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As members of the Master’s Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by Shanshan Niu titled “The Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative by the U.S. and Indian News Media (2013-2018)” and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirement for the Master’s Degree.

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Date: 4/30/19

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the Master’s requirement.

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School of Journalism

Date: 4/30/19
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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Dedication

For my husband

Thank you for your encouragement and support as I continue my education.

For my dad and mom

Thank you for your unconditional support and love.

For my son

Thank you for the endless joy you have given to my life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 7

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 8

Background ............................................................................................................................................ 9

Literature Review ................................................................................................................................... 11

*Framing theory* .................................................................................................................................. 11

*News framing of China* ....................................................................................................................... 12

Research Questions ................................................................................................................................. 16

Methods .................................................................................................................................................. 17

*Study period* ........................................................................................................................................ 17

*Study sample* ....................................................................................................................................... 18

*Coding and measurement* .................................................................................................................... 19

*Intercoder reliability* .............................................................................................................................. 21

Findings .................................................................................................................................................... 21

*Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative from 2013 to 2018* ......................................................... 24

Economic project frame .......................................................................................................................... 25

Global expansion/invasion/competition frame ....................................................................................... 26

Threat/fear/conflict frame ....................................................................................................................... 26

Global development/cooperation/benefit frame .................................................................................... 27
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Leadership frame .......................................................................................................................... 27
Human rights frame .......................................................................................................................... 28
Other ............................................................................................................................................ 28

Similarities between Indian and U.S. news media articles about the Belt and Road Initiative 29

Differences between Indian and U.S. news media articles about the Belt and Road Initiative 31

Discussion ....................................................................................................................................... 34

Limitations and future studies ........................................................................................................ 39

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 40

Appendix A: Coding sheet ........................................................................................................... 41

Section 1: Article Information ........................................................................................................ 41

Section 2: Types of frames ............................................................................................................ 43

Section 3: Dominant source .......................................................................................................... 45

Section 4: Tone ............................................................................................................................... 46

Reference ....................................................................................................................................... 48
Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative by The U.S. and Indian News Media (2013-2018)

Abstract

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has attracted worldwide attention since it was proposed by China’s President Xi Jinping in 2013. There is a lack of research, however, focused on news framing of the initiative, which offers a blank slate on the study of the BRI as China’s top level national project. Using framing as a theoretical framework, the current study examined how U.S. and Indian news media framed China’s BRI between 2013 to 2018 based on a content analysis of 400 articles from four English-language news outlets: The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Times of India, and Economic Times. The findings show that the economic project was the most frequently used frame, but the overall framing was still negative because of the threat, competition, and expansion frames. Indian and the U.S. media framed China’s BRI with many similarities and a few differences in length, topics, frames, dominant sources, and dominant tone with the consideration of each country’s stand on national interests and strategic foreign policies.

Key Words: framing, Belt and Road Initiative, China, Indian news media, U.S. news media, economic project, geopolitical expansion, superpower
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (or BRI)\(^1\) was first proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. The Initiative has been proposed to expand China’s domestic economic growth and international market. China has promoted the BRI as a mutually beneficial project for the involved countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. However, some countries, such as the U.S. and India, worry that China’s economic rise will pose a great threat to their economic dominance, economic strength, and global peace (Oshi, 2012, pp. 341-343). China’s growing global economic strength, increasing political influence, and Chinese cultural exportation through BRI have been highlighted as a potential threat to global balance of power in the news coverage of many Western media outlets. These perspectives may affect people’s understanding about the BRI and China’s role in the world.

Thus, this research will build on previous framing studies of China-related coverage, including coverage of the impact of China’s rise and economic development (Holbig, 2018; Hong, 2017; Khattak & Khalid, 2017; Lan, 2018; Lams, 2010, 2016; Lardy, 2003; Nolan, 2012; Oros & Tache, 2012; O’Trakoun, 2018), China’s political issues (Chen & Zhang, 2016; Huang & Leung, 2005; Liao, Liu, Morse, Su. & Jin, 2017; Richter & Gebauer, 2011; Xing, 2011; Yang, 2004; Zeng, 2016), Chinese people’s human rights (Kobland, Du & Kown, 1992; Osondu-Oti, 2016; Yao & Wang, 2007; Zhou & Moy, 2017), and environmental problems (Wu, 2009). The current study addresses the overarching research question of how news media reports from the two largest democracies and economic competitors framed China’s BRI. More specifically, the study examines how two elite U.S. news outlets \textit{(The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal)} and two leading English-language Indian newspapers \textit{(The Times of India and The

\(^1\) The Chinese name of BRI is “Yidaiyilu.” Official site: https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn
Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative

Economic Times) framed China’s BRI. The research also analyzes similarities and differences of frames, topics, sources and tone between the news media of the two countries. The following sections provide background on the BRI project, framing theory, and news framing of China.

**Background**

The full name of the BRI is the “The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” which was first proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 to promote international trade and economic links with 64 countries cross Asia, Africa and Europe” (MOFCOM, 2013). The Belt and Road Initiative is also called the “New Silk Road” because the ancient Silk Road historically served as a network for promoting trade, arts, culture, religion, and international relationships among China and countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe (Tang et al. 2017, pp. 2595-2596). In 2015 the Chinese government released a report that states the overall concept of China’s promotion of the Belt and Road project and highlights its framework and guidelines of construction and principles of international cooperation (Xinhua News, 2015). In 2016 the official English name was changed to the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI official site).

The BRI is not only a regional plan for economic development (Tang et al., 2017, p. 2596), but also a long-term strategy to promote international cooperation and integration by boosting international trade and building a network of transportation, infrastructure, and connection between China and the countries involved. More than two-thirds of the world’s population and one third of the global Gross Domestic Product will benefit from the project. (O’Trakoun, 2018). The total estimated investment by China will be $6 trillion (U.S.) (BRI, 2013), and the

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2 The Silk Road Economic Belt was first proposed in September 7, 2013, and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road was first proposed on October 3, 2013.
3 The report was jointly released by the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce.
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

investment will be used for infrastructure construction, such as “roads, railways, seaports, canals, bridges, gas and oil pipelines” and other work. (Khattak & Khalid, 2017, p. 1). The China Development Bank reported that the BRI has planned a larger global economic footprint with estimated $900 billion overseas investment (O’Trakoun, 2018; Liao et al., 2017).

China’s growing economic strength has become a driving force of Asian economy (Lardy, 2003), but China’s rapid development combines both benefits, challenges or even potential threats to many countries. India firmly rejected joining the BRI because of border disputes. The United States, Germany, Brazil, and Japan are worried about cheap Chinese labor and low prices, which may lead to an increased number of Chinese products in Western countries. Though China has gained many unfair short-term competitive advantages because of its toleration for lower environmental quality standards than some competitors, these advantages will not last long because of limited resources and serious environmental pollution (Oros, 2012). Western countries also have criticized China’s Communist-led authoritarian political system and the Chinese government for abusing human rights (Osondu-Oti, 2016, p. 60).
Framing theory

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson first defined the concept of frames in 1972 as a “spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages” (p. 197). Goffman (1974) proposed a frame analysis that suggests individuals interpret events around the world from the perspective of frameworks. The frameworks, in part, stem from information from news media. Most news framing helps the audiences find, identify, view, understand, and label the central concepts highlighted in the reports even though the framing provides only a core of a perspective or approach (Goffman, 1974, pp. 21, 24).

