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U.S. Perceptions of China in the Context of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

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U.S. Perceptions of China in the Context of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

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Abstract

This study examined U.S. perceptions of China in the context of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games based on Ghanem's four dimensions of framing. The researcher coded primary targets, framing mechanisms, cognitive and affective attributes to define media coverage in a national and local newspaper before, during and after the Games. Since media coverage during the Olympics mirrors actual relations between nations (Dai, 2006), this study concluded negative attention garnered by China's actions during this time affected American's public opinion of the nation. As a result, the researcher proposed a continuation of Isaacs' (1973) transformations of U.S. perceptions of China: The Age of Disaccord.

Introduction

Sport contains all the manifestations of politics – nationalism, Cold War Posturing, regionalism, relations between races and genders, the ‘common-sense’ judgments made about people’s characteristics, psychologies, and about ‘nature’ itself. It is most evident in massive events like the Summer Olympics.

- Triesman (1984, p.17)

The Olympic Games throw countries to the forefront of the world stage every four years when talented athletes compete in sporting events, just as the ancient Greeks and Romans did for more than 1,000 years. Some say the Games have strayed from their original intent of athletic competition. Now it’s “...not so much for international fair play, peace, and understanding as for national self-interest, survival, and pride” (Epsy, 1979, p.12).

Because “all sport is political and the Olympics most political of all” (Triesman, 1984, p.17), the media take this opportunity to cover not only sporting events and athletes but also issues separate from the Games. More specifically, during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, articles published in United States news outlets about Chinese conflicts, politics and Olympic blunders rivaled coverage of the sports themselves. These articles have the ability to shape Americans’ public opinion about China beyond the sporting events because “American media have the power to educate, raise awareness, and shape public attitude” (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001, p.229).

Research has shown the trends of media coverage during the Olympics tend to mirror political relations between countries (Dai, 2006) so U.S. coverage of the 2008 Olympics should give insight into the current U.S.–China relationship. This study

examined the transformation of American attitudes toward China since the United States officially became a nation in 1776, paying specific attention to media coverage of the 2008 Olympic Games in China. *Scratches on Our Minds* (1973), written by Harold Isaacs, documents how Americans regarded the Chinese in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through qualitative interviews with “leadership types.” He established a timeline for transformations of attitudes toward China, including sentiments of respect, admiration and hostility, and he paved the way for others to examine how Americans perceive China.

Others expanded on Isaacs’ study of public opinion through 2004, and they have shown U.S. perceptions of China are reflected in Olympic coverage. Dai (2006) examined the changing relationship between the U.S. and China compared to the development of Olympic coverage between 1980 and 2004. The researcher found an evolving trend in framing of the Olympic Games based on the relationship between the two nations. Media coverage during the Olympics reflects the development of international relations over time (Epsy, 1979) and communicates the trends to the public.

The way individuals feel about a particular issue may be rooted in their personal experiences, or in the general culture, and it can be shaped over time through generations (McCombs, 2004). Research has also shown that exposure to the mass media can shape public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Semetko, 1992; Golan & Wanta, 2003; McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). Two key components of media’s effect on public opinion are frequency and tone. Frequency of coverage on a specific topic can increase or decrease its salience, which affects the public’s view of the issue’s importance (Ghanem, 1997). In addition to shaping what the public thinks about, the media affects how individuals think

about subjects through the use of positive and negative coverage (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992). Each of these variables plays a role in the public's perception of particular societal issues.

Many studies on the media's effects are grounded in the theories of framing and agenda setting. The concept of framing in the realm of newspaper coverage is similar to a photographer taking a picture (Reese, 1995). Only the most important aspects of a scene or story can be included in a photograph or article. Newspapers lack the time and resources to report every detail of every event so journalists are charged with the responsibility of choosing the most newsworthy aspects of a story and disseminating it to their audience (Golan & Wanta, 2003).

Content analyses help researchers to quantitatively study framing and agenda setting in a systematic way. One definition of this research method is "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998, p.3). Generally this involves classifying articles into specific categories. Ghanem (1997) warns researchers of oversimplifying studies as a result of a content analysis. He argues reducing news coverage to singular aspects of framing ignores the complexity of reporting news. To counteract oversimplifying research but still collect quantifiable data, Ghanem (1997) introduces the four dimensions of framing:

1. Subtopics
2. Framing mechanisms
3. Affective elements
4. Cognitive elements

The structure of the current study is a content analysis based on these four dimensions of framing for the purpose of examining coverage of China and the Olympics in U.S. newspapers. The sample is taken from a national newspaper, *USA Today*, and a local newspaper, *The Advocate*. For each article, the author analyzed the primary target, framing mechanisms, news values, scope and tone. The goal is to use the results from the content analysis to continue Hamilton's period of Ambivalence, Wilgoos' period of Concern or to establish the beginning of a new phase in U.S. – China relations. The study will begin with an examination of prior research on U.S. – China relations and international media coverage to set the stage for examination of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Literature Review

Perceptions of China

The relationship between the United States and China has evolved during the past few centuries based on the countries' political interactions and "perhaps no issue has seen such a see-sawing of American opinion as that of China" (Wilgoos, 2006, p.2).

According to Harold Isaacs (1973), American perceptions of the Chinese have progressed in chronological stages since the inception of the U.S. in the eighteenth century. Each of these major transformations in U.S. perceptions of China is "the result of some major event. Unfortunately China always seems able to provide such events" (Wilgoos, 2006, p.4).

The relationship begins with a 100-year span of the Age of Respect from Americans to the Chinese people. Respect gradually turned into the Age of Contempt from 1840 to 1905 then the Age of Benevolence until 1937. "Growing American involvement in Asia's affairs" (Isaacs, 1973, p.141) caused feelings of benevolence toward the Chinese. Next the Age of Admiration is characterized by the idea of China being the United States' "heroic ally" during the time of Japanese hostility and their attack on Pearl Harbor. It only lasted seven years. The heroes could not live up to their reputation and quickly fell into the Age of Disenchantment. Isaacs' final stage, the Age of Hostility, began with the Communist regime's rise in 1949 and continued until about 1973, the year *Scratches on Our Minds* (Isaacs, 1973) was published.

