

Re-examining the Determinants in International News Coverage:  
Cross-news-category and Cross-country Comparisons

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## **ABSTRACT**

Re-examining the Determinants in International News Coverage:

Cross-news-category and Cross-country Comparisons

Huan He

Since the 1960's, communication scholars have conducted numerous studies to identify determinants of international news flow and coverage. Most of these studies have failed to recognize the fact that different news categories are governed by different criteria of newsworthiness. Also, there has been a lack of research that investigates non-Western, especially non-U.S. news media, and a lack of comparative studies examining media in different parts of the world. The current study was designed to address the two problems. Using quantitative content analysis, four newspapers, which were published in Canada, India, China and the United States, were investigated. Their international news outputs in four news categories were compared. The four categories were political news, military news, economic news and news on natural disasters. Two hypotheses were tested: 1) In a newspaper, the determinants of international news coverage vary among different news categories; 2) The determinants of international news coverage in a particular news category are similar among newspapers from different countries. Hypothesis I was generally supported by the data; however, hypothesis II was only partially supported. The results suggest that research should be conducted to understand news-making processes in different news categories. More comparative studies are required to further explore similarities and variations in news values and practices in different countries.

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## INTRODUCTION

The current study is an effort to improve our understanding of the processes involved in the making of international news. My interest in international news research is associated with my own experience as a journalism student in a Chinese university and as a news editor in a few Chinese newspapers. I have been attracted by some research questions raised in this field of study, especially those concerning how gatekeeping routines and values affect news coverage.

Through a quantitative content analysis of four quality newspapers, I attempt to demonstrate that newspapers from different cultural, economic, political backgrounds cover international news in the same manner. The four newspapers have been selected from the United States, Canada, China and India. Moreover, I intend to prove that there are different criteria of newsworthiness governing the coverage of international news under different news topics. News that falls into four news categories is examined. Among them, political, military/terrorist and economic news are considered to be the main focus of all quality newspapers. The fourth news category is natural disasters, which has received some research attention in recent years.

In this introductory chapter, I would like to first present the research problems that are addressed by this study, and why I am interested in them. Then, I will briefly describe the journey that I have gone through to complete this study, and explain the organization of the current research paper.

## **Section I: Statement of Research Problem**

The current study investigates the determinants of international news flow and coverage. International news determinants are factors that represent various forces shaping the coverage of world events. Some examples are the deviance of an event, the economic power of a country, and the financial ability of a news medium. In the 1960s, a group of Scandinavian scholars first attempted to explain the wide disparity in the amount of news covering various countries by examining the relationship between ‘news factors’ and the amount of news coverage on each country (Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984). These news factors are considered to be either the technical/structural impediments that hinder the flow of news among countries, or forces that influence the gatekeeping decisions of news professionals and organizations. This research approach became popular in the 1970s, and continued to attract much academic attention throughout the recent decades.

When examining previous literature, my own journalistic experience has helped me to identify two issues in this field of study. One is the lack of understanding of how media from non-Western countries cover the world. The other is the lack of awareness that different news categories are governed by different news determinants.

A majority of the existing studies on international news determinants focus on Western media, in particular, American media. Non-Western media have not received substantial attention in English-language research. My background in China, a non-Western country, has made me curious about the differences between Western and non-Western media. My own experience tells me that these media are not likely to vary greatly in terms of practices and values associated with the gatekeeping processes.

The Chinese press has been considered to be very different from its Western counterpart because of its adoption of Confucian philosophy, which stresses consensus and cooperation rather than individual freedom and rights, which are emphasized by Western cultures. Also, it is not a free press, but the ‘mouthpiece’ of the ruling communist party (Parsons, 1997; Wu and Weaver, 1998). However, in spite of these significant differences, I do not think there are major variations in the actual production of news between China and the West.

When I received my journalism education in China, our textbooks were re-written from Western journalism textbooks. I was not taught about any ‘Chinese’ journalism but only Western ones. Wu and Weaver (1998) reported that due to a shortage of qualified scholars, many Chinese journalism programs have been hiring foreign professors, mostly from the United States. At the same time, many Chinese teaching faculty members received training in Western countries. Textbooks in the West have been translated and used in Chinese classes. Students have been increasingly exposed to Western media, such as ABC and VOA from the United States, and StarTV from Australia. All these facts indicate the domination of Western journalism training in Chinese universities. Interestingly, Wu and Weaver’s (1998) study on the professional values held by Chinese journalism students shows that a majority of students consider the ‘watchdog role’ to be the most important mission of their future profession, and they tend to ignore the media’s functions as a ‘mouthpiece’ defined by the communist ruler.

After I came to Canada, I read a number of publications on journalist practices in North American media (e.g. Downing et al, 1990; Ericson et al, 1987; Hartley, 1982; Tuchman, 1978). I found that these media are very similar to the ones where I used to



work in China, in terms of internal organization, division of tasks, newsgathering routines, and news selection practices. Moreover, reading U.S. and Canadian newspapers, I found that Chinese newspapers do not vary from their Western counterparts in terms of division of news topics, and their emphases on political, economic and military news. In China, government censorship does affect the everyday work in the newsroom. However, from my experience, the control is rather loose in the domain of international news, as long as the events are not related to any foreign policy of the government.

If media from China do not differ much from their Western counterparts, I wonder what about media in other non-Western countries, which in many cases (e.g. India, Brazil and Argentina) have had more Western influences than China has, and embrace more liberal values. I feel that the newspaper itself is a Western artifact. When it is adopted by another country, a whole set of protocols and values are adopted at the same time. Tai and Chang (2002) compared perception of newsworthiness in 34 U.S. newspapers and 25 non-U.S. newspapers published in English. Interestingly, they found strong similarities in what was considered newsworthy between the two groups. Tai and Chang (2002) considered these similarities to be a result of the diffusion of news values across cultures, possibly through the heavy reliance on U.S. wire services.

I see the examination of news determinants as an adequate method to explore whether similar gatekeeping routines and professional values are adopted by news media in different parts of world. If my speculation is accurate, similar determinants should be found in these news media. For example, if news editors in both China and the United States see events in developed countries more newsworthy, we will find, in both Chinese

and U.S. media, a strong, positive relationship between the volume of coverage that each country receives and the country's Gross National Product per capita.

In this study, I have compared the international news coverage of four newspapers. I have chosen to study newspapers rather than television or radio because they are easier to access. Recordings of past television and radio programs are very difficult to obtain. Moreover, as a former newspaper editor, I am more familiar with the journalist practices involved in a newspaper's production. The four newspapers investigated are *The Globe and Mail* from Canada, *The Times of India* from India, *The People's Daily* from China, and *The New York Times* from the United States. The four newspapers are all quality newspapers with nation-wide circulations in their respective countries. They all allocate considerable importance to international news. *The Times of India* and *The People's Daily* are from the non-Western Worlds. They are published in countries with very different cultural traditions from those of the United States and Canada. Moreover, *The People's Daily* is from an authoritarian country. It is subject to the ideological control and political censorship of its government. The other three newspapers are all from democratic countries.

Reviewing past literature on international news determinants, I found something that contradicts my experience. Most of the research in this field treats foreign news as a whole, and attempts to find uniform news determinants to explain overall foreign coverage. However, according to my experience as a news editor, there are different definitions of newsworthiness for different categories of international news. Take the examples of economic news and military news. An event related to a large international corporation is likely to be newsworthy only when the corporation has some sort of

economic ties with China. Therefore, economic relationships are a main determinant of economic news coverage. On the other hand, war within a country or between countries is always newsworthy no matter whether it affects the interest of China, or not. It is the characteristics of a military event that determines whether it will be covered or not in the news.

In identifying this problem, I decided to isolate four different news categories in my study. These categories are political, military/terrorist, economic, and natural disaster news. Nine news factors have been tested. They are population, military power, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP per capita of the countries being covered, trade, common official language, colonial ties and geographical distance between the countries being covered and the country that hosts the newspaper, and the number of people killed in a natural disaster. The last factor is tested only in the natural-disaster category.

## **Section II: Outline of This Study**

The journey to complete this study started with a painstaking examination of existing literature on international news flow and coverage. It took me a few months to identify the different research approaches involved in this field of study. Previous studies can be roughly grouped under three research questions: 1) what are the news factors that determine whether or not, as well as how much, an international event is covered by news media; 2) what are the forces that shape the volume and direction of international news flow; and 3) how are international events and actors portrayed in news, and why? A variety of research methods has been employed to address these research questions, including quantitative content analysis, discourse analysis (i.e. qualitative content

analysis), network analysis, and ethnographic methods (e.g. interviews, and questionnaire surveys).

I have focused my literature review on studies concerning the first research question, using quantitative content analysis. Two main problems were identified in the existing research. There were a lack of understanding of how newspapers from different parts of the world compare with one another, and a lack of recognition that the coverage of different news topics are governed by different sets of determinants. I have designed my research to address the two research problems. Quantitative content analysis of international news coverage was conducted in the four newspapers. The relationship between news coverage and each of the nine news factors was analyzed. The analysis results were used to verify the hypotheses of this study.

When interpreting the analysis results, I revisited some past studies that had examined the same news factors, in terms of how the news factors were defined, measured and tested, and how their research results compared with mine. Such a comparison helped me to gain insights on how some of the news factors influence news coverage, and how they should be examined in future determinants research. I consider such insights as by-products of this study, and will discuss them in this research paper.

The organization of this paper reflects the research journey I have undertaken. Chapter I undertakes a review of previous literature in the field of international news flow and coverage, focusing on determinants studies of international news coverage. From this review, two main limitations in this research approach are identified. This led me to the formulation of my research objectives and hypotheses.

Chapter II describes the issues and procedures concerning the research methods employed in my study. First, each step of the content analysis is described in detail. Every choice made pertaining to the selection of newspapers, sampling methods, and definition of categories is justified. Then, the selection and measurement of news factors are presented; my main data analysis instruments are introduced.

Chapter III contains the results of data analysis. After a brief look at the data obtained from the four newspapers, the imbalance in their international news coverage is described. The two hypotheses of this study are then tested. The news factors are examined mainly through an ‘inter-country comparison’ of news coverage, which detects the effect of each factor by comparing the coverage of different countries in the same newspaper. For instance, if a newspaper has a tendency to give more coverage to countries close to its host country than those faraway, geographical distance can be seen as an effective factor of the newspaper’s foreign coverage. After this testing procedure, the effects of some weak factors are verified by employing the ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ method. This method involves the comparison of a number of newspapers in terms of their coverage of one country (or a group of countries). Again, take the case of geographical distance. If the newspapers that are close to a country cover the country more than those far from it, we can conclude that geographical distance is an effective factor.

In the last part of this research paper, I will discuss some of the implications of my research results. How can we make sense of these research results? How can they benefit our future research on international news coverage? I also take stock of some of

the ‘by-products’ of this study, that is, how some of the news factors involved in this study should be conceptualized, measured, and tested.

## CHAPTER I

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will briefly overview the existing English literature on international news flow and coverage, focusing on determinant studies involving the quantitative content analysis of media output. Some weaknesses in the literature will be discussed. Then, I will outline the objectives and hypotheses of the current study, which have been developed to address the weaknesses.

The determinant approach in international news flow and coverage constitutes research conducted to identify and explain the patterns dominating international news flow and coverage. This approach assumes that there are identifiable forces shaping the production and transmission of international news and attempts to recognize them using different research methods.

The quantitative content analysis of media output is the most employed research method in determinant studies. Various determinants/factors are defined and their relationships with news coverage are tested and measured. Other methods employed include ethnographic studies of news routines and professionalism, a network analysis of international news exchange, and a qualitative content analysis (also called discourse analysis) of media content.

The scholarly literature that has been examined here was located using three methods. The first one involved computer assisted literature searches. Second, I reviewed the issues of four major communication journals published in the past 20 years. The four journals are *Gazette*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (formerly called

*Journalism Quarterly*), *Communication Research*, and *Journal of Communication*. Also, a snowball method has been used; that is, to look for relevant studies from the references of the already available literature.

My literature search yielded journal articles and book chapters that represent research efforts during the past four decades. The earliest studies were mostly conducted by Scandinavian scholars. Some of these studies have had considerable influences on the later research. Most of them were published in the *Journal of Peace Research*. Most quantitative studies on international news determinants were found in *Gazette* and *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. The former has devoted much of its space on the research topic. *Communication Research* has published some articles on the methodological issues related to the research. Qualitative research on international news coverage has flourished since the 1980's. A few academic journals have been responsible for publishing these studies. Among them are *Critical Studies on Mass Communication* and *Journalism Monographs*.

### **Section I: Existing Literature**

Since the 1950's, the study of international news coverage and flow has yielded a rich body of literature. The amount and content of news covering various countries are measured and research has been conducted to reveal various influences on international news flow and coverage.

Wilbur Schramm, a pioneer in international news flow and coverage study, suggested in his book *Mass Media and National Development* (1964), that the major variables in the study of international news should include 1) the pattern of international



news flow, 2) the nature and type of international news coverage, 3) the structure of international news organizations, 4) the behaviors of journalists in these organizations, and 5) the structural factors affecting international news flow and coverage. In fact, most of the studies in this area have examined one or more of these variables.

Two main goals can be identified in these studies. The first is to reveal the characteristics of international news flow and coverage (i.e. pattern of international flow and the nature and type of international news coverage). The second goal is to explain why these characteristics exist (i.e. the structure of international news organization, the behaviours of journalists in these organizations and the structural factors affecting international news flow and coverage). Yet, most earlier studies bear only the first purpose (e.g. Bishop, 1975; Giffard, 1984; Rimmer, 1981; Peterson, 1980). The majority of studies serving the second purpose are determinant studies of international news flow and coverage.

Pertaining to the characteristics of international news flow and coverage, although there are some inconsistencies, empirical studies have generally supplied evidence supporting three general findings. First, there is an imbalance in news coverage. News media pay more attention to developed countries than less developed ones (Elliott and Golding, 1973; Hackett, 1989; Hart 1996; Hicks et al, 1974; Markhan, 1961; Peterson, 1980; Rimmer, 1981; Semmel, 1976). Second, negative reports tend to dominate news coverage of foreign countries and the less developed countries receive more coverage of this kind (Adams, 1964; Elliott et al, 1973; Hackett, 1989; Hester, 1974; Lent, 1977; McClelland and Young, 1970; Rimmer, 1981; Singler, 1972). The third finding is that news media around the world constitute the same imbalance and bias (Cho and Lacy,

2000; El Sarayrah, 1986; Hudson et al. 1988; Ishii, 1996; Schramm, 1964; Sreberny-Mahammedi, 1984).

The imbalance and bias in international news flow and coverage have inspired many researchers to inquire why these problems exist. As a result, much research has been done to investigate the determinants of international news flow and coverage; that is, the factors that determine whether a foreign event will be reported by news media.

Over the years, researchers have introduced a number of factors that might influence international news flow and coverage (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gan, 1979; Ostgaard, 1965; Hester, 1973; Rosengren, 1970 and 1974). The factors have been examined under various theoretical and methodological considerations. I can by no means exhaust them here, nor the research rationales associated with them. However, I will borrow two methods of classification from other scholars to illustrate the main research interests that are associated with these factors.

First, the factors can be classified according to their references to different elements involved in international news flow and coverage. Chang et al (1987) divided them into two categories: context-oriented factors and event-oriented factors. The context-oriented factors include factors describing the nature of the location where foreign events occurred, such as population of the guest country<sup>1</sup>, trade between the guest country and the host country<sup>2</sup>, communication infrastructure in the guest country, etc. The event-oriented factors are factors that describe the nature of the events themselves. They determine the newsworthiness of the events. Examples include timeliness,

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<sup>1</sup> Guest country is the country where an event takes place.

<sup>2</sup> Host country is the country that hosts the new media in question.

unexpectedness, human interest, continuity, deviance, as well as relevance to the media's host country (Shoemaker et al, 1986).

Indeed, Chang et al's (1987) classification consists of only factors that are external to the news media's organization and operation. There is also a group of factors that are associated with the characteristics of media, their workers, and their market. I call them media-oriented factors. There is a wide range of news factors that can be classified into this category, for example, use of wire services, media size, market size, percentage of immigrants in the market, professionalism, news professionals' background, and ideology dominating the news media.