News framing refers to selecting certain content or aspects of a topic or reality and highlighting them in an attractive, meaningful, and memorable way to audiences (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Gitlin (1980) argued that journalists use frames to deal with information efficiently and routinely, and the heart of journalists’ explanation relies on news frames, which represent the current pattern of selection, emphasis, exclusion and evaluation of events. Journalists often rely on familiar news frames and existing information from trusted sources when they make decisions on what and how to convey the facts, storyline, and dominant meanings (Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003). In short, media frames can define, interpret, and present analytical views about a particular issue (Entman, 1993). News media play a key role in influencing people’s perspective on public affairs (Gamson, 1988; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing can be explained both macroscopically and microscopically (Scheufele, 1999). On the macro-level, framing is critical to organizing concepts, values, opinions, and expectations to present information for audiences, and it is necessary to help people reduce the complex content of an issue (Gans, 1979). The frames make issues more accessible to complex topics by
presenting existing cognitive schemas (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). On the micro-level, framing describes how people form impressions by using information and typical features regarding issues (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12).

According to Entman (1993), “Framing essentially involves selection and salience” (p. 52). That means the media only select and highlight certain texts, images, and realities of an issue or a situation for their audiences. Journalists and communication professionals provide certain aspects of reality to the public by structuring information with words and images and giving their point of view to maintain people’s interests under the frames they select (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Scholars analyze news media framing by examining the “placement or repetition” of aspects of news events or the way these events have been associated with culturally familiar symbols, which make the framing much easier to be noticed and remembered (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) also pointed out that the phrase at the end of the text or sources gives greater emphasis to an aspect of reality than any other location. Researchers argue that people may refuse to accept weak frames if they have accepted strong frames. It is difficult to measure the strength of frames, but the capability of different frames to attract people varies, based on “frequency, accessibility and relevance” (Chong and Druckman, 2007, pp. 103-104).

News framing of China

In the past 20 years, China has become an important economic and political power globally (Golan & Lukito, 2015), so China has attracted increased worldwide media attention (Lams, 2016). Studies have found that the media play a significant role in shaping people’s perceived image of a foreign country (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Han, G., Chock, T., & Shoemaker, P, 2009; Shapiro & Chock, 2004). People’s perceptions and evaluation will largely rely on media coverage when they are lacking of personal experience with that country (Wang et al., 2008), and
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

China has been reported upon as a product-country with low labor and resource costs (Han & Wang, 2012). The overall tone of U.S. coverage about China has been increasingly negative with the exception of the high emphasis on China’s economic power (Peng, 2004; Stone & Xiao, 2007).

The U.S. media have been found to follow U.S. foreign policies and national interests in news coverage (Lams, 2016, p. 140). *The New York Times* framed China as a global power undermined by structural limitations, but *The Wall Street Journal* framed China as a direct threat to U.S. foreign policies and interests (Golan & Lukito, 2015, pp. 758-763). China’s high-speed expansion hinders the U.S.’s unparalleled world-leading position (Ooi & D’Arcangelis, 2017, p. 270), so China has been framed as a competing global power (Art, 2010).

China has been promoting a positive image of the country by using various tactics and enhancing China’s soft power (Wang & Shoemaker, 2008). China’s efforts to promote soft power did not change people’s existing impressions of China when the mainstream media hold unfavorable attitudes toward China (Golan, 2013). China has been framed as a “threatening, hungry giant” and a “yellow threat” (Becker, 2011, p. 496). Increasingly, China has been framed as a currency manipulator and a thief of economic resources because the Chinese government undervalued its currency to benefit exports, thus prompting the U.S. to engage in numerous trade disputes with China for unfair trade practices (Ooi & D’Arcangelis, 2017). U.S. news reporting is not only motivated by newsworthiness, but also ideology, so it is common to frame China as “red China,” “communism,” “socialism,” and “potential enemy” (Chang, 2008, p. 11).

Surveys conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project show a sharp decline in Indian people’s favorable view of China, from 57 percent in 2005 and 34 percent in 2010 to 25 percent
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

in 2011. A survey\textsuperscript{4} conducted in 2013 found that more than 83 percent of Indians regarded China as a security threat, while three-fourths of respondents worried about a possible war between India and China. Only one-third of Indians believed that China’s rise benefits their country (Wade, 2013).

Chinese culture has been given great weight by global news coverage, while China’s science, education, and society, were completely neglected (Richter & Gebauer, 2011). The U.S. media reports highlight that China has been punished for concealing its human rights issues (Willnat & Luo, 2011). Besides, China’s negative news has been most frequently reported through U.S. media coverage, such as lack of democracy, deprivation of freedom, censorship on social media, and violent incidents (Richter & Gebauer, 2011).

Some studies have found that the overall tone of U.S. media’s framing of China is negative, which follows the patterns of U.S. news outlet coverage of China (Peng, 2004) and the U.S. foreign policy toward China (Stone & Xiao, 2007). Chinese government has been often framed as a dishonest or oppressive regime (Lams, 2010) for its problems, wrongdoings, and failures (Kobland et al., 1992). The assessment of China has recently improved in news, but criticism to Chinese government or the Communist Party for a single event can damage the overall assessment of China again and again (Wilke & Achatzi, 2011, p. 362). Scholars (Gans, 1979; Lee & Yang, 1996) argued that U.S. media coverage of other countries focuses on American themes under the principles of American culture and politics, so the more China follows the American ideals of freedom, the more positive the media portrayals will be.

Researchers found that China has been framed as an active, negative, and semantic role, such as a human rights abuser (Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1988; Huang & Leung, 2005; Lams, \textsuperscript{4}The survey was conducted by the Lowy Institute for International Policy and the Australia India Institute in 2013.)
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

2013). The human rights frame has been a major frame used in news coverage of China, which focuses on the China’s human rights conditions and policies (Hauser, 2011). The one-child policy in China was reported as a main concern in Western media before it was abolished in 2015, and Peng (2004) found that China was framed and blamed for trying to control birth despite the pressure of overpopulation and economic development (Farmer, 1990) and brought negative attention to China repeatedly (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005). The Chinese government is criticized for depriving the Chinese people of basic human rights, especially for the brutal suppression of the 1989 student movements, which also contributed to a cruel and repressive role of the Chinese government (Kobland et al., 1992, p. 72). Though some studies framed China as a rising media star based on the large amount of international news coverage (Willnat & Luo, 2011), the framing of China is still limited to lack of freedom of expression.