The method Isaacs used to determine these stages is not scientifically conclusive, but the qualitative data he gathered strongly supports his concept of ages. Judgments about Chinese individuals ranged from “intelligent” and “high caliber” to “unreliable” and “devious” (Isaacs, 1973, pps.72-73). It is worth noting feelings during these stages do not completely end before the next begins. According to Isaacs, “each lives on into and through the other, and in all their many expressions they coexist, even now” (Isaacs, 1973, p.71).

As time passed since the book was published, many scholars added their own chronological extension to Isaacs’ proposal. Mosher (1990) provides the first continuation of periods in *China Misperceived*. According to him, Isaacs’ Age of Hostility that began in 1949 ends in 1972 when the Second Age of Admiration begins. Because China was closed off to the outside world, positive first-hand accounts of select academics slowly spread to the West in intellectual circles through low circulation journals (Mosher, 1990). Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 also spurred positive sentiments towards the Chinese to mark the Second Age of Admiration. Again, this stage is short-lived and replaced by the Second Age of Disenchantment, (1977-1980), characterized by images of “hunger, malnutrition, and famine” (Mosher, 1990, p.164) which were discovered after Chairman Mao’s death in 1976. Mosher’s periods end with the Second Age of Benevolence from 1980 until 1989.

Wilgoos (2006) adds two periods after Mosher’s Second Age of Benevolence. From 1989 to 2002, U.S. perceptions of China reflect the Tiananmen incident, the age of Tiananmen. “As the events of Tiananmen illustrated, the world has grown so small that we are participant-observers in one another’s affairs and the media are a key element of

participation as well as observation” (Womack, 1990, p.229). And finally, the age of Concern begins in 2002 until 2006.

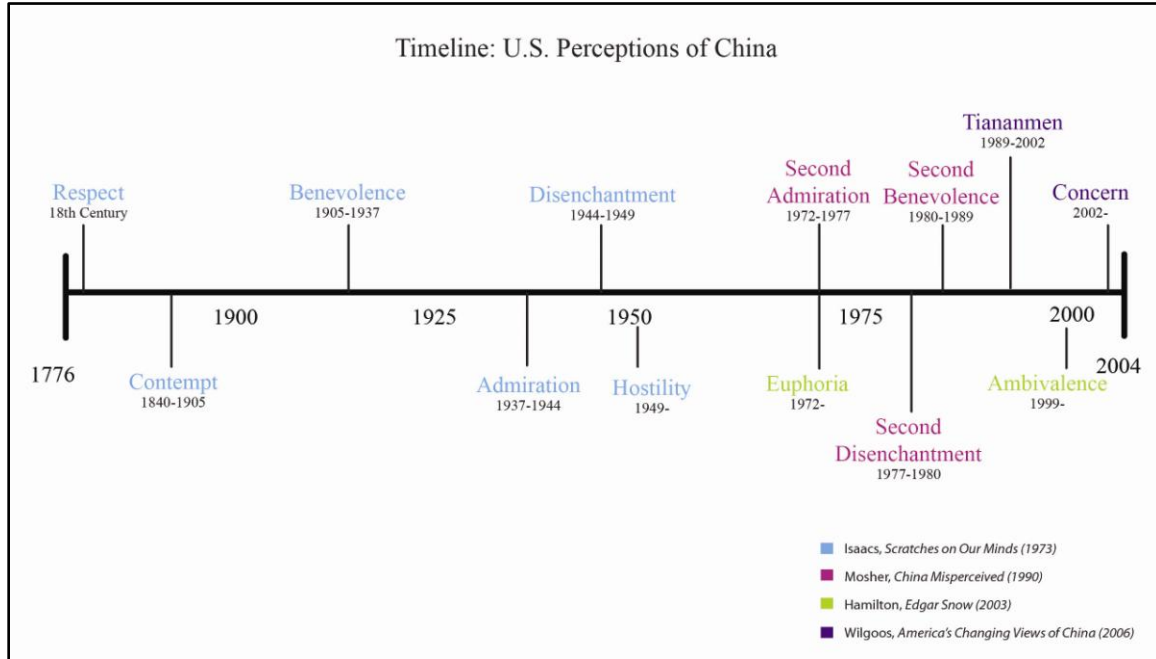


Figure 1: Timeline of the transforming U.S. perceptions of China, as denoted by Isaacs (1973), Mosher (1990), Hamilton (2003) and Wilgoos (2006).

Hamilton (2003) proposed the Age of Euphoria, following Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, and the Age of Ambivalence beginning in 1999. In addition to his proposal of stages, Hamilton’s (2003) biography on Edgar Snow gives insight to the delicate relationship between U.S. and China during Isaacs’ periods of Disenchantment and Hostility. Snow was the first journalist to have contact with the Chinese Communists for more than a decade and his reports garnered attention from both the U.S. and China.

Dai (2006) connects this evolution of U.S.–China relations to U.S. media coverage of China in the context of the Olympics. Spanning the years 1980-2004, Dai’s study established three time periods to parallel with the “development of U.S.–China

relations to help better explain the background of media framing about China” (Dai, 2006, p.10). Through a content analysis of the Olympic Games, Dai concluded that “the development of contexts of news about the Olympic Games was led on by the U.S. foreign policy toward China” (Dai, 2006, p.19). For example, China’s “Open and Reform” policy in the late 1970s resulted in more positive coverage of China during the Olympics, but the Tiananmen Square Event in 1989 created tension between the two governments. As a result, the media reported less about the Olympic Games and more on the Chinese government.

“As newspapers’ framing about China mirrored the ups and downs in the U.S. – China relation, a dynamic conception of framing need to be developed: framing is an evolving process within which different attributes experience adjustment, negotiation, competition, and mediation as a result of exposure to the outside institutional relationships (in the case of this study, it is the U.S. foreign policy toward China).”

