A Framing Comparison of the United States and Hong Kong: Individualism and Collectivism in the Coverage of the Newtown Mass Shooting

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Xiu Li
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This thesis titled
A Framing Comparison of the United States and Hong Kong: Individualism and Collectivism in the Coverage of the Newtown Mass Shooting

by

XIU LI

has been approved for
the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Michael Sweeney
Professor of Journalism

Scott Titsworth
Dean, Scripps College of Communication

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ABSTRACT

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A Framing Comparison of the United States and Hong Kong: Individualism and Collectivism in the Coverage of the Newtown Mass Shooting

Director of Thesis: Michael S. Sweeney

This study examines cross-culture differences in media framing, particularly regarding the degree of Individualism-Collectivism. Based on the first two weeks of coverage of the Newtown mass shooting, similar framing patterns were found between U.S. and Hong Kong newspapers. Both newspapers chosen for this study, regardless of their communities’ IC degrees, highlight the collective actors in primary topic and attribution of responsibility, and rely on individuals and collective informants equally. The results of this study indicate that cultural differences among journalists appear to be fading, especially in the globalized era. The globalization process which promotes unification of cultures possibly erases the IC difference in journalistic practice.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On December 14, 2012, a mass shooting took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, with twenty children and six adult staff members killed. The shooting received intense media attention, both in the U.S. and internationally due to its scale and severity, especially during the two weeks after the tragedy.

According to Leary et al. (2003), school shootings have received continuing national attention since 1995, as opposed to sporadic attention before that in the United States, and much research has been conducted on the dynamic process of news production. Nevertheless, comparison between cross-cultural and cross-media coverage on a macro level has a lesser voice in the academic field.

The vast amount of response internationally toward the Newtown mass shooting casts an interesting question about the plausible influence of cross-cultural differences on journalistic practice. Each culture has its own attitudes, values and beliefs shaped, to a large extent, by its inner philosophy, ethics and art (Singh, Huang and Thompson, 1962). In the years since Singh, Huang and Thompson’s study, globalization, especially through the progress in social media and the Internet, may have diminished certain cultural differences, making the routines of news outlets more alike. The development of digital technology and news distribution infrastructures enables the swift flow of information almost anywhere in the world. Friedman (2006) wrote that new technologies have leveled the world’s economic playing field, eliminating barriers of time and space, by empowering individuals at the expense of governments and corporations. His metaphor for this ongoing process is reflected in the title of his book: *The World Is Flat.*
Nevertheless, with the march of globalization, the anticipated convergence of wholly integrated international journalism with similar standards and routines has not appeared. “Globalization has not produced international media,” wrote Duke University sociology Professor Emeritus Joel Smith (Smith, September, 2003, p.525). There persist substantial differences in journalistic practice among nations as journalists as well as editors are cultivated and socialized in and by different culture-domestic environments (Hanitzsch, T., 2007; Nossek, H., 2004; Lee et al., 2002).

Hofstede (1980; 1983) labeled four dimensions — power distance, uncertainty avoidance, Individualism-Collectivism (IC), and masculinity versus femininity — to be related to very fundamental problems that face any human society. Psychologists and anthropologists have consensus on the concept of IC (Hui and Triandis, 1986). In brief, individualism is the emotional independence of groups or societies, and the basic unit of survival is individual; whereas collectivism is interdependence, even to the extent of submerging the individual in groups or societies, and the basic unit of survival is collectivities (Hofstede, 1983; Hui, 1988).

As one of the key cultural dimensions, IC is found to be a critical determinant in the process of decision making and conflict solving (Leung, 1987; Hui, 1988). The difference in IC among cultures is supposed to influence and be reflected through media framing, backed up with cultural values and beliefs. This study compares the print coverage of the Newtown, Connecticut, shooting between the United States and Hong Kong, and explores whether IC influences framing differences on the coverage of school shootings.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing in Mass Communication

Framing essentially involves promotion of certain information to the public. Framing means “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p.52). Across societies, media are integral to and at the forefront of framing by providing needed information and assisting readers in making sense of the event (Hawdon et al., 2012; Ryan and Hawdon, 2008). In the process of rendering news comprehensible to an audience, framing is virtually inevitable as reality itself is too multifaceted to be comprehended whole, and the process is most visible when an issue or event is controversial (Birkland and Lawrence, 2009).

Scheufele (1999) summarized three potential sources capable of influencing the process of framing building. First is journalistic-centered influence, such as ideology, attitude, and professional norms; second is organizational routines, such as the political orientation of the medium; and third is external sources, for instance, political actors, authorities, interest groups and other elites.

Journalists and editors who are concerned with institutional constraints and self-legitimization of the journalism profession produce news that resonates with cultural beliefs and values within a particular community. The specific collective frame used when reporting a particular issue is the media lens adopted by journalistic practice. Notably, the extent of framing through a collective lens may differ depending on a nation’s cultural disposition (Kwon and Moon, September, 2009). Thus, for example,
media in two distinct countries may frame the same events in different ways, in order to resonate with their audiences.