In mainland China, news framing of China closely follows Chinese governmental policies (Yao, 2007). The Communist Party has complete control of information, so China’s mainstream media outlets have basic responsibility to preserve the political stability and confidence (Zhang, 2006). The most influential Chinese newspapers are all Chinese governmental newspapers, so in many ways the coverage represents the political authority in the country (Scollon, 2000). Some news organizations act as the Chinese Communist party’s mouthpiece, but others are watchdogs that criticized the party and the government for the lack of credibility and transparency (Zhou & Moy, 2007). The popularity of social media poses more challenges to censorship by the Chinese government and the Communist party, especially for sensitive issues, such as corruption and injustice (Chen & Zhang, 2016), but government censorship and control still are external forces that shape and guide public perspective and the mainstream media in China (Chen & Zhang, 2016).
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Research Questions

The lack of research on the framing of news media coverage of China’s Belt and Road Initiative is surprising, given the popularity of Chinese’s top economic project in the news from 2013 through 2018. This research will attempt to fill a gap in the scholarly literature about BRI coverage by examining the frames and tone used by newspapers in India and the U.S.. These two countries were chosen because after China, India and the U.S. have the world’s largest populations (World Population Prospects, 2017), so the framing of news may affect more people not only in the markets of origin, but also the global markets where news from those outlets would land. Besides, India and the U.S. are main economical competitors in Asia and the world, so they have very complicated relationship with China. This study will examine media coverage in two elite U.S. newspapers and two leading English-language Indian daily newspapers, analyze the framing of BRI, and compare the similarities and differences of frames between newspapers in those two countries. Based on the literature, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How did two elite English-language news outlets in the United States and two in India frame China’s Belt and Road Initiative?

RQ2: What are the similarities between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

RQ2a: What are the similarities in topics between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

RQ2b: What are the similarities in tone between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?
RQ3: What are the differences between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

RQ3a: What are the differences in length between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

RQ3b: What are the similarities in dominant sourcing between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles related to the Belt and Road Initiative?

Methods

Study period

To address how the news media in the U.S. and India reported on China’s BRI, the researcher conducted a content analysis of newspapers from September 7, 2013, to September 30, 2018. The year 2013 was selected as the starting point of the sampling time because BRI was first proposed on September 7, 2013. The year 2018 was selected because September 7, 2018, is the ending date of the five-year period. The researcher analyzed two leading newspapers in the U.S. (The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times) and two leading English-language newspapers in India (the Times of India and The Economic Times).

Those countries were selected for the following reasons. India and the U.S. have conflicts and cooperation with China in economics, politics, culture, and the military, so it is meaningful to study the different news media framing in those two countries. The U.S.-China relationship has been among the most important and complicated bilateral relationships in the 21st century (Young, 2015). China and the U.S. are close economic partners but have multiple disputes on economy, politics, and military affairs (Young, 2015). On the other hand, China and India have been developing fast economically in recent years, and they are major economic competitors.
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

with lots of conflicts, such as the issues of India-China border disputes, India’s support of Tibetan protestors and Taiwan’s government, and China’s involvement in the Indian Ocean region (Pal, 2014).

Study sample

The news outlets were chosen for several reasons. First, those newspapers have a long history, and their circulation sizes are among the largest in each country. The Wall Street Journal is the largest newspaper by paid circulation with more than 2.2 million subscribers in 2018 (Agility PR, 2018), and it has been among the most influential newspapers with global readership (Stulberg, Ariel, 2017). The New York Times was established in 1851, and it is the second largest newspaper in the U.S. with 2.3 million circulation and worldwide readership (Worldatlas, 2018). The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times are both viewed as gatekeepers by many readers (McElroy, 2013). The Times of India was founded in 1838, and it is the oldest Indian newspaper and the largest selling English-language daily in the world with a circulation of 3.198 million (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2017). The Economic Times is the largest English-language business newspaper in India with the readership of 834, 000 (Indian readership survey, 2014). It is among the top three newspapers with the greatest political influence in India’s capital (Pednekar-Magal, 2007; Relly & Schwalbe, 2013, p. 285). Second, those newspapers are not only representative of the media in their home countries but also have great influence on their global readership. The Times of India ranked the world’s fourth largest news outlet by circulation (World Press Trends, 2014). The Wall Street Journal ranked 12th by circulation of 2.379 million in the world (World Press Trends, 2014).

The researcher used the Wall Street Journal database to access The Wall Street Journal news content, ProQuest Newsstand for The New York Times articles, and Access World News database
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

for the *Times of India* and *The Economic Times* news articles. The databases provided scanned copies of related news articles from the five-year period between September 7, 2013, and September 30, 2018. The researcher downloaded all the articles in the databases that contained the keywords “China’s BRI,” “New Silk Road,” “China’s ambitious project,” “OBOR,” “Belt and Road Initiative,” “Xi’s dream plan,” and “China’s Marshall Plan” in the headline, lead, and articles during the study period. Articles that only mentioned the related keywords in the title or the lead but did not elaborate more about them in the text were not included, such as one-sentence “briefs” or articles referring only to the ancient silk road or the online “Silk Road” black market of the drug trade.

The census of articles was 429 news reports from *The Wall Street Journal*, 290 news articles from *The New York Times*, 246 articles from the *Times of India*, and 223 news reports from *The Economic Times*. The researcher took a random sample of 100 articles from each newspaper to create the dataset of 400 total news articles.

**Coding and measurement**

The articles were coded according to the study protocol using a codebook to conduct the content analysis. A pre-test with a second trained coder was done with articles outside of the study period (after September 30, 2018) to ascertain that the codebook was clear and comprehensive. Once all the articles were collected, each article was coded for variables grouped into four sections: article data, frame, source, and tone.

The article data included the headline, the date of publication, length, and main topic. The topic refers to the focus of each article. The topics are based on both the headlines and the entire article. If a story contains more than one topic, only the dominant topic will be coded. This will be determined by the topic that is highlighted in the headline, deck, or lead.
The frames of the articles were analyzed and identified based on the headline and a careful reading of the entire article about the Belt and Road project. Because there were no previous framing research studies of the Belt and Road Initiative, the author identified common frames found in previous articles and coverage of China, then went through the entire database of articles to add potential frames. An analysis was conducted by the researcher, who utilized the completed codebook (see Appendix) to study frames of the Belt and Road project from the 400 cases of news reports from the four news outlets.

The dominant frame designation was the one most highlighted or repeated in the headline or the whole article. If more than one frame emerged in the article, the researcher utilized the one that was dominant. If two frames were dominant, then the one first appeared was coded.

Based on the literature, this study adapted the following seven frames for this study: leadership frame (Art, 2010; Golan & Lukito, 2015; Lams, 2016); economic project frame (Han & Wang, 2012; Peng, 2006; Stone & Xiao, 2007); threat/fear/conflict frame (Becker, 2011; Chang, 2008; Ooi & D’Arcangelis, 2017; Paletta & Davis, 2012a, 2012b); global development/cooperation/benefit frame (Wade, 2013, p.12); global expansion, invasion, or competition frame (Golan, 2013; Wang & Shoemaker, 2011, Wang, 2008); human rights frame (Chang, Wang & Chen, 1988; Huang & Leung, 2005; Kobland et al., 1992; Lams, 2013; Scollon, 2000); and a category for other frames.

The study also coded for dominant sources (domestic officials, Chinese officials, international officials, and unofficial sources). The dominant source is the source cited the most in the article. If two or more sources are cited the same number of times, the first source cited in the article will be coded as the dominant source. Finally, the researcher coded for tone. The
dominant tone of the articles was identified as positive, negative, or neutral. (See Appendix A for coding system.)