- Dai, (2006, p.20)

The 2008 Beijing Olympics presented China with an opportunity to prove they were capable of hosting this international event and to also change perceptions of their country. Countries generally take advantage of the “...political stage on this scale – one not really found anywhere else – promotes its use for foreign policy and propaganda objectives by governments” (Triesman, 1984, p.22). Since the coverage of the Olympics mirrored U.S.–China relations in media, this study will continue the comparison of this political relationship based on the tone of coverage in U.S. newspapers during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Media

Since Isaacs' (1973) observations of U.S. perceptions of China, many studies have been conducted to analyze the connection between the perceptions of foreign nations and their coverage in U.S. media outlets. Most of what people know comes to them "second" or "third" hand from the mass media or from other people (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Previous studies have suggested the public forms their opinions based on the amount and tone of media coverage the countries receive. To discover the U.S. perceptions of China during Olympic coverage, this study will first discuss how the media affects the public's opinion through *frequency* and *tone*.

Media coverage of an object increases the importance of that object among members of the public. Thus, individuals learn the importance of issues based on the amount of coverage that those issues receive (Ghanem, 1997) regardless of one's attention to the issue (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992). McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue there is evidence voters tend to share the media's composite definition of what is important. The media actually exerted a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Similarly, Schoenbach and Semetko revealed "parallel developments in the media agenda and the public agenda" (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992, p.841). This shows correlations that support the agenda-setting concept of media controlling the public perception, but it does not necessarily prove causation.

Research also shows a clear connection between the visibility of countries in U.S. media and Americans' concern with the nation (Golan & Wanta, 2003; Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992; McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). Golan and Wanta (2003) conducted an

opinion poll in America about select countries around the world and found that coverage of a nation increases the American public's view that the country is "vitally important to U.S. interests" (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004, p.364). McNelly and Izcaray (1986) conducted a similar survey based in Venezuela to examine the media's effect on public opinion. They found "exposure to mass media is associated with relatively positive, if not well-informed, images of foreign countries to perception of them as being successful" (McNelly & Izcaray, 1992, p.546). In other words, more media coverage results in more concern with a country.

In addition to affecting *what* the public thinks about, the media can also influence *how* the public thinks about issues, specifically through the use of tone (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992; emphasis added). Although positive coverage didn't influence public perceptions of a nation, negative coverage swayed respondents to think negatively about countries (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004). Positive coverage during the Olympics will not have as great of an effect as negative coverage on perceptions of China. These observations have remained consistent over time and in a variety of contexts so the current study will apply these findings to examine the American perceptions of China in the context of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Techniques

As the prior studies have shown the media have an impact on public opinion, it is necessary to gain an understanding on the theories and techniques that support these conclusions. Framing and agenda setting are common topics in the field of media study

because they create a second-hand reality for their publics. Framing is the emphasis upon particular attributes for the media agenda (McCombs, 2004), and it can have an effect on public opinion.

Framing is also defined as the “selecting and highlighting of some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution” (Entman, 2003, p.5). The origin of the term is in photography and cinematography (Reese, 1995). The metaphor of a camera helps to visualize the act of picking the most important aspects of a story because only those small bits of information can be passed among millions of people to understand the basics of a situation.

The way we see other peoples depends on the window through which we look at the world, what we see through it, when, under what lights and shadows and, especially, in what larger setting, for whatever the many varieties of individual experience, each one's outlook is perhaps most heavily influenced by the larger political, economic, and cultural facts of the relationship at the given time.

- Isaacs (1973, ix)

One of the earliest and most notable commentators on this concept of media shaping public opinion is Walter Lippmann. Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) examines the relationship between private knowledge and public opinion in mass society. Individuals force the issue of public interest into stereotypes because it is impossible to experience every aspect of the real environment. Although stereotypes are convenient and timesaving, they offer virtues of merely efficiency, not accuracy. As a result, humans tend to treat fictions as realities and piece these stereotypes into pseudo-environments (Lippmann, 1922).

A simplified version of reality is necessary for news coverage, but this issue is at the heart of framing and agenda setting processes. “Limited by time and space, news directors often have to select only a handful of stories, while leaving dozens of news stories off the air” (Golan, Wanta & Lee, 2004, p.365). Essentially, information cannot be presented as a panorama of events so it is presented as an oversimplified, stereotyped version of the real world (Zaller, 1992). All public events cannot be fully experienced by each individual person so citizens deal with a second-hand reality (McCombs, 2004, p.1).

According to Golan and Wanta (2003):

Few Americans experience world news events first-hand. Instead, Americans must rely on news media...for information about important happenings around the world. The news media, however, have time and space limitations and thus must make value judgments regarding what international news events are important enough to receive coverage.

For example, less than 185 million people actually attended the 2008 Olympics, whereas an estimated 3 billion people worldwide watched the games on television. This does not include the news reports, print publications and commentary transmitted to the public second-hand. In this case, the power to influence our beliefs may be particularly strong when there is no possibility of experiencing events themselves (Bullock, Whyche & Williams, 2001).

News coverage of international events such as the Olympics in Beijing is often the only source of information for the public. As a result, there is a clear connection between the visibility of countries through the media and public opinion (Golan & Wanta, 2003; Shoenbach & Semetko, 1992). Decisions on what stories to publish and which not to publish can have a significant impact on the publics who receive the

information. The public's reliance on media for information on international issues makes the news stories more influential (Auerbach & Block-Elkon, 2005).

There is a constant demand for issues contending for public attention, but the public cannot focus on more than a few of these issues at any given time. There is "intense competition" because the resource of any individual's attention is scarce (McCombs, 2004, p.38). Time and psychological capacity place extreme limitations on a human's ability to attend to issues, which is why framing in the news media is almost necessary to communicate any information to the audience. As a result, the media is responsible for transmitting social culture by "placing varying degrees of emphasis on attributes of persons, public issues or other subjects" so "framing and agenda setting call our attention to perspectives of communicators and their audiences" (McCombs, 2004, p.141).

The daily news alerts us to the latest events and changes in the larger environment beyond our immediate experience....Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day.