Ahern (1984) provided another way to categorize existing news factors. He identified two mechanisms through which these factors affect international news flow and coverage. The two are the logistical perspective and the gatekeeper perspective. The former focuses on how technical and structural impediments might hinder the flow of news from various parts of the world. Factors responsible for the processes can be context-oriented or media-oriented. For example, absence of correspondents in a guest country (context-oriented factor) might lower the amount of coverage on the events in the country. The use of wire services by a news medium (media-oriented factor) may increase the likelihood of remote countries being covered.

The gatekeeper perspective is concerned with the multi-step processes of newsgathering and distribution by a chain of gatekeepers. Each step represents a point of news selection. Only foreign events that pass through all gates will reach consumers or recipients of the news. Media-oriented factors may influence the choices of the gatekeepers. For instance, the presence of a large number of Chinese immigrants in the

market area may make the gatekeepers feel that it is necessary to report more on events in China. At the same time, both context-oriented and event-oriented factors can be related to the gatekeeping processes. For example, news workers might tend to report on events with a high degree of deviance (an event-oriented factor), as well as events taking place in countries with advanced economic development (a context-oriented factor).

Compared with Chang et al's (1987) classification of news factors, Ahern's approach can better help us to understand how various news factors influence news flow and coverage. However, it does not yield exclusive sub-sets of factors, as one single news factor can influence news flow and coverage through both logistical and gatekeeper perspectives. Language, for example, can affect news workers' ability to gather news in another country from a logistical perspective. At the same time, from a gatekeeper perspective, news editors might assume that readers are more interested in the countries that use the same language (culturally proximate), thus reporting more on these countries.

To avoid confusion, I will adopt Chang et al's (1987) categorization to demonstrate how the three classes of news factors have been examined in previous research. The emphasis will be put on context- and event-oriented factors, as they are the main focuses of this study. Factors that fall into the two categories do not have any preoccupation of possible differences among newspapers. In contrast, media-oriented factors address the inherent differences among newspapers. It is assumed that the differences are likely to affect the international news flow and coverage. In other words, when media-oriented factors vary, we might identify different event-oriented and context-oriented factors in the news. The current study is designed to reveal similarities

among newspapers in different countries. Therefore, media-oriented factors have limited relevance here.

### **Context-Oriented Factors**

A large number of context-oriented factors have been examined in previous studies. Wu (2000: pp.111) reviewed previous literature on ‘systematic factors’, which he defined as ‘the distinctive traits of individual nations, as well as the magnitude of interaction between any two nations in the context of the global system’. His notion of ‘systematic factors’ is, indeed, equivalent to the concept of ‘context-oriented factors’ defined by Chang et al (1987). Wu (2000) divided the factors into three groups. The first group consists of factors that describe the ‘national traits’ of the guest country, including territory size, population, total or per capita Gross National Product (GNP), total or per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), military personnel, freedom of expression, etc. The hypothesis is that the countries with more economic/political/military power or freedom of expression are more likely to be reported by other countries.

The second group of factors indicates the interactions and relatedness between the host and guest countries, including trade, colonial ties, geographical distance, language similarity, ideological similarity, political affiliation, volume of migration, etc. It is proposed that countries, which are close related economically, culturally, politically, and/or geographically are more likely to be in each other’s news.

The third group, the logistical factors, includes presence of international news wires, national news agencies, and satellite earth stations in the guest country. Countries

and locals with well-developed communications infrastructure are expected to gain more coverage than those that do not because it is easier to gather and transmit news from them.

Studies examining context-oriented factors usually involve quantitative content analysis of news output. The relationship between news output and news factors is then measured. Instead of news output, a few studies use other dependent variables, such as volume of news trade among countries (Kim and Barnett, 1996). It is very difficult to summarize the contents of the studies because they often investigate more than one news factor. Also, their findings have not been consistent. Therefore, I have constructed a table to list studies that paid attention to each news factor.

**Table 1- 1 Results of previous studies on selected context-oriented factors.**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Related</b>	<b>Not related</b>
<b>National Traits</b>		
Population	Kariel & Rosenvall 1984; Charles et al, 1979; Ishii, 1996; Dupree, 1971; Kim, et al, 1996; Nmaemeka, et al 1996;	Robinson and Sparkers, 1976; Larson, 1979; Wu, 2000
GNP/GDP (total or per capita)	Ahern, 1984; Kareil & Rosenvall, 1984; Ishii, 1996; Hester, 1973; Shoemaker et al, 1991;	Robinson and Sparkers, 1976; Wu, 2000
Freedom of expression	Nnameks & Richstad, 1981; Robinson and Sparkers, 1976	Ahern, 1984; Chang et al, 1987; Van Belle, 2000; Wu, 2000
<b>Interaction and Relatedness</b>		
Trade	Wu, 2000; Dupree, 1971; de Verneil, 1977; Ahern, 1984; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Charles, 1977; Shoemaker et al, 1991	Haynes, 1984; Robinson et al, 1976; Cossara, 1993; Mayo & Pasadeos, 1991
Colonial ties	Haynes, 1984; Meyer, 1989; Skurnik, 1981; Nnameka & Richstad, 1981	Wu, 2000
Geographical Distance	Wu, 1998a & 2000; Haynes, 1984; Chang, et al, 1987*; Ramaprasad, 1991; Adames, 1986; Dupree, 1971.	Hicks and Gordon 1974; Luttbeg, 1983; Chang et al, 1987* & 2000; Shoemaker et al, 1991; Vilanilam, 1983; Johnson, 1997.
Language	Skurnik, 1981; Hester, 1973; Johnson, 1997; Kareil, et al, 1984	Cassare, 1993; Rosengren, 1970; Chang et al, 1987 & 2000; Shoemaker et al, 1991
<b>Logistical Factors</b>		
Correspondents	Ishii, 1996; Larson, 1979	
International Wire Services	Larson, 1979; Chang et al, 1992; Wu (2000)	Link, 1984
INTELSAT	Larson, 1979; de Vernei, 1977	Larson, 1984

\* This study has shown that geographical distance is not a factor for international news coverage in newspapers, but has considerable influence on television's coverage of foreign countries.

Table 1-1 consists of some of the most investigated factors in the three groups of context-oriented factors. Studies that have found a factor to affect news coverage are placed in the ‘Related’ column, and those that have not found any effect are placed in the ‘Not Related’ column.

The current study tests eight context-oriented factors, including population, GDP, GDP per capita, military power, trade, colonial ties, geographical distance, and language. Seven of these factors are listed in Table 1-1. As we can see, they have been repeatedly tested in previous research. However, researchers have not agreed on their effects on international news coverage. Military power has been largely ignored in previous literature. I have found no research that tests the news factor.

### **Event-oriented Factors**

Studies of event-oriented factors involve quantitative content analysis of actual news output, and undertake an examination of the relationship between news output and some characteristics of the actual events. Among the many event-oriented factors proposed in the literature, only two factors have been empirically examined. They are relevance to the host country and deviance, with the latter receiving more attention.

Shoemaker et al (1986) examined the coverage of international events in U.S. media against various conceptualizations of ‘deviance’. They defined two indicators of deviance. One is normative deviance, which refers to the extent to which an event violates the social norm in the host country. The other is potential-for-social-change deviance, which describes the extent to which an event threatens the status quo in the host

country. Both indicators are found to be important predictors of news coverage of international events.

Chang et al (1987) and Shoemaker et al (1991) examined normative deviance, potential-for-social-change deviance, relevance to the United States, as well as a number of context-oriented factors using U.S. media output. Both studies found deviance and relevance to the United States to be the most prominent determinants of news coverage.

Weimann and Brosuis (1991) studied the newsworthiness of international terrorism using deviance as a predictor of newsworthiness. A number of deviance indicators were tested, including victims, type of action, type of targets, and nationality of targets, geographical location, perpetrators and responsibility. He concluded that deviance as newsworthiness can be regarded as the guiding principle of coverage.

The number of people killed in an event has been examined as an indicator of deviance in the studies on the news coverage of natural disasters. Van Belle (2000) examined the influence of the factor on the coverage of natural disasters in U.S. media, and found it to be a dominant predictor. Adams' (1986) investigation on the coverage of earthquakes in U.S. media, on the other hand, showed that the number of people killed is related to the coverage of major disasters (at least 300 people killed). However, it is a less powerful predictor than U.S. tourists in the guest country.

Charles et al (1979) investigated the relationship between the degree of violence and news coverage in an American newspaper. He found that the more violent an event, the more chances it gets to be covered on the front page.

There are only a handful of studies on 'relevance to the host country' and deviance. Yet, it appears that the factors have been relatively well accepted as an



influential determinant of international news flow and coverage. In this study, deviance of news events is tested against the coverage of natural disasters. It is not examined in other news categories due to the difficulties involved in evaluating the deviance of an event in different societies.

### **Media-oriented Factors**

The media-oriented category involves news factors that are associated with very different theoretical and methodological consideration. For example, political ideology has been considered as an influence upon news content; that is, how events and actors are portrayed in the news. Some researchers view media content as being manipulated by the powerful to dominate the powerless (Shoemaker, 1987). Using quantitative and/or qualitative content analysis, they study the media coverage of certain countries and compare them with host country's foreign policy towards these countries (e.g. Carragee, 1991; Cassara, 1998; Entman, 1991; Kim, 2000; Kirat, 1989; Wasburn and Burke, 1997).

Studies of professionalism consider how a journalist is socialized to take on the role of news professionals. Gatekeepers learn what is newsworthy through this process of socialization (Shoemaker, 1987). In these studies, ethnographical research methods, including field observation, questionnaire survey, and interviews, are employed to reveal the news selection criteria used by news professionals (e.g. Bublic and Sitaraman, 1998; Peterson, 1979; Tai and Chang, 2002; Wilke and Rosenberger, 1994). The relationship between news professionals' background and news value is sometimes examined (Chang and Lee, 1992).

Some other media-oriented factors that have been examined are those associated with the nature of news organizations and their market. Johnson (1997) called them news organization factors and market factors, respectively. News organization factors include media size, profitability, number of foreign editors, and the use of wire service. Examples of market factors are market size and number of immigrants in the market. Very few studies have investigated these news factors. Johnson (1997), and Cho and Lacy (2000) compared international coverage in a number of newspapers to identify differences among them. Various media-oriented factors are then tested to explain the differences.

Much of the previous research on international news determinants has not attempted to conceptualize their findings to a more abstract level. However, some studies did embed themselves in established communication theories. For example, Haynes (1984) and Meyer (1991) empirically tested the structural theory of imperialism of Johan Galtung (1971). The concept of hegemony has been applied to analyze the political functions of the mass media (Thussu, 2000; Shoemaker, 1987). Research has been conducted to reveal how ideology has affected the coverage of international events (Cassara, 1998; Kim, 2000; Kirat, 1989).

In recent years, a revised version of dependency theory has been applied to the study of international news flow and coverage, namely world-system theory introduced by Immanuel Wallerstein (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Chang, 1998; Chang et al, 2000). The dependency theory sees the global system as a two-tier concentric market. The Western developed countries are at the core and the rest of the world is at the periphery. Immanuel Wallerstein expanded the theory by identifying a third sphere in the global system, the

semi-periphery zone lying between the core and the periphery. The core countries are rich, powerful, economically diversified, and relatively independent of outside controls. The peripheral societies are relatively poor, weak, economically overspecialized and subject to manipulation and control by the core countries. The semi-periphery nations stand between the core and periphery and are trying to industrialize and diversify their economies. The three spheres interact with each other in economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

Communication researchers who advocate world-system theory have used Galtung's (1971) idea of feudal structure to illustrate how international news transmits in the world system (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Chang, 1998; Chang et al, 2000). For them, communication takes place more actively among core countries and between core countries and their former colonies in the periphery, than among periphery nations, due to historical colonialism and modern imperialistic practice. Yet, there are even more interactions between the core and semi-periphery than those within the core and between core and periphery. Three studies have been conducted to test world-system theory in the domain of international news flow and coverage (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Chang, 1998; Chang et al, 2000). All of them have found strong evidence to support the feudal structure of news flow suggested by Galtung (1971).

The current study is not aimed to test the validity of world-system theory. However, it presumes the uneven distribution of news coverage among the core, semi-periphery, and periphery spheres in the world system. Intending to show that news media from very different backgrounds cover the world in a similar manner, I have chosen newspapers from countries with different status in the world system (also see Chapter II).

Also, in Chapter III, I will use the core/semi-periphery/periphery demarcation of the world to illustrate the imbalance in international news coverage of the four newspapers under investigation.

The application of world-system theory in research requires the identification of the core-periphery structure of the world. How to classify countries into three zones is still a research problem open to debate (Chang, 1998). Past studies have used different standards to demarcate the world into core, semi-periphery and periphery (Chang, 1998; Gunaratne, 2001; Kim and Barnett, 1996; Rossem, 1996). For example, Gunaratne (2001) used GNP and total export of merchandise and services to rank the countries in the world. Rossem (1996), on the other hand, looked beyond economic powers of the countries. He based his classification on imports, exports, trade in major conventional weapon systems, the presence of foreign troops and the presence of diplomatic representation. Blockmodel analysis was used to identify the distinct spheres in a complex network. Chang (1998) and Chang et al (2000) adopted the classification method introduced by Steiber (1979). They blockmodeled the world-trade system using the import-export statistics for four commodity classes, namely, crude materials, mineral fuels and related materials, chemicals, as well as machinery and transport equipment.

These studies do not fully agree with each other on the structure of the world system, particularly for some countries that cluster around the semi-periphery zone. Chang (1998) and Chang et al (2000) placed Canada in the core, China in the semi-periphery, and India in the periphery zone. However, Gunaratne's (1996) classification gave China a more central role than Canada. In Rossem's (1996) study, China is a core country and India a semi-periphery country.

In this study, I have adopted the classification by Chang (1998) and Chang et al (2000). According to them, the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan and Canada are the core countries in the contemporary world. The semi-peripheral countries include other Western European countries (e.g. Sweden and Switzerland), Russia, China, several advanced economies in Asia (e.g. South Korea and Singapore), Argentina and Mexico in Latin America, and Egypt in Africa. Most developing and underdeveloped countries, including former Soviet Bloc countries (except Russia), are at peripheral position.

## **Section II: Critique of Existing Literature**

From my review of the existing literature on determinants of international news, two major problems have been identified. One is a lack of study of global scale as well as study of news media other than those in the United States. The other is that there is an inconsistency in research results.

### **United States versus the World**

In the literature of international news flow and coverage research, we can find the same imbalance as that in international news flow and coverage. Most of the studies in the area focus on Western media, especially on media in the United States. Third World countries, on the other hand, are under-represented in the research. Wu (1998b) reviewed 67 published papers investigating international news determinants, 55.2 % of them focused on North American media (U.S. and Canada), 16.4 % on other Western media, compared with 10.4% on Asian media, 6% on Latin American media, 4.5 % on African

media, 3 % on Eastern European media, 3% on Oceania Pacific media, and 1.5 % on Middle Eastern media.

In a world of increasing interconnectedness, the picture of international flow and coverage is a global one. It cannot be represented by the media in a few countries. The lack of study of non-Western media has hindered our understanding of the nature and mechanism of international news order.

Moreover, there is also a lack of inter-country comparative study. Most studies focus only on the media in a single nation. Some researchers have compared media from different developed countries (e.g. Robinson and Sparkers, 1976, Kitagawa et al, 1994). A few others have compared media from developed and developing worlds (e.g. Hick and Gordon, 1974, Vilanilam 1983). There are also studies that investigated media from different countries in one region, such as Africa (Skuinik, 1981; Nnaemeka and Richsead, 1981), as well as media from two different regions (Meyer, 1991).

Most of the comparative studies found that similar determinants work for media from different countries, with one exception. Robinson and Sparkers (1976) reported that trade volume between host and guest countries is a strong factor of international news coverage in Canadian newspapers, but not a factor in U.S. newspapers.

Two world-scale comparative studies have been published in recent years. Wu (2000) compared news media from 38 countries, and assessed 9 context-oriented factors. He found that trade volume and presence of international news agencies were two primary predictors of the amount of news coverage, despite some variation.

