confucian idea of a society built upon hierarchal relationships. However, instead of officials having a responsibility to the Emperor, the highest rung of the social hierarchy is the Communist Party.

Phrases like “discipline violation” imply that there is an ethical code rather than legal code that relies on the commitment and character of public servants in order to maintain political stability. In fact, CCTV quoted a CCP scholar who said, “Observing discipline is a basic requirement for a CPC member. And the top discipline is to follow the Party’s political rules, to stand on the same side of the CPC Central Committee, with Hu Jintao as the general secretary, and fully implement their decisions.”

This implies that discipline is not a system of laws, but rather an ethical code that public servants commit to adopting. Public servants are not meant to speak out of turn, or have goals that

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72 China 24, April 18, 2012
conflict with the goals of the CCP. The use of the word “discipline” and the ethics frame also implies that without discipline the government would be unstable because the hierarchal system of the CCP would be subverted.

On the other hand, law was approached as a pre-determined set of institutions set up to distribute and remove power and rights. In the Chinese political system, the legislature (including the National People’s Congress) is more of a figurehead that simply approves legislation put forward by the Central Party. Law was referenced in the coverage in the context of crimes and criminal acts, which were distinctly different from the concept of “duty” and “discipline” that was associated with ethics.

References to the law were evenly split between the Bogu Kailai case and the Bo Xilai case. References to power and ethics were heavily skewed toward coverage of the Bo Xilai case. (See Table 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>References in Bogu Kailai Sources:</th>
<th>References in Bo Xilai Sources:</th>
<th>References in Wang Lijun Sources:</th>
<th>Total References:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Harmony</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Power was emphasized throughout the coverage, and the coding was approached through two sub-themes: the power of the government to act (“appoint”, “suspend”, “expel” etc), as well as the emphasis on the power of the people. The CCP and other government institutions hold power and have the ability to distribute it to others, while individual public servants (like Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun) are given power by citizens. For example, the media used quotes from citizens to emphasize that “power is held in the
hands of the people”, therefore, Bo Xilai’s actions were an abuse of the power he was given by the people.  

However, in the end the representation of power as being held by the people obscures the fact that the government acted unilaterally in its response to Bo Xilai. The government’s power to “expel” Bo Xilai from his position as Party Secretary, or “suspend” his membership in the Chinese Communist Party were left unquestioned, and all the quotes considered the government’s actions justified. The quotes emphasized that “the central authority’s swift decision showed its capability and will to safeguard the dignity of law.” The government’s will is considered synonymous with their ethical responsibility to maintain discipline, but the quote also implies that the “central authority” is the sole guarantor of rule of law, which is an important component of maintaining a stable government and society.

Social Harmony was one of the most important themes in the coverage, and the references were also evenly split between the Bo Xilai case and the Bogu Kailai case. Social harmony encompassed terms like “rule of law”, “order”, “harmony” and “stability”, all of which are connected to the Confucian ideal of a hierarchy that is maintained through the careful maintenance of social relationships. This ideal emphasizes loyalty, duty and power structures, all of which were framed as being violated by Bo Xilai, Bogu Kailai and Wang Lijun. Not only were their actions illegal or unethical, but they also damaged the stability of society itself. By hiding evidence of Bogu Kailai’s involvement in the murder of Neil Heywood, the court asserted that Wang Lijun had violated his duty and harmed society. In the Bogu Kailai case, the four accomplices

73 China 24, April 15, 2012
74 Ibid
received five to ten year sentences because their decision to help Bogu Kailai cover up the murder of Neil Heywood “brought extreme harm to society.”

Rhetoric used in quotes and by the anchors themselves time and time again reinforced that the most serious part of the Bo Xilai case was that their actions had harmed society.