**Intercoder reliability**

The study trained a second coder for intercoder reliability. The author coded the 400 news articles according to the coding sheet. The second coder was trained in the study protocol and coded 10 percent of the samples (40 articles) randomly selected. Each variable was calculated by using both Holsti’s (1969) formula for simple agreement and Scott’s pi (Lovejoy, Watson, Lacy, & Riffe, 2016) to make sure the coding was reliable.

Holsti’s simple agreement ranged between 87.5% and 100% for each variable: main headline (100%), date of publication (100%), length of the article (100%), main topic (95%), dominant frame (87.5%), dominant source (100%), and dominant tone (92.5%).

Scott’s pi results ranged between 0.8 and 1.0 for each variable: main headline (1.0), date published (1.0), date of publication (1.0), the length of the article (1.0), main topic (0.94), dominant frame (0.82), dominant source (1.0), and dominant tone (0.86).

Table 1: Intercoder reliability test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent Agreement</th>
<th>Scott’s Pi</th>
<th>Cohen’s Kappa</th>
<th>Krippendorff’s Alpha</th>
<th>N Agreements</th>
<th>N Disagreements</th>
<th>N Cases</th>
<th>N Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Headline</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Topic</td>
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<td>0.94</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
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<td>0.83</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings**
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

This study examined 400 articles about the BRI from two U.S. newspapers and two Indian newspapers during the study period. The following are the basic findings of the study on the number of articles by year, the variety of frames, news media’s main topics, dominant source and dominant tone. No article about the BRI was published in 2013, but the number of articles increased by each year thereafter (See Figure 1.). There were 11 sample articles (2.8%) published in 2014, then 22 articles (5.5%) in 2015, and 27 articles (6.8%) in 2016. However, the number of articles sharply increased to 164 (41%) in 2017 and 176 (44%) in 2018.

![Figure 1: Numbers of U.S. and Indian articles published (2013-2018)](image)

A variety of dominant frames were used in news coverage (See Table 2.). The most frequent frame appeared in 181 (45.3%) news articles to frame the BRI as an “economic project.” The second most frequent frame is “global expansion and competition” with 100 articles (25%), followed by “threat” (n = 51 or 12.8%), “global development” (n = 38 or 9.5%), “leadership” (n = 22 or 5.5%), “human rights” (n = 4 or 1%), and the others (n = 4 or 1%).
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Table 2: Frames of U.S. newspapers and Indian newspapers (N = 400)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>The Wall Street Journal</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Times of India</th>
<th>Economic Times</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic project</td>
<td></td>
<td>44 (11%)</td>
<td>55 (13.25%)</td>
<td>46 (11.5%)</td>
<td>38 (9.5%)</td>
<td>181 (45.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global expansion/invasion/competition</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 (5%)</td>
<td>24 (6%)</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>38 (9.5%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat/fear/conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 (3.25%)</td>
<td>10 (2.5%)</td>
<td>21 (5.25%)</td>
<td>7 (1.75%)</td>
<td>51 (12.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global development/cooperation/benefit</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (2.5%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>38 (9.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>6 (1.5%)</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
<td>22 (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.25%)</td>
<td>3 (0.75%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.25%)</td>
<td>3 (0.75%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>400 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common topic is “international relationship” (n = 125 or 31.3%), followed by “Chinese government’s profiles, actions, or programs” (n = 72 or 18%), “BRI’s threats or negative impacts on other countries” (n = 61 or 15.3%), “Challenges and difficulties of the project” (n = 55 or 13.8%), “globalization or regional cooperation” (n = 31 or 7.8%), “Introduction of the BRI” (n = 28 or 7%), and the other topics (n = 28 or 7%) (See Table 3.).

Table 3: The topics of U.S. and Indian newspapers (N = 400)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td>17 (4.25%)</td>
<td>38 (9.5%)</td>
<td>29 (7.25%)</td>
<td>41 (10.25%)</td>
<td>125 (31.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese government’s profiles, programs, actions, or potential aims</td>
<td>26 (6.5%)</td>
<td>15 (3.75%)</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>13 (3.25%)</td>
<td>72 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats or negative impacts on other countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>14 (3.5%)</td>
<td>11 (2.75%)</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>61 (15.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (0.75%)</td>
<td>21 (5.25%)</td>
<td>11 (2.75%)</td>
<td>55 (13.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization, global market, or regional cooperation</td>
<td>9 (2.25%)</td>
<td>10 (2.5%)</td>
<td>5 (1.25%)</td>
<td>7 (1.75%)</td>
<td>31 (7.75%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of the B&amp;R project schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (1.5%)</td>
<td>6 (1.5%)</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>28 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>14 (3.5%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>6 (1.5%)</td>
<td>28 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>400 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dominant sources play an important role in framing the BRI, and the results show the most frequent quoted sources are unofficial sources, with a total of 121 articles (30.3%), followed by
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Chinese officials (n = 84, or 21%), U.S. or Indian officials (n = 82 or 20.5%), international officials (n = 79 or 19.8%), and documents (n = 34 or 8.5%). (See Table 4).

Table 4: Dominant sources in the news reports (N = 400)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial sources</td>
<td>39 (9.75%)</td>
<td>47 (11.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese officials</td>
<td>25 (6.25%)</td>
<td>11 (2.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic officials</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>14 (3.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International officials</td>
<td>17 (4.25%)</td>
<td>26 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document sources</td>
<td>1 (0.25%)</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of article tone are shown in Table 5. More than half of the articles (n = 212 or 53%) show dominant negative tone, 106 (26.5%) articles are neutral, and 82 (20.5%) are positive. However, some negative material or descriptions were present in the dominant positive or neutral articles.

Table 5: Tone of the newspapers (N = 400)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>21 (5.25%)</td>
<td>27 (6.75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>62 (15.5%)</td>
<td>56 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>17 (4.25%)</td>
<td>17 (4.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
<td>100 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative from 2013 to 2018

The first research question asked how two elite U.S. newspapers and two elite India newspapers framed their coverage of China’s BRI from 2013 to 2018. In both countries the most frequently used frame is “economic project” (97 U.S. articles, or 48.5%, and 84 India articles, or 42%), followed by the “global expansion and competition” frame (44 U.S. articles, or 22%, and 56 India articles, or 28%) and “threat” frame (23 U.S. articles, or 11.5%, and 28 India articles, or
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

14%). Among the least used frames in U.S. articles were leadership (n = 18), other (n = 4), and human rights (n = 0). However, four India articles used the leadership frame and five articles used the human rights frame, but no India articles used “other” frames (See Figure 2.)

![Figure 2: Comparison of frames in U.S. and Indian newspapers](image)

**Economic project frame**

China’s BRI has attracted worldwide attention, and the economic project is the most common frame that the news media used in-articles. The most frequently used frames were “China’s ambitious mega-plan,” “China’s Marshall Plan,” “China’s Grand Trade Plan,” “a multi-billion-dollar connectivity program,” “Chinese-style infrastructure project,” and “Chinese-led bilateral economic initiative.” In order to highlight BRI’s importance in China, the news framed it as “China’s highest level program,” “China’s highest-profile investment deals,” and “China’s signature foreign policy to grab economic partnership and extend trade links across the world.” In a word, the BRI was reported as the mother of all other projects, and reporting suggests it served as President Xi Jinping’s grand dream of reviving the old Silk Road by exporting capital, technology, and infrastructure to build trade links and connect economic partnerships in Asia,
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Europe, and Africa. The news articles reported potential goals were reducing China’s surplus capacity of industry, creating new global markets, and expanding China’s global influence.