Chang et al (2000) compared television newscasts in six countries in an attempt to test whether world-system theory can be applied to the study of international news flow

and coverage. The authors confirmed that the status of a country (core, semi-periphery or periphery) in the world system determines its place in international news order. On the other hand, geographical and cultural proximity do not predict the amount of news flow and coverage. The results are consistent for all six countries.

The lack of studies on non-Western, non-U.S. media, and the lack of inter-country comparative studies may have been caused by three reasons. First, language is a barrier for English-speaking researchers to access news media in other languages. International cooperation is usually required to implement multi-country studies. Second, comparative studies usually demand more resources and time. Financial and time constraints may have kept many researchers from pursuing them.

The third reason is related to the application of culturally sensitive news factors to media in different countries. To a large extent, the indicators of these news factors have been defined according to Western social and cultural specificities. It may not be adequate to use them to examine non-Western media. For example, cultural proximity is usually indicated by language similarity, colonial ties and volume of migration from the guest to the host country. If we apply the indicators to countries like Japan, we may find no nation culturally proximate to it, despite its cultural closeness with China and Korea. Therefore, the existing research methods need to be further developed in order to cope with the need to conduct research on non-Western countries.

The studies of normative and potential-to-social-change deviance, as initially introduced by Shoemaker et al (1986), have not been tested on non-U.S. media. To examine them in another society would need researchers to develop thorough understanding of the cultural norms and social order of the society. Distinctive coding

systems need to be developed. Comparative studies of these two factors in different countries would require separate coding systems for each country. It is almost impossible to realize when the study involves countries very different in cultural values, religious beliefs and political systems. One researcher can hardly develop a good comprehension of two very different cultures, let alone three or four required in the studies with a global scale.

Despite these difficulties, we need more multi-country comparative studies, especially those on a global scale, in order to better understand international communication processes.

Moreover, existing multi-country studies tend to agree that news media in different countries function in the same fashion, as similar news determinants have been found among them. These studies have confirmed my speculation that the international news coverage in news media across the world is influenced by the same set of mechanisms. Similarities in gatekeeping routines and professional values have resulted in similar behavior in the coverage of the world's events.

### **Inconsistency**

Both Wu (1998b, 2000) reviewed literature in the field of international news determinants studies (the latter focused only on the context-oriented factors). In both studies, he claimed that his first impression about previous literature is that the results of past studies are not entirely consistent. Contradicting results are commonplace among different studies. My literature review indicates the same problem. Table 1-1 is a clear



indication of this. Among the context-oriented factors listed in the table, researchers seem to uniformly agree upon only the influence of the ‘correspondents’ factor.

Wu (2000) attributed the inconsistency in research results of the determinant studies to variation in sampling methods, time frames, definitions, and the other details of implementation among the studies. However, the author did not elaborate on what he means by the ‘variations’. He went on to argue that this incompatibility has resulted in fruitlessness of past studies. Almost no solid theories have been yielded in the past few decades, despite the vast amount of literature accumulated and intellectual endeavour invested.

It is true that international news determinants studies have delivered few theories. However, Chang (1998) did not attribute it to the problem of inconsistency. Rather, he blamed a lack of adequate efforts to build bridges between theory and research. Both arguments may be true. Yet, here, I am more concerned with the issue of inconsistency, which represents a series of problems at the methodological level. I will discuss six possible causes of inconsistency in previous literature, including issues of time frame, sampling method, media selection, definitions of news, geographical scope of the study, and differentiating news by topics.

### Time Frame

Most of the studies on international news flow and coverage are short-term studies, which have a time frame of less than half a year. There are only a few studies that have selected news samples from over half-a-year period (e.g. Ishii, 1996; Larson, 1984). Some studies investigated media output of only one single day or a few consecutive days

(e.g. Vilanilam, 1983; Skurnik, 1981; Nnaemeka & Richstadt, 1980). Hester (1973) suggested that without the long-term study, the studies of international news would obtain only a “distorted picture”, and the basic pattern and mechanisms of international news flow and coverage can only be revealed by studies over time. Study results from a short period of time are often influenced by particular themes on the international and/or national agenda. Thus, short-time studies are likely to vary in their results.

The research efforts on international news determinants have lasted for a few decades. Wilbur Schramm’s pioneering work on international news flow and coverage, *Mass Media and National Development*, was published in 1964. The latest studies included in this literature review were released in 2002. During the four decades in between, much has changed in the world. The Cold War has ended, and a new world order has formed and continues to undergo changes. During the Cold War era, many non-core countries tended to align either with the Western camp or the Soviet Bloc. After the demise of the communist bloc, the United States has become the single super power of the world, although its domination has been increasingly challenged by Japan and the European Union (Chang, 1998). Given the dramatic changes in the world system, international news coverage in many countries is likely to change focuses. For example, newspapers in countries that were close to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, may, now, report more on the Western World than before. Their coverage on the former and current communist countries may decline significantly.

Moreover, advanced communication technology has transformed much of the way in which news is made. Events in remote countries are more and more likely to

appear in news quickly. Geographical distance can impose less and less pressure on international news flow and coverage.

The news media in different countries may have undergone much change during a time period of 40 years. Indeed, the press systems in the four countries involved in this study have all experienced great changes over the past decades. After China opened its door to the outside world in the early 1980's, communist doctrine faded away in many domains of the news production. Market-oriented press boomed (Chang et al, 1993; Lee, 1994; Zhao, 1996). We can expect that such a loosening of ideological control over press would have had a dramatic impact on journalistic practices.

In the case of India, from 1987 to 1994, approximately 400 new newspapers and magazines were established. Hindi language presses grew rapidly and became more and more influential. Facing the increasing competition, at the beginning of the 1990's, the *Times of India* underwent a reform in both format and content (Chaudhary and Chen, 1995). As newspaper content changes, newsholes for different news topics are likely to alter (e.g. more space for political and economic news). News selection criteria may also change (e.g. more reports on conflicts and disasters).

In addition, studies have found that both Canadian and American newspapers have experienced a decline in the importance of foreign news, due to a limitation in resources, competition from other media (e.g. television and Internet), and perceived reader preference over local news. International news is occupying less news space than previously was the case (Soderlund et al, 2002). The shrinking of international newsholes may result in changes in news selection criteria.

As we continue accumulating knowledge on international news flow and coverage, time has rendered some of the early research findings irrelevant. We cannot compare these results with those of more recent studies without considering changes that have occurred within the news media and in their host societies.

### Media Selection

The selection of media may influence the outcome of determinant studies, as media-oriented factors can lead to variation in news coverage. For example, different types of media may provide us with different research findings. Newsgathering and news selection procedures vary among newspapers, magazines, television and radio. There is empirical evidence that the printed press and television differ significantly in news coverage and dissemination, both in domestic and international affairs. Chang et al (1987) examined the same range of news determinants in a newspaper and three television networks. They found some variations in news determinants for the two types of media. Geographical distance is a relatively powerful factor for the television networks, but irrelevant for the newspaper. On the other hand, potential-for-social-change deviance is a strong predictor for the newspaper, but has no say in the TV networks. Obviously, television coverage of international events is more likely to be constrained by technical problems, such as availability of camera crews and cost of transmission of stories, which are distance-sensitive. Print media may give more attention to subjects of social change, in order to take advantage of its better ability to analyze events in depth.

### Sampling Methods

When investigating media output over a relatively long period of time (e.g. half a year or more), researchers usually cannot afford to study the output day by day. A sample needs to be drawn from the population. Previous studies usually employed two methods to construct the samples. Many used simple random sampling to randomly select a number of days from the given period of time (e.g. Semmel, 1976; Vilanilam, 1983; Ishii, 1996). Others utilized stratified sampling, e.g. ‘constructed-week’ sampling for newspaper and television, or ‘constructed-month’ sampling for weekly magazines. The latter methods tend to yield samples that represent the population more adequately. It takes the inherent variation in news output among different days of a week or weeks of a month into consideration. (Riffe et al, 1993, 1998). When simple random sampling is used, certain weekdays or weeks of a month are likely to be over-represented in the sample. Such a bias can significantly affect research results.

There are studies that use the front page to represent the overall foreign coverage of a newspaper (e.g. Hunson, 1995). The front page is shared by national news and international news. Coverage of international news on the front page is very sensitive to the availability of space and is largely influenced by the coverage of national news. Therefore, news determinants tend to differ between front-page foreign news and foreign news coverage in all sections of a newspaper.

### Definition of News

Pertaining to the definition of foreign news, some studies consider every piece of foreign information as foreign news, including market information (e.g, Vilanilam, 1983).

Others exclude news on sports, entertainment, as well as market information from their sample (e.g. Semmel, 1976). The source countries of sports news, entertainment news, and market information are limited to a few developed countries. Therefore, inclusion or exclusion of these categories of news may significantly alter the research outcome.

Van Belle (2000) did an interesting study to explore the causes of the discrepancy in research findings among the international disaster-coverage studies. He constructed three samples to test the same range of determinants. One includes all news on earthquakes; one on major disasters, and the other on all natural disasters. For the major disaster sample, the 'U.S. tourist' variable (the number of U.S. tourist who visited the country in the year the disaster took place) was found to be statistically significant. In the earthquake sample, geographic distance was found significant. The all-disaster sample suggested that the number of people killed was an important predictor. He concluded that when definitions of news category vary, research results are likely to differ.

#### Geographical Scope of the Study

Most determinant studies examine the media coverage of all countries in the world. However, some research focuses on the coverage of a particular region. For example, Charles et al (1979) investigated the coverage of Equatorial and Lower African countries in *The New York Times* between 1960 and 1975, and tested the influence of import/export, population and amount of telecommunication traffic on the coverage of these countries. They found that trade and population were both important predictors.

Such a research design helps minimize the influence of some other news factors, such as a nation's power and physical distance from the United States. All of the

countries in the study were among the least powerful in the world and their distances to United States are similar. If all countries in the world are added to this study, it is possible that the effect of the two news factors will be overshadowed by other variables. Therefore, when studies differ in their geographical scope, the results tend to vary.

### Differentiating News by Topics

Previous determinant studies of international news (except studies focusing on a particular news topic, such as disaster and terrorism) usually treat all foreign news as a whole. No one has speculated whether there exists different determinants for news under different topics.

I believe that there exist different definitions of newsworthiness for different categories of international news. To some extent, this may have caused inconsistencies in previous research because news media usually assign different weight to different news topics. Some carry more economic news; others focus more on politics. When two media differ significantly in their emphasis, or when a medium shifts its focus over time, very different news factors may appear to be important determinants.

Moreover, examining news as a whole can make the data very sensitive to some special events taking place during the sampling period, in particular, war and terrorist attacks. Some countries are over-represented in the news because of these odd events. Their coverage does not fit in the overall pattern, thus severely damaging the analysis results. When two studies differ in sampling periods, their data is likely to be affected by different sets of major events in the world. These events may make the studies incomparable with each other. However, if we divide news into different news categories,

these war or terrorist reports will fall into the military news category, where deviance of the events determines news coverage. The coverage of the countries troubled by the violent events will just fit into the overall trend. At the same time, the other news categories will not be affected by the coverage.

There is a small number of scholars who have limited their research scope to a single topic of international news or a single kind of event. I have found four studies on the coverage of foreign disasters. Gaddy et al (1986) found that the levels of earthquake coverage by U.S. media are not lower for Third World nations. Therefore, the socio-economic status of the guest countries is not a predictor of earthquake coverage. Simon (1997) tested three determinants of the U.S. TV coverage of earthquakes, including the number of people killed in an earthquake, the number of people affected by an earthquake, and physical distance of the earthquake to the New York city. Only the number of people killed was found to be an effective predictor of the coverage.

Studying the coverage of major foreign disasters, Adams (1986) found the number of U.S. tourists, estimated disaster death, and distance from New York City are predictors of coverage by U.S. television. Focusing on U.S. newspaper and television, Van Belle (2000) found that the number of deaths is the most effective factor in the selection of natural disasters. When the number of deaths is controlled for, geographical distance appeared to be a predictor, but not U.S. tourists, use of English language, and nation's power.

Weimann and Brosius (1991) studied the relationship between deviance of terrorist events and their coverage on three U.S. TV networks. They conclude that deviance as newsworthiness can be regarded as the guiding principle of the coverage.



Cho and Lacy (2000) examined the effect of a few media-oriented factors on the coverage of conflict and disasters in a number of Japanese newspapers. They concluded that dependence on wire services is a good predictor of the coverage.

I have found limited literature on international news of particular news topics and no studies dealing with news topics other than disasters, conflicts and terrorism. The four studies on disasters are not comparable because of variation in type of media selected, sampling methods used, definition of new category, and news factors tested. Moreover, due to variations in research strategies, these single news topic studies cannot be used to demonstrate whether there are different sets of determinants for the coverage of disaster and terrorism. To find out whether different news categories are governed by different news determinants, we need to study the coverage of various news topics in a single set of media, with a single time frame and the same sampling methods.

### **Section III: Objectives and Hypotheses**

The current research intends to address the two limitations of the previous literature, that is, a lack of knowledge on how news media around the world compare with each other, and a lack of recognition that different news categories are governed by different sets of news factors. This study will compare four newspapers from different countries to verify whether media from different countries work according to similar rules and values. Also, it attempts to enrich our knowledge of non-Western media as two of the four newspapers are from non-Western countries, namely India and China.

Moreover, the current study attempts to reveal whether examining international news coverage by category is a more adequate way to study news determinants. If each

news category does bear a distinctive set of news determinants, adopting a category-sensitive research design would, to some degree, reduce inconsistency and confusion in future research.

Two hypotheses will be tested:

1. For one newspaper, the determinants of international news flow and coverage vary among different news topics. (e.g. the determinants of economic news are different from those of military news and news on terrorism).
2. The determinants of international news under a particular topic are similar among newspapers from different countries.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The current study intends to test two hypotheses: 1) For one newspaper, the determinants of international news flow and coverage vary among different news topics; 2) The determinants of international news under a particular topic are similar among newspapers from different countries.

The main research instrument employed here is quantitative content analysis. Defined by Riffe et al (1998: pp 2), the 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. It involves a process of hypotheses formulation, sample selection, definition of categories, design and implementation of coding process, assessment of reliability and validity, and analyzing the output of the coding process (Emmert & Barker, 1989).

Quantitative content analysis has been the most employed research method in the field of international news determinants studies. Its popularity can be attributed to a number of advantages inherent in the method. First, quantification allows the reduction of a large amount of data, thus enabling the researcher to deal with large amounts of material fairly quickly and without substantial financial resources. Second, the materials for content analysis (i.e. newspapers, magazines, recording of radio/TV programs) are usually readily available. Third, because content has a life beyond its production and consumption, longitudinal and retroactive study becomes possible. Finally, content

analysis is an unobtrusive technique for data collection and analysis. It usually does not interfere with the operations of the sample to be measured. Thus, bias is easier to deal with than bias in other methods such as experiments or surveys. (Emmert & Barker, 1989; Riffe et al, 1998)

Employing quantitative content analysis does not mean a rejection of qualitative methods. Holsti (1969) argues that content analysis should use qualitative and quantitative methods to supplement each other. It is by moving back and forth between these two approaches that an investigator can best make sense of his/her data. Although my analysis of media output mainly involves the counting of news items under different news categories, a qualitative look of news content will be taken when necessary, at the time of data analysis.

The current study has adopted the approach advocated by Rosengren (1977) to identify factors that influence international news flow and coverage. I first examine the actual media output from the four newspapers under investigation through content analysis. The results of the procedure are called the dependent variables. Second, I measure news factors involved in this study with 'extra media data', i.e. data that are independent of the newspapers. The measurements are called the independent variables. Finally, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is measured to find out the effect of each news factor on news output.

The following part of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will illustrate how content analysis of media output has been conducted to obtain data for the dependent variables. The second section will explain what independent variables have

been selected, and how they have been measured. In the last section, the procedures used for data analysis will be introduced.

## **Section I: Dependent Variables**

In the current study, the dependent variables are the amount of coverage each nation received from each of the four newspapers. Coverage in five news categories is counted. The five categories are foreign news, foreign diplomatic activities/domestic politics, foreign military actions/terrorism, foreign economic matters, and foreign natural disasters.

In this section, I will discuss the procedures concerning the analysis of news output, including sampling, definition of categories, coding, and reliability assessment.