Empirical research on framing can be divided into studies on media frames and audience frames (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). A media frame serves as “attributes of the news itself” (Entman, 1991, p.7), which propagates ideologies and information by media outlets. An audience frame is specified as “information-processing schemata” of individuals (Entman, 1991), or “internal structures of the mind” (Kinder & Sanders, 1990, p.74), which guides an audience to interpret and process information. A media frame, as its appellation suggests, is distinguished by highlighting or downplaying certain facets of a news context by reporters through media outlets. An audience frame serves as the audience’s cognitive comprehension of information received. For example, journalists apply one media frame and blame easy gun acquisition as the culprit of the Newtown tragedy while audiences might have their own frames and attribute the cause of the massacre to other things.

Media frames could be analyzed by function into two categories, episodic frame and thematic frame (Iyengar and Simon, 1993), or in other words, issue-specific news frame and generic news frame (de Vreese, Peter and Semetko, 2001). An episodic frame or issue-specific frame pertains to particular topics or news events while a thematic frame or generic frame is broadly applicable to a series of different news contexts that share the same subject (de Vreese, Peter and Semetko, 2001; Iyengar and Simon, 1993). In other words, the episodic form tends to depict concrete instances with an event-oriented approach and is employed more often in journalistic practice. The thematic one, on the
other hand, emphasizes general outcomes and statistical evidence. For instance, news stories that focus on the event of the Newtown shooting adopt the episodic form whereas articles that discuss school violence employ the thematic frame.

In general, episodic framing is supposed to achieve less “objectivity” for the whole picture of news events, as significant issues will be neglected should they be deemed not newsworthy by “gatekeepers”; thematic news framing, for the same reason, could be vulnerable to bias and editorializing (Werder, 2002; Iyengar and Simon, 1993).

Framing School Shootings

To keep a story fresh and moving, journalists shift among a variety of frames and emphasize different aspects of an incident over time. Chyi and McCombs (2004) developed a two-dimensional, i.e. time and space, measurement scheme, as an analytical framework for school shootings. The first is the space dimension, which consists of five levels: individual, community, regional, societal and international, ranging from the micro to the macro. The second is the time dimension, which shifts a news story’s focus from providing background information or tracing related events in the past to predicting further developments or evaluating the impact of the incident.

Muschert and Carr (2006) assessed the utility of the framework and applied it to study nine school shootings from 1997 to 2001. The news media initially discussed school shootings as an issue of concern primarily to the communities in which they occurred, and of present-tense concern; as time lapses, the societal impact of the shootings increasingly gained more ground, and so did both the present and future
concerns (Chyi and McCombs, 2004; Muschert and Carr, 2006). In other words, the news changed its frame from an immediate, community-based tragedy to something broader, such as an explanation for why the tragedy occurred.

Muschert and Carr (2006) assert that the news outlets have turned catastrophic events into predictable news “products”—“first the raw facts, then the search for meaning, then the assignment of blame, followed by the final wrap-up” (p.30). After providing the objective facts for the first few days, journalists are pushed to immediately find meaning in a complex tragedy of such magnitude that may never render sufficient explanation and agree on exactly what to blame. Forced to explain an ambiguous disaster and address why such social trauma occurred immediately, media gloss over reality and do not intensively question all potential elements and the complex connections behind them.

The media have attributed school shootings to various causes, such as lax gun control laws; Goth culture; and pop-culture media products such as recorded lyrics, movies, violent video games and the Internet (Leary etc., 2003; Consalvo, 2003; Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell, 2003). The news’ fascination with “meaning” or “blaming” has been called degrading and desensitizing as reporters are witnesses rather than oracles (Caseay, 1999; Muschert and Carr, 2006; Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell, 2003). Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell (2003) simply concede “that an accurate and fair assessment of blame was impossible” (p.87).

Frymer (2009) argued that the media coverage of the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado in 1999 turned the perpetrators into a class of vicious and alien
American youth who were identified as the causal contributors of the tragedy while “there was no ultimate Reality or Truth underneath the crime” (p.1, 390). Similarly, Ott and Aoki (2002) stated that the tendency of detailed reporting of the criminals’ personality was viewed as a scapegoat mechanism that cleansed the public of the guilt associated with prejudice, hatred and violence. By focusing on the alienation of the perpetrators, the audience could attribute the motive of the shooting to the particular person, rather than a social problem. Leavy and Maloney (2009) confirmed the existence of the scapegoat mechanism in their study, which showed that when the perpetrator was a member of a minority group with a lower than average income, his race and socioeconomic situation received more explicit coverage. Besides, such framing of public trauma resulted in only symbolic resolution instead of a lesson for all involved (Ott and Aoki, 2002).

Popular-culture products, particularly those containing violent words and images, were also introduced by journalists as possible contributors to school shootings (Consalvo, 2003; Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell, 2003). Nevertheless, a report released by the U.S. surgeon general stated that exposure to media violence and long-term aggression were not connected and the only correlation was a short-term link (hours to days after exposure) (Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2001).

Leary et al. (2003) in their case study identified rejection by peers as a factor of a higher risk to perpetrate aggression, especially when combined with other factors such as psychological problems, interest in guns or explosives, or fascination with death.
The voluminous coverage of school shootings itself has raised questions of the potential jeopardy of media coverage of violence to actually contribute to further violence (Casey, 1999). When the public was immersed in vivid descriptions of how the Columbine massacre took place, Casey (1999) questioned whether such coverage might inspire a disturbed teen to be a dark celebrity, and whether hyper-sensitized officials might see every kid in black T-shirt as a “ticking time bomb” (p.33).