-McCombs (2004, p.1)

Tversky and Kahneman (1981) illustrated the psychological framing effect on people's decisions through their prospect theory that analyzes the decisions an individual will make between alternatives involving risks. Systematic reversals of preference for the same problem presented in different ways demonstrated the power of framing on a simple level (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Tversky and Kahneman (1981) demonstrated that frames affect individual judgment, and "frames are powerful, but typically unnoticed devices affecting the public's judgments of responsibility and causality" (Bullock, 2001).

To examine the complexity of framing attributes in a content analysis, Ghanem (1997) suggests a multidimensional approach is necessary. The first of four dimensions is the subtopic. Subtopics, or primary targets, are independent variables that describe the issues included in a frame. The second dimension addresses the physical attributes of an article. Framing mechanisms quantify the article's presentation through word count, number of photographs and sources quoted for the article. The cognitive dimension of framing includes details on the amount of information included in the frame, or scope of each frame based on Iyengar's (1990) episodic and thematic categories. Episodic frames report on specific events, whereas thematic frames report a story in some form of general context. Finally, the affective dimension will help to determine the public's emotional response to specific articles through examination of tone.

Based on the research of U.S. perceptions of China, media and techniques, this study will employ Ghanem's framing dimensions to examine U.S. media coverage during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. If studies on international news are true, exposure of China during the Olympics should increase public awareness and therefore, public opinion of China. However, negative coverage could be more influential on U.S. perceptions of China. This study will attempt to answer these questions:

RQ1: What were the primary targets of American coverage during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games?

RQ2: Did articles aim to produce an emotional response or attachment to the story?

RQ3: Is there a difference in overall coverage between local and national American coverage of the 2008 Olympics?

RQ4: Did the coverage of China and the Olympics differ before, during, and after the Olympic games?

RQ5: Was the overall tone of American coverage on China positive, neutral or negative?

Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, this study quantified data from articles through a content analysis of two U.S. newspapers *USA Today* and *The Advocate*. *USA Today* gave an idea of the kind of news elite, national papers published during this period and *The Advocate* of Baton Rouge served as a local newspaper that focused on news relevant to the region. The researcher retrieved articles using the Lexis Nexis database, which returned 737 articles for *USA Today* and 196 articles for *The Advocate* when searching the terms “Olympic” or “Beijing” or “China” or “Chinese” between the dates of July 22 and September 10, 2008. Several of these articles were mere mentions of “China” or “Olympic” or did not focus on the targeted subject. If an article did not provide information about China or the Olympics beneficial to this content analysis, the researcher eliminated it from the research sample. For example, the researcher did not include articles concerning mutual funds with only a mention of China’s economy among hundreds of nations or the Baton Rouge Special Olympics. With this in mind, Lexis Nexis returned 469 and 82 articles from *USA Today* and *The Advocate*, respectively. The researcher took a random sample of 20 percent of these articles (N=111) for this study.

Since the main purpose of this study is to determine American public opinion of China based on Olympic coverage, the time frame is divided into three equal sections for analysis. The Olympic Games, between the opening ceremonies and the closing ceremonies, lasted 17 days during the month of August 2008. The dates between July 22

and September 10, 2008 represent three 17-day periods: before, during and after the Olympics. Three equal time frames allow for comparable data in a quantitatively balanced study and a transition in coverage over these periods of time will indicate either a change or continuation of overall American public opinion of China.

Coding

The following coding procedure, based on Ghanem's (1997) four dimensions of framing, answered the research questions.

RQ1: The researcher coded the primary targets of each article by the presence or absence of specific, predetermined topics. Subtopics included Olympic teams/squads, individual athletes, Chinese politics, culture, conflict, medal counts or local athletes. If the article contained two subjects, two primary targets were coded for the specific article. For example, the primary target is coded "individual athlete" if the article profiles swimmer Michael Phelps' record-setting eight gold medals and does not highlight the U.S. swim team. This research question reflects Ghanem's (1997) first dimension.

RQ2: Ghanem's affective dimension "deals with the public's emotional response that may result from media coverage" (Ghanem, 1997, p.12). Journalists report more than just facts in stories so this dimension captures the human aspect of an article. Narrative structures dictate the focus and limit the outcome of articles (Schulman, 1990) based on the use of chronicle or story narrative style. Chronicle narrative structures use inverted pyramid whereas the story engages the reader with its style of writing. For the purposes of this study, the researcher coded articles as chronicle, story or other based on narrative structure. Another measurement of Ghanem's (1997) affective dimension is the use of

news values within a story. “Proximity and human interest are possible news values that might make a reader or a viewer identify more closely with what is being reported” (Ghanem, 1997, p.12). As a result, articles written using the story narrative style, proximity news value or human interest news value are more likely to elicit an emotional response from the reader.

RQ3: *USA Today* and *The Advocate* will serve as samples for national and local news coverage. Primary target, framing mechanisms, affective attributes and cognitive attributes all contributed to the analysis of national vs. local coverage. The primary target was determined as explained above. Framing mechanisms refer to Ghanem’s (1997) second dimension of framing that evaluates the emphasis a newspaper puts on a certain story based on quantitative aspects of the article. For example, word count, presence of a photo and sources quoted all determined the framing mechanisms employed by each newspaper. In addition, Ghanem’s (1997) affective attributes were analyzed as explained above. Finally, examples of cognitive attributes according to Ghanem (1997) are Iyengar’s (1990) concepts of episodic and thematic framing. Episodic framing refers to reporting a “concrete but isolated event, attributing the problem to internal predispositions” and thematic framing refers to reporting in a “broader manner, linking the controversy to larger societal or contextual backdrops” (Iyengar 1990, p.14). Each article was coded as episodic, thematic, combination or neither.

RQ4: Articles were divided into their respective time periods. An analysis based on topic and time frames illustrated the change in focus of U.S. newspaper coverage before, during and after the Olympics. The articles are categorized as positive, neutral or negative and the time frame will be taken into consideration. Changes in coverage before,

during and after the games provided a foundation for examining the potential change in American perceptions of China.

RQ5: Finally, the overall tone of American coverage on China was labeled as positive, neutral or negative. Because there is a wide range of article topics during this time frame, only articles that have the potential to influence American public opinion of China were actually coded as positive, neutral or negative. For example, articles only reporting the outcomes of events did not give an impression of China so they were not included in the “tone” of an article. These dimensions gave a clear picture of the articles U.S. newspapers report about China during the Beijing Olympics. A combination of quantitative selection of words and overall tone as determined by the coder went into account when determining the tone of an article.

Results

RQ1: What were the primary targets of American coverage during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games?

The most frequent primary targets published in articles during this time were individual athletes and Olympic teams. Together these two categories made up nearly 41 percent of the sample and proved a majority of the coverage was sports-related, as opposed to issue-related (Dai, 2006). American swimmer Michael Phelps and Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt headlined a majority of articles coded “individual athletes.” Phelps won a record eight gold medals and broke seven world records during the Beijing Olympics. Bolt also won three medals and set world records in each. The Olympic team primary targets focused on collective achievements, such as the U.S. men and women’s basketball each winning a gold medal.

The primary targets coded about China (conflict, culture and politics) made up 18 percent of the targets coded. Reports that denoted “China” as one of the primary targets included U.S. newspaper coverage focusing on China’s state-run sports system or the controversial history of Tiananmen Square. Other subtopics (local connection, medal count, media, etc.) each appear in 4 to 15 percent of the articles.

The lack of significant commentary on controversial issues may indicate a relative peace between China and the U.S. In Dai’s (2006) study, use of a sport frame versus an issue frame in reporting on China and the Olympics is a gauge of the political

relationship between U.S. and China. In this case, coverage on sports rather than conflict or human rights about China may be a result of U.S. foreign policy with China.

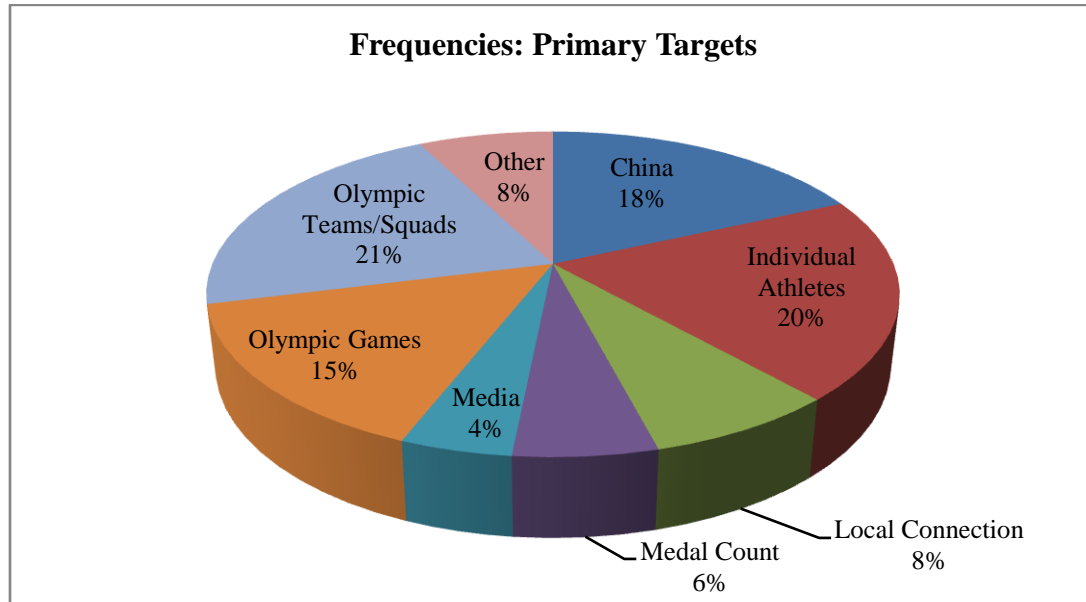


Figure 2: Frequency of primary targets coded between July 22 and September 10, 2008.

In addition to measuring the frequency of primary targets, the researcher calculated the cross-tabulation of primary targets and news values in SPSS. Several calculations returned statistically significant correlations (absolute value of $r = .240 - 1.00$), including connections between the conflict frame and human interest news value ($r < .326$). Articles such as the lip-syncing child and human rights in Tibet reported the issues with an emotional connection which resulted in this finding. Results also showed statistical significance when the human interest news value and the primary targets Chinese conflict ($r < .326$), politics ($r < .267$) or culture ($r < .433$) were present. According to Ghanem's (1997) affective dimension, the presence of the human interest

news value may indicate the use of emotion to appeal to the audience especially with controversial issues.

Other significant correlations existed between articles that focus on the local connection with the proximity news value present ($r < .956$). *The Advocate* printed 12 articles (71 percent) highlighting Baton Rouge's local connection to the Olympics, or athletes with close ties to Louisiana who represented America in Beijing. Several Louisiana State University athletes competed in the 2008 Olympics and *The Advocate* tracked each one's progress.

Also, the individual athlete frame showed a significant relationship with the rarity news value ($r < .325$). During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Phelps and Bolt each broke several world records on their way to earning several gold medals. These extraordinary feats show the connection between athlete frame and rarity value.

News Values	Proximity	Human Interest	Impact	Timeliness	Prominence	Conflict	Rarity
Primary Targets							
China: Conflict	-.121	.326	-.079	.084	.234	.273	-.121
China: Culture	-.115	.433	-.075	-.140	-.262	.092	-.115
China: Politics	-.102	.267	-.067	.029	-.248	.223	-.102
Individual Athletes	.077	-.010	-.152	-.152	.222	-.074	.325
Local Connection	.956	-.188	-.083	-.027	.197	-.081	.054
Medal Count	-.108	-.160	-.071	.193	.168	-.181	-.108
Media	-.094	-.140	.594	.007	-.025	-.158	.136
Olympic Games:							

General	-.127	-.049	.045	-.027	.062	-.147	-.127
Olympic Teams/Squads	-.120	-.265	-.072	.304	.230	-.272	.001
Olympics: Conflict	-.037	.090	.045	-.154	-.073	.376	.054

Table 1: Data in this table represent statistical significance in cross tabulations between primary targets and news values. Significant correlations are represented by the r values closest to 1.00. All highlighted numbers in this graph have r values with an absolute value between .240 and 1.00 and are significant. R values between .195 and .240 represent relationships approaching significance.

The subtopic of Olympic teams and squads returned several significant relationships with news values. Human interest ($r < -.265$), timeliness ($r < .304$), prominence ($r < .240$) and conflict ($r < -.272$) news values each showed a substantial correlation to the team frame due to the nature of the Olympics themselves. Articles about elite, Olympic athletes in this context fulfill both the timeliness and prominence news values. Olympic athletes obviously garner more attention *during* the Games than the four years in between the event so it is naturally a timely news value. Similarly, the world's greatest athletes competing make the Olympics prominent as well.

RQ2: Did articles aim to produce an emotional response or attachment to the story?

In general, the articles from both the local and national newspapers did *not* heavily appeal to the reader's emotions, or Ghanem's (1997) affective dimension of framing. The most prominent narrative structure, chronicle, appeared in 51 of the 111 articles (45 percent). The inverted pyramid style of chronicle reduces the emotional connection between a reader and the story, as compared to the story narrative style. The current study showed the story narrative style only appeared in 25 percent of the articles, thus *USA Today* and *The Advocate* didn't create an emotional attachment to their stories in 75 percent of the articles.

Similarly, news values used in the articles didn't aim to produce an emotional response from the audience. The values of proximity and human interest only appeared in 12 and 23 percent of the articles, respectively, whereas the most prominent values, timeliness and prominence, appear 70 and 76 percent respectively.

The significance of this finding is both newspapers reflected objective reports on the 2008 Olympics rather than issuing an emotional appeal to sway Americans to think one way or the other about China.

RQ3: Is there a difference in overall coverage between local and national American coverage of the 2008 Olympics?

Primary target

The national newspaper, *USA Today*, and local newspaper, *The Advocate*, each published articles with similar frequencies of primary targets during the 2008 Olympic Games. The frequency of coverage on local connection was the only statistically significant difference between the national and local papers ($p = .000$). Naturally, *The Advocate* of Baton Rouge, Louisiana printed more articles focused on Olympic athletes who lived in Louisiana or had some connection to the state, such as Louisiana State University athletes. Besides the local connection, there weren't any noteworthy differences between the elite and local media in subtopic coverage of the Olympics.

Framing mechanisms

Ghanem's (1997) cognitive dimension focuses on the physical attributes of a story. Because the articles were retrieved from Lexis Nexis, analyzing articles' placement on a page was not an option. Instead, framing attributes such as word count, presence of a

photo and the number of sources revealed a division between the elite and local newspaper coverage of China and the Olympics. SPSS returned statistically significant correlations between the newspaper source, *USA Today* or *The Advocate*, and the number of sources quoted in each article ($p = .001$). *USA Today* used an average of 2.5 sources per article, most of which were Olympic participants (coaches and athletes). *The Advocate* averaged .70 sources per article, highlighting a gap between the two newspapers' coverage.

Interestingly, news wire services did not significantly contribute to the content of the local or national newspaper. Only 31 of the 111 articles coded (28 percent) did not include bylines from staff reporters; twenty-seven of those were not attributed to anyone so the researcher coded the byline as "none." One article by a non-staff reporter was a blog by IOC President, Jacques Rogge. The remaining three articles were Advocate News Service wires and showed little difference in reporting frames for the 2008 Olympics.

The other framing attributes, word count and presence of a photo, revealed correlations between national and local media that are approaching significance ($p = .010-.090$). The average word count in *USA Today* is 677 but only 381 in *The Advocate* ($p = .070$). The presence of a photo in each source also offered insight into the framing mechanisms employed by the newspapers. *USA Today* averaged .98 photos per article and *The Advocate* only averaged .59 photos per article ($p = .095$). Because *USA Today* statistically displays articles on China and the Olympics more prominently, a gap existed between the national and local newspapers concerning the cognitive dimension of framing news (Ghanem, 1997).

Table 2: Correlations in framing mechanisms between local and national media.

	USA Today	The Advocate	Significance
Word Count	677	380	.070
Photographs	.98	.59	.095
Sources Quoted	2.5	.7	.001

Affective attributes

The study returned statistically significant correlations when analyzing the differences in the news values from Ghanem's (1997) affective attributes dimension used in the local and the national newspapers. *The Advocate* applied the proximity news value in more than 70 percent of its articles when reporting about Olympic athletes with a local connection, as compared to *USA Today's* use in only 1 percent of its articles ($p = .000$). Conversely, the human interest news value appeared in less than 6 percent of *The Advocate's* articles which is significantly less than *USA Today's* 26 percent ($p = .075$). This correlation is approaching significance.

Results found relatively little difference in the way local and national papers used the narrative aspect of affective attributes. Both sources applied the chronicle structure in approximately 45 percent of the articles coded, which implies the majority of articles published on the Olympics also reported using the inverted pyramid style. The main difference between the two newspapers' use of narrative exists in the use of the emotional story style. The national newspaper used the story structure in 29 percent of its articles, as opposed to the local newspaper's 6 percent. This finding is another result of *The Advocate* publishing several profile stories on local Olympians, coded as "other" (47 percent).

Cognitive attributes

Again, both the national and local newspapers use similar attributes for reporting about the Olympics. Ghanem's (1997) cognitive dimension reveals the newspapers heavily lean toward an episodic scope, as opposed to thematic. Reports on specific, timely events in Beijing, such as medal counts and competition updates defer the need to provide thematic background information.

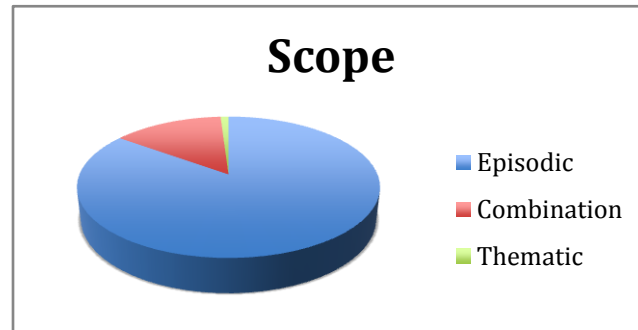


Figure 3: Frequency of scopes used in reporting on the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

RQ4: Did the coverage of China and the Olympics differ before, during and after the Olympic games?

The most notable difference in the three 17-day periods before, during and after the Olympics is the actual number of articles published during these times. Of the 111 articles coded for this study, 82 were published during the Olympics, August 8 – 24, 2008, which is expected. Aside from numbers alone, the tone of articles reflected less positive reports on China during the actual Olympics. The number of neutral and negative articles coded spiked during the second period of Olympic coverage.

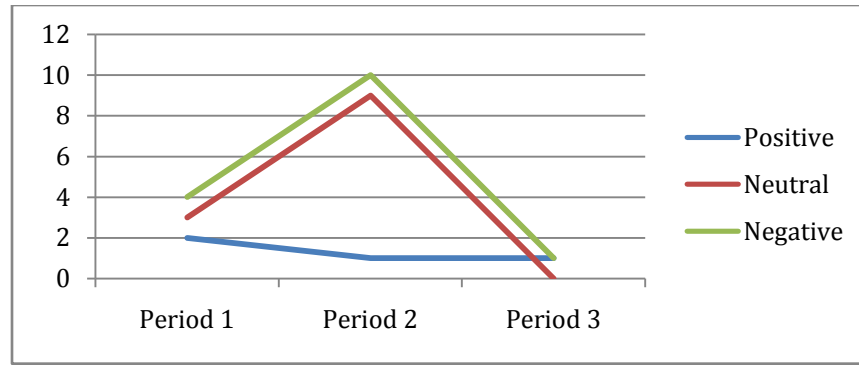


Figure 4: Frequency of tone used in articles in separate periods before (7/22-8/7), during (8/8-8/24) and after (8/25-9/10) the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The graph showing the number of articles with different tones over time showed an obvious negative peak in coverage of China. However, the same numbers of tone over the three periods of time show a decrease in *percentage* of articles. Figure seven shows a steady reduction in the relative amount of articles reporting specifically on China. The marked increase of negative articles in figure six coincides with the rise in number of articles published during that time so it has less of an impact when examining percentages. Of the 82 articles published during the second period, ten (12 percent) had a negative tone.

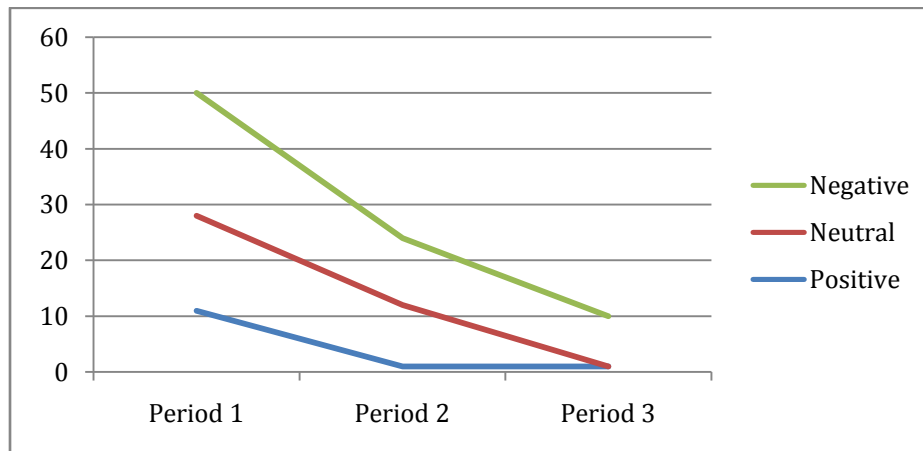


Figure 5: Even though the actual number of negative and neutral numbers rose during the second period, the *percentage* of articles published that have potential to influence public opinion decreased over time for negative, neutral and positive.

RQ5: Was the overall tone of American coverage on China positive, neutral or negative?

Overall tone in articles that had possibility of influencing Americans' perception of China leaned toward a negative tone (mean = 1.35). According to this study, nearly half of all articles coded as influential from *The Advocate* and *USA Today* (N = 31) were also coded with a negative tone. A combination of the presence of words, such as “dismal,” “contradiction” and “opposition” concerning China, and qualitative observations by the coder established these findings. Some of the articles anticipated propaganda during the Olympics and others reported on Chinese blunders as they welcomed the world into their country.

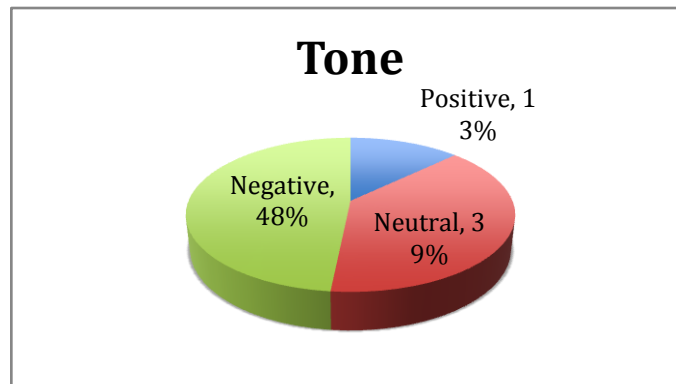


Figure 6: Percentages of tone used in articles coded as potentially influential on U.S. perceptions of China (N = 31). Positive (N = 4), neutral (N = 12) and negative (N = 15) each affect public opinion.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study addressed Ghanem's (1997) four dimensions of framing in an attempt to capture all aspects of the Olympic coverage during the 2008 Beijing Games. Because subtopics, framing mechanisms, cognitive and affective attribute dimensions each provide a unique perspective to view the articles, the data revealed statistically significant information pertinent to examining U.S. perceptions of China.

The sports-oriented coverage (Dai, 2006) found in this study shows the media did not heavily emphasize issues throughout the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Instead, the majority of articles in this sample focused on reporting about individual athletes or Olympic teams. However, the articles that did have the possibility of affecting U.S. perceptions of China showed a negative tendency in reporting. Issues, such as human rights and China's misleading actions, garnered negative media attention.

The negative coverage had a significant impact with highly politicized issues (Bullock, 2001) and conflict-related stories or concrete presentations (Wanta and Hu, 1993). An article published in *USA Today* quotes President Bush addressing some of China's highly politicized issues. "America stands in firm opposition to China's detention of political dissidents, human rights advocates and religious activists." Another article

published in the first period of Olympic coverage compares communist China's actions to the Nazis' control during the Games. "After promising not to censor the Internet for visiting journalists, authorities reversed themselves...(This includes) sites that discuss Tibet, Taiwanese independence, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Amnesty International and Radio Free Asia, for starters."

Although this is a limited data set, the small amount of time surrounding the Olympics has become a political forum over the years. Even the IOC hoped to see changes in China. "The decision in 2001 to give the games to China was made in the hope of improvement in human rights and, indeed, the Chinese themselves said that having the games would accelerate progress in such matters" (Pound, 2006). An article in *USA Today* addresses the concern about Tibetan human rights brought to light as the Olympics approached. "In recent months, China has imprisoned hundreds of Tibetans...How a nation treats its citizens is a legitimate subject of international concern." Along the same lines, an article published in *The Advocate* said, "The little guy is the victim of the Olympics. The Chinese are honored by the Olympics. This is an event filled with contradiction."

Even though Tibetan activists demonstrated against the decision to allow China to host the Olympics several years ago, others had expectations for the 2008 Beijing Olympics to parallel the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The Olympics are credited for bringing democratic ideals to South Korea. Similarly, China had high expectations for the 2008 Games. An article published in the first period of Olympic coverage reported on the Pew Research Center survey stating, "eight in 10 Chinese expressed positive views of the way

China is going,” and 93 percent of the people surveyed thought, “the Olympics will improve China’s image worldwide.” *USA Today* published this article on July 23.

On the other hand, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games are reminiscent of the 1936 Berlin Olympics when the U.S. seriously debated boycotting the event altogether. The Nazi regime welcomed the world into their country and put on a façade in Berlin by taking down signs that would remind visitors of the country’s harsh racial supremacy ideologies. The presence of spectacular venues and propaganda from the Aryan race strike a familiar chord with perfection-driven China. Even coverage of the Opening Ceremonies revealed negative outcomes in the pursuit of perfection.

An article entitled, “Beijing: It’s our Party, and we’ll fake it if we want to,” reports on the “tricks” China threw at the world. In addition to the computer-generated fireworks at the opening ceremonies, the Communist Party allowed a 9-year-old girl to “sing” at the ceremonies, when she was unknowingly lip-syncing to a 7-year-old’s voice. The 9-year-old did not have the voice and the 7-year-old did not have the looks, so they combined the two for this performance. Musical director for the show said, “The child we put on camera should be flawless in image, internal feelings and expression. But, in terms of voice, all of our team thought Yang Peiyi (7-year-old) was flawless, the most outstanding.” Geramie Barme, an Australian expert on China, is quoted in the article saying this type of behavior is driven by the fear of having an imperfect performance and Americans perceive this as negative.

Chinese culture is known for its elitist nature and control by the government and these values overflow to Chinese sports. An article published in the *USA Today* during

the Olympics featured Chinese Olympic athletes in the *USA Today* article entitled, “Elite athletes made in China; State system is the center of their lives.” Even though the government provides food, clothes and communal housing for Olympic athletes, they restrict trips home, discourage dating or marrying and deduct a large percentage of the athletes’ winnings. The article states, “China’s athletes are government employees, raised by and for the state.”

Other articles focused on Chinese athletes questioned the validity of their participation in the Olympics. The International Olympic Committee set the age requirement for competing in the Olympics as 16-years-old, but the Chinese gymnasts are accused of breaking this rule. Documents proved the same gymnasts registered with younger birthdays in different competitions. To make it worse, the Chinese government was accused of actually changing passport ages to allow the athletes to compete.

Such drive for glory on the international level may have actually hurt China’s image in the long run. A BBC opinion poll taken between November 2008 and February 2009 shows China’s positive rating decreased by 6 percent since the last poll in 2007. The BBC World Service Poll is based on 13,575 in-home or telephone interviews throughout 21 different countries. Although these data are not limited to the United States, they support the findings in this study. Negative coverage of China parallels public opinion of the country following their Olympic display. China is craving respect but may not deserve it.

Epsy (1979) referred to the United States and the Soviet Union winning the most medals through 1979 as coincidence with the international structure among nations. If

this reflection is accurate, China is deemed a world power, as they won the most gold medals overall during the 2008 Olympics. However, in this quest for the gold, China has tripped and fallen on the world stage several times. Reports on human rights violations and misleading actions reveal the Chinese pursuit of perfection often involves cutting corners or disregarding moral guidance.

Thus, U.S. perceptions of China are emerging out of Hamilton's Age of Ambivalence into the researcher's new stage, the Age of Disaccord. Keeping in mind that, "First, there is rarely, if ever, a single perception held by all Americans...Second, few Americans have anything but a shallow understanding of China...Third, the two principal determinants of attitudes are perceptions of relative power and perceptions of cultural values and whether they are shared or opposing" (Cohen, 2003, p.25), negative media attention has exposed China and solidified previously ambivalent thoughts of distrust. The Olympics represents the manifestations of concern felt in the Age of Ambivalence and has proven that there exists a lack of harmony between the two nations. Negative schemes existed throughout the Olympics, but interest in China's mishaps decreased over time. As a result, disaccord between the nations reflected the differences in U.S and China's societal values shown in media coverage and acceptance of this disagreement.

Further research should follow U.S. perceptions of China based on high-profile international events, such as the Olympics, and expand the study to include outputs and outcomes. For example, this study examined the outcome of U.S. public opinion based on the 2008 Beijing Olympics. With an added layer of complexity, researchers can examine these results based on China's output. Studies on impression and perception management,

as used by many nations, would be helpful in finding deeper meaning in the complex relationship between U.S. and China.

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