### **Sampling**

The sampling process involves three steps: 1) selecting four newspapers from four countries; 2) time frame; 3) selecting issues from each newspaper.

### **Selection of the Four Newspapers**

The four newspapers being examined are *The New York Times* (U. S.), *The Globe & Mail* (Canada, metro edition), *The Times of India* (India, Bombay edition), and *The People's Daily* (China, National edition). They have been chosen under several considerations: the geographical location of their host countries, status of their host

countries in the world system, cultural and political tradition of their host countries, the quality of the newspapers themselves, and their availability in the libraries in Montreal.

One of the main purposes of this study is to compare the behaviour of news media from different background. Therefore, it is preferable to compare newspapers from all parts of the world, from countries in all three zones of the world systems, as well as from societies with different cultural norms and political regimes. However, Montreal libraries subscribe to only a handful of foreign newspapers, including those published in the United States, the United Kingdom, India, China and France. Adding Canada, there were only six candidates available for selection.

Only China and India are from the non-Western World. They have very different cultural traditions from the two Western countries. Pertaining to their position in the world system, China is located in the semi-periphery zone, and India the periphery. The four Western countries are all at the core. The United States is the single super power of the world, and the leader of the core. It is, therefore, selected. I selected Canada rather than France or the United Kingdom because the latter two's status is close to that of the United States. Canada, on the other hand, occupies the margin of the core. Moreover, as a Canadian, I am more interested in investigating a newspaper of my own country.

China is dominated by a very different political system than those of the United States, Canada and India, which have democratic regimes. A single political party dictates its political life. *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Times of India* are typical Western presses, which enjoy independence of journalism, and embrace libertarian values. *The People's Daily* is an authoritarian press. It is subject to the ideological control of the ruling communist party (Hachten, 1999). It would have been

ideal if I could have included a newspaper from a non-communist, non-democratic country. However, there is none available.

Geographically, the four newspapers represent only two continents of the world, namely North America and Asia. My study has been flawed because I could not include newspapers from Latin/South America, Africa, Oceania, and Europe.

Although there is no formal criterion for selecting newspapers pertaining to their quality, researchers tend to choose influential newspapers, which are renowned for their superiority in depth and breadth of news coverage, and by the elite status of their readers. The four papers in this study are all very influential in their own host countries. They have all been included in the list of world's great 50 newspapers by Merrill and Fisher (1980). Indeed, these newspapers have always been the first choice for scholars when their host countries are being investigated.

*The New York Times* is the most influential metropolitan newspaper in the United States. Although not a national newspaper, it comes close to the claim of being nationally read. Its extraordinary standards of coverage, writing, and editing have made it a model for American journalism. It is found to be far ahead of other metropolitan newspapers in the U.S. in the scope and quality of its international coverage. It covers more international news than any other newspapers in the United States. (Simmel, 1976; Adams & Mckercher, 1991).

*The Globe and Mail* was the only newspaper with a nation-wide circulation in Canada at the time of 1996. It was the most influential newspaper among leaders in civic and professional circles (Merrill. & Fisher, 1980). It targets Canada's political and economic elite and has long been known as one of the country's top newspapers of record.

Its business report is virtually required reading for the business community (Adams & Mckercher, 1991). A survey among newspaper editors in Canada in 2000 has shown that its international coverage is of the highest quality among Canadian newspapers (Soderlund, et al, 2002).

*The People's Daily* ranks as one of the world's most widely read serious journals and serves as the ultimate voice of authority. As the voice of the Central Committee of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, it provides must reading for all who wish to be informed on Party matters, be they officials, Party leaders or diplomats (Merrill & Fisher, 1980). It sets the line for all other publications in the country. National, provincial, municipal, and district papers all refer to *The People's Daily* for guidance, when practising self-censorship (Chen & Chaudhary, 1991). Since the early 1990's, Chinese journalism has experienced an important change. Market-oriented press has boomed, and has played a more and more important role in the Chinese readers' daily life (Chang et al, 1993; Lee, 1994; Zhao, 1996). However, in the area of international news, *The People's Daily* continues to dominate because the release of international news (except the sports and entertainment news) is still tightly controlled by the government's news sources, such as the Xinhua News Agency. Moreover, as the communist party's official press, it is the only newspaper that is given the permission to set up bureaus overseas.

*The Times of India* is the oldest English daily in India and has the largest circulation in the country. The newspaper is widely applauded for its comprehensive national and international coverage as well as independent views. It plays an influential role in the country's political milieu and educated elite. (Chen & Chaudhary, 1991; Merrill & Fisher, 1980).



The four newspapers all have a nation-wide market and a large circulation. As national newspapers, all of them are likely to devote great effort to cover events worldwide (Semmel, 1976). Their large circulation ensures sufficient financial ability to gather and process information from different parts of the world. Therefore, when comparing the four newspapers, I can assume that they are racing from the same starting point. As variations in newspaper organization and market can result in differences in international news coverage (Johnson, 1997; Cho and Lacy, 2000), such effects have been minimized.

In studies of newspapers, researchers often face an additional problem, which is to decide which edition of the newspaper to use (Budd, et al, 1967). Three of the newspapers involved in my study have different editions. However, I was spared from making the decision because, for each of the papers, only one edition was available. They are the final metro edition of *The Globe & Mail*, the Bombay edition of *The Times of India*, and the national edition of *The People's Daily*.

### Time Frame

The current study examines the international news coverage of the four newspapers during the first half of 1996. In news determinant research, although it is always preferable to study the most recent media output, publishing time of the media product is not a crucial factor.

The time period was chosen due to two reasons. During this period, there were no significant social, political or economic events taking place in any of the four host countries, such as major civil unrest or direct involvement in a war. Such events would

largely reduce the space for international news in these newspapers. Major events during the time period include elections in a number of countries, the war in Bosnia, the military conflict between Russia and Chechnya, and the terrorist activities in the Middle East (*World Almanac*, 1997). None of the events took place in any of the four host countries.

A second reason was that *The Times of India* published from 1997 to 2001 was not available. A time period in 2002 is not desirable because the sheer impact of the ‘September 11<sup>th</sup>’ tragedy has not faded away. Consequently, 1996 was chosen as the year for the study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, long-term studies can better reflect the general pattern of news coverage than short-term ones. A time period of half a year is sufficient for a long-term study. Yet, a period of one year or more would be more desirable. Unfortunately, time and financial constraints have prohibited me from pursuing it.

### Selection of Issues

How to deal with the large number of newspapers published over a period of time is a struggle for every researcher. There are several ways of solving the problem. Some studies simply do day-by-day work. However, such a method hardly allows any long-term study or complicated coding procedure. Some others randomly select a number of issues published during a one or multi-year period. Yet, there is the so-called ‘constructed week’ sampling method, which claims to be superior to pure random selection.

‘Constructed-week’ sampling refers to the random selection of an equal number of issues published on each day of the week, respectively. Such a method has been

developed to accommodate the differences in assignment of space on different days of a week (Lacy et al, 2001; Riffe et al, 1993). Pure random selection may cause bias in research results by over-representing issues published in certain days of the week. Considering that the volume of international news varies among different days of the week, I have chosen the ‘constructed-week’ sampling method for my study.

Riffe et al (1993) conducted a series of experimental studies and verified that issues of one constructed week can effectively represent all issues in a half-a-year period. In this study, issues of two constructed weeks are selected from the first half of 1996. I have added one extra week’s issues in order to enlarge sample size for statistical purposes.

My constructed week comprises six days. Sunday newspapers are not included in the samples because they tend to break with the normal pattern of presentation carried through the weekdays. For instance, *The New York Times*’ Sunday papers are in tabloid format. *The People’s Daily* publishes as few as four pages on Sundays. Indeed, most previous studies that have used the ‘constructed-week’ method have excluded Sunday papers from their samples (Semmel, 1976; Stevenson and Cole, 1982).

Usually, multi-country comparative studies select issues published on the same days for all newspapers under investigation in order to compare the news coverage on the same set of events taking place in the world. However, for the two Asian newspapers, I have decided to choose issues that were published one day after the release of *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* issues. In the case of the Saturday paper for the two North American media, the issues released on the following Monday were chosen. Although such a practice is not common (except Huang et al, 1999), I see very strong reasons for doing so. There is approximately a 12-hour time difference between the two

Asian countries and North America. International events taking place during certain times of the day would appear one day later in Asian newspapers than in North American ones, even if the newspapers gain access to the information at the same speed. Moreover, *The People's Daily's* major foreign news sources are indeed Western news agencies. Xinhua News Agency is its main wire-service provider. However, the Agency does not compose its own news reports. It is a common practice for its journalists to translate news releases from their Western counterparts (Parson, 1997). As a result, *The People's Daily* always reports on foreign events later than Western media. The situation for *The Times of India* is not known. In this case, however, I decided to simply apply 'the-next-day' issues for the newspaper. When coding news stories, I did not find much difference between the two Asian papers and the two North American papers in terms of coverage of hard news. Therefore, the selection of the second-day issues for Asian papers proved to be an effective decision.

The 12 days of two constructed weeks were selected using a random table. The 12 dates for *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* are:

- Monday: Mar. 4 and Apr. 22
- Tuesday: Mar. 5 and May 21
- Wednesday: Feb. 21 and Mar. 13
- Thursday: Jan. 4 and Jan. 18
- Friday: Jan. 26 and Mar. 22
- Saturday: Mar. 2 and Jun. 15

The dates for the Asian newspapers are:

- Tuesday: Mar. 5 and Apr. 23

- Wednesday: Mar. 6 and May 22
- Thursday: Feb. 22 and Mar. 14
- Friday: Jan. 5 and Jan. 19
- Saturday: Jan. 27 and Mar. 23
- Monday: Mar. 4 and Jun. 17

*The Times of India* did not publish on Saturday, Jan. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1996. The issue released on the following Saturday (Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1996) has been used instead.

### **Defining Categories**

In content analysis, categories are the ‘pigeonholes’ into which content units are to be classified (Holsti, 1969). They are, in fact, the variables that are being investigated in research (Budd et al, 1967). This study is concerned with the amount of international news coverage given to each country in different news categories. Therefore, the categories of content analysis are indeed the news categories under investigation.

News can be classified into many categories, such as politics, military, economy, crime/police/law, sports, arts, etc. Stevenson (1984) identified as many as 17 news categories. The current study has chosen only four to investigate. These are: diplomatic activities/domestic politics, military actions/terrorism, economic matters, and natural disasters. All of the four categories are ruled by the definition of foreign news. Foreign news is also a category of content analysis, which will be used as a reference in data analysis.

In this sub-section, I will define foreign news and each of the four news categories, as well as present the rationale behind the selection of the four news

categories. The definition of foreign news is partially derived from Vilanilam (1983). The other four definitions have been developed based on Stevenson's (1984) classification of news topics.

'Foreign news' is simply news items dealing with events taking place or situations existing outside the host countries. Technically, news items which bear one of the following characteristics are considered foreign: having a foreign dateline, reporting on home country's dignitaries going abroad, events in other countries, foreign relations such as negotiations between nations, and diplomatic and international agreements. Reports on a geographical region, such as 'Africa' or 'Eastern Asia', which does not mention any particular nation, are excluded. The same applies to news on international organizations (e.g. United Nation, World Trade Organization, G-7, and European Union). Foreign news items located in all sections (including main news sections and back sections) are counted, except those found in the sports and entertainment pages. News stories, editorials, features, readers' letters, pictures, and caricatures are considered to be news items. Book reviews, film reviews, daily reports on fashion and the stock exchange are not, and were thus excluded.

The category 'diplomatic activities/domestic politics' includes diplomatic/political activities between states, domestic political issues of a foreign country, such as internal conflict or crisis, elections, campaigns, appointments, government changes. Stories on the British Royal family are not considered political news, thus do not belong to this category.

Economic matters include all the economic issues about foreign countries, such as trade agreements, tariffs, exports, imports, capital investment, stock issues, financial

market, economic performance (for economy as a whole or particular enterprise), prices, industrial/infrastructure projects, agricultural matters, and labour relations.

The military actions/terrorism category consists of armed conflicts or threat of such conflicts, peace moves, negotiations, settlements, arms deals, weapons, exercises, and terrorist activities.

Natural disasters include floods, earthquakes, volcanic activities, mudslides/landslides, forest fires, avalanches, droughts, cold/hot waves, storms, cyclones/tornadoes, hurricanes/typhoons, etc. Epidemics are not considered natural disaster.

Please note that natural disasters were not coded using the ‘two-constructed-week’ samples. Instead, a day-by-day search was conducted to locate all news on natural disasters during the first half of 1996. There are two purposes for doing so. First, the number of news items on natural disasters that can be found from two weeks of newspapers is too small for any statistical analysis. Second, a day-by-day inventory will allow me to compare the news coverage with the actual occurrence of disasters in the world, thus demonstrating whether deviance of an event itself contributes to its chances of appearing in a newspaper. Such a method has been adopted from Van Belle’s (2000) study on news coverage of disasters in a few U.S. media.

News reports on international events involving the host country are counted as foreign news, but not included under any of the four news topics. Examples of this type of news are negotiation between a host country and some other countries, investment from the host country to another country, and a host country’s diplomatic activities and policies. The rationale for such exclusion is that events involving a host country are more

likely to be in the news (Chang et al, 1987; Shoemaker et al, 1991). Thus, the guest countries involved in the events are given the chance to appear in the news simply because the host country has been involved. I believe that it will hinder us from seeing the effect of contextual factors in determining news coverage. Moreover, the coverage of events involving the host country is most likely to be influenced by political ideology dominating the news media. By eliminating this type of news, I can minimize the influence of ideology on the data, thus will be able to identify the similarity/difference in gatekeeping routine and values among the four newspapers.

The four news topics are chosen for two reasons. First, three of them, namely military action/terrorism, diplomatic activities/domestic politics, and economic matters, are the main focus of all quality newspapers. They account for a significant proportion of a paper's international news coverage (Vilaniyam, 1983; Atwood, 1987; Weaver et al, 1984). Second, I believe that their coverage is subject to the influence of very different news determinants. For news on diplomatic activities/domestic politics, the coverage of a nation is rather a function of the power of a nation. If a nation is more powerful, its political activities (both internal and external) will get more attention from foreign media, as news workers suppose readers are more interested in them.

For news on economic matters, the coverage of a nation may be more a function of economic characteristics, such as GDP, trade relations between the host and guest countries. The more economic power a nation has and/or the more economic interaction it has with the host country, the more coverage it is likely to receive.

The coverage of military action/terrorism is governed by an event-oriented factor, namely deviance of an event. These events are always newsworthy. The main reason for



covering a war is that the war has happened. Context-oriented factors have very limited influence on it.

News on natural disasters may also be greatly influenced by deviance of an event. Coverage is a function of the magnitude of the disasters. It is the well-designed study on natural disasters by Van Belle (2000) that has inspired me to select this category. The study showed that in U.S. media, the number of people killed in a disaster is the most important determinant of coverage.

### **Coding**

The principal unit of measurement is the news item. The number of news items represents the volume of coverage. Some researchers use length of relevant content to indicate amount of coverage, arguing that length is a better indicator of a newspaper's emphasis on a country. A large-scale study (with large samples) by Stevenson and Cole (1982) has shown that the two measuring methods make very little difference. However, the situation with small samples is unknown.

The two Asian newspapers are very different from the two North American ones in terms of the amount of space available for international news. In the case of *The People's Daily*, its total foreign newshole is only half of that of *The New York Times*. Yet, it publishes more news items than the latter. Its foreign news is typically very short and brief. Yet, occasionally, it releases some very long articles. Although the newspaper publishes far more news on the United States than on Pakistan, one long news story on the latter might overshadow 5 short reports on the United States. Therefore, if the length

of the relevant content is used to measure amount of coverage, comparison among the newspapers might become very difficult.

Only the main topic of a news item was used to decide to which category it belongs. The subsidiary topics in the news were not considered. For example, a story about a Japanese company in *The New York Times* is coded as economic news despite the fact that it has some discussions on the political background of the event. A picture showing a family from Belgrade moving back to their apartment is not categorized as a news item on societal life, but as a war story because the other stories around the picture all talk about the war in Bosnia.

The study by Stevenson and Cole (1982) has also shown that coding the main topics or all topics does not make much difference in research results. This may be only true for large samples. Yet, I decided to code only the main topic to simplify data analysis.

Multiple coding is allowed for identifying countries involved in a news item. Only countries that are involved in the main topic are counted. For each news item, every country was counted only once, no matter how often the country was mentioned in the text. Moreover, for the 'two-constructed-week' samples, it is the origin of the actors involved in an event, rather than the geographical location where the event takes place that counts. If a British citizen was killed by a French citizen in France, both countries are counted. If a British citizen committed suicide in France, only the United Kingdom is counted. However, for the coding of natural disasters, geographical location of a disaster is used as the criterion.

For the 'two-constructed-week' samples, microfilm was used to code *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*. Coding of *The People's Daily*

was conducted on hard copy of the newspaper. To code natural disasters, I used the newspaper indices for *The New York Times*, and *The Globe and Mail*, microfilm for *The Times of India*, and newspaper hard copy for *The People's Daily*.

## **Reliability**

Reliability in content analysis is “viewed as the ‘objectivity’ of the measuring instrument” (Emmert and Barker, 1989: pp.208). If a categorizing procedure is reliable, different coders should yield similar results on a given sample with the same instrument. According to Holsti (1969), reliability is a function of a coder’s skill, insight and experience (coder reliability), clarity of categories and coding criteria (category reliability), and the degree of ambiguity in the data. Reliability is measured by the agreement among coders about categorizing content (Riffe, 1998). It is usually a requirement for all content analysis studies.

Lacking financial resources to hire experienced coders, I have coded the newspapers myself. This has helped to avoid some coder-induced reliability problems, such as disagreement among coders due to cultural understanding. A coder reliability test was conducted three months after the original coding of the newspapers. Two issues were randomly drawn from *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* samples, respectively. The test was not conducted on the two Asian newspapers because it was difficult to gain access to them again. The test results are as follows. The agreement over the identification of foreign news is 93.1%; coding of countries covered in a news item 92.4%; and coding of news topics 96.5%.

Here I will discuss a few issues that may have enhanced or reduced the reliability of the current study. Pertaining to coder reliability, I, as a well-trained newspaper editor, am highly capable of accurately identifying the main topic of a news item. Also, I have gained some coding experience from two previous content analysis studies conducted during my Master's study.

When defining news categories and designing coding criteria, attention has been paid to reducing ambiguity and minimizing the requirement of judgmental tasks. The definition of each news category, as shown above, has included as many examples as possible.

The coding procedure involves reading news content to determine news topics. Therefore, ambiguity in the news can impose much difficulty in applying coding criteria. I have encountered one of such cases. The U.S.-Cuba Trade Crisis is both a political and economic event. Reports on the crisis usually contain both dimensions. I have to make careful judgement concerning to which category each report belongs. I believe that this is the area where the reliability of this analysis might have been slightly affected.

## **Section II: Independent Variables**

Independent variables being tested include eight context-oriented factors and one event-oriented factor. The context-oriented factors are population, military power, GDP, and GDP per capita of the guest country, and trade, common official language, colonial ties and geographical distance between the host and guest countries. The former four are factors reflecting the national traits of the guest country; the latter four are those indicating interactions and relatedness between the host and guest countries. The event-

oriented factor is the number of people killed in a natural disaster. While the eight context-oriented factors were tested against all 5 categories, the event-oriented factor was applied only to the natural disasters category.

In this section, I will first discuss the theoretical considerations underlying the selection of the variables. Then I will talk about how these variables are measured.

Seven of the eight context-oriented factors (except military power) are among the most studied predictors in international news determinant studies. Four factors are ‘national traits’ factors, namely, population, military power, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and GDP per capita. They indicate a nation’s power, which I assume to predict the coverage pattern of diplomatic activities and domestic politics. If national power is a determinant of news coverage, at least some of the four factors should show a strong relationship with the number of news items released on each country. GDP, GDP per capita, and trade are indicators of economic activities that I suppose to affect the coverage of economic news.

Common official language and colonial ties are indicators of cultural distance. Cultural distance and geographical distance do not have particular interest for me, as I do not expect them to be highly influential in the news categories under investigation. However, I feel obliged to include them because they have been repeatedly tested in previous research. It would damage the validity of my study not to include these relatively well-accepted news determinants.

The number of people killed in a natural disaster is a measure of deviance. I would like to test deviance for all news topics, especially for the military actions/terrorism news, which I believe to be governed by deviance. However, deviance

is an attribute very difficult to measure. Chang et al (1987) and Shoemaker et al (1991) have developed a procedure to code normative and potential-for-social-change deviance for U.S. media. However, the procedure can hardly be used for other countries, especially countries with very different socio-cultural traditions, such as India and China. It is impossible for me to develop separate coding system for each of the four countries. Yet, the number of people killed in a disaster provides me with a simple measure of deviance. Therefore, the testing of the factor in the natural disaster category becomes possible.

Information on GDP, GDP per capita, and population was derived from *The World Almanac* (1998). The data for the year 1995 is used, considering that certain time is required for contextual forces to take effect on news coverage (Wu, 2000).

Military power is measured by the total number of active duty personnel. The data was adopted from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac* 2003. It is for the year 2000. However, I expect no great difference between the data for 2000 and that for the mid-1990s.

Trade between host and guest countries is indicated by the total amount of imports and exports between the host country and a guest country in 1995. The data is derived from *The Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook* 1998. Information for a small number of countries is not available. In these cases, the trade volume is considered zero.

For common official language, a value of 1 is assigned to a country if it shares at least one official language with the host country. If not, the score is 0. Information of each nation's official language is derived from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac* 2003.

Colonial ties are defined by the belonging of a country to a colonial group, whether the country is the colonizer or colonized. The technical definition is the whole or a significant part of a country's territory has ever been ruled or occupied by another country within the past two centuries. Should colonial ties exist between a country and the host country, a value of 1 is assigned to it. If not, a value of 0 is given. For *The People's Daily*, former and current Communist countries are scored 1, indicating their special ties with China. Information on colonial history was obtained from the brief introduction of each nation's history in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac* 2003.

Geographical distance is measured by distance between two countries' capitals. It is calculated using PC software, *Microsoft ENCATA- Interactive World Atlas*.

The data for natural disasters occurring in the first half of 1996 was obtained directly from the U.S. Aid Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Van Belle (2000) has used the same data source for his study on the coverage of natural disasters. He found that the data covers a wide range of disasters, including a significant number of minor disasters. However, to my surprise, the list I have obtained from the office is far from complete. It includes only disasters with a relatively large magnitude.

### **Section III: Data Analysis**

Content analysis involves the examination of relationships between independent variables and dependent variables. In this study, the examination is conducted using two methods. The first method is to compare the amount of coverage of different countries in the same newspaper, and to correlate them with each independent variable. For example, the influence of trade volume on news coverage is indicated by the relationship between

*The People's Daily's* coverage on each country and these countries' trade volume with China. I would call this method 'inter-country comparison' of news coverage.

A second method is to compare the coverage of certain countries among the four newspapers and to determine the effectiveness of a predictor. For example, I may compare the coverage of Mongolia in the four newspapers. Mongolia is a neighbour of China, which is the host country of *The People's Daily*, but relatively far from the host countries of the other three newspapers. Therefore, the comparison can help us to understand the effect of geographical distance on news coverage. I shall call this method 'inter-newspaper comparison' of news coverage.

While 'inter-country comparison' is widely used in determinant studies, the 'inter-newspaper comparison' method has been particularly important in examining context-oriented factors concerning cultural and geographical distance, as well as media-oriented factors (Cho and Lacy, 2000; Johnson, 1997, Kariel and Rosenvall, 1983, and Wu, 1998a). It has particular strength in detecting the effect of news factors, which is strong only within a certain domain, thus is likely to be masked by the more universal influence of other factors. For example, a newspaper might cover more of its host country's close neighbours, without regard of their power. However, when it comes to countries that are not close by, it would only give attention to the more powerful ones. As there are fewer neighbouring countries than faraway ones, the effect of geographical distance will not be visible when comparing the coverage of all countries in the world. A nation's power will appear to be the single strong predictor. However, if we look at only the coverage of the few neighbouring countries and compare it with their coverage in some newspapers from other parts of the world, we are likely to see the particular



emphasis the newspaper has given to its host country's neighbours. Here, the context-oriented factor, geographical distance, has been transformed into a media-oriented factor. What we are actually testing is the distance of the newspapers to the group of neighbouring countries, but not the inverse.

'Inter-country comparison' will be used to examine the independent variables in each news category. It is the main analysis instrument in this study. 'Inter-newspaper comparison' will be used as a supplementary method to examine factors of cultural and physical relatedness.

The current research uses Pearson correlation<sup>3</sup> to determine the relationship between each context-oriented factor and news coverage. However, it is not used for the natural disaster category because the data sample is too small. For example, *The Times of India* has released only seven reports on foreign disasters, covering four countries during the first half of 1996. The testing of context-oriented factors in the natural disaster category and event-oriented factors is done through observation of the data and descriptive statistics, such as ranking and percentage. Also, correlation analysis is not used for inter-newspaper analysis, as there are only four newspapers involved in this study. Descriptive statistics are employed instead.

The United States is not included in the correlation analysis because it appears to be an outlier<sup>4</sup> in many data samples. At least one of two causes may have made it an

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<sup>3</sup> Pearson correlation is a measure of association for interval variables, which is very commonly used in social science research. It is the standardized regression coefficient for the bivariate regression model. It represents how a dependent variable Y varies when an independent variable X changes. The letter 'r' is usually used to denote the value of Pearson correlation. The value of 'r' ranges from -1 to +1. When larger X is corresponded with smaller Y, 'r' will be negative. If larger X results in larger Y, the 'r' value will be positive. When r equals to +1 or -1, we say X perfectly predicts Y. If r equals to 0, there is no relation between X and Y. (Agresti, 1979)

<sup>4</sup> Outliers are data points that split off from the rest of the data. They are either much larger or much smaller than other values in the data set. Regression analysis is very sensitive to outliers. One or two

outlier. First, it often receives far more attention from the newspapers than any other country in the world. The total number of news items focusing on it, in many cases, splits off from the rest. For example, in the economic matters category of *The Globe and Mail*, the United States is covered in 131 news items, while the sample median is only 2. Another cause of its outlier status is the sheer size of its GDP and its relatively large trade volume with Canada, the host country of *The Globe and Mail*. Statistical procedures are usually very sensitive to outliers. My analysis shows that inclusion of the United States sometimes inflates the correlation largely. An extreme case is the correlation between trade and coverage in *The Globe and Mail*'s political news. The correlation drops from 0.8304 to 0.0667 after the United States is taken out of the sample. Although the United States does not have a detrimental effect on all samples, I decided to drop it from all correlation analysis to ease the analysis.

Another incident in which outliers are removed from the sample occurred in the analysis of *The New York Times*. Canada, Japan and Mexico are removed as outliers when calculating correlations for trade volume. The three countries have huge amounts of trade with the United States. Canada's trade volume is nearly 20 times the sample median, Japan 14 times, and Mexico 10 times.

Pertaining to the interpretation of the correlation scores, any  $r$  above 0.4 is considered significant. A score above 0.7 indicates a strong relationship, between 0.4 and 0.7 a moderate relationship. Variables that yield an  $r$  between 0.2 and 0.4 are regarded as weak predictors. Any variable with  $r$  below 0.2 is not regarded as a predictor. (Riff et al, 1998)

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outliers may significantly inflate or suppress the analysis results, thus prevent us from seeing the general trend in most of the data. Therefore, it is essential to remove outliers from the data sets before undertaking any analysis.

It is believed that multiple regression is a more advanced and capable method in determinant studies because it enables us to calculate individual contributions of each predictor to the amount of news coverage (Wu, 2000). However, the method is not employed here due to two reasons.

First, this study attempts to identify important news determinants in order to prove that there are different news predictors in different news categories. It does not intend to compare the relative importance of each identified news determinant. Therefore, multiple regression is not a must.

Second, the samples for each news category are too small in size for testing as many as eight predictors. The sample size ranges from 17 (military and terrorist news in *The Times of India*) to 47 countries (diplomatic and domestic politics in *The People's Daily*). According to Steven (1996), the 'sample size/number of predictors' ratio is crucial in determining the validity of a regression equation. In social-science research, a ratio of at least 15:1 is needed for a reliable result. Two thirds of the 12 samples contain less than 30 countries, which means the majority of the samples are not even enough for an equation with two predictors. The employment of predictor-selection procedures (e.g. forward regression, step-wise regression) will not help the situation.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the results of data analysis. Section I contains an overview of the international news coverage in the four newspapers. I will compare the newspapers in terms of total volume of foreign coverage and allocation of space to each news category. Section II discusses the imbalance in the foreign coverage of the newspapers. I will demonstrate that all of the four newspapers have paid more attention to countries near the core of the world system. In Section III, news coverage in each news category is examined through the ‘inter-country comparison’ method. The results are compared and contrasted to verify the two hypotheses of this study. Section IV contains a re-examination of some of the independent variables, namely common official language, colonial ties, and geographical distance. These variables have failed to show much influence on news coverage using the ‘inter-country comparison’ approach. ‘Inter-newspaper comparison’ is, thus, employed to detect their effects that may have been masked by other news factors.

#### **Section I: International News Coverage in the Four Newspapers – An Overview**

The volume of foreign news in the four newspapers differs greatly in terms of the total length of relevant content. A rough estimate showed that *The New York Times* published an average of four full pages each day; *The Globe and Mail* slightly over four pages; *The People’s Daily* around two pages; and *The Times of India* slightly over two pages. However, the total number of foreign news items did not vary as much among the

newspapers. In the 12 issues of *The New York Times*, I located 379 foreign news items (an average of 31.6 per day). In *The Globe and Mail*, 491 news items (40.9 per day) were coded as foreign news. In *The People's Daily* and *The Times of India*, I found 397 (33.1 per day) and 340 (28.3 per day) foreign news items, respectively. (See Table 3-1)

Although the two Asian papers had only half of the space for international coverage as the two North American papers did, they did not lag behind in terms of news items published each day. This was especially true for *The People's Daily*, which carried more news items per day than *The New York Times*. In fact, the two Asian newspapers featured a great deal of very short news items. Hard news dominated, with relatively little editorial content, and few features and pictures. The larger number of news items found in *The Globe and Mail* can be explained by the large number of short reports taking up much of its Business Section.

Different news categories did not receive equal amount of attention in the four newspapers. As shown in Table 3-1, *The Globe and Mail*, being famous of its business report, carried a large proportion of news on economic matters (called economic news below). Fifty one percent of all foreign news fell into this category. Diplomatic activities/domestic politics (called political news below) and military action/terrorism (called military news below) accounted for 23% and 13%, respectively.

In *The Times of India*, economic news also received the largest share of attention. Twenty nine percent of the foreign newshole was devoted to this news category. Political news accounted for 26% of the coverage; and military news 21%.

Thirty percent of the foreign newshole in *The People's Daily* was given to political news. Also, there were a large number of news items dealing with China's

diplomatic activities and foreign policy. If these news items are added to the political news sample, the percentage will hike up to nearly 40%. Economic news constituted 19% of the total coverage; and military news 15%.

*The New York Times* devoted 26 percent of its coverage to foreign politics, and 24% to economic matters. Military news received least attention, accounting for 21% of overall coverage. Indeed the newspaper has paid more attention to economic news than political news. However, a significant proportion of its economic news talked about events that involved the United States. These news items have been excluded from the sample.

Economic news was the most covered news topic in *The Globe and Mail*, *The Times of India* and *The New York Times*. Only *The People's Daily* favoured topics on foreign politics more than economic news. This may have been a result of its role as the propaganda instrument of the ruling communist party.

In all of the four newspapers, political, military and economic news accounted for a large share of their international news. In *The Globe and Mail*, the percentage was as high as 87%; in *The Times of India*, 76%; in *The People's Daily*, 64%; and in *The New York Times*, 72%. The percentage for *The People's Daily* was relatively low because of the exclusion of a large amount of political news, which involved China.

News on natural disasters constituted a very small percentage of international news coverage in the newspapers. For the 182 days from January 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup> 1996, only 17 reports on natural disasters were published in *The Globe and Mail*; seven in *The Times of India*; 47 in *The People's Daily*; 18 in *The New York Times*. Among them, *The*

*People's Daily* seemed to be more faithful in tracking down the natural disasters took place around the world.