Global expansion/invasion/competition frame

BRI is framed as Beijing’s tool to dominate geopolitics, and it is far more ambitious than any other previously reported planning giant projects. Articles report on calls for transparent lending practices based on recognized international norms. The news reports underlined India’s concerns that Beijing’s huge efforts to sell the project as a global ideal to the world shows China’s growing ambitions to an exploitative geo-strategic move. India insists on standing in China’s way to the BRI because India fears China is expanding its geopolitical influence and military power at India’s expense in the disputed Kashmir region and the Indian Ocean. These reports also emphasized the possibility that the BRI will become a debt trap for borrowers who cannot repay Chinese loans because of the high interest rates. China would put South Asia into a debt snare and increase those countries’ financial deficits, conflicts of resources, and political dependence. This frame also stressed that the BRI is not only China’s economic strategy, but also a tool to gain support in the most strategic places, such as South Asia, Indian Ocean, and Africa. Other overall frame emphases included BRI signaling a confident China, aiming to open new East-West trade routes, generate business, expand its strategic influence, and redraw the world’s geopolitical map.

Threat/fear/conflict frame

China’s BRI is a sign of China’s fast development, so reports about China’s conflicts with other countries likely would be inevitable. News framing showed India firmly rejecting an endorsement of China’s BRI because of worries about the ambitions of the BRI, especially the key plan, the “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC),” which violates India’s sovereignty.
and territorial integrity. India news articles also highlighted that the BRI contains a lot of unequal treaties, and its success may lead China’s exports to flood the market and destroy the ecology of Central Asia and South Asia. News reports also highlighted India’s concerns that China’s “Digital Silk Road” will be used for electric surveillance. U.S. news articles warned that the plan has demonstrated China’s maritime ambitions and its plan to shake up the world economic order and challenge the economic position of the United States. U.S. news also focused on concerns about problems with the credit-driven growth model and how it may waste investment, exacerbate corruption, and run into debt in some countries.

Global development/cooperation/benefit frame

This frame depicts China as welcoming countries to join the BRI with wide consultation, shared benefits, and joint contributions, and the BRI as inclusive and mutually beneficial. These articles emphasized that China’s project is not only a “Foreign-Aid Frenzy” but also a “Global Building Spree.” The reports frame the project as serving as a geopolitical network to connect with the less-developed countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe by building land and sea trade links to boost global trade. For those less-developed countries that cannot afford to build infrastructure themselves, China would provide them with a win-win plan that would create international cooperation. As a regional infrastructure and trade agreement, BRI has shared benefits for members. Beijing is becoming a “vocal promoter of globalization” via the BRI, and it keeps the spirit of globalization alive with large positive spillover effects on global welfare.

Leadership frame

News articles highlighted China’s economic strength (Lams, 2016), and framed China as a global economic and political power (Golan & Lukito, 2015; Art, 2010). China’s BRI is reported as a way to reshape the world by promoting the “China Model” to challenge the U.S.-led liberal
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

order and U.S. dominance of global security. News frames showed that China does not hide its ambition to become a leading power and that its influence has continued to grow over time. As a top project for China, the BRI is reported as part of Xi’s “China Dream.” Its final objective is being the “Asian Dream,” with the goal of returning China to the greatest power in Asia. The reports in the leadership frame emphasize that after years of preparation, China is determined to be a dominant power, and the BRI is central to the mega-plan. The reports stress that Xi promotes the “superpower plan” to lead in the reform of “global governance” and extend China’s leadership far beyond its own country. The reports frame China’s BRI as seeking a “China First” world.

Human rights frame

China has been criticized for abusing human rights in many aspects, and there is no exception with the framing of the Belt and Road project. The BRI is framed as a unilateral, not a consensual exercise, with news reports exposing its colonial style and exploitive and unethical policies in developing countries. In this frame as well, BRI is framed as a not-free trade plan, and it is viewed as a “carrot and stick approach,” with China’s true purpose being to maintain its great power, reduce its domestic economic pressure, and explore ways to open emerging markets across the world. Some reports suggested that the project is more than a colonial enterprise, leaving debt and broken communities in its wake. Some countries in this frame were reported to have pushed back against Beijing because of human rights violation issues and unfair treaties of BRI.

Other

Two new frames emerged from this study, showing different perspectives on China’s BRI. One is the “military expansion frame,” which referenced “a plan to expand China’s global
military footprint.” The U.S. and India newspapers expressed concern that besides commercial pursuits, the real ambition of China’s Maritime Silk Road is to establish military bases in other countries and expand China’s military influence. The other is the “cultural export frame,” which was described as “a major test of its ability to export Chinese culture.” The cultural export frame noted that the BRI provides a China a chance to test the ability of its growing film industries to export Chinese culture.

**Similarities between Indian and U.S. news media articles about the Belt and Road Initiative**

The second research question asked about the similarities between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles in the topics and tone of the BRI. Articles from all four news outlets show similarities in dominant topics and the overall tone.

![Figure 3: Comparison of topics in U.S. and Indian newspapers](image)

Research question 2a asked about the similarities in dominant topics of Indian and U.S. news coverage. Figure 3 demonstrated that U.S. news outlets and the Indian news outlets have
high levels of similarity on the reporting of the top four popular topics. The most popular topic is “international relationship” in both of the U.S. news outlets (n = 55, 27.5%) and Indian articles (n = 70, 35%), followed by “the Chinese government’s profiles, programs, and actions” (n = 41 U.S. articles, 20.5%, n = 31 Indian articles, 15.5%), “threats or negative impacts on other countries” (n = 32 U.S. articles, 16%, n = 29 Indian articles, 14.5%), and “challenges and difficulties” (n = 23 U.S. articles, 11.5%, n = 32 Indian articles, 16%). The three least popular topics are “globalization and regional cooperation” (n = 19 U.S. articles, 9.5%, and n = 12 Indian articles, 6%), “the BRI and its updated information” (n = 12 U.S. articles, 6%, and n = 16 Indian articles, 8%), and “other topics” (n = 18 U.S. news articles, 9%, and n = 10, Indian articles, 5%).

Question 2b asked about the similarities in dominant tone of Indian and U.S. news coverage. The overall tone of the U.S. articles and Indian articles are highly similar (See Figure 4.). A negative tone predominated in all the U.S. (n = 118, 59%) and Indian (n = 94, 47%) news reports. The neutral tone occupied the second position, with 48 (24%) U.S. articles and 58 (29%) Indian articles. Only 34 (17%) U.S. articles and 48 (24%) Indian articles showed overall positive attitudes or descriptions. There were more negative U.S. articles than Indian articles (See Figure 4.).

Figure 4: Comparison of tone in U.S. and Indian newspapers
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Differences between Indian and U.S. news media articles about the Belt and Road Initiative

The third research question asked about the differences in the article length and dominant source between the Indian articles and the U.S. articles on the coverage of the BRI. The results show clear differences between the U.S. articles and Indian articles on their length and dominant sources.