All four themes were referenced again and again in the context of government institutions like the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC or the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau. Government institutions were referenced over 180 times, and in every single news clip. The table below represents a matrix made through NVivo, which gathers the references to government institutions with the four themes, thus providing a picture of the context in which institutions are mentioned. As evidenced by the table, government institutions were most often referenced in conjunction with the law.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A : Ethics</th>
<th>B : Law</th>
<th>C : Power</th>
<th>D : Social Harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because all four themes were framed with government institutions, the frames identify government action as the treatment recommendation for these problems. Thus, social harmony cannot be achieved without a strong government, and rule of law cannot succeed without the will of the Communist Party government. While the frames rhetorically claim that in the socialist system all citizens are afforded equal rights and power, the manifest meaning implies that the socialist system is also endowed with the power to take away those rights if it wishes, if it thinks that the individual would harm society as a whole.

\[75 \text{News Update, August 20, 2012}\]
Step 3: Implications in the Broader Cultural and Political Context:

When applying Entman’s four purposes of media framing, cause identification, problem definition, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation, the goals were very clear. The rhetoric used by CCTV in the coverage of the Bo Xilai incident failed to identify a cause; however, the definition of the problem was very clearly and carefully framed. In the end, the coverage was both looked at as a whole, and as separate stories divided among the three main actors: Bo Xilai, Wang Lijun, and Bogu Kailai. The coverage defined Bo Xilai and Wang Lijun’s actions as “discipline violations” rather than illegal acts, while frames defined Bogu Kailai’s case as a crime that should be addressed through legal channels.

One of the most significant purposes of the framing was to downplay institutional weakness and problems as a cause of the Bo Xilai scandal. Perceived corruption in the Chinese Communist Party has been an issue discussed widely, especially over the internet. Reports of officials abusing their power, as well as mysteriously having the financial means to live opulent lifestyles and send their children to universities and private boarding schools abroad have damaged the Communist Party’s image over the past twenty years. Having an official with as high a profile as Bo Xilai become embroiled in a corruption scandal this large reinforces those perceptions of the Communist Party and delegitimizes the government. Therefore, throughout the framing of the Bo Xilai case, the word “corruption” was only used twice, and never used to identify Bo Xilai’s actions. Instead, synonyms such as “abused his power”, “bribe taking”, and “bending the
law for selfish gain” were all used. All of these synonyms indicate personal actions, while the word corruption implies a weakness in the institutions overall.

Having the Bogu Kailai case emerge at the same time as the Bo Xilai scandal could have been a blessing in disguise for the Chinese Communist Party. While Bo Xilai’s actions reflected poorly on the CCP, especially because of his high profile, addressing Bogu Kailai’s case through the courts gave the government the flexibility to legitimize their relatively authoritarian response to Bo Xilai. The coverage of Bogu Kailai’s trial could be more open, showing that the government could still rely on the justice system to address crimes, giving the government the flexibility to expel Bo Xilai from the Party. CCTV’s coverage of Bogu Kailai’s trial included more details, as well as more varied scripts, than the coverage of either the Bo Xilai or Wang Lijun incidents. On average, the clips were longer, and incorporated more video footage than the coverage of Bo Xilai incident did.

However, with the actors in the incident very rarely appeared on camera or spoke. Wang Lijun and Bogu Kailai’s responses to the verdict were recorded, which was the first time in the coverage that the main actors themselves had been able to speak on camera. Both of the responses were repentant, and positive towards the government’s response. Wang Lijun said he would “spend the rest of my life repenting and making amends” for his actions. Because the actors were only spoken about instead of pictured, the coverage emphasized the government and the frame became a thematic of the government fighting an enemy.

Both frames also tried to legitimize the government through displaying only positive reactions to the Chinese government’s decision-making. When “quoting”
citizens, there were no dissenting opinions displayed. For example, a quote in an April 15th News Update said, “The central authority’s swift decision shows its capability and will to safeguard the dignity of law, and China’s worldwide image of a socialist country.” Even Bogu Kailai, in her only quote displayed on CCTV, said, “I think the sentence is just. It has shown that the court is especially respectful of law, truth and life.” Instead, every quote emphasized the government’s “commitment” to enforcing discipline and rule of law, which legitimized the government’s response to the incident.