**Table 3- 1 International news coverage in the four newspapers.**

	Globe and Mail	Times of India	People's Daily	New York Times
Total Items per Day	40.9	28.3	33.1	31.6
Military/Terrorism	13%	21%	15%	22%
Dip/Dom Politics	23%	26%	30%	26%
Economic Matters	51%	29%	19%	24%
Natural Disasters	15*	7*	47*	18*
Total Length per Day	Over 4 pages	Over 2 pages	Around 2 pages	Around 4 pages

\* The figure is the total number of news items found in all issues published from January 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

## **Section II: Imbalance in International News Coverage**

An imbalance in international news flow and coverage has been a major concern in the study of international communication. Previous research has repeatedly detected an under-representation of less-developed countries in news media from both the developed and less-developed world. Recently, some researchers have used world-system theory to explain this imbalance (Chang 1998; Chang et al, 2000, Kim and Barnett, 1996). They argue that communication occurs more intensively among core countries and between core countries and their former colonies in the periphery, than among the periphery countries. Yet, the information flow between core and periphery is one-way, always from the core to the periphery. The semi-periphery serves as the intermediary zone among the three spheres. Its interactions with the core are even more active than interactions within the core and between core and periphery. Therefore, we can expect that both core and

semi-periphery countries attract a large amount of attention in newspapers from all three zones. Periphery countries tend to be neglected in the news in all countries in the world.

When comparing the amount of coverage dedicated to countries from the three zones, I revealed an imbalance in all of the four newspapers. I will use the top-10 most covered countries to illustrate this imbalance. Table 3-2 shows the top-10 countries that have received the most coverage from the four newspapers. They are ranked according to the total number of news items on them in all four newspapers. The ranking of the top-10 countries in each newspaper is shown separately. The attention that each country received is indicated by the percentage<sup>5</sup> of news items covering it.

Among the top ten countries listed in Table 3-2, we can find 5 of the 6 core countries in the world system. The five countries are the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and France. Canada is the only core country being left out. Beside them, three semi-periphery countries are on the list, namely China, Russia and Italy. Israel and Bosnia are two nations far away from the core. Their popularity was caused by the military or terrorist activities taking place in their territory at the time of 1996. The news items covering the two nations can be mainly found in the military and political news categories. Their names are hard to find under other news topics.

The top-10 ranking for each newspaper is fairly similar to the four newspaper's overall ranking. In *The New York Times*, the United States is its host country, therefore not on the list. India, a periphery country, is the No. 10 country on its list, receiving 2.2%

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that the percentage was not calculated using the total number of foreign news found in each newspaper. Instead, an adjusted figure was used. The figure does not include news items reporting on international organizations (e.g. United Nation, European Union, and Group-7), or geographical regions (e.g. Africa, Latin American and Southeast Asia), without mentioning any particular nation. Also, because one news item may be coded for more than one country, all news items covering two countries were counted as two items, three countries as three items, and so forth. Indeed, the figure is the sum of total number of news items covering each country.



of its overall coverage. *The Globe and Mail*'s list almost perfectly corresponds with the overall list, except its neglect of Italy. Taiwan, another semi-periphery country, has joined the list as No. 10 instead, accounting for 2.4% of its foreign coverage. The ranking for *The People's Daily* also corresponds with the overall ranking pretty well. However, France and Italy were more marginalized in its coverage. Three of its neighbouring countries, South Korea (semi-periphery, 2.6% of total coverage), India (2.3%) and Pakistan (periphery, 2.3%) occupy the bottom of its top-10 list. In the list for *The Times of India*, Bosnia and Germany are absent. Its neighbouring country Pakistan (5.1% of total coverage) is ranked No. 6. Taiwan takes up the 8<sup>th</sup> position. It received the same amount of attention (3.0% of total coverage) as France and Italy did.

From the top-10 rankings, one can see that all of the four newspapers have favoured core and semi-periphery countries in their international coverage, no matter the newspaper itself is from the core, semi-periphery, or the periphery. Periphery countries are seen in the top-10 list only when they have been either troubled by warfare or terrorism, or when they have happened to be a neighbour the host country (one exception is the No. 10 ranking of India in *The New York Times*).

The imbalance in the international news coverage can also be illustrated by the proportion of news coverage dedicated to the top 10 countries. As shown in Table 3-2, in both *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*, around 70% of the coverage has focused on the top-10 countries. The percentages are 71.4% and 67.4%, respectively. For the other two newspapers, the top-10 nations also accounted for about half of the total coverage, that is, 55.3% in *The New York Times*, and 49.7% in *The People's Daily*.

**Table 3- 2 Top ten countries in the international news coverage in the four newspapers.**

Overall Rank	Country	Total Items	N.Y. Times		Globe & Mail		People's Daily		Times of India	
			Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
1	U.S.	312	-	-	1	36.1	1	14.6	1	23.1
2	U.K.	126	2	9.0	2	6.9	4	5.6	2	11.1
3	Russia	121	1	9.2	3	6.3	2	8.2	3	7.2
4	Israel	97	4	8.4	6	4.3	3	5.6	5	6.3
5	Japan	82	6	4.3	5	4.5	5	5.1	7	4.2
6	China	68	5	6.0	4	4.9	-	-	4	6.6
7	Bosnia	63	3	8.4	7	2.8	7	3.5	16	1.4
8	Germany	47	7	3.5	8	2.6	6	4.0	13	1.5
9	France	40	9	3.0	9	2.4	14	1.8	8	3.0
10	Italy	32	7	3.5	21	0.6	17	1.3	8	3.0
<b>Total Percentage</b>		-	-	55.3	-	71.4	-	49.7	-	67.4

Table 3-2 has indicated another attribute of international news coverage, which is the prominence of the United States in the three non-U.S. newspapers. The United States was not only the most covered nation, it also received a disproportionate share of coverage. In *The Globe and Mail*, over one third of the news talked about the United States (36.1%). *The Times of India* dedicated nearly a quarter of its foreign news to this single country (23.1%). In the case of *The People's Daily*, the proportion has been lower. Yet, it still accounted for 14.6% of the total coverage. Such an over-representation of the United States is a reflection of the country's super-power position the contemporary world.

The top-10 listings have vividly demonstrated the imbalance in the international news coverage of the four newspapers. Although the degree of imbalance differed among them, they all paid more attention to countries near the core of the world system. Yet, there were countries that broke away from this pattern. The most significant deviance was

the attention paid to periphery nations that were suffering from some extreme forms of violence (e.g. war).

Interestingly, the imbalance in international news coverage is not equally significant among the four news categories that I have examined. Core and semi-periphery countries dominate the economic news category in all of the four newspapers. They also account for a large proportion of news items in the political news category. However, in most of the cases, the imbalance is absent from the military and natural disaster news categories.

### **Section III: Examining News Determinants by Category**

Hypothesis I of this study is that, for one newspaper, the determinants of international news coverage vary among different news topics. If this hypothesis is true, in each of the four newspapers, I shall find different sets of news determinants in the four news categories under investigation. Hypothesis II states the determinants of international news in a particular category are similar among newspapers from different countries. If this hypothesis is true, for each of the four news categories, I shall identify the same set of news determinants from the four newspapers.

In this section, I will present the main results of the data analysis, and test the two hypotheses using the results. First, the news determinants identified in the four news categories are compared. Then, the four newspapers are compared in terms of the determinants found in each news category. Because correlation analysis is not used in the natural disaster category but the other three, I shall first present the analysis results for the

other three categories. The coverage of natural disasters in the four newspapers will be discussed separately.

### **News Determinants in Different News Categories - Military, Politics and Economy**

Results of the correlation analysis for each newspaper are listed in Table 3-3 to 3-6. The United States has been excluded from the analysis as an outlier.

#### The Globe and Mail

As shown in Table 3-3, the correlations obtained from each news category have some remarkable differences. None of the eight context-oriented factors are significantly correlated to the news coverage in the military news category. In the political news category, only military power appears to be influential. Yet, with an  $r$  score of 0.44, the relationship is only a moderate one. GDP and Trade volumes are two strong predictors of the news coverage on economic matters, with  $r$ -values that equal to 0.88 and 0.89, respectively. Population and military power are moderated correlated to the coverage. Their  $r$ -values are both 0.40.

**Table 3- 3 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in each news category - *The Globe and Mail*.**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>All foreign news</b>	<b>Military/Terrorism</b>	<b>Dip/Dom Politics</b>	<b>Economic Matters</b>
Population	0.38	-0.03	0.21	0.40
Military power	0.45	0.03	0.44	0.40
GDP	0.66	-0.11	0.26	0.88
GDP per capita	0.29	-0.02	0.02	0.31
Trade	0.57	-0.19	0.07	0.89
Language	0.01	-0.17	-0.09	0.08
Colonial tie	-0.11	-0.32	-0.08	-0.11
Distance	-0.10	-0.23	-0.06	-0.08

### The Times of India

As indicated in Table 3-4, no significant correlation is found in the military and political news categories. In the economic news category, GDP and Trade have relative high r-values. The scores are 0.68 and 0.64, respectively. Population, with an r of 0.40, also has a moderate relationship with the news coverage on economic matters.

**Table 3- 4 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in each news category – *The Times of India*.**

Factors	All foreign news	Military/Terrorism	Dip/Dom Politics	Economic Matters
Population	0.37	0.11	0.17	0.40
Military power	0.44	0.14	0.22	0.32
GDP	0.50	-0.03	0.21	0.68
GDP per capita	0.17	0.16	-0.11	0.29
Trade	0.44	-0.09	0.21	0.64
Language	0.13	-0.13	0.12	0.37
Colonial tie	0.07	-0.17	0.22	0.17
Distance	-0.23	-0.08	-0.12	-0.17

### The People's Daily

Again, no significant predictor is found in the military news category. In the political news category, military power ( $r = 0.52$ ) appears to be moderately correlated. For news on economic matters, GDP and Trade prove to be strong predictors, with r scores of 0.80 and 0.83, respectively. GDP per capita has a moderate correlation score. The value is 0.41.

**Table 3- 5 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in each news category – *The People's Daily*.**

Factors	All foreign news	Military/Terrorism	Dip/Dom Politics	Economic Matters
Population	0.25	0.18	0.25	-0.004
Military power	0.50	0.33	0.52	-0.02
GDP	0.59	0.13	0.28	0.80
GDP per capita	0.22	0.03	0.17	0.41
Trade	0.47	0.07	0.13	0.83
Language	-0.05	-0.09	N/A*	N/A*
Colonial tie	0.07	0.04	0.24	-0.05
Distance	-0.22	0.07	-0.17	-0.16

\* No country has a non-zero language score. Correlation cannot be calculated.

### The New York Times

Table 3-5 shows that no significant factors are found in the military and political news categories. There are two influential news factors in the economic news category, which are GDP and trade. Their correlation scores are 0.58 and 0.64, respectively.

**Table 3- 6 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in each news category – *The New York Times*.**

Factors	All foreign news	Military/terrorist	Dip/Dom Politics	Economic Matters
Population	0.27	-0.13	0.19	-0.02
Military power	0.35	-0.10	0.29	0.02
GDP	0.48	-0.19	0.29	0.58
GDP per capita	0.15	0.03	0.16	0.28
Trade*	0.40	-0.13	0.03	0.64
Language	-0.01	-0.16	0.03	0.14
Colonial tie	-0.14	-0.26	-0.04	0.10
Distance	-0.11	-0.16	-0.13	-0.20

\* Canada, Mexico and Japan were removed as outliers when calculating the correlations.

A brief comparison of the political, military and economic news categories shows that economic news differs significantly from the other two categories. Correlations for

GDP and trade volume range from moderate to strong. However, the two factors display no more than a weak relationship with political news coverage (The highest score is 0.29 which can be found in *The New York Times*). They hardly have any influence on the coverage of military news.

In *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*, moderate correlations are found for population in the economic news category. However, the factor has very limited effect on news coverage of military and political events. Moreover, in *The Globe and Mail*, the 0.40 correlation score for military power corresponds to a significant relationship in the newspaper's political coverage ( $r=0.44$ ), but not in its military news ( $r=0.03$ ).

It is safe to say that the coverage of economic news is influenced by different determinants from the other two news categories. However, we cannot draw any conclusion from the comparison between military and politics categories, because no influential predictor is found among the 8 independent variables, except military power. The news factor appears to have some influence on the coverage of political events in *The Globe and Mail* ( $r = 0.44$ ) and *The People's Daily* ( $r = 0.52$ ). The moderate correlations are corresponded with a weak relationship ( $r = 0.33$ ) in *The People's Daily's* military coverage, and a near zero  $r$  score of 0.03 in *The Globe and Mail's* military news.

### **News Determinants in the Four Newspapers**

The current comparison of the four newspapers is mainly based on the correlation analysis results for the eight context-oriented independent variables. An overview of

news titles has been conducted in the military news category to discover news factors that have been affecting news coverage.

#### Military Actions/Terrorism

Table 3-7 consists of the correlation scores for the eight context-oriented factors derived from the four newspapers' military coverage. None of the factors has yielded a correlation score above 0.40. Two relatively high scores are found for military power in *The People's Daily* ( $r = 0.33$ ), and colonial ties in *The Globe and Mail* ( $r = -0.32$ ). Yet, the score for the later is a negative one. Interestingly, colonial ties have been expected to have a positive relationship with the amount of news coverage. The assumption is that newspapers tend to report more on countries that have colonial ties with their host countries.

**Table 3- 7 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in the military actions/terrorism category.**

Factors	Globe and Mail	Times of India	People's Daily	New York Times
Population	-0.03	0.11	0.18	-0.13
Military power	0.03	0.14	0.33	-0.10
GDP	-0.11	-0.03	0.13	-0.19
GDP per capita	-0.02	0.16	0.03	0.03
Trade	-0.19	-0.09	0.07	-0.13
Language	-0.17	-0.13	-0.09	-0.16
Colonial tie	-0.32	-0.17	0.04	-0.26
Distance	-0.23	-0.08	0.07	-0.16

I have expected that context-oriented factors have very limited influence on the coverage of military and terrorist events. It is the deviance of an event that determines which country is put into the news. We usually require the comparison of the day-by-day



news coverage with the day-by-day occurrence of military/terrorist events to find out the strength of deviance in predicting news coverage. Also, before any comparison, the actual occurrences of events need to be evaluated to determine their level of deviance. However, some significant trends can be identified by simply looking at the events that have been covered in the newspapers.

In the four newspapers, a huge amount of coverage was given to three countries, namely Israel, Russia and Bosnia. A total of 273 news items were published during the first half of 1996; and, 155 of them (56%) focused on the three countries. The percentage of military news coverage dedicated to these countries was 63% in *The Globe and Mail*, 40% in *The Times of India*, 56% in *The People's Daily*, and 68% in *The New York Times*. The lower percentage for *The Times of India* was a result of its neglect of Bosnia. Only 4 news items talked about the country.

Israel, Russia and Bosnia were, indeed, places that were troubled by the most extreme forms of violence at the time of 1996. A civil war occurred in Bosnia. Russia battled with Chechnya over a group of hostages. In Israel, a series of deadly bombings were launched by Palestinian terrorists, causing a large number of casualties.

Other nations that were relatively well represented in the four newspapers were China, Taiwan, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, the United Kingdom and Ireland. The events being covered included China's open military threat to Taiwan, armed conflict among Iraqi military leaderships, and terrorist activities in Lebanon, Liberia, the United Kingdom and Ireland. The events were less significant than those in Russia, Israel and Bosnia, in terms of the military action involved and/or the number of casualties.

Therefore, it is clear that military/terrorist events with higher degree of deviance have received more attention from the newspapers.

While observing the data, another pattern caught my attention. The United States, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were relatively well covered in *The Times of India*, while the United States received a fair amount of attention from *The People's Daily*. The two newspapers were basically tracking down every military move of these countries. The behaviour can be explained by the perceived military threat imposed by the guest countries to the host countries.

We may conclude that the deviance of military/terrorist events had a strong effect on the coverage of military news in all of the four newspapers. Moreover, a perceived threat to the guest country, a context-oriented factor, also played a role in the two Asian newspapers. The factor reflects the political relationship between the host and guest countries.