Question 3a asked about the differences in length of Indian and U.S. news articles. The results show the U.S. articles and the Indian articles varied in length (See Figure 5.). There are 107 (53.5%) U.S. articles between 500 words and 1,000 words, and only 13 (6.5%) articles less than 500 words. Though 81 (40.5%) U.S. articles were more than 1,000 words, the actual word count in at least one fourth of long articles is even more than 2000. Compared with the long U.S. articles, more than half of the Indian articles are very short, with 107 (53.5%) articles less than 500 words and only 5 (2.5%) articles greater than 1,000 words. Though 88 (44%) Indian articles are between 500 words and 1,000 words, about one third of medium-length articles are only a few words more than 500, so most are very short.

Figure 5: Comparison of length of the U.S. and Indian news articles
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The results show not only different design and writing styles of U.S. news articles and Indian news articles but also different main topics. Most Indian news articles focused on international relationships (especially the India-China relationship and the relationship with its Asia neighbors); Chinese government’s profiles of BRI, actions and potential threats; and India’s reaction, actions, and plans to deal with the challenges. Those articles mainly introduced the current news with short comments or analysis, such as the state visits between India and other countries, India’s rejection of joining BRI and attending the BRICS\(^5\) meetings, and China’s latest news about promoting BRI. These short articles only highlighted significant events. Most of the U.S. articles were longer, with full analysis, comments, sources, and discussion. The U.S. newspapers also paid more attention to international relationships and the Chinese government’s profiles of BRI and actions, but they usually talked in more detail about the events related to the initiative and analyzed the results, potential reasons, possible influences, and benefits. They also reported about the U.S. caring more about the changes and challenges that the BRI might have brought for the global powers, and other countries’ reactions to China’s ambitions than did the Indian media.

Question 3b asked about the differences in dominant source of Indian and U.S. news articles. The U.S. and Indian articles have different types of dominant sources (See Figure 6). “Unofficial sources” are the main sources cited in U.S. articles (n = 86, or 43%). Figure 7 shows that among the 86 non-governmental sources, 40 (46.5%) were scholars (university professors, researchers, scientists, or experts), 30 (34.9%) were businessmen/businesswomen, managers, program operators, lawyers, directors, or analysts, and 12 (14%) sources were citizens, editors, publishers, authors, or writers. Only 4 (4.7%) sources were NGOs. The second most popular

\(^5\) BRICS is the acronym coined for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. http://infobrics.org/
source is “international officials” (43, 21.5%), followed by “Chinese officials” (36, 18%) and “domestic officials” (32, 16%). Only 3 (1.5%) U.S. articles cited “documents,” while 31 Indian article sources included “documents,” even though it is the least used source in the Indian articles. “Domestic sources” were most frequently used in India articles (50, 25%), which was followed by “Chinese officials” (48, or 24%). “International officials” had a similar proportion with “nonofficial sources” (36, or 18% of U.S. articles, versus 35, or 17.5%, of Indian articles). Among the 35 nonofficial sources (See Figure 7), 24 (68.6%) were dominated by scholars, professors, scientists, and experts, and 6 (17.1%) cited businessmen/businesswomen, managers, or lawyers. Only three (8.6%) articles were dominated by sources such as citizens, authors, or editors. Only two (5.7%) dominant article sources were NGOs.

![Figure 6: Comparison of the sources of U.S. and Indian news articles](image)

The most frequently used sources of U.S. articles were unofficial sources, diverging from Indian news articles’ dominant sources, which were Indian officials, Chinese officials, and international officials. Those articles preferred to use the comments, ideas, or advice from unofficial sources, especially professors and scholars from top U.S. universities or Chinese
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

universities; scientists or experts in related fields from international research institutes; and business operators, lawyers, program managers or activists who were involved in business and programs of BRI or had first-hand information of the projects in different member countries.

Figure 7: Comparison of unofficial sources in U.S. and Indian news articles

Another big difference between India and the U.S. newspapers was on the use of document sources. Only 1.5 percent of U.S. news articles use document sources in news reports, but 15.5 percent of Indian news articles used document sources, and most of them were from Indian or Chinese government profiles and Chinese state newspapers, so the results also match Indian newspapers’ leaning toward use of government-sourced information.

Discussion

This study found that media in India and the U.S. framed China’s BRI with many similarities and a few differences with the consideration of each country’s national interests and strategic foreign policies. Both Indian and U.S. media highlighted that the BRI has been China’s top level project that aims to connect countries around Asia, Europe, and Africa by building
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

infrastructure and that shows the ambitions of repositioning China in the center of Asia and even the world. India firmly rejected joining this project because the BRI will expand China’s geopolitical influences and threaten India’s sovereignty and national security. In contrast, the U.S. is mainly concerned that the initiative will make China competitive enough to reshape the U.S.-led global economic order and challenge its leading position in the world.

Utilizing previous scholarship, this research established the types of frames of BRI based on the frames of China. The study also contributes to the literature by establishing two new frames for China’s BRI—military expansion and culture exportation. The keywords that Indian and U.S. news media used to frame the BRI were “ambitious projects,” “massive investment,” “infrastructure connectivity,” “trade links,” “superpower,” “China’ Dream,” “debt trap,” “geopolitical influence,” and “expansion.” These remarkable labels, such as “dream, superpower, trap, and expansion” show the most notable features of BRI, and support framing the BRI in an attractive, meaningful, and memorable way to the audiences, according to Entman’s framing theory.

The study found that “economic project” is the most common frame that the U.S. and Indian news media used in articles. Moreover, the news media of India and the U.S. extended China’s leadership frame with a global perspective and geopolitical expansion, and the media aimed to dig China’s deep ambitions of creating a “China First” world via BRI. Though the literature highlighted China’s economic and political position as a global power (Art, 2010; Lams, 2016; Golan & Lukito, 2015), the BRI has been, for the first time, framed as a top-priority project for China, an important part of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s dream and even China’s Asian Dream, and a way to reshape the world by promoting the “China Model” to challenge the U.S.-led liberal order and global security order.
The study found that the framing of BRI suggests that media usually select and highlight certain perspectives of reality for a situation or issue for their audience. The U.S. media and Indian media appeared to select primarily the key words to attract their audiences, such as “debt trap,” “Asian Dream,” and “multitrillion-dollar investment.” According to China’s official documents of BRI, the BRI provides opportunities in five key areas: cultural exchange, financial integration, trade and investment, facilities connectivity, and policy coordination (The Belt and Road Basics, 2015). However, the U.S. news media and Indian news media did not pay attention equally to all of these key areas. The majority of frames focused on investment, facilities, financial integration and policy of BRI, such as “Chinese highest-profile investment,” “China’s multi-billion-dollar connection program,” “China’s signature foreign policy,” and “Global Building Spree.” In contrast to the framing of Chinese media that emphasized Chinese culture, the framing of BRI rarely mentioned cultural exchange. In the current study, only one frame referred to China’s culture export via BRI, which indicates that the U.S. media and Indian media did not connect Chinese culture to the mega-project closely in their framing, although China has taken great efforts to promote its “soft power.”