The openness of Bogu Kailai’s trial in contrast to the closed nature of Bo Xilai’s case was a direct response to Western media speculations that the trials would become “show trials” that would only serve to give off the appearance that the case was going through legal channels. This frame was reinforced by the fact that Bogu Kailai’s lawyers were reported to be giving their “opinions”, rather than their evidence or defense during the court case.76 Although Bogu Kailai’s trial was open and footage was aired on CCTV News, this was only at the level of imagery, which did not support the openness and transparency frame that the government was trying to sponsor.

This goal of minimizing the perception of government weakness is also crucial when considering that the Bo Xilai scandal happened as the Communist Party was preparing for the 111th National People’s Congress and CCPCC, which would announce the political transition from Hu Jintao to relative newcomer Xi Jinping. Unlike Bo, Xi was not a well-known politician with prominent, successful anti-corruption campaigns and strong records in urban economic growth. Bo was supposed to play a large role in the new administration, and his fall had the potential to seriously impact Xi’s administration.

76 News Update, CCTV News, August 20, 2012
In order to fully understand the reason that the government-influenced media chose to emphasize this frame in its English-language coverage, it is important to return to the importance of social harmony in Chinese society and politics. Not only does the Chinese government seek social harmony inside the country, it also promotes the perception that it seeks to have a more harmonious world globally. This approach to foreign policy gets at the crux of the framing of the Bo Xilai incident: the Chinese government needs to project an image of internal social harmony in order to legitimize its own claims in the foreign policy arena. As scholars have argued, China has taken on a unique approach to soft power whereby internal and external power are intrinsically linked, and the state has become a valuable soft power resource. Because these frames are targeting foreign audiences, the goals of the Chinese government in controlling the frames are different than they would be for internal audiences. Instead of only using framing to compete with Western news frames, the government also needs to utilize news frames to legitimize itself inside and outside the country.

Conclusion:

As anticipated, frames were directly created and distributed by a central authority. The coverage overall was overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the Central Communist Party of China. No dissenting opinions were portrayed, even the defendants were supportive of the institutional verdicts. However, the sharp separation of the coverage of Bogu Kailai and Bo Xilai was unexpected. Even though the stories would often reference the other narrative, they were distinctly two different narratives that did

78 Yu Keping, Men Honghua referenced in Hayden, 182
not overlap in terms of actors, timelines or implications. The coverage clearly defined the problems; however, it neglected to determine a cause of Bo Xilai, Bogu Kailai and Wang Lijun’s actions.

The government struggled to create a strong frame in this case more than it had in previous corruption scandals partly because of Bo Xilai’s high profile, but also because of the growth in an internet dialogue within China. In spite of government efforts to block search terms and crack down on internet discourse during the eight months the scandal developed, intelligent, curious citizens and bloggers evaded government censors and developed their own discourse that was unique in the wider context of global media.79 The internet has become one of the greatest resources for accessing different media frames; however, this does not mean that the power of dominant frames is diminished by more options. Further research should no longer only investigate content that is produced by mainstream news organizations like CCTV News. The conflicts that say the most about the discourse surrounding cases like the Bo Xilai scandal are held on micro-blogging sites like weibo.

Perhaps researching CCTV News says more about the Chinese government, and its institutions, than it can predict shifts in China’s political ideologies in response to the broader debate on socialism’s place in China’s society. The Chinese government was under threat by the unraveling of the Bo Xilai case, and the framing response showed their approach in dealing with change. The government retreated to cultural staples like social harmony that have in part formed the foundation of China’s cultural paradigms, which have also dictated Chinese foreign policy. Without the ability to present a strong

front the Chinese government does not have the legitimacy that it needs, whether it is in international politics or in the discussions on micro blogs. This is why framing in Chinese media that is broadcast to foreign governments should not be so quickly dismissed, because as little credible news value as it has, it still has insight into the goals of the Chinese government as it deals with domestic crises on the world stage.


Pan, Zhongdang, “Media Change Through Bounded Innovations: Journalism in China’s Media Reform”, *Journalism and Democracy in Asia.*