Although considerable research has been conducted to analyze the media coverage of school shootings, there is a lack of cross-national comparative studies (Hawdon, Oksanen and Rassanen, 2012). Hawdon, Oksanen and Rassanen (2012) investigated how reporting varied between the Virginia Tech University Shootings in the U.S and the Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings in Finland, in 2007 and 2008 respectively. They found that the coverage of the Virginia Tech tragedy was more victim-focused, with portrayal of details of their lives. In addition, the U.S. reporting relied more on local informants than did that of Finland; the concerned community and its residents were depicted by American journalists more as subjects rather than as objects receiving assistance.

Kwon and Moon (2009) compared U.S. and Korean newspapers and blogs about the Virginia Tech campus shooting and identified cross-media differences in the salience of collectivistic storytelling. They found high salience of collectivism in the Korean news coverage framing and a paucity in that of the U.S., which indicated that journalistic news construction is susceptible to the nation’s culturally contingent values. In the research, Kwon and Moon (2009) observed that a universalized framing pattern existed to some
extent, despite national differences—individual and societal aspects were emphasized and the criminal coverage rather than victims was given a priority.

“Cross-national comparison is a useful approach to discover how macro-leveled values are reflected in news framing” (Kwon and Moon, 2009, abstract). The Newtown mass school shooting received media attention worldwide, but no one has yet compared its coverage between two countries with various collectivism levels. Due to the scarcity of cross-national research of media coverage of school shootings, this study fills the void.

Framing with Culture Orientation across Nations

For the journalistic profession, the concept of objectivity supposes that anyone from any background should report the same story the same way. It posits that an individual journalist’s own education, family, and culture, as well as other factors, should not affect the construction of a news story. However, journalistic practice is infused with national or cultural orientation. International journalism research has produced much evidence in support of the view that the journalism profession is shaped through twofold, universalized occupational culture and national culture; framing is the interplay of journalism routines and surrounding cultural values and beliefs (Nossek, 2004; Clausen, 2004; Kwon and Moon, 2009). Leavy and Maloney (2009) also observed that social and historical context influences what the media focus on to a large extent.

“Substantial differences between national journalistic cultures persist” (Hanitzsch, 2007, p.368). By deconstructing the concept of journalism culture, Hanitzsch (2007) identified prevalent ideology in one culture as a principal constituent. Analyzing the
coverage of the Fourth UN Conference and the NGO Forum in Beijing, in 1995, Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (2000) found evidence of an anti-communist and an anti-feminist tendency in an American press that was under the influence of dominant ideology in the U.S. society. Similarly, Reta (2000) found that the American democratic values that encouraged negotiation, reconciliation, and free and fair elections were a major source of framing in the U.S. media when covering the issues and actors in the 1994 South African elections. Werder (2002) stated that understanding a culture and the operation of media within that particular culture, could help explain why the U.K. and German print media framed the introduction of the Euro currency with discernible differences.

Individualism-Collectivism (IC), as a cultural variable, has been employed to emphasize the social-interactional nature of behavior and to describe the behavior of individual personality (Hui and Triandis, 1986; Singh, Huang and Thompson, 1962). Absorbing prevailing values and collecting life experience in one society, individuals are products of a national culture, though diverse in personality. Journalists are also reared and raised in one particular cultural surrounding and thus, they and their news articles are prone to be influenced by cultural predispositions. The difference in IC among cultures is believed to be a determinant on the process of media framing.

To present the fundamental differences in the way people with different nationalities perceive and interpret their world, Hofstede (1983) accessed data from a large survey project that was conducted among industrial employees from no less than 67 countries about work-related values. By analyzing parts of the survey questions and
combining scores, Hofstede came up with an Index Value for the four cultural dimensions. In terms of the IC index, the United States scored 50 out of 50 on the scale—the highest rating for individualism—followed by Australia, 49; and Britain, 48. At the low end of the scale, Taiwan scored 10; South Korea, 11; Singapore, 13-14; and Hong Kong, 16.

Of the 50 countries and regions valued for individualism, English-speaking nations are the most individualistic whereas regions with a Chinese background are on the extreme collectivistic side of the scale (Hofstede, 1983; Leung, 1987). Singh, Huang and Thompson (1962) also found in a comparison of the values held by American, Chinese and Indian students, the Chinese ranked highest in society-centered orientation, whereas Americans ranked highest in self-centered orientation.

To find out the influence of the two ideologies on media coverage, the media of Hong Kong and for comparative purpose, those in the U.S., would be ideal options as they are on the opposite ends of the IC scale while sharing much in common.

Media censorship in mainland China is oriented toward attempting to forestall (potential) collective activities (King et al., 2013). For instance, on the same day of Newtown mass massacre, a man with a knife wounded 22 students and an adult at HeNan Province, Central China. The information was sealed off by the local government by refusing to allow interviews and the incident received scarce coverage by Chinese media. Meanwhile the state broadcaster, CCTV, reported the Newtown tragedy continuously and even contributed a special column analyzing specifics, root causes and aftermath.
Despite the voluminous reporting of the Newtown massacre, the media of mainland China were deemed not suitable for this study, as Chinese media when covering U.S. news often emphasize human rights transgressions, especially gun attacks, to divert attention and highlight the superiority of China's rule of law to America's (Coonan, 2013). It is hard to identify whether the Chinese media’s focus on collectivity of the tragedy was caused by governmental censorship or inner culture predisposition.

Unlike mainland China, where the media are under stringent governmental censorship, media in Hong Kong enjoy a more liberal environment. “With the exception of the Hong Kong press, Chinese media still belong to the government,” wrote media historian Betty Winfield (Winfield et al., summer, 2000, p.323). While citizens of Hong Kong are ruled under one of the most capitalistic systems that exposes them to individualist ideology for more than a century of British rule, they originate from a culture where the collectivist Confucianism and Buddhism prevail. Exposed to individualist values as they have been, collectivist virtues are still salient (Hui, 1988). Hong Kong, where the majority speak Cantonese, which adheres to traditional Chinese patterns, is comparable culturally to mainland China while economically and legally comparable to the U.S. (Ralston et al., 1992). These two regions, the U.S. and Hong Kong, are similar in media law, economic and educational environment, yet differ greatly in terms of language and cultural heritage.

Based on the discussion above, this study explores whether there are consistent and distinguishable framing patterns on the Newtown mass shooting and whether these patterns differ from each other according to the degree of a culture’s predisposition to IC.
RQ: What effect(s) would the IC level of a certain society have on the media interpretation of the Newtown massacre and whether the media from the U.S. and Hong Kong would take on different frames?

Framework

To examine framing patterns of the coverage of the massacre between the U.S. and Hong Kong, this study analyzes relevant news articles from three aspects: news sources, the prevailing topic and attribution of responsibility (Table 1). The news articles, especially those presented as hard news, express explicitly what the principal topic is in the headline and in the first three paragraphs at most. Therefore, the study examines the headline and the first three paragraphs for what the news article mainly depicted for the audience and the whole story for what kind of news sources were selected by journalists and what were attributed as the causes of the tragedy.

The media spectacle of the incident is a dynamic process over time and the framing pattern changes accordingly. The pattern of the frame is expected to change over the lifespan of the coverage, indicating a shift in focus from the “specific to the general—from reports on personal details to discussion of violence as a social problem” (Chyi and McCombs, 2004, p.29). Therefore, the framing pattern is examined along with the time span of the news coverage, which is two weeks following the incident.

The U.S. is a highly individualistic nation (Hofstede, 1983) that values individual pursuits while Chinese culture for centuries, especially Confucianism and Buddhism, emphasizes collectivism and social harmony (Winfield et al., 2000).
<table>
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<th>Frameworks</th>
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| **Primary Topic** | Describe individuals (*including perpetrator, victims or any individual NOT associated with any organizations or government*)  
Describe collectivities (*including Newtown community, the nation as a whole, national organizations, Gun laws and gun control policy, school safety etc.*). |
| **Attribution of Responsibility** | Blame individual (*including peer rejection, bullying and abuse, psychological or psychiatrist problems, interest in guns and explosives, influence of family members*)  
Blame society (*including lax gun-control policy, society-wide moral decline, Goth culture, and exposure to violence through media*). |
| **Sources** | Rely on individual informants (*including Newtown residents and any individual NOT associated with any organizations or government*)  
Rely on national level informants (*including national or federal governmental officials, national organizations, and professionals and experts*). |

The tragedy is domesticated international news for Hong Kong and domestic-level news for the U.S.. Based on previous research discussed above, it is assumed that Hong Kong news articles will present attributes of collectivism more than the U.S. counterparts. It is hypothesized that the principal topic of the media of U.S. would be about individuals,
whether about the details or reactions of the perpetrator, victims, or any other individuals; the Hong Kong media would report more about collectivities, such as the misery and reactions of the Newtown community, the National Rifle Association, or the nation as a whole.

H1a: The media from U.S. would focus more on individuals as principal topic than would the media of Hong Kong

H1b: The media from Hong Kong would focus more on collectivities as principal topic than would the media of U.S.

The Newtown school massacre has already triggered a nation-wide gun-control debate in America, with many accusing the National Rifle Association and the gun-control laws for the tragedy. According to certain researchers (Caseay, 1999; Muschert and Carr, 2006; Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell, 2003), the causes are almost impossible to distinguish exhaustively for an event of such magnitude. Media are still seeking what is behind the tragedy. It is hypothesized that the cultural tendency of collectivism in Hong Kong would lead the media to attribute responsibilities at the societal level whereas the media of the U.S., which are born and matured under an individualistic ideology, would blame individual factors more.

H2a: The media from U.S. would attribute causes to individuals more than would the media of Hong Kong

H2b: The media from Hong Kong would attribute causes to collectivities more than would the media of U.S.
The Chinese notion of fixed truth — that truth is a collective one and the concept of truth cannot be discerned by individuals (Winfield et al., 2000) — is contrasted with Western philosophy that stresses the individual’s pursuit of truth. Thus, it is hypothesized that the U.S. media would refer to local sources more and to national level opinions less; in terms of the media of Hong Kong, vice visa.

H3a: The media from U.S. would refer more to individual informants as sources and less to national-level sources.

H3b: The media from Hong Kong would refer more to national-level informants as sources and less to individual sources.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

This study explores what effect(s) would the Individualism-Collectivism (IC) degree of a certain community have on the media interpretation of the Newtown massacre and whether the media from the U.S. and Hong Kong would take on different frames.

Articles were selected from the *New York Times* (NYT) for the U.S. and *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) for Hong Kong. Both papers are recognized as the paper of record for their audience and have a nationwide reputation for excellence in journalism. As the longest-running daily newspaper in Hong Kong, *SCMP* enjoys the largest general circulation. The newspaper is renowned for its authoritative and influential reporting and is highly regarded by researchers for the newspaper's editorial perspective (Arbor, 2014, January 27; Yuk-hang, 2013). As the most award-winning newspaper in the U.S., the *NYT* is committed to high-quality journalism, and focuses on journalism to the exclusion of other businesses, according to its publisher (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007).

The retrieved period was from December 14, 2012, the day of the shooting, to December 28, 2012 (in Hong Kong time, from December 15, 2012 to December 29, 2012). The amount of coverage peaked immediately after the incident and diminished rapidly during the third week (Chyi and McCombs, 2004). In the first few days, both the individual and collective actors were salient, but over time, the media spectacle shifted away to the discussion of social importance (Chyi and McCombs, 2004; Muschert and Carr, 2006). Therefore, the framing pattern is examined for two weeks following the tragedy.
Articles for the *NYT* were taken from National Newspapers Expanded and *SCMP* from its online archives. The searching keyword was “Newtown mass shooting.” All the news stories and thematic articles relating the school shooting were coded, excluding articles from opinion sections such as editorials and letters, as the study focuses on the framing of professional journalistic practice. Other keywords, such as “Sandy Hook school shooting” yielded less number of articles, not as inclusive, either. For instance, only two thirds the number of articles was found when searching with the “Sandy Hook school shooting” than “Newtown mass shooting” within *NYT*.

The numbers of analyzed articles were 57 and 24 for *NYT* and *SCMP*, respectively, and each story was numbered randomly. For each story, length of story, source of news, primary topic of the headline, primary topic of the whole story, and attribution of responsibility were identified. The news source was coded into the following categories: people in Newtown community, non-Newtown people not associated with any organizations, people associated with national government or organizations; and other sources.

Three independent coders (author included), all graduate students majoring in journalism were trained on the code book (see Appendix I). Ten percent of news articles (5 articles from *NYT* and 5 from *SCMP*) were randomly selected to conduct inter-coder reliability. During the pilot coding, ambiguity was found regarding the attribution of responsibility as one news article may have more than one sources who blamed the causes of the tragedy differently. Final coding criteria were designed as to identify the most discussed contributor.
Krippendorff’s alpha is a reliability coefficient developed to measure the agreement among observers, coders, judges and raters (Krippendorff, 2007; Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007). All reliabilities were between .617 and 1.00 (Table 2). Certain variables such as article ID, news agency, date of story, story length and source of news were almost 100% agreed and were tested inter-coder reliability under one category, objective. Coefficients for every category were calculated by web service ReCal (Freelon, 2010).

Table 2

*Inter-coder Reliability*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Krippendorff’s alpha</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>.98</td>
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<td>Primary topic in headline</td>
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<td>Primary topic of the story</td>
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<td>Attribution of responsibility</td>
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<td>News sources</td>
<td>.79</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>.91</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The study examined whether the Newtown massacre reporting would be framed differently by the media from U.S. and from Hong Kong, according to the degree of a culture’s predisposition to Individualism-Collectivism (IC). Articles from two newspapers, NYT and SCMP, served as samples for the content analysis respectively.

Hypothesis 1 posited that in terms of principal topic, including the primary topic of the headline and of the whole story, the media from U.S. would report more at the individual level while the media of Hong Kong, would focus more on the opposite side of the collective level.

There is almost no difference between the two news media when portraying the principal topic. In terms of the major topic for the whole story, more than half (64.9%) of the articles in the NYT focused on collectivities, more than one fifth (26.3%) on individuals and only 5 (8.8%) on details of the massacre while more than half (62.5%) of the articles in the SCMP focused on collectivities, one fourth (25.0%) on individuals and merely 3 (12.5%) on details of the massacre. The two newspapers showed similar inclinations of pro-individual/collectivity. As to the primary topic of headline, the percentiles almost resemble the trend, except that SCMP did not present details of the massacre in its headlines. As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, regardless of headline or the article, both newspapers devoted themselves to reporting the primary topic more than twice on collectivities than individuals ($X^2 = 2.06$, df = 2, $p > .10$).
Table 3

*Primary Topic of Whole Story*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NYT Freq. (%)</th>
<th>SCMP Freq. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>15(26.3)</td>
<td>6 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivities</td>
<td>37(64.9)</td>
<td>15(62.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of Massacre</td>
<td>5(8.8)</td>
<td>3(12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = .26, \text{ df}=2, \ p > .10$

Table 4

*Primary Topic of Headline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NYT Freq. (%)</th>
<th>SCMP Freq. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>15(26.3)</td>
<td>9 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivities</td>
<td>39(68.4)</td>
<td>15(62.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of Massacre</td>
<td>3(5.3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 2.06, \text{ df}=2, \ p > .10$
Hypothesis 2 stated that the media from U.S. would blame individuals as the cause of the tragedy and the media of Hong Kong would attribute it to collectivity. Less than one fifth (15.8% and 16.7% for NYT and SCMP respectively) blamed the perpetrator, Adam Lanza to be responsible and almost half (38.6% and 45.8% respectively) did not identify any cause of the massacre. Both newspapers perceived almost half (45.6% and 37.5% respectively, $X^2 = .48, df = 2, p > .10$) of the contributors of the shooting on a collective scale, especially lax gun-control policy. The NYT blamed gun-control policy more than 5 times as much as pop-culture products and had no attribution to society-wide moral decline, both of which the SCMP did not mention at all. As shown in Table 5, both newspapers reported collectivities more than twice as often as individuals as the causes of the tragedy ($X^2 = 1.92, df = 3, p > .10$).

Nevertheless, there was a difference in attribution of responsibility along the timeline for NYT ($X^2 = 53.51, df = 36, p < .05$), but interestingly, the tendency was not applied of SCMP ($X^2 = 13.44, df = 18, p > .10$). As shown in Table 6 and Figure 1, in the first week following the shooting, NYT blamed the gun man in the first three days as the major contributor of the massacre and later attributed the cause to lax gun-control policy which was at the peak at the end of the first week. Only in the next week the pop-culture products cause emerged and was almost overwhelmed by the gun-control cause. Over the lifespan of coverage, the NYT ($X^2 = 53.51, df = 36, p < .05$) dynamically shifted from individual causes in the first place to social factors contributing to the school shooting on collective scale. In regards of SCMP ($X^2 = 13.44, df = 18, p > .10$), no statistically significant difference was found.
Table 5

*Attribution of Responsibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>NYT</strong> Freq. (%)</th>
<th><strong>SCMP</strong> Freq. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuals/perpetrator</strong></td>
<td>9 (15.8)</td>
<td>4 (16.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collectivities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 (45.6)*</td>
<td>9 (37.5)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pop-culture products</td>
<td>4 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lax gun-control</td>
<td>22 (38.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Society-wide moral decline</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>None</strong></td>
<td>22 (38.6)</td>
<td>11 (45.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 57

\[ X^2 = 1.92, \text{df} = 3, p > .10 \]

* \[ X^2 = .48, \text{df} = 2, p > .10 \]

** No specific cause was identified

Table 6

*Attribution of Responsibility along Timeline for NYT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuals/perpetrator</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pop-culture products</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lax gun-control</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ X^2 = 53.51, \text{df} = 36, p < .05 \]

*society-wide moral decline was not listed as 0 articles blamed it as the contributor

** Category “None” was not listed

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Hypothesis 3 assumed the media from the U.S. would cite more individual informants as sources and the media from Hong Kong would refer more to national-level sources. More than one-third (35.1% and 37.5% for NYT and SCMP respectively) cited individuals as news sources. NYT relied less (43.9%) than SCMP (54.2%) on local people for individual sources (NT people) ($\chi^2 = .72$, df =1, $p > .10$) while NYT depended more (42.1%) than SCMP (29.2%) on non-Newtown people for individual sources ($\chi^2 = 1.20$, df =1, $p > .10$). In terms of SCMP, the local sources (54.2%, $\chi^2 = .72$, df =1, $p > .10$) almost doubled that of non-Newtown people (29.2%, $\chi^2 = 1.20$, df =1, $p > .10$) while there is no difference for NYT (43.9%, $\chi^2 = .72$, df =1, $p > .10$ and 42.1%, $\chi^2 = 1.20$, df =1, $p > .10$ respectively). Another one-third (29.8% and 33.3% respectively) employed
national-level informants as sources and the last one-third (35.1% and 29.2%) referred to both. As shown in Table 7, the two newspapers showed similar preference when citing news sources, except that the media from Hong Kong favored local people more than those from the U.S. as individual sources.

Table 7

*News Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>NYT Freq. (%)</th>
<th>NYT (%)</th>
<th>SCMP Freq. (%)</th>
<th>SCMP (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>20(35.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 (37.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT people</td>
<td>25(43.9)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>13(54.2)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-NT people</td>
<td>24(42.1)**</td>
<td></td>
<td>7(29.2)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National level informants</td>
<td>17(29.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8(33.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>20(35.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7(29.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[X^2 = .27, df = 2, p > .10\]

*\[X^2 = .72, df = 1, p > .10\]*

**\[X^2 = 1.20, df = 1, p > .10\]**

In addition, the difference between the two newspapers in citing news sources was manifested in the timeline. The NYT (\[X^2 = 33.63, df = 24, p < .10\]) presented statistically significant preference in choosing news sources while the SCMP (\[X^2 = 16.31, df = 18, p > .10\]) did not. As shown in Table 8 and Figure 2, in the first week, the reliance on an individual source was in ascending order, which reached its peak at the end of the first
week and descended in the next week. The same trend was applied as well to collective
sources with the peak almost at the same time.

As the coverage continued with time, the NYT ($X^2$, $df$, $p<.10$) cited sources on
both individual and collective scales at the same time. In regards of SCMP ($X^2=16.31$, $df$
=18, $p>.10$), no statistically significant difference was found.

Table 8

*News Sources along Timeline for NYT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual source</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective source</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2=33.63$, $df=24$, $p<.10$
Figure 2. News Sources along Timeline for *NYT*.

\[ X^2 = 33.63, \text{ df} = 24, \text{ p} < 0.10 \]
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored cross-national differences in framing and argued that the pattern of framing was the product of journalistic routine and culturally contingent values. The study content analyzed U.S. and Hong Kong print coverage of the Newtown mass shooting and anticipated that the Individualism-Collectivism (IC) level of a community would affect framing patterns.

A generalizable framing pattern exists to some extent which is contradicted by the assumption that individual actors will be more salient in newspapers where individualistic values prevail. Both newspapers chosen for this study, regardless of their communities’ IC degrees, highlight the collective actors in primary topic and attribution of responsibility, and rely on individuals and collective informants equally. Specifically, it is observed that newspapers of both nations highlight the collective level in two aspects, primary topic and attribution. In regards of news sources, both newspapers cite individuals and collective informants equally. One interesting set of results shows that the U.S. newspaper chosen for this study frames dynamically and shifts focus from individual level to collective scale when attributing responsibility. Another set of results presents that the U.S. newspaper refers to individuals and collective sources with no time difference.

The similar framing pattern between the two newspapers with different IC degrees may be explained by affinity to the incident. Nossek and Berkowitz (2006) indicated that national threat or geographical proximity would cause the journalistic narrative to shift to collectivistic styles. The U.S. journalists turned to collective actors that allow coherence
and integration in society to overcome the crisis, rather than criminal coverage in a dominantly violent story to attract audience. Unlike the U.S., the core values of the Hong Kong community are not under direct threat by the physical violence thousands of miles away. Hong Kong journalists, though with less affinity to the massacre, are influenced by the inherent cultural tendency and present more collective actors when reporting international news. Future research might explore to what extent national threat would turn journalistic reporting to a collective style.

The globalization process, especially the globalization of individuals through social media, may be another explanation of the universalized journalism pattern. Friedman (2006) anticipated the third wave of globalization, the power of individuals to collaborate globally and erase differences among cultures. With the development in global news distribution infrastructures and the prevalence of social media, the globalization of individuals seems to be coming true.

In addition, Friedman also suggested that the news world appears to be getting flatter, perhaps an outcome of the heavy influence of wire services on international news coverage. The SCMP depended almost exclusively on wire services, such as McClatchy Tribune and Reuters, etc. in coverage of the massacre and only a few edited combinations, while all the articles from NYT were written by staff writers. The salience of collectivism in SCMP could be affected by the gatekeeper role of Western sources that are assumed to present a higher individualism predisposition in framing. The unification among cultures, especially with wire media outlets at the frontline processing and
distributing information globally, possibly explains why the IC difference between the media from two cultures almost disappears.

The only difference between the two newspapers chosen for this study is that the NYT shifts its focus from the individual level to the collective scale when attributing responsibility. Both individual and collective informants are equally salient along timeline when the NYT refers to news sources.

In previous study of school shootings, Chyi and McCombs (2004), Muschert and Carr (2006) found that over time, the media spectacle shifted away from both individual and collective actors to the discussion of collectivity. The trend of NYT when attributing responsibility seems to resonate with previous findings. Immediately after the incident, the newspaper would more likely to blame the perpetrator and later attribute the cause to societal importance like gun-control policy.

Powers and Fico (1994) found that journalists' own orientations were major determinant in choice of sources, though organizational and professional background substantially influential. Reporters are expected to gather information from sources representing both sides of a story. The journalists of NYT most probably did a great job by citing individual sources and collective informants equally along timeline.

Geological and cultural proximity affect the flow of information (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Swain, 2003; Zaharopoulos, 1990). For Hong Kong media, the Newtown massacre is neither a geographically influential incident nor a culturally related act. Though the two communities share many connections and watch each other closely in a globalized era, the quantity of the coverage from the Hong Kong media is still dwarfed
by its U.S. counterpart. One limitation of the study is that the school shooting happened in the U.S., which at first glance, may not draw much attention of the community on another continent across the Pacific. Future study could select similar local incidents for both communities to minimize the influence of geological distance and cultural affinity variables.

The geological distance also limited the ability of another community with historical ties to China from reporting the incident. In Taiwan, the media displayed more diverse tendencies rather than solely pro-United States, thanks to the lifting of martial law in 1987 (Su and Siu, 2003). The Newtown mass shooting received few reports in Apple Daily and Central News Agency, both leading newspapers in Taiwan. Although Taiwan and Hong Kong are both developed Chinese communities, the press of Taiwan was under strict governmental control until the lifting of martial law and less developed than that of the Hong Kong. Except for the dominant anti-communist ideology, Taiwan media are comparable to that of the Hong Kong for geological and cultural distance from the U.S. and thus, are supposed to frame the incident similarly. Future studies of the IC variable in international framing of major news events therefore might benefit from examining Taiwan as a counterweight to the United States.

The study excluded editorials, op-eds and letters from the readers to focus on the framing of professional journalistic practice. The interpretation of editors and individual readers also reflect the dominant ideology of cultures where they are cultivated. Journalists, under the substantial influence of organizational routines and professional ethics, maybe more alike globally than common individuals from cultures with different
dominant IC levels. Individuals’ evaluation of news events becomes a more influential audience frame, with the prevalence of interactive media and the populace of comment areas on news websites. Future study could focus on the editorials, comments and even blogs to explore whether the viewpoints are affected by the IC degrees of each community.

Another limitation of the study is that the data set is limited. The numbers of analyzed articles were 57 and 24 for the two chosen newspapers. In the future, researchers might seek a larger body of stories by examining more than one newspaper from each community or selecting more couple of communities that are extreme on the different sides of IC scale.

The inter-coder reliability of the “attribution of responsibility” category is lower than expected. The coding instrument could be improved by specifying the definition of “attribution of responsibility” and providing more specific training for coders. The contributor(s) of the massacre could only be speculated at the early time of reporting. Or rather, as put it before, the incident is so complex that “an accurate and fair assessment of blame was impossible” (Scharrer, Weidman and Bissell, 2003, p.87). The media’s indirect and blurry attribution of responsibility may cause misunderstanding among coders. The category name could be given more explanation in the codebook to avoid such disagreement. For instance, if more than 50% of one particular article discusses about the gunman, including but not limited to peer rejection and bullying, psychological status, interest in guns and influence of family members, the article could be identified as to blame the perpetrator as the cause of the incident.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: CODEBOOK

Article ID = the numeric label of the article being coded
News Agency
  NYT = the article was published in New York Times
  SCMP = the article was published in South Morning China Post
Date = the date the article was published, 14<sup>th</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> (U.S. time) / 15<sup>th</sup>–29<sup>th</sup> (Hong Kong time)

Story Length
  Short = 250 words or less
  Medium = between 250 and 500 words
  Long = longer than 500 words

Source of Story
  Staff news = the story was written by employees of the newspaper
  Wire news = the story came from other news agency, AP, Reuters, or other
  Other = special contributor, freelance writer or no author

Primary Topic in Headline / for the Whole Story
  Describe individuals = any individual NOT associated with any organizations or government, i.e. mental state, interests, school life and sufferings of perpetrator or victims, or any other person’s reactions and comment
  Describe collectivities = Newtown community, the nation as a whole, national organizations, i.e. assistance and guidance, consolation, sufferings, aftermath, impacts and lessons learned, Gun laws and gun control policy, school safety etc.
  Describe the details of the massacre = discusses the details of the massacre, including the number of victims, the specifics of the gun and how the perpetrator committed the massacre
    None
    Other

Attribution of Responsibility (of mention)
  Perpetrator = Blame the gunman, including peer rejection, bullying and abuse, psychological or psychiatrist problems, interest in guns and explosives, influence of family members
  Exposure to violent media products, including lyrics, movies, video games and the Internet
  Lax gun-control laws
  Society-wide moral decline or prevalence of Goth culture
    None
    Other (Specify_____ )
News Sources

People in Newtown community= Newtown residents, including victims, people related to victims and perpetrators, campus faculty and staff, Newtown government officials and police

Non-Newtown people not associated with any organizations= Individuals outside of Newtown, including celebrities and ordinary people

People associated with national government or organizations= People who are associated with governments or organizations at national or international level, including FBI, ATF, NRA, professionals and experts etc.

Other Sources
No Sources
APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

Article ID: _____ (unique number)
News Agency 1 NYT _____ 2 SCMP_____
Date: _____(dd)

Story Length: ___
1 = Short (250 words or less)
2 = Medium (between 250 and 500 words)
3 = Long (longer than 500 words)

Source of Story: _____
1 = Staff news
2 = Wire news (AP, Reuters, or other)
3 = other (special contributor, freelance writer or no author) Specify_____

Primary Topic in Headline
1 = Describe individuals (including perpetrator, victims or any individual NOT associated with any organizations or government)
2 = Describe collectivities (including Newtown community, the nation as a whole, national organizations, Gun laws and gun control policy, school safety etc.)
3 = Describe the details of the massacre
4 = None
5 = Other

Primary Topic for the Whole Story
1 = Describe individuals (including perpetrator, victims or any individual NOT associated with any organizations or government)
2 = Describe collectivities (including Newtown community, the nation as a whole, national organizations, Gun laws and gun control policy, school safety etc.)
3 = Describe the details of the massacre
4 = None
5 = Other

Attribution of Responsibility: _____
1 = perpetrator (including peer rejection, bullying and abuse, psychological or psychiatrist problems, interest in guns and explosives, influence of family members)
2 = Exposure to violent media products (including lyrics, movies, video games and the Internet)
3 = Lax gun-control laws
4 = Society-wide moral decline or prevalence of Goth culture
5 = None
6 = Other (Specify______ )

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News sources: _____
People in Newtown community (victims, people related to victims and perpetrators, campus faculty and staff, local government officials and police) 1Yes_____ 2 No_____
Non-Newtown people not associated with any organizations (celebrities, ordinary people etc.) 1Yes_____ 2 No_____
People associated with national government or organizations (including FBI, ATF, NRA, professionals and experts etc.) 1Yes_____ 2 No_____
Other Sources (Identify_____) 1Yes_____ 2 No_____
No Sources 1Yes_____ 2 No_____