China has been framed as a “threatening, hungry giant” and a “yellow threat” for a long time (Becker, 2011, p. 496), and China’s rise may increase the U.S. and Indian media’s sources’ unfavorable attitude toward China. The existing frames, in part, provide insights into some of the reasons that the BRI was framed in an overall negative way. Indian media not only stressed the country’s strong stand against joining the project because of sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns in the disputed region of Kashmir, but also underlined that the BRI’s unequal treaties would throw some countries into China’s “debt trap” and “electric surveillance” and that the project revealed China’s geopolitical and military ambitions in the South Asia and Indian Ocean.
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The U.S. media sources expressed concern that China would challenge the solo global economic position of the U.S., shake the world economic order, and redraw the world’s geopolitical map. U.S. media reports also emphasized more problems than the contributions to support a negative perspective toward China’s BRI, such as the credit-driven growth model, the wasted investment, possible environmental harm, and corruption. Besides, a U.S. media article indicated that Indian media’s framing that China would use BRI to encircle India was overblown (Dhume, 2017).

Compared to the framing of China in previous research, this study found that the framing of the BRI is more comprehensive than a simple dominantly negative tone. The overall tone is still negative, but the findings show that some articles framed the BRI as a mutually beneficial project for both China and the involved countries. The U.S. media’s framing affirmed that the BRI is projected as a win-win plan, which serves as a geopolitical network to connect China with less-developed countries by building land and sea trade links to boost global trade. Moreover, framing also emphasizes that the BRI project promotes globalization. Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that people may refuse to accept weak frames if they have accepted strong frames, so the positive global cooperation and development frame indicates that media’s reported perspectives are more comprehensive on Chinese issues than before, but this frame is a weak frame compared with the most frequently used frames.

The human rights frame has been a major frame used in the news reporting of China (Hauser, 2011), but only two percent of the total articles in this study focused on human rights issues with regard to the BRI. It is surprising that the media did not consider the human rights issues of the BRI, given the historical coverage of China. The project was framed not as a free trade plan but that China’s true purpose was to seek colonial-style development and apply its exploitive and unethical policies in developing countries. Even though the project has been
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

framed as a colonial enterprise that is leaving debts and broken communities, the Chinese government was not criticized for this in the majority of news reports, as has past coverage that has focused on China’s depriving the Chinese people’s human rights with birth control, brutal suppression of student movements, or lack of freedom of expression.

Another contribution to the framing literature is the differences in the types of sources that the U.S. media and Indian media used in their articles. The study found that U.S. and Indian media often rely on familiar news frames and existing information from trusted sources in their articles. The U.S. media preferred to use unofficial sources, especially scholars, experts, and scientists from top U.S. universities, while the Indian media’s favorite sources were Indian officials and Chinese officials (See Figure 7). The current study found that China’s President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Keqiang, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and other Modi government officials were the most frequently cited sources in the Indian media’s articles. Moreover, Indian media used a lot of documents in their articles, yet it is clear that they prefer official sources because most of the documents were from Chinese governmental news agencies.

The U.S. news media had more negative articles than the Indian news media, but the Indian media’s articles showed a stronger negative tone toward China’s ambitious plan than the U.S. media did. News headlines are illustrative for comparison. For example, The New York Times reported that “China Has Donald Trump Just Where It Wants Him” (November 10, 2017), and The Wall Street Journal wrote that “The Marshall Plan birthed a U.S.-led global order—now China is building a new world” (January 30, 2018). Many negative U.S. articles mainly reported disappointment or concerns of the U.S. government related to issues of U.S.- China competition instead of targeting the project itself, whereas the Indian media’s negative articles directly showed strong negative tone toward the BRI, such as “China wants ‘BRICS Plus’ to include
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

‘friendly’ countries, plan might hurt India’s interests” (Times of India, March 9, 2018) and “India keeps China hanging on BRI” (Economic Times, April 23, 2017). Those types of headlines indicate that negative news articles focused on the potential threat and negative impacts of BRI on the U.S., India, or other countries.

**Limitations and future studies**

The current study is limited in that only two of the largest circulation elite U.S. newspapers and two of the largest English-language Indian newspapers were analyzed. The study period is from September 2013 to September 2018, so there may be some useful articles published later than the study period that were not included. China’s Belt and Road Initiative is progressing very quickly, and the international relationship between the related countries is changing as well, so this study might not analyze the newest information and changes in news frames.

This study selected the articles from newspapers, but other types of publications were not included, such as online newspapers or magazines, social media, digital media, broadcast news, or small local or regional newspapers. That means this study can only analyze the most representative ideas from this sample yet not present a complete perspective of U.S. media and Indian media. Thus, the results and conclusions generated from this research cannot be applied to other types of news outlets. Other countries, such as BRI nations, and other types of news outlets should be examined and analyzed in future studies.

In addition, this study compared the similarities and differences of news frames between two U.S. and two Indian newspapers, but it does not further compare the frames between The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, and the differences and similarities between the Times of India and The Economic Times. A future study also will compare news frames among
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

China, the U.S., and India, because it is important to examine how the Chinese media frame the Belt and Road Initiative and the possible reasons for the differences among those countries.

Conclusion

This study of how four elite U.S. and Indian news outlets framed news coverage of China’s Belt and Road Initiative found that there are many similarities between the two countries’ news media on the reporting of dominant frames, topics, and overall tone of articles about the BRI, but some differences exist with regard to the dominant sources and depth of coverage. China’s BRI was primarily framed as China’s top-level national economic project, but the frames of “global expansion,” “threat and conflict,” and “leadership” indicate negative tone toward China’s BRI still are reported in U.S. and Indian news media, reflecting those countries’ strategic foreign policies and national interests. The two countries’ newspapers did not pay particular attention to the human rights issues of the BRI but instead highlighted that China’s BRI provides a new way to promote globalization and international cooperation, which means the U.S. and Indian news media are able to frame the BRI in a comprehensive way beyond the constraints of previous negative frameworks on China. The new frames of “global military footprint,” and “Chinese culture exportation” show the U.S. and Indian news media’s new concerns about China’s giant plan around the world. This study concludes that the news framing of China and Chinese issues by the U.S. and Indian media is always changing with the game of international relationships, states interests, and competition.
Appendix A: Coding sheet

Section 1: Article Information

The codebook reflects the research questions about the framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Please code each article according to the following categories.

V01: Newspaper

Code the newspaper in which the article appears.

1 = The Wall Street Journal
2 = The New York Times
3 = Times of India
4 = The Economic Times

V02: Article number

Assign a number to each article, starting with the number 1 and ending with 400 for all the newspapers.

1-100 = The Wall Street Journal
101-200 = The New York Times
201-300 = Times of India
301-400 = The Economic Times

V03: Main headline

Type in the main headline of the article, without including the sub-headline (deck).

V04: Date published

Type the date when the article was published. Time period from 09/07/2013 to 09/30/2018.

MM/DD/YYYY (12/01/2013)

V05: The length of the article
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

1 = **Short** (Less than 500 words)

2 = **Medium** (Between 500 and 1,000 words)

3 = **Long** (1,000 words and above)

**V06: The main topic**

Note: The topic refers to the focus of each article. The topic is based on the headline, deck, lead, and entire text. If a story contains more than one topic, only code the dominant topic, which should be highlighted in the headline, deck, or lead.