#### Diplomatic Activities/Domestic Politics

As shown in Table 3-8, the political news coverage in the four newspapers produced low correlation scores for seven of the eight independent variables. Military power gained a significant score in *The Globe and Mail* ( $r = 0.44$ ) and *The People's Daily* ( $r = 0.52$ ), indicating some moderate influences on news coverage. The variable was also among the most effective factors in *The Times of India* and *The New York Times*, with correlations of 0.22 and 0.29, respectively. Therefore, military power was the most influential predictor among the eight variables in all of the four newspapers.

**Table 3- 8 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in the diplomatic activities/domestic politics category.**

Factors	Globe and Mail	Times of India	People's Daily	New York Times
Population	0.21	0.17	0.25	0.19
Military power	0.44	0.22	0.52	0.29
GDP	0.26	0.21	0.28	0.29
GDP per capita	0.02	-0.11	0.17	0.16
Trade	0.07	0.21	0.13	0.03
Language	-0.09	0.12	N/A*	0.03
Colonial ties	-0.08	0.22	0.24	-0.04
Distance	-0.06	-0.12	-0.17	-0.13

\* No country has a non-zero language score. Correlation cannot be calculated.

Some other variables displayed a weak relationship with news coverage. Above 0.20 r-values were found for the GDP in all of the four newspapers. There was a weak correlation between population and the political coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily*. Colonial ties had above 0.20 scores in *The Times of India* and *The People's Daily*.

I expected that the amount of news coverage on diplomatic and political events is a function of a nation's power. I have selected four variables to indicate a nation's power. They are population, military power, GDP, and GDP per capita. However, my speculation has been disproved by the analysis results. Military power was a predictor that, weakly to moderately, affects political news coverage. GDP was only a weak factor in the four newspapers. Population had some limited effects in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily*. GDP per capita's influence on news coverage was negligible in all of the four newspapers.

Yet, in the three non-U.S. newspapers, the United States topped the list of the most covered countries in the political news category. In *The Times of India*, it accounted for 26.7% of the total coverage; in *The Globe and Mail*, 24.3%; and in *The People's Daily*, 15.2%. This may indicate that the world's most powerful nation has attracted a huge amount of attention in this news category. When the United States is excluded, the pattern becomes unclear. My speculation is that the more powerful nations tend to receive more attention. However, other news factors have put some less powerful nations into the spotlight. For example, countries experiencing violent conflicts, such as Bosnia and Israel, were given a relatively large amount of coverage in this news category. Diplomatic activities associated with these conflicts were considered newsworthy. A number of other events and countries have been prominent in the news. Simply observing the data can help me little to reveal the reasons why they have been emphasized by the newspapers. A systematic investigation is required to reach the goal.

### Economic Matters

As shown in Table 3-9, GDP and trade were the most influential predictors among the eight independent variables in the four newspapers. The two's prediction power was particularly strong in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily*. Their r-values were both over 0.80. A few other factors have appeared to have significant relationships with news coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*. They are population and military power.

**Table 3- 9 Pearson correlations between eight context-oriented news factors and the number of news items in the economic matters category**

Factors	Globe and Mail	Times of India	People's Daily	New York Times
Population	0.40	0.40	-0.004	-0.02
Military power	0.40	0.32	-0.02	0.02
GDP	0.88	0.68	0.80	0.58
GDP per capita	0.31	0.29	0.41	0.28
Trade	0.89	0.64	0.83	0.64**
Language	0.08	0.37	N/A*	0.14
Colonial tie	-0.11	0.17	-0.05	0.10
Distance	-0.08	-0.17	-0.16	-0.20

\* No country has a non-zero language score. Correlation cannot be calculated.

\*\* Canada, Mexico and Japan were removed as outliers when calculating the correlation.

I have proposed earlier that some economic factors may strongly influence the news coverage of economic matters. My expectation has been confirmed by the analysis results. GDP demonstrates a nation's economic power. Trade volume indicates the amount of economic interactions between the host and the guest countries. They have both imposed considerable influence on the coverage of economic news in the four newspapers.

When comparing the four newspapers' news coverage in three categories, a certain degree of uniformity among the newspapers has been found for the most influential predictors in all of the three news categories. Inter-newspaper variations have occurred for some less powerful predictors.

### **The Case of Natural Disasters**

The coverage of natural disasters was very different among the four newspapers. The coverage in *The People's Daily* was the heaviest in terms of the number of news items released and the number of events covered. During the first half of 1996, it

published 47 news items, in which 33 natural disasters around the world was reported. Eighteen news items were released in *The Globe and Mail* to cover 10 disasters. In *The New York Times*, the total number of news items released was also 18. Thirteen disastrous events were reported. *The Times of India* had very little coverage on natural disasters. There were only seven news items published, and five events covered.

All coverage of natural disaster in *The People's Daily* was in the form of news briefs. Each item contained less than 100 words. In the other three papers, the coverage was carried in the forms of news stories, news briefs, as well as pictures.

Looking at the amount of coverage each country received, there appeared to be some geographical imbalances. First, *The Globe and Mail* reported five events took place in the United States in nine news items, which constituted half of its total coverage. *The Times of India*, on the other hand, dedicated four of its only seven news items to two disasters that had taken place in Bangladesh. There was also one news item on a disaster in Pakistan. The emphasis placed on neighbouring countries has been strong enough to conclude that geographical distance is a strong factor in the coverage of natural disasters in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*. However, because the United States shares its official language with Canada, and the two are both former British colonies, one may argue that cultural proximity may have also been at work here. In the case of *The Times of India*, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were all British colonies more than half of century ago. Therefore, cultural, as well as spatial relatedness may have been the determinants of disaster coverage in the two newspapers.

Another type of geographical imbalance occurred in all of the four newspapers. The papers seemed to pay much more attention to Asia than to other regions of the world.

In *The People's Daily*, 60% of the coverage went to Asian countries; in *The New York Times*, 78%; in *The Times of India*, 86%. In the case of *The Globe and Mail*, while half of the coverage focused on the United States, the other half was all dedicated to Asian countries.

We may attribute the over-representation of Asia in the two Asian newspapers to the effect of geographical proximity. However, what would explain the emphasis on the continent in the two North American newspapers? Is it possible that there were simply more natural disasters took place in Asia during the first half of 1996?

Table 3-10 consists of the list of natural disasters occurred from January to June 1996, which was provided by U.S. Aid Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). The list includes only 16 natural disasters, which is half of the number of disasters covered by *The People's Daily*. However, after comparing the list with *The People's Daily's* coverage, I understand that it contains disasters that are rather large in magnitude, in terms of the number of people's killed and/or affected.

.Among the 16 disasters listed in the table, half of them took place in Asia. Also, the five most deadly disasters with over 100 people killed took place in the region. It is highly possible that the over-representation of Asia in the four newspapers was simply due to the concentration of major disasters in the area.

Table 3-10 also shows that how the 16 major disasters have been covered in the four newspapers. In the table, disasters are ranked according to the number of people killed in a natural disaster, which is an independent variable tested exclusively in this news category. The variable seems to predict the coverage in the two North American newspapers very well. Both of them concentrated their coverage heavily on the three

most deadly events, which were a tornado in Bangladesh, and the earthquakes in China and Indonesia. *The Times of India* carried very limited amount of coverage on the news topic. It is difficult to conclude whether the newspaper tended to cover disasters with larger magnitude. *The People's Daily* reported on a large range of events, and each event was rarely covered in more than one news item. Neither cultural/geographical distance with the guest country nor magnitude of the disasters seemed to affect its coverage.

**Table 3- 10 Coverage of major natural disasters in the four newspapers.**

Country	Date	Disaster	# killed	G.M.	T.I.	P.D.	N.Y.T.
Bangladesh	16/05/1996	Tornado	525	2	3	2	4
China	06/02/1996	Earthquake	322	3	0	n.a.	3
Indonesia	23/02/1996	Earthquake	104	2	0	1	2
Afghanistan	29/05/1996	Floods	100	0	0	1	0
Yemen	18/06/1996	Floods	100	0	0	1	0
Brazil	23/02/1996	Floods	70	0	0	0	1
China	01/03/1996	Cold wave	48	0	0	n.a	0
Bolivia	15/04/1996	Avalanche	30	0	0	0	0
Morocco	02/02/1996	Floods	25	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	01/04/1996	Earthquake	21	0	0	1	0
Indonesia	10/01/1996	Floods	18	1	1	1	0
Mozambique	14/03/1996	Floods	7	0	0	1	0
Costa Rica	14/02/1996	Floods	5	0	0	0	0
Venezuela	01/04/1996	Mudslides	0	0	0	0	0
Tajikistan	07/06/1996	Floods/Landslides	0	0	0	0	0
Madagascar	01/02/1996	Cyclone	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Total events covered</b>				<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total news items</b>				<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

To conclude, the four newspapers displayed significant discrepancies in the coverage of natural disasters. Cultural and physical relatedness was an effective predictor of coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*. The coverage in the two



North American newspapers was strongly influenced by the magnitude of the disaster in terms of death tolls. No effective news factor was found for *The People's Daily*.

### **Summary**

The analysis results show that, among the eight context-oriented variables involved in this study, none has had significant influence on the coverage of military news. Some other factors may have been at work. Event-oriented factors, such as degree of violence involved in military action and death tolls in terrorist attacks, were evidently influencing the news coverage in all of the four newspapers. The effect of a context-oriented factor, political relation between the host and the guest countries was evident in the two Asian newspapers.

In the political news category, no strong predictor was found among the eight independent variables. Military power appeared to have moderate effects in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily*. The variable displayed weak influence in the other two newspapers. However, compared with the other variables, its effectiveness was among the highest.

Trade between the host and guest countries and GDP was found to be the most powerful predictors in all of the four newspapers' economic news. Their effects on new coverage were very strong in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily*, and were moderate in the other two newspapers. Some other variables have shown some moderate relationships with news coverage, but not in all newspapers. The variables were population in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*, military power in *The Globe and Mail*, and GDP per capita in *The People's Daily*.

In the natural disasters category, no common predictor was found among the four newspapers. Cultural and physical relatedness appeared to influence the news coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India*. The coverage in the two North American newspapers was strongly influenced by the death tolls of the disasters. The coverage in *The People's Daily* did not display any particular pattern.

Hypothesis I has been strongly supported by the above results. In the same newspaper, different determinants can be found in different news categories. Hypothesis II was partially supported. In the military, political and economic news categories, there were significant commonalities among the four newspapers, although discrepancies did occur. However, in the natural disasters category, the four newspapers seemed to publish according to different rules.

#### **Section IV: Cultural and Physical Relatedness – a Re-examination of Its Effectiveness**

In the military, political and economic news categories, the correlation scores for common official language, colonial ties and geographical distance were never found significant, nor were they in the overall foreign news category (Please see Table 3-3 to 3-6). The three factors have been intensively studied in previous research, and many scholars found them having considerable influences on news coverage.

It is possible that the effect of the three factors have been over-shadowed by other factors. In this section, I will use 'inter-newspaper comparison' to re-examine the influence of language, colonial ties and distance on foreign news coverage. The result of the comparison can only be tentative because a sample of four newspapers is too small

for any conclusion. However, it allows us to see some noticeable trends in the data. To simplify the procedure, data for overall news coverage will be used for the analysis.

Geographic distance has yielded a weak correlation score (just below -.020) in *The Globe and Mail*, *The People's Daily* and *The New York Times*. The correlation found in *The Times of India* had an absolute value lower than 0.1. However, when comparing the newspapers' coverage on countries in different regions, they all showed strong tendencies to favor their host countries' close neighbours.

*The Times of India* covered India's three neighbors in South Asia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in 35 news items<sup>6</sup> (10.5% of the total coverage). However, in *The People's Daily* of China, the three countries appeared in only 12 news items (3.1%). *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* each carried four news items focusing on the three countries (0.8% and 1.1%).

On the other hand, the *People's Daily* published 9 news items to cover China's three northwestern neighbours, including Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. However, none of the other three newspapers has ever mentioned a single word about these nations.

Similarly, events in Latin America were more likely to be covered in *The New York Times*. A total of 34 items (9.2% of total coverage) was allocated to nations in this region. At the same time, the Canadian newspaper published 21 news items (4.3%) and the Indian paper only 11 items (3.3%) to cover this region. The Chinese newspaper had relatively more reports than the two. Twenty-four news items were released, which accounted for 6.1% of its total coverage.

The comparison of the four newspapers' coverage on certain countries showed that geographical distance did play a remarkable role in determining the amount of

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<sup>6</sup> The figure is the sum of total number of news items covering each of the three countries.

coverage. However, the argument might be true only when the neighbors of the host countries were concerned. For non-neighboring countries, the other news factors prevailed.

Common official language and colonial ties have also gained very low correlation scores in the four newspapers. In most of the cases, the r-value was below 0.1 or even negative. Only in one instance, it exceeded 0.10, that is, language yielded a score of 0.13 in *The Times of India*.

When comparing the newspapers to check the influence of common official language and colonial ties, three of the newspapers can be classified into one group. Canada, India and the United States are all former British colonies, and share English as a common official language. China, on the other hand, belongs to the communist bloc, and does not use English as an official language. Therefore, we can test the influence of colonial ties by comparing the coverage of the former and current communist countries and members of British colonial group in the four newspapers. When comparing their coverage of English speaking countries, we will get some insight about the effectiveness of common official language as a predictor.

*The People's Daily* of China printed far more news items to cover the former Soviet nations and the former communist countries in Eastern Europe. Russia, as a former super power and a trouble spot in the world, was well covered in all newspapers. Excluding Russia, a total of 12 nations from the group were mentioned in 24 news items in the Chinese newspaper. In contrast, among the other three papers, each only published 4 news items on them. A total of six nations were mentioned.

When the coverage of the British colonial group members (excluding Canada, the United States, and India) was compared, no significant discrepancy was found between *The People's Daily* and the other newspapers. *The People's Daily* published 67 news items (17.1% of total coverage) on these countries. *The Times of India* carried 99 news items, which accounted for 25.3% of its total foreign coverage. Although the amount was higher than in *The People's Daily*, the difference was not sufficient to indicate a strong tendency to favor the British colonial group. *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* carried only a few more news items than *The People's Daily*. The former published 77 news items (20.9%), and the latter 73 (14.8%). Indeed, when the percentage in overall coverage was compared, *The Globe and Mail* appeared to have given less attention to the British colonial group than *The People's Daily* did.

The influence of colonial ties on international news coverage was very limited. The news factor had some effects in *The People's Daily*, and possibly has somewhat boosted up the coverage of the British colonial group in *The Times of India*. However, the two North American newspapers were not influenced by the factor.

Pertaining to the coverage of English speaking countries (excluding Canada, the United States and India), the results are as follows. *The Globe and Mail* carried 69 news items covering English speaking countries (14.0% of coverage). *The Times of India* published 48 news items (14.4%); *The People's Daily* 31 (7.9%); and *The New York Times* 71 (19.3%). We can see that *The People's Daily* has paid much less attention to English speaking countries than the other three. The effect of common official language on foreign news coverage is noticeable.

To conclude, inter-newspaper comparison of international news coverage shows that both geographical distance and common official language have had some effects on news coverage. Yet, the effects were limited in certain area. The influence of colonial ties appeared to be very small, except in *The People's Daily*, which paid much attention to the former U.S.S.R. nations and former communist countries in Eastern Europe.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The data obtained from the four newspapers has strongly supported Hypothesis I, but only partially supported Hypothesis II of this study. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the implications of these research findings and draw conclusion on my research. In Section I, I will stress the importance of studying international news by category and discuss the effect of various news categories on a newspaper's overall foreign coverage. In Section II, I attempt to interpret the research findings pertaining to the similarities and variations among the four newspapers. Section III contains a discussion of some news factors involved in this study. Issues pertaining to their definition, measurement and testing will be addressed. The last section of this chapter provides a conclusion of this research paper.

### **Section I: Studying International News by Categories**

The data derived from the four newspapers has supported Hypothesis I of this study. News determinants do vary among different news categories. Therefore, the pattern of overall international news coverage is subject to the combined effects of all news categories. To understand the processes of international news coverage, we must study the mechanism associated with the news making in different news category. Researchers have conducted some studies on news coverage of foreign disasters, conflicts, and terrorist events. No other news category has been investigated. Future research needs to pay attention to various news categories, and systematically examine the determinants of their coverage.

I originally suggested that different news determinants may be found between two newspapers' overall international news coverage if they emphasize different news topics. If two newspapers are subject to the influence of similar new determinants in each news category, variations in their overall coverage can be explained by their foci on different news categories. Two of the newspapers involved in this study have given disproportionate amount of coverage to specific news topics. In *The Globe and Mail*, 51% of foreign coverage was on economic matters. If the political news involving China was counted, *The People's Daily* had nearly 40% of its coverage devoted to international political news. However, I cannot show whether the different focuses of the two newspapers have caused variations in their overall news coverage because this study did not examine all of their news categories. The influences of other categories on their overall foreign coverage are unknown. Moreover, the news categories in *The Globe and Mail* and *The People's Daily* were not always subject to similar influences. The situation has been far more complicated than I have expected. The two newspapers' emphases on different news topics may be able to explain some of the variations between their overall coverage. Differences within some news categories may also contribute to the variations.

My research has found different news determinants in political, economic, military news and news on natural disasters. These findings seem to be useful in explaining why Third World countries are more likely to appear in negative news. According to the data I have obtained, the coverage of military news has been a function of the deviance of the event. At the same time, in the two North American newspapers, deviance was the principle determinant of the coverage of natural disasters.



While these rather ‘negative’ news items were reported without regard to economic status of the guest countries, the more ‘positive’ economic news has focused on the economically powerful countries (i.e. countries with higher GDP value). Moreover, countries with larger military power had more chances of appearing in political news. Therefore, when we look at the overall international coverage, we may get an impression that the Third World countries are reported only in ‘negative’ news. Those relatively ‘mutual’ or ‘positive’ news reports mainly focus on the relatively powerful countries.

## **Section II: Newspapers from Different Countries – Similarities and Variations**

Hypothesis II has been partially supported in this study. Although minor variations occurred, the determinants found in the four newspapers, in general, agreed with each other in the political, military and economic news categories. However, in the natural disasters category, the four newspapers seemed to function in very different fashions. I would attribute the similarities to the same gatekeeping routine and professional value adopted by the four newspapers. News workers in the four newspapers held similar concepts of newsworthiness, despite differences in cultural background, ideology, and the political structure in which they were situated. They considered an economic event newsworthy when it took place in a country with relatively high economic power and intensive economic interactions with their host countries. Also, for them, a military/terrorist event’s degree of deviance meant its level of newsworthiness.

One may argue that the similarities between the two Asian newspapers and the two North American newspapers may be a result of the former's heavy reliance on Western news agencies. Looking at the news sources cited in *The People's Daily*, a majority of its international news items were obtained from China's own news agency, the Xinhua News Agency. However, Parson (1997) has reported that it is a common practice for the Agency's employees to translate news releases from Western news services. They do not usually write their own reports. In the case of *The Times of India*, the reliance on Western news agencies was significant, although non-Western, especially India's own news agencies also contributed many news items. It is difficult to distinguish the effects of professional practices and values on news coverage from the influences of the use of wire services. However, similarities in news routines and values are still the necessary conditions for similarities in news output because newspapers do not print every news items provided by news agencies. They select only a small number of news items from the huge amount of information produced by wire services each day. Only when the newspapers apply similar rules in deciding which events to cover, we can find similar sets of news determinants among them.

This research has, to some degree, confirmed the proposition that journalists in the Western and non-Western worlds have adopted similar gatekeeping practices and values. They do not follow separate journalistic traditions. The Western tradition has had considerable influences on the non-Western media. This finding indicates that the core countries have not only dominated the flow of news in the world system, but also the diffusion of news values and practices. The world-system theory has previously been adopted to explain the pattern of international news flow. I would like to argue that

it could also be utilized to understand the transmission of journalistic values and practices around the world.

What has caused the differences among the newspapers? Foreign disasters seemed to be much more newsworthy in *The People's Daily* than the other three newspapers. I suspect that such a tendency has been caused by the ideological spell put on the newspaper by China's communist regime. Parsons (1997) compared the coverage of national and international news by China's Xinhua New Agency. He found that the agency produced far more sensational news on other countries than on China. China was thus portrayed as a stable country free of violence, crimes and social conflicts. At the same time, both developed and developing worlds were depicted as places troubled by crimes, political unrests and wars. Such a political bias indicated that the news agency still function as a propaganda instrument for the ruling communist party, although economic reform in China had helped it to gain much independence. I believe that *The People's Daily's* enthusiasm on covering foreign disasters has been the result of a similar political bias. It is the political ideology dominating the news medium that has made it different from the other newspapers.

The current study compared the international news coverage in four newspapers in terms of the amount of news coverage they gave to each country or event. It focuses on the information availability and news selection aspects of news production, but not the meaning production dimension of news media. Media are a major force in the production of popular ideologies. They construct reality according to some particular norms and values of a society. At the same time, they are actively involved in the reproduction of these norms and values (Van Dijk, 1983, 1985). Therefore, it is

necessary to analyze the messages transmitted in news coverage in order to fully understand the nature of news media from different countries. Various approaches of discourse analysis have been employed to study how countries or events are portrayed in the news (Carragee, 1991; Entman, 1991; Keshishian, 1997; Portier, 1992; Wall, 1997). I believe that this kind of study will bring up many differences among the four newspapers investigated here.

### **Section III: Examining News Factors – Conception, Measurement and Testing**

In this section, I will discuss some of the news factors that I have examined in this study, pertaining to their conception, measurement and testing methods. When interpreting my research results and comparing them with some past research, I found that geographical distance might have been inadequately measured in my study. My findings on colonial ties, GDP and GDP per capita displayed significant discrepancies from some previous research. Moreover, military power, a news factor that has been found influential in some newspapers and news categories, has not received any attention in the literature. I will address these issues in below.

#### **Nation's power**

In this study, I have employed four factors to indicate a nation's power. Among them, GDP and GDP per capita were used to indicate the economic power of a nation. Interestingly, GDP has displayed more influence than GDP per capita in the political and economic news categories, as well as in the overall foreign news coverage. In the military news category, both factors appeared to have negligible effect on news

coverage. GDP per capita gained a significant (but moderate) correlation only in the economic news in *The People's Daily*. Therefore, I may conclude that GDP has been a better predictor of foreign news coverage, and the economic size of a nation (GDP) can be more important than its wealth (GDP per capita) in imposing influence on other countries.

Please note that a high GDP per capita does not necessarily mean a large GDP. For example, Canada's GDP per capita was ten times larger than that of China in 1996. However, its GDP was only one quarter of that of China. Countries such as India, Russia, Mexico and Brazil also have relatively large GDP, but low GDP per capita. Conversely, some rich nations in the world have very high GDP per capita, but a pretty small GDP.

Revisiting past studies on GDP/GNP, Wu (2000) has tested GDP and GDP per capita in his study of 38 countries' news media. He found that GDP per capita was a predictor in four countries. GDP, on the other hand, had some influences on news coverage in one country. The two factors showed no effect in other countries. Dupree (1971) examined GNP and GNP per capita at the same time. His study of a U.S. magazine found that the per capita value was superior to the total value as a predictor of foreign news coverage. The two studies both employed stepwise multiple regression to analyze the relationships between news factors and coverage. If I have applied the same statistical method to my data, it is quite possible that GDP will be marginalized in or even squeezed out of the regression equations in some newspapers due to the existence of some news factors highly correlated with it<sup>7</sup>. However, being marginalized in or

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in my data, GDP was often highly correlated with trade volume between the host and the guest countries. Its correlation scores always lower than that of the latter.

excluded from the regression equations for the purpose of mathematical maximization does not necessarily mean that a news factor has little influence on news coverage (Stevens, 1996). I could not compare my research results with those of Wu (2000) and Dupree (1971) because the two authors did not provide any details about their data analysis procedures. It is not known whether ‘mathematical causes’ have reduced the prediction power of GDP/GNP in their studies.

Military power has appeared to be the most influential news factor in the political news category. It also displayed weak to moderate effects in the economic news category in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Times of India* and the military category in *The People’s Daily*. I have found no previous study that tested the news factor. I believe that the news factor deserves more attention in international news determinants research.

### **Geographical Distance**

In this study, geographical distance between two counties was measured by distance between their capital cities. It was found to have very limited effect on news coverage. However, ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ has shown that the newspapers did give more attention to their host countries’ close neighbors. Wu (2000) has observed the similar pattern from his investigation of international news coverage in 38 countries. Geographical distance between capital cities was found to have some effect only in a handful of developing countries. However, every nation’s news output seemed to demonstrate a regional preference.

Why does geographical distance play little role beyond a region? When attempting to find an explanation for the question, I found it is necessary to clarify, first, the conception associated with the news factor. Although the factor has been repeatedly tested, it has never been clearly defined (Johnson, 1997). What does this factor measure? If it stands for real distance, the assumption will be that distance is an impediment of information transmission. If it indicates ‘psychological’ distance, we are assuming that people are more interested in the affairs taking place in countries close by (Hicks and Gordon, 1974). Or, it could refer to the cultural, political, and economic relationships naturally formed among countries adjacent to each other.

My research results clearly indicate that physical distance has not hindered the newspapers from reporting on events in remote countries. Modern transportation and communication technology might have eliminated the friction of distance in information transmission, at least for newspapers. Geographical distance may be more a measure of ‘psychological’ distance and close relationships among neighbouring countries. Countries faraway from the host country do not necessarily receive less coverage. However, countries close-by are likely to get more attention. Therefore, what we need to measure is ‘geographical proximity’ rather than ‘distance’.

Consequently, the distance between two nations’ capitals is not an adequate measure of the news factor. A mean to differentiate psychologically and socio-politically nearby countries from none-nearby countries is required. Some researchers have used the concept of regionalism to accommodate the idea. However, the definition of region is a tricky task. Historical context and identity issues often complicate the demarcation of regions. Some researchers simply use the conventionally defined

continents to test regional preference (e.g. Chang et al, 1987; Nnaemeka and Richstad, 1980). However, such a method might be too crude, as many continents cover large amount of landmass. Countries at different ends of the landmass might perceive themselves to be far away from each other. They may, indeed, have very little interaction with each other.

I would like to suggest that we can consider only neighbouring countries as being physically proximate. Countries that share boundary by land or are divided by straits are neighbours. Studies need to be conducted to test whether this is a better measure of geographical proximity than continents.

### **Colonial Ties**

Colonial ties have failed to demonstrate much influence on international news coverage in the four newspapers. It showed some influence only on *The People's Daily* when comparing the coverage of the former Soviet states (excluding Russia) and former communist countries in Eastern Europe among the four newspapers.

Some previous studies have found support for the news factor. Skurnik (1981) compared a number of African newspapers' coverage of colonially defined geographic regions and linguistic zones. He claimed that the newspapers gave more attention to the former colonies in the same colonial group. However, the former colonizers were not over-represented. Nnaemeka and Richstad (1980) studied the coverage of major world regions in 19 newspapers in Pacific Islands and the United States. Meyer (1991) examined the news sources of three newspapers in Africa and three in Latin America. Both studies demonstrated that the Third World newspapers tended to cover countries in



the same colonial group, including the former colonizer and the colonized. Haynes (1984) investigated the dependency on Western news agencies and the coverage of different regions in 18 newspapers around the world. He found that colonial ties predicted the coverage in Latin American newspapers, but not in African newspapers

One study found evidence in disfavor with the news factor. Wu (2000) tested the effect of colonial ties in newspapers from 38 countries of all levels of development. His data showed that the factor never imposed any positive influence on the news production among the countries.

When comparing the five studies, I found that the authors had interpreted the news factors differently. Both Wu (2000) and Haynes (1984) treated it as an indicator of cultural proximity. Skurnik (1981) saw it as a component of a country's national interest. Meyer (1991) and Nnaemeka and Richstad (1980), in contrast, understood the factor in light of Galtung's (1971) theory of structural imperialism. It was argued that news media in the Third World countries tended to report more on their relevant core countries (former/current colonizers) than on other countries in the core. Also, they reported more on periphery countries in the same colonial groups than in other groups. Under such an interpretation, colonial ties function only in the countries at the periphery.

Moreover, different research strategies have been employed in the five studies. Wu's (2000) research was the only one that used 'inter-country comparison' of news coverage. All of the other four studies adopted the 'inter-newspaper comparison' approach. The differences in research method may have caused differences in results, as 'inter-newspaper comparison' is not effective in detecting influences of the news factors, which function only within a certain domain, such as colonial ties.

The four ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ studies have all found evidence in favor of colonial ties. Why my research has failed to find any influence of the factor in the three newspapers hosted by three former British colonies, even when using the ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ method? First, the two North American newspapers are First World newspapers. If Galtung’s (1971) structural imperialism is used to understand the news factor, the two newspapers are not the victims of imperialism, thus free from the influences of this news factor. Indeed, all of the four ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ studies have tested the effect of the news factor in Third World media.

Second, in the case of *The Times of India*, time might be an explanation here. The four ‘inter-newspaper comparison’ studies were conducted in mid-1970s to mid-1980s. My research data was derived from the newspapers published in 1996. As one to two decades passed by, the influences of the colonial history and structure on the formerly colonized nations might have somewhat faded away. New cultural, political and economic ties have been established, communication infrastructure built, and interest on other countries developed. Therefore, in the contemporary world, colonial ties may not play a role as significant as in 10 or 20 years ago, at least in countries that are relatively powerful in the periphery zone.

The above discussions show that some of the relatively well-established news factors need to be carefully re-conceptualized. For geographical distance and colonial ties, there have been different definitions. We need to determine which one can best describe how these news factors affect international news coverage. Time is an important element in defining news factors, as changes in the technical, economic and

political structures of the world may alter the way in which they affect news coverage. Research results produced 20 years ago cannot be applied to the contemporary situation without considering changes in context. Longitudinal studies across several decades are sometimes necessary to reveal the effect of changing context on the production of international news.

Measurement techniques should be developed according to definition of a news factor. For example, if a country's economic size increases its economic influence in the world, GDP or GNP should be used to measure its economic power. If economic power is a function of a country's wealth, GDP or GNP per capita becomes a more adequate measure.

Testing methods should also be carefully selected. 'Inter-country comparison' of news coverage may not be suitable for examining some news factors, such as geographical and cultural proximity. The effect of these news factors can easily be masked by factors that affect the coverage of both proximate and remote countries.

#### **Section IV: Conclusion**

The current study has attempted to address two limitations in past research on international news determinants. One of the limitations is the lack of recognition that news media apply different news selection criteria to different news categories. The other is the lack of research on non-Western, especially non-U.S. media, as well as the lack of comparative studies of media around the world. As a pilot project, this study compared the international news coverage in four news categories and among four newspapers. My research results have shown that different news categories are

governed by different news determinants. Therefore, the news coverage in various news categories needs to be carefully investigated in order to fully understand the nature of international news coverage.

Both similarities and variations have been found among the four newspapers. The similarities can be explained by the same journalistic practices and values adopted by the news media in the four countries. Differences in political ideologies dominating their host societies may explain some of the variations. The world-system theory can help us to understand how news practices and values have diffused from the Western, core countries to the rest of the world. More cross-country comparative studies, which are sensitive to news categories, are required to enrich our knowledge on the nature of news media from different parts of the world. In addition to research investigating the information availability and news selection aspects of news production, like the current study, we need to, also, look at the meaning production function of news media. Discourse analysis can be useful for us to reveal differences and similarities among news media across the world in terms of the popular ideologies they help to produce and reproduce.

This study has also gained some by-products, which are some understandings pertaining to the examination of various news factors. Before testing any news factors, we need to carefully consider their meanings, that is, how you expect them to affect news coverage. Changes in social context may require us to re-conceptualize some of the news factors from time to time. Measurement of a news factor should be designed to reflect its definition. Specially designed research is required for us to formulate an adequate definition and to identify the best measurement for some factors, such

geographical distance and colonial ties. The selection of testing procedure can affect research results greatly. 'Inter-newspaper comparison' of news coverage can usually better reveal the effect of physical and cultural proximity than the 'inter-country comparison' method.

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