1 = **Introduction of the B&R project schedule.** Updated information about the plan, infrastructure instruction, investment, acquiring lands and resources.

2 = **Chinese government’s profiles of BRI, programs, actions, or potential aims.** Also include the solutions that China will take to solve problems and actions to promote the project.

3 = **Challenges and difficulties.** The project is facing many challenges in some countries, including their attitude and actions.

4 = **Globalization, global market, or regional cooperation.** Include the achievement and benefits that the plan has provided to other countries.

5 = **Threats or negative impacts on other countries.** Some people worry that the plan has made or will bring great threats to global economy and peace, or other countries’ security, independence, and development.

6 = **International relationship.** Include the changes in the relationship between China and other countries, along with comments, criticism, or analysis from the U.S., India, or other countries.

7 = **Other.** Code the specific topic of the article.
Section 2: Types of frames

The following frames were selected from the literature and created from the first round of inductive analyses of the 400 cases. The unit of analysis is the news article. Each article was examined, and the dominant frame was coded. If there are two main frames used in one article, then the one that first appeared was coded as the dominant frame. Please code each individual frame with the following categories:

V08: Frame

1. Leadership frame. This frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted China’s economic position in the world (Lams, 2016) and its desire to be a competing global power with important economic and political influence (Art, 2010; Golan & Lukito, 2015;). News frames of BRI also showed China’s great ambition to be the new leader of the world economy and its global push for influence through the BRI. Keywords, phrases, and concepts include new world order, superpower plans, leading the world economy, creating a new global marketplace, the global winner, building an empire along the road, China’s global dream, Asia dream, and a modern approach to the imperial-era power play.

2. Economic project frame. China has been viewed as a product-producing country with low labor costs and high resource costs (Han & Wang, 2012), and the overall tone of news about China has been increasingly negative except the emphases on economic development (Peng, 2006; Stone & Xiao, 2007). For example, frames of the Belt and Road Initiative continue to attract worldwide attention. The economic projects frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted China’s Marshall Plan, China’s new Silk Road, and the Grand Trade Plan. Keywords, phrases, and concepts include China’s highest-profile investment deals, a series of
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

China’s megaprojects, an infrastructure-led growth model, a billion-dollar infrastructure project, and an ambitious multitrillion-dollar trade.

3. Threat/fear/conflict frame. China has been framed as a “threatening power” and “yellow threat” (Becker, 2011, p. 496), “a currency manipulator” and “a thief of economic resources” (Ooi & D’Arcangelis, 2017, pp. 269-270; Paletta & Davis, 2012a, 2012b), and “red China” and “potential enemy” (Chang, 2008, p. 11). The threat frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted that the Belt and Road Initiative contains a lot of unequal treaties, and its success may lead China’s exports flood the market. Keywords, phrases, and concepts include China’s maritime ambition, China’s plan to shake up the world economic order, a credit-driven growth model, and BRI is running into troubles in countries involved.

4. Global development/cooperation/benefit frame. The project is not only China’s “Foreign-Aid Frenzy,” it also is a “Global Building Spree.” The global development frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted BRI serves as a geopolitical tie to connect with the countries along the road, and it is a win-win plan for those countries by reviving a classic trade route. Keywords, phrases, and concepts include BRI keeps the spirit of globalization alive, BRI will have large positive spillover effects on global welfare, and BRI is a force to fight terror along the road.

5. Global expansion/invasion/competition frame. Besides the increasing global economic development and political influence, China has used multiple strategies to promote China’s positive image and soft power (Wang & Shoemaker, 2011, Wang, 2008), but the effort did not change foreign media’s unfavorable attitude (Golan, 2013), and China has been framed as an ambitious global power. The global expansion frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted BRI makes some countries lose competitive strength and leads them to deep debt
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

traps, BRI creates security vulnerabilities for the U.S. and other countries, or BRI is viewed as involvement or invasion of other countries’ domestic affairs and sovereignty by asserting Chinese values and interests.

6. Human rights frame. China had been framed as a human rights abuser (Lams, 2013, p. 61) and the human rights frame is a hot frame in news reporting of China (Naomi, 2011). The Chinese government is criticized for lack of freedom of expression (Kobland et al., 1992), the Communist party’s control on propaganda (Zhang, 2006), and the mainstream media represent the political authority (Scollon, 2000). The human rights frame was operationalized by coding for topics that highlighted BRI serves as a “carrot and stick approach” to many countries, it is a colonial enterprise contains many human rights violation issues and unfair treaties, and some countries have pushed back against Beijing.

7. Other (code the specific frames). Such as the military expansion frame and the culture export frame. Enter and describe repetitive keywords, phrases, or ideas that suggest the use of a frame not listed above.

Section 3: Dominant source

Code sources in news reports who were cited or quoted about specific issues or aspects of the Belt and Road plan. The dominant sources were classified into four general categories: 1 = domestic officials, 2 = Chinese officials, 3 = international officials, and 4 = unofficial sources.

The procedure for ascertaining the dominant source is the source cited the most in the article. If two or more sources are cited the same number of times, the first source cited in the article will be coded as the dominant source. If there are the same number of two kinds of sources, the source that is more critical to the topic will be selected as the dominant source.

V09: Dominant Sources
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

1 = Domestic officials. Officials from the central government or local government in India or the United States.

2 = Chinese officials. Chinese leaders, politicians and bureaucrats.

3 = International officials. Officials from the United Nations or countries other than China, India, or the U.S..

4 = Unofficial sources.
   401 = Scholars, experts, or scientists from China, India, the U.S., or the other countries.
   402 = Businessmen/businesswomen, lawyers, and managers involved in the BRI projects.
   403 = Members of nongovernmental organizations.
   404 = Citizens, editors, authors, and publishers.

Section 4: Tone

The dominant tone of the articles was identified as positive, negative, or neutral. The tone was ascertained by the headlines and the entire article. Each paragraph in the article was assessed for positive, negative, and neutral content using a coding sheet. The dominant tone to emerge after tabulating the tone of each paragraph was used. In the coding book, positive = 1, neutral = 2, negative = 3.

V 10: Tone

1 = Positive tone: Positive articles contain supportive content, citations, or quotes that show a positive attitude, belief, agreement, hope, happiness, trust, support, enthusiasm, or excitement. The words used in the article evoke a sense of optimism.

2 = Neutral tone: Neutral articles provide basic facts and details, comments, or discussion without obvious favoritism or bias. The words used evoke little reaction, and/or the writing is
straightforward or simply explanatory. A neutral tone also occurred when the number of positive features equaled the number of negative features (Relly & Schwalbe, 2013).

3 = Negative tone: Negative articles have obvious evidences to show disbelief, disagreement, impatience, distrust, fear, threat, disappointment, worry or opposing opinions. The words used evoke defeat and pessimism.
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

and financial performance from an agenda-building and agenda-setting perspective.


MOFCOM, The Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, which is responsible for all domestic and international trade and economic affairs.

[http://history.mofcom.gov.cn/?special=2ydylzldtc](http://history.mofcom.gov.cn/?special=2ydylzldtc)
FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE


FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE


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FRAMING OF CHINA’S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE


