

How US and Chinese Media Cover the US–China Trade Conflict: A Case Study of War and Peace Journalism Practice and the Foreign Policy Equilibrium Hypothesis

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Abstract

This article examines the news coverage of a nonmilitary conflict: The US–China trade conflict by major news media outlets in the USA and China using the war and peace journalism framework. Role in the conflict as initiator/responder, medium difference, the press role in each press system, and partisanship of news media were hypothesized to affect the war and peace journalism practice. Moreover, the trade conflict was divided into three stages to test the applicability of the “foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis” by analyzing the changes in the uses of sources and presence of competing frames over time. US news media were found to employ more war journalism and less peace journalism than their Chinese counterpart. They also had much lower coverage of the conflict than their Chinese counterpart. Newspapers were more likely to use war journalism than television. US partisan liberal media selectively supported and opposed the US government trade policy.

Introduction

With its economy growing in double figures and gaining power internationally, China has been being labeled by the Western media as an “enemy” (Stone & Xiao, 2007) and seen as posing a threat to the United States’ world superpower status (Casetti, 2003). The 2018 trade conflict between the US and China has been characterized as the biggest trade war in economic history (Li, He, & Lin, 2018; The New York Times, 2018). It presents an ideal setting to study the differences in framing an international conflict by party/partisan and elite news media in a changing digital media landscape because media can escalate a conflict through its representation of the conflict occurrences (Bastiansen, Klimke, & Werenskjold, 2019).

Proposed by peace studies scholar Johan Galtung to highlight the important role of journalists in promoting world peace (Lee & Maslog, 2005), *peace journalism* stresses a nonpartisan coverage of all sides, exposing the lies and untruths, with a focus on common people and aims at finding solutions and promoting peace initiatives. In contrast, *war journalism* escalates the conflict by focusing on violence, siding with the elites, and serves as government propaganda to achieve a “victory” for the home country (Galtung, 2003). This study aimed to explore how war and peace journalism were practiced in a conflict

between China and the U.S. which have different press systems. We examined how the roles of the U.S. as the initiator of the trade war versus China as the defender of the trade war influenced the use of war and peace journalism framing in news coverage. In addition, we investigated whether media format (TV vs. newspapers) and partisanship of media affected the coverage of government policy and the use of war and peace journalism framing. In China, the increasing commercialization of news media and advocacy of multiplatform news delivery propelled news media to pay more attention to the audience's interest. In the United States, there is animosity between the Trump administration and the press and the rise of the partisan media in the U.S. such as *FoxNews* (conservative) and *MSNBC* (liberal). How did these changes in the media landscape in both countries affect the coverage of trade war? Did the coverage of the trade war change over time?

This article first discussed the significance of this study in explaining the factors that influence the use of war and peace journalism and how the *foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis* could predict the use of news sources and competing frames in the course of an international conflict. Then, we reviewed the common theoretical approaches to the study of news coverage in international conflicts and the journalistic traditions of the United States and China. We showed why peace journalism is a useful approach in analyzing the framing of an international conflict which can facilitate a peaceful solution. The foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis was introduced to help explain news media's impact on foreign policy. We then explained the journalism traditions of each country and how the relationship between countries affected the coverage of international news to develop our research questions and hypotheses.

Significance of the Study

The US-imposed tariffs on China in 2018 have been viewed as both a political confrontation and an economic battle between the U.S., the number one world power, and China, the number two in economy size based on GDP (Bradsher & Myers, 2018). This study, comparing how Chinese and U.S. media covered and presented the conflict to the public, can provide important theoretical and methodological contribution to conflict management research as well as journalism and political science research. Since Galtung (1998) published his first article on peace journalism two decades ago, there has been no study conducted on war or peace journalism practice in communist countries such as China (Gouse et al., 2019). Hence, this study's theoretical contribution to peace journalism research is the testing of the applicability of peace journalism in different press systems and in nonmilitary conflicts, and how different media format and partisanship of media can influence the *peace* and *war journalism* practices. To political science research, we provide the first empirical and cross-national evidence and counter-evidence of the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis, tracking the changes in the use of news sources over time and the dynamics of media partisanship in the support and opposition of government policy. For conflict management research, this study offers explanations of how news about the conflict can be presented with a peace or war journalism framing and the different roles of initiators and responders in a conflict to predict war and peace journalism practices. Methodologically, the tracking of changes of information sources and competing frame presence in the coverage of a conflict by stages can help measure how information and frame changes as the conflict evolves.

Propaganda Model, News Indexing Hypotheses and Cascading Activation as Traditional Approaches to US International News Coverage

Prior research on international news coverage has utilized various theoretical lens, and all of them emphasized how the government and the powerful elites influence the public's understanding of international news through the heavy use of elite sources in the news coverage. Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model in *Manufacturing Consent: the political economy of the mass media* is a useful framework for analyzing and understanding how the mainstream US media worked and why they performed

as they did in covering international news. News media, as elite institutions in society, focused on elite sources and followed their dominant (anti-communist) ideology which essentially made them propaganda tools for the government and the elites (Herman, 2000). Similarly, Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis explained news coverage by how news media "index" or reflect the range of voices and viewpoints of the society. International news research applying the indexing hypothesis has found that elites' views carry more influence on news media than others (Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen, 1996). In addition, Entman's (2003) cascading activation model demonstrated how interpretative frames were activated and spread from the government top's officials to the network of nongovernment elites, and on to news organizations, their news products, and the public—and how interpretations were moved up from lower to higher levels. Applying the cascading activation model, a study found that journalists could play an active role in international news by providing counterframes on terrorism different from the government during the September 11 attack if they did their own independent research (Valenzano, 2009).

Although these models are useful in explaining the international news coverage behavior of U.S. or Canadian news media, they did not show how news media can actively contribute to escalating or reducing international conflicts through different framing approaches and their news practices. The war and peace journalism framing paradigm provides a useful perspective on the active role played by the news media during the conflict while continuing to recognize the importance of news sources.

War and Peace Journalism

A major theme in international news is conflict (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Peace journalism advocates a more proactive role for the news media while reporting conflicts with an aim to reduce it instead of escalating it or remaining spectators (Colbert, 2009). A review of 41 studies on peace journalism (Gouse et al., 2019) demonstrated its evolution from quantitative analysis of news articles to qualitative and quantitative studies analyzing the attitude of journalism practitioners toward war/peace journalism (Neumann & Fahmy, 2016). These studies illustrated the variations in journalistic norms and values across countries, and how differently war and peace were conceptualized. In reporting violent conflicts, peace journalism practices could set international norms and improve the professional ethical standards (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2015).

Based on peace journalism, Howard (2009) advocated conflict-sensitive reporting by training journalists to contribute to dialogues among communities of the parties in conflict that avoid stereotypes and maintain professionalism with accuracy, fairness, balance, and responsible conduct. Although the peace journalism ideal has received support from many journalism scholars such as Keeble, Tulloch, and Zollman (2010), Lynch and McGoldrick (2013), Youngblood (2017), Demarest and Langer (2018), there are also criticisms of the underlying assumption of peace journalism. Hanitzsch (2004) argued that journalists are not as powerful as peace journalism advocates assumed. Journalists work under many constraints and by promoting peace journalism, it shifted the peace responsibility of the government and the military to the journalists. Instead, he urged for more transparency and reflexivity among the journalists by exposing the conditions of reporting and by applying a critical view on sources. Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Hanitzsch and Nagar (2016) proposed using an alternative conflict narrative framework to replace peace journalism. The theme is still violence (war) versus nonviolence/diplomatic (peace), which is the basic premise of the peace and war journalism dichotomy. We proposed that peace journalism can promote critical thinking and transparency by a journalist's acknowledgment of the limitations of sources and thus attempting to diversify them. Additionally, the dual nature of war and peace journalism measurement implies that news stories may often contain both war and peace attributes, instead of assuming they are mutually exclusive. For example, a story can use primarily elite sources (war journalism) while envisioning a win-win solution (peace journalism). A greater emphasis on "peace" items than "war" items (i.e., "higher peace journalism differential") constitutes peace journalism framing (Lee & Maslog, 2005) and facilitates readers to seek and desire more peaceful resolution of the conflict.

U.S. and China's recent trade conflict provides opportunities for both war and peace journalism framing by journalists. The US government made accusations of unfair trade practices against China on grounds of intellectual property theft, devaluing the currency to boost Chinese exports to the US, and government subsidy. As a punitive measure, the US government announced the imposition of tariffs on Chinese imports and pressurize China to concede to US demands. However, this was seen by China as a direct attack intended to impede its economic growth through false accusations and stall its economic and technological advancement. It was perceived as a survival threat to China (Liu & Woo, 2018). Chinese journalists might arouse nationalist sentiments by megaphoning the government's stance in order to generate favorable public opinion for the government's decisions against the U.S. sanctions. They might also provide a different take on US–China relations by utilizing alternative sources and reflecting on the country's economic and technological development.

News Media's Impact on Foreign Policy: The Foreign Policy Market Equilibrium Hypothesis

While the war and peace journalism framing is useful for showing how news media cover an international conflict, it overlooks the different stages of a conflict and how it relates to foreign policy making. Studies on the effects of media on foreign policy decision-making have mainly been conducted in western democracies (Baum & Potter, 2008). News media play an important role in increasing the public's understanding of a foreign policy issue, thereby making policy makers more receptive to public opinion. Soroka (2003) demonstrated this by conducting longitudinal studies in the United Kingdom and the United States and comparing the public's salience of foreign policy in both countries as a result of the agenda-setting role of the news media. His subsequent analysis indicating policy changes (defense budget changes) resulted from increased public salience was a strong evidence of the important role of the news media in shaping public opinion and explained how and why the news media's coverage of the issue affected policy makers.

After a review of 46 studies across political science and political communication and borrowing idea from economics, Baum and Potter (2008) proposed the concept of foreign policy market equilibrium. It sought to explain the changing role of media through different stages of a conflict as a result of the changing information gap between foreign policy makers and the public. During the initial stage, media will follow the government's narrative and rally the flag, so to speak, as political leaders are the only source of information on the foreign policy. An equilibrium stage is reached when policy makers do not have an information advantage over the public on the foreign policy issue and the public has sufficient knowledge of the policy. At this stage, policy makers are bound to respond to public needs; thus, the media and public influence foreign policy. This equilibrium hypothesis can be studied by analyzing the media's role in supplying information to the public and public policy through different stages. In the beginning, the common people do not have sufficient information about the foreign policy or are simply disinterested, and the policy makers and elites have an information advantage. Media play a conveyor belt role during this stage by reporting only the government's viewpoint and use elite sources. As the issue develops further, the news media are more likely to incorporate alternative sources and provide competing frames that pique the public's interest in the foreign policy, especially when journalists explain its implications on people's daily lives.

Although the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis explained how the information gap between government and the public can be reduced and illustrated the changing relationship between news media and the government over time, it did not consider the specifics of news framing practice used by journalists such as language use and explaining consequences of the conflict as in peace and war journalism. This study, by examining both the war and peace journalism framing of the US and Chinese news media and the changes in sources and frames over the course of the conflict based on the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how news coverage can reduce or increase the information gap between the government and the public over time.

The common foci on the news source and frame in both peace journalism and foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis also make them good complementary perspectives to explain the US–China trade war and other conflicts. This unique and useful combination can shed light on future research on international conflict management by showing how war and peace journalism news framing and the use of sources can reduce the conflict and information gap between the public and the policy makers.

Press System and Journalism Practice Differences Between the US and China

To compare the journalistic practices between China and the United States, we need to understand their journalistic traditions and press systems. While the US media system is often considered as a model of libertarianism, the Chinese press is considered to be a close approximation of the Soviet communist model (Joseph, 2005). However, as indicated by Hallin and Mancini (2004), comparing media systems requires a more nuanced approach.

Although the history of American journalism can be traced as far back as the 17th century, the modern ideals of nonpartisan and objective journalism only came into being in the 20th century (McChesney, 2003). Kaplan (2003) contended that the World Wars provided the foundation for much of modern American journalistic practices by reinforcing a national identity. He argued that in the context of war journalism, partisanship had never quite been replaced by objectivity, only the locus shifted from within the nation to “the actions of the president in confrontation with our national enemies.” (p. 215). This was catalyzed by the structure of media ownership in the US which was largely profit-driven and heavy on sensationalism (McChesney, 2003).

China is not the same as in the past when the news media were totally controlled and funded by the Communist party and people had no alternative source to obtain information about the outside world. Journalists in China have been exposed to western journalism skills and knowledge and many took workshops and obtained degrees from western countries or from faculty that were trained in the West. Chinese government encouraged journalism faculty to attend international conferences on journalism and communication research or becoming visiting scholars in western institutions. Although the party media still play a dominant role in promoting government’s views and conveying information the government wants to disseminate, one cannot neglect the increasing commercialization of news media, particularly in the past 40 years of economic boom. News media have to consider news audiences’ interest to attract advertising, resulting in a new form of professionalism among journalists in China (Simons, Nolan, & Wright, 2017). Cao (2007) classified China’s news media into two types: the party press and the market-oriented news press with substantial differences in foreign affairs coverage. The former focuses on the leaders and government with a preaching style while the latter is more lively and provides more contextual information and nongovernmental sources.

In 2014, media convergence was established as a national strategy and most mainstream news media in China have developed an active online presence on multiple platforms including online news sites, mobile news apps, Weibo, and WeChat accounts (Lu, 2017). In 2017, the market share of internet, print media, broadcast, and mobile phones as news media were 15%, 6%, 13%, and 51%, respectively. A majority of media outlets added their presence online as well as offering their own news brand mobile applications (Cui, 2018). Social media in China provides a platform for both individuals and media organizations to release information and attract huge amount of readers. Compared to emerging commercial new media producers, traditional mainstream media have unique advantages as they have inherited professional teams for news production from well-established traditional media and, most importantly, the government licenses to cover major political news and international affairs. So, in examining foreign policy-related matters such as the US–China trade conflict, the role played by the official traditional mainstream media is crucial because of their exclusive access to government information and resources to cover more news on the topic.

Culture and dominant national discourses have great influence on news framing and reporting and adhere to the system of opinions, ideas, and political powers (Krumbein, 2015). The different ideological stands and national interest of U.S. and China shaped how Chinese and US media cover international news. In a study comparing how US media, *Washington Post* and *the New York Times*; and Chinese media, *the China Daily* and *the People's Daily Online*, covered the air strikes carried out by NATO in 1999 in Yugoslavia, different media frames were used in disseminating news about the NATO intervention. Chinese media framed the NATO military action as a military intervention of the former Yugoslavia's territory and sovereignty, while the US media covered the same air strikes by NATO as a humanistic assistance to curtail the Serbians from massacring Albanians in the name of ethnic cleansing (Yang, 2003). Human rights issues in China are one area that has repeatedly come under the lens of the US media and policymakers. Yin (2007) portrayed the discourse in *The New York Times* and *People's Daily* as a struggle for "authority to define this issue" (p. 89).

US Coverage of China and China's Coverage of US

There is quite a bit of literature studying US and China's coverage of each other based on their relationship at the time. Lu (2011), while looking at the dynamics of the US–China relationship facilitated by media discourse, found that the relationship had been constructed from "military allies" to "ideological enemies" and from "moral adversaries" to "strategic partners" in responding to environmental and domestic needs. The study concluded that the media framing of the relationship between the US and China was largely influenced by individual country's domestic interests and cultural orientations. A comparative study of broadcast news content between ABC in the US and CCTV in China by Chang, Wang, and Chen (1998) gave further support to the idea that social and cultural norms dictate the framing of news content about domestic and international affairs. Interestingly, CCTV gave more coverage to certain events in the US than ABC. In contrast, there were no reports about China on ABC during the study period, suggesting an unbalanced flow of information.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, China's portrayal in the US has grown increasingly negative (Peng, 2004; Shambaugh, 2003; Xu, 2018; Yang & Liu, 2012). Although it is apparent political relationships affect the news coverage, whether journalists in each country practice war journalism which escalates the conflict, or peace journalism which promotes peaceful relationships and compromises in a direct conflict between the U.S. and China, has not been explored. The conflict escalation or peace promotion effect of war and peace journalism is based on the assumed news framing effect of peace and war journalism. McGoldrick and Lynch's (2016) four-country laboratory experiment on audience responses' to peace journalism on TV found that viewers who were exposed to news presented in the peace journalism framing were more in favor of nonviolent conflict responses and solving structural issues than those who were exposed to news following the war journalism model.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

We hypothesized the following differences in news coverage of the conflict in Chinese and US news media based on (1) the role each country plays in the conflict as initiator or responder in the conflict, (2) the medium difference, (3) the relationship between the press and the government at the time, and (4) the partisanship of the news media outlet. Although responsibilities of conflicts typically involved both parties, there would always be one that took the offensive or initiated the conflict by taking actions against the other party, blaming its wrongdoing and expecting concessions. The U.S. is considered the initiator of the trade war because President Donald Trump, in his tweet dated March 2, 2018, clearly stated, "When a country (USA) is losing many billions of dollars on trade with virtually every country it does business with, trade wars are good, and easy to win." The offensive the U.S. took was by imposing tariffs in 2018 starting with June 15, 2018's declaration by Trump that the United States would impose a

25% tariff on \$50 billions of Chinese exports. The initial \$34 billions would start July 6, 2018, with a further \$16 billion to begin at a later date. The US news media, on the other hand, being in the country initiating the trade war with the high tariffs to reduce the trade deficit with China and have the market pressure and need for drama and sensational news, should play up the conflict and are more likely to practice war journalism than peace journalism. China played a role of defending against the U.S. tariff attack by tariff retaliation. But China had a strong desire for a peaceful solution or trade agreement because it was in the Chinese government's interest to avoid public panic on the consequence of the tariffs. With more state ownership of news media and controlling access to government information, Chinese news media should follow the government's interest and exhibit more peace journalism practices.

Hypothesis 1. US news media are more likely to use war journalism than peace journalism in comparison to Chinese news media in covering the trade conflict.

We expect that apart from country differences, different media types (e.g., TV, elite newspapers) can also exhibit different practice of peace and war journalism. In the second and third hypotheses, we examine the difference in broadcast TV news coverage and newspaper coverage. The higher likelihood to use war journalism should also apply specifically to the broadcast TV news in the United States. CCTV, as China's official party organ and reaching the largest audience in the country at all levels, will be cautious in the reporting and less likely to emphasize differences and confrontation with the United States in the coverage of the conflict. In contrast, US broadcast TV, either commercial (ABC) or noncommercial (PBS), would adopt the position of the US government against the "foreign" rival, China, with more war journalism framing.

Hypothesis 2a. US broadcast TV news media (PBS and ABC) are more likely to use war journalism than Chinese TV news media (CCTV).

Elite newspapers can play a unique role in covering the conflict. Their readers are well-educated and opinion leaders in the society. They have higher expectations of the news in representing their views. U.S. elite newspapers such as the *New York Times* (NYT), because of the commercial pressure and position of the U.S. as initiator of the trade tariffs, is also likely to use war journalism framing than its Chinese counterpart. Chinese elite newspapers such as *People's Daily* target the strong party followers and serve as the party organ. As China is playing a defender/responder role, *People's Daily* would follow the Chinese government policy and be cautious in the reporting with less war journalism framing in comparison to the *New York Times*.

Hypothesis 2b. US elite newspapers (NYT) are more likely to use war journalism than Chinese elite newspapers (*People's Daily*).

In addition to a comparison of US and China's newspaper and TV news coverage, we also examine if the medium itself is the cause of the difference in the use of war and peace journalism because newspapers have headlines and long text to frame the news while television newscasts are much shorter without a headline, the opportunity for war and peace journalism framing should be higher than television, regardless of country.

Hypothesis 3. Newspapers are more likely to use war journalism than television.

Chinese news media are not allowed to oppose the government. However, US news media are more likely to have a diverse role because of the watchdog expectation of the media and the pluralism in news media ownership with a spectrum from ultra-left to ultra-right and many in the middle. It is especially

so when currently there is high animosity between the Trump administration and the news media. Hence overall, we hypothesize in H4 that US news media are more likely to oppose the tariffs rather than supporting the tariffs in the trade conflict, while the Chinese news media will only oppose the tariffs.

Hypothesis 4. US news media are more likely to oppose the US tariffs than supporting the US tariffs while Chinese news media will only oppose the US government tariffs in their coverage.

In the US, liberal partisan news media are known to criticize the Trump administration. It is expected that in foreign policy such as trade tariffs, the liberal news media are also likely to oppose the US tariffs, perhaps even more than the Chinese party press. So, we hypothesized in H5 that liberal news media are more likely to oppose the US government's tariffs than Chinese party press such as the *Global Times* and *People's Daily*.

Hypothesis 5. US liberal news media (*MSNBC, PBS, and CNN*) are more likely to challenge/oppose the US government policy/tariff than Chinese party press (*Global Times, People's Daily*).

This study also combined the knowledge of foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis and peace and war journalism practices to examine how US and Chinese news media report the trade conflict, taking into consideration the different stages of the conflict in the coverage. According to Baum and Potter's foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis, based on information supply and demand of the public, the longer the conflict and the later the stage, the more the presence of competing frames and the more nonelite sources will be used by the news media. The use of nonelite source can reduce the advantage of the political leaders and elites in the dominance of information sources. As there were no previous empirical studies employing the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis with news frames and news sources involving the Communist context, we pose the following research question in this setting of the Trade War:

RQ1: Can the *foreign policy market equilibrium* suggested by Baum and Potter (2008) apply in both China and the US where the news media offer more diverse frames and sources as the US-China trade conflict progresses?

Method

Sampling Description and Sampling Procedures

Content analysis was the method we employed to examine the journalism practice and coverage of the U.S.-China trade conflict. Television and newspapers (online version) were the two most prominent news media in both countries. Our selection of media outlets considered the size of followers online, audience ratings, as well as their reputation as elite news media. They represent the most commonly used media on the topic and the current media landscape. Due to the high use of social media as a news source in both China (CNNIC, 2018) and the United States (Shearer, 2018), we selected online articles of newspapers featured on social media for newspaper media coverage. We used "China" or "the United States" depending on the country and "trade" as the keyword for all included media outlets to retrieve news items.

For the Chinese media, we chose one TV channel, online news articles posted by two party newspapers' social media (WeChat) accounts and news articles of one market-oriented news app with original news reports for our content analysis of the China-U.S. trade conflict. WeChat is the largest social media app in China with more than one billion active daily users (Lee, 2019). For the TV channel, we chose China Central Television (CCTV). *CCTV News* has always been the leading news program in China watched by the entire nation and its audience is still growing with increasing penetration of TV in rural

areas. In 2017, the rating of *CCTV News* rose to 44.5%, from 40.7% in 2016, dominating the TV news market in China (Cui, 2018). For CCTV newscast, we used the three keywords in searching the full archive of news videos on the CCTV website. Since the website provides videos for the past year, we searched up to December 20 because there was no major event happened after the truce was announced and the arrest of CFO of Huawei. We found a total of 253 video newscasts related to the U.S.-China trade conflict for the year 2018. A random sample of 100 videos were chosen as the final sample for coding. Coders transcribed the newscast related to the trade conflict, and then, the transcripts were coded.

The WeChat accounts of *People's Daily* and the *Global Times* were chosen because both of them were among the top five WeChat news accounts in 2018. *People's Daily* was the top WeChat news account in 2018. The *Global Times*, though ranked 5th, focuses on international news and China's foreign policy and deemed most relevant to our study (NewsRank, 2018). For mobile news apps, we chose *The Paper*, the top market-oriented news apps based in Shanghai with original news gathering and reporting. Its main users are male (62.7%) and young people aged from 26-35 (47.8%). Wisers, a leading Chinese media database, was employed to retrieve samples of the two WeChat accounts (*People's Daily* and *Global Times*) and *The Paper* from January 1 to December 31, 2018. One hundred news stories were chosen randomly from the search results in each news media outlet, respectively, for coding.

In the United States, for newspapers, two elite newspapers *The New York Times* (on Facebook) and *The Wall Street Journal* (on Twitter) were chosen. CNN is one of the highest used social media news outlets online with its online audience larger than TV audiences and a major global news brand (Boland, 2018; CNN, 2017). We therefore examined its online version featured on Facebook rather than the TV broadcast. For television, we selected TV news outlets to include a complete political ideological spectrum from the conservative, pro-Trump administration partisan Fox News, neutral commercial broadcast news (ABC) which had the highest ratings in 2018 (Battaglio, 2018), public broadcast TV news (PBS), and liberal MSNBC (Engel, 2014). Hence, we used a total of seven news outlets to sample the U.S. news coverage of the trade war (ABC, PBS, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, *NYT*, *WSJ*). For TV news, except CNN for the reason explained above, the newscast transcripts during the period of January 1 to December 31, 2018, were downloaded from Nexis Uni, the most popular news database. Because many shows on Fox News and MSNBC are not newscasts but talk shows, we limited the coding to *The Beat with Ari Melber* (MSNBC) and the *Special Report with Bret Baier* (Fox News) to be comparable to other broadcast newscasts. All TV newscasts we analyzed were aired at 6 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. as the main evening newscast.

For social media elite news in the U.S., we located them through the search algorithm of Facebook and Twitter and restricted the time period to January 1 to December 31, 2018, by the most important (relevant) articles of the month. All databases and algorithms ranked the article by relevance. Hence, to build a list of sample articles, coders checked from the most relevant articles in the order listed by Facebook and Twitter until the articles were found not relevant. With this comprehensive approach, we still found a low number of news items covering the trade war. We decided not to sample but instead used all news items we could identify as relevant to the topic of each selected outlet (PBS, $N = 42$; CNN, $N = 48$; ABC, $N = 38$; Fox News, $N = 75$; MSNBC, $N = 18$; *NYT*, $N = 71$, *WSJ*, $N = 47$). With all these seven outlets combined, the total number of U.S. news articles on the topic was 339, which was lower than the number of randomly sampled Chinese news articles ($N = 400$) in the four outlets sampled. So, the unequal sample size between the United States and China reflected the difference in the news media's emphasis in each country on the topic. The higher number of outlets in the U.S. than China was necessitated by the pluralist system to represent the broad political spectrum in mainstream media.

Coding

A total of five graduate students in a coastal university in China, and four graduate students and two faculty members in a Midwest public university in the United States served as coders in this study. The first

author served as the second coder for the U.S. news sample and an additional graduate student was hired in China for double coding 10% of the Chinese news media sample in order to compute the inter-coder reliability. Several training sessions were conducted to make sure the coders understood the coding scheme and employed the coding process as required. The presence of competing frames and the use of nonelite sources both achieved 95.0% agreement. The tone of coverage's coder agreement was 80.0%. The war journalism practices percent agreement was 82.5% (from 70.0% to 95.0% for individual indicators) and the peace journalism practices percent of agreement was 84.4% (from 75.0% to 100.0% for individual indicators).

Measures

War and Peace Journalism Practice

We employed the coding scheme of war and peace journalism practices used by Lee and Maslog (2005) with 13 items each for war and peace journalism, respectively (see Tables 1 and 2), which showed high reliability in analyzing conflicts in four South Asian countries. In addition to listing frequency of war and peace journalism practice indicators as what they did, we computed a score of peace journalism and a score of war journalism by summing up the presence of war and peace journalism indicators (0–13). We also computed a “war-peace journalism differential” to show whether a story is more war journalism dominant or peace journalism dominant by subtracting the war journalism practice indicator score from peace journalism indicator score, similar to the method used by Lynch (2014). A negative differential shows more peace journalism practice.

Use of the Term “Trade War” in the News

To corroborate the war and peace journalism item analysis, we also counted whether the term “trade war” was used in the news story. Because the length of the story and the news media format might affect its frequency, the use and nonuse of the term was a good indicator of the journalist's adoption of the war journalism and frame the conflict as a “war.”

Type of Sources

One of the war and peace journalism practice indicator is the type of sources used: elite sources (war journalism) and nonelite sources (peace journalism). Elite sources included political leaders and think tank experts. Nonelite sources were from nongovernment organizations and industry representatives, common people, etc.

Number of Sources

To provide evidence of increase in the sources as in the market equilibrium, we compared the number and type of sources used by each news media outlet as well as the stage of the conflict.

Presence of Competing Frames

An objective and fair reporting should contain competing frames, which are equally persuasive (Beattie & Milojevich, 2017). As the conflict goes on, there should be more competing frame in news stories over time. The coder first determined if there was more than one frame in a story and whether the frames were competing with each other.

Position on the Tariffs

We also examined the news story's position in general from four categories between (1) supportive or mostly supportive of the policy (tariff sanction against China), (2) opposing the policy, (3) neutral, (4) partly supportive and partly opposing the policy.

Trade Conflict Stages

We divided the trade conflict into three stages to test the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis. The beginning stage (Stage 1) started January 22, 2018, when U.S. President Trump imposed tariffs on solar panel and washing machine imports from China, which represent one of China’s largest exports to the United States. The stage ended in April 2018 when China responded by imposing tariffs on 128 products it imported from the United States. Stage 2 is the combative stage, which started in May 2018 when China’s Vice-Premier visited the United States for trade talks and ended in July when American tariffs on \$34 billions of Chinese goods came into effect and China imposed retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods of a similar value. Stage 3 is the truce stage starting on August 8, 2018, when the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative published its list of 279 Chinese goods, worth \$16 billion, to be subject to a 25% tariff starting on August 23, 2018, and China responded with its own tariffs of equal value. The stage ended in December 2018 when a summit was held between President Xi and Trump at the G-20 Summit in Argentina with an announcement of a truce in tariffs for three months with further talks and negotiations.

Results

War and Peace Journalism Practices in the US–China Trade Conflict News Coverage

The total number of news articles we analyzed was 739, which included 400 Chinese articles and 339 US articles. The scores for each peace and war journalism practice indicator in US and Chinese news media are shown in Tables 1 and 2. For peace journalism practices, Chinese news media were significantly more likely to use neutral language and reported the damages, causes, and consequences of the conflict, and the areas of agreement that might lead to a solution to the conflicts and win–win orientation than US news media. To test H1 which posited that the war journalism scores of US news media would be higher than Chinese news media, we used an independent sample *t*-test. The hypothesis was supported on both war journalism and peace journalism scores. The mean of war journalism score in the Chinese data was only 3.38 in comparison to the mean in the US data, which was 4.0649, $t(737) = -4.22, p < .001$. The

Table 1
Peace Journalism Comparison Between China and U.S. News Media

Peace Journalism Indicator	China, <i>N</i> (%)	US, <i>N</i> (%)	Total, <i>N</i> (%)
1. Reporting on damage to society and culture**	35 (8.8%)	56 (16.5%)	91 (12.3%)
2. Reporting on psychological damages	4 (1.0%)	14 (4.1%)	18 (2.4%)
3. Focusing on nonelite sources	32 (8.0%)	42 (12.4%)	74 (10.0%)
4. Discussing similarities/mutual interests between the countries involved**	107 (26.8%)	79 (23.3%)	186 (25.2%)
5. Report causes and consequences of the conflict**	153 (38.3%)	178 (52.5%)	331 (44.8%)
6. Win–win orientation**	71 (17.8%)	76 (22.4%)	147 (19.9%)
7. Presenting diversity (give voice to many parties in the conflict)**	87 (21.8%)	108 (31.9%)	195 (26.4%)
8. Proactive reporting**	10 (2.5%)	93 (27.4%)	103 (13.9%)
9. Nonpartisan	237 (59.3%)	199 (58.7%)	436 (59.0%)
10. Reports the areas of agreement that might lead to a solution to the conflicts**	38 (9.5%)	73 (21.5%)	111 (15.0%)
11. Avoid victimizing language	326 (81.5%)	241 (71.1%)	567 (76.7%)
12. Avoid demonizing language	376 (94.0%)	264 (77.9%)	640 (86.6%)
13. Objective and moderate wording**	305 (76.3%)	207 (61.1%)	512 (69.3%)

Note. ***p* < .01.

Table 2
War Journalism Comparison between China and US News Media

War Journalism Indicator	China, <i>N</i> (%)	US, <i>N</i> (%)	Total, <i>N</i> (%)
1. Reporting economic damages (visible effects)**	140 (35.0%)	252 (74.3%)	392 (53.0%)
2. Reporting material damages**	44 (11.0%)	76 (22.4%)	120 (16.2%)
3. Focusing on elite sources (leaders and intellectuals)**	271 (67.8%)	229 (67.6%)	500 (67.7%)
4. Focuses on differences that lead to the conflict**	66 (16.5%)	144 (42.5%)	210 (28.4%)
5. Focuses mainly on the here and now (present happenings)**	253 (63.2%)	106 (31.3%)	359 (48.6%)
6. Dichotomies between good and bad guys**	61 (15.3%)	36 (10.6%)	97 (13.1%)
7. Presenting a zero-sum game**	83 (20.8%)	61 (18.0%)	144 (19.5%)
8. Reactive Reporting**	77 (19.3%)	102 (30.1%)	179 (24.2%)
9. Stop reporting after conflict**	125 (31.3%)	90 (26.5%)	215 (29.1%)
10. Loss of voter/public support**	36 (9.0%)	34 (10.0%)	70 (9.5%)
11. Use victimizing language**	73 (18.3%)	57 (16.8%)	130 (17.6%)
12. Use demonizing language on sources	18 (4.5%)	28 (8.3%)	46 (6.2%)
13. Use emotive words**	104 (26.0%)	163 (48.1%)	267 (36.1%)

Note. ** $p < .01$.

mean of peace journalism score in the Chinese data was 4.8, higher than the US data, which was 4.44, $t(737) = 2.21, p = .03$. The mean differential between war and peace journalism within each story of Chinese news media was -1.075 . The mean differential between war and peace journalism in US news media was $-.743$, which was also higher than Chinese news media’s war-peace journalism differential. The higher the value of the differential, the more dominant war journalism in the story is. In addition, US media were more significantly more likely to the term “Trade War” ($M = 0.72, SD = 0.45$) than Chinese news media ($M = 0.61, SD = 0.49$), $t(729) = -3.08, p = .02$. So, the US news media were more likely to use war journalism than peace journalism in comparison to the Chinese news media by all measures.

Then, we moved to the medium type comparison. To test H2a that US broadcast TV news is more likely to employ war journalism than CCTV, we also used an independent sample t -test comparison. The mean of war journalism for PBS and ABC was 3.88, $SD = 1.87$ while the mean of war journalism for CCTV was 2.75, $SD = 1.42$ and the difference was statistically significant $t(178) = 4.58, p < .001$. So, PBS and ABC were more likely to use war journalism than CCTV. H2a was supported.

To test H2b that elite newspapers in the U.S. are more likely to use war journalism than their Chinese counterpart, we also used an independent sample t -test. For the war journalism score, the mean of *the New York Times* was 5.66, $SD = 1.59$, and the mean of *People’s Daily* was 4.91, $SD = 2.01$. The difference was statistically significant: $t(169) = 2.62, p = .01$. So, H2b that the US elite newspapers significantly use more war journalism than Chinese elite newspapers was supported.

H3 posited that newspapers are more likely to use *war journalism* than television. We compared the *war journalism* score of newspaper and television newscast samples in both countries. We found that indeed there was a significant medium difference. Newspapers, with more text and longer length than television newscasts and have clear headlines for the news reports, scored higher on war journalism. The mean of war journalism of newspapers was 3.70, $SD = 2.31$, and the mean of *war journalism* for television was 3.20, $SD = 1.70$. The difference was statistically significant: $t(662) = 2.98, p = .003$. H3 was supported.

To test H4 that US news media are more likely to oppose the US government tariffs policy than support the US government tariffs policy compared to their China counterpart, we cross-tabulated the data. There were 280 articles (70.0%) of Chinese news media opposing the US tariff policy; none of the articles supported the policy, and 120 articles (30.0%) were neutral. For the U.S. media, there were almost the same amount of articles supporting and opposing the policy: 60 articles (17.8%) of US news media

opposing the policy and 61 articles (18.0%) supporting the policy. The majority were neutral (64.2%). Since the U.S. news media did not have more articles opposing to the government policy than supporting the US government policy, H4 was rejected.

To test H5 whether liberal news media in the U.S. are more likely to oppose the U.S. tariffs policy than Chinese party news media, we cross-tabulated the data by each type of news media. Only 21.0% of US liberal news media opposed the government policy. But 82.0% of Chinese party news media opposed the U.S. policy, which was significantly higher than the U.S. liberal news media. So, H5 was rejected.

As the sources of news are the linchpin in both peace journalism and the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis, we first presented the type of sources for U.S. and Chinese news media. As shown in Table 3, except for the dominance of government sources in both countries, the countries differed significantly in the use of nonelite sources. Chinese news media were more likely to use sources from sectors affected by the trade war most such as retail/trade (40.6%), manufacturing (17.5%), and agriculture (13.5%) than the U.S. counterparts. For elite sources, Chinese news media were more likely to use academics (18.5%), while U.S. news media were more likely to use sources from think tanks and consultants (39.0%).

For the research question related to the foreign policy market policy equilibrium hypothesis, we compared the changes in the number of sources, use of nonelite sources, and the presence of competing frames during the three stages of the conflict with a one-way ANOVA. In addition, we compared the scores of peace and war journalism in each stage of the conflict. When analyzing the data, we found great difference between the US and Chinese data on these information diversity indicators and frames. For the U.S., although we found differences between the stages on the number of sources, the highest number of sources was during the first and third stage with a dip in the middle (Table 4). So, this did not correspond to the hypothesis that sources diversify over time. The use of more sources was not related to the use of nonelite source ($r = .01, p = .66$). We then looked specifically to nonelite sources, there was no significant difference in different stages on the use of nonelite sources. For the presence of competing frames, we found some differences between the stages approaching statistical significance. Yet the stage with most competing frames was during the second stage and not at the last stage. So, the source did not diversify over time as per the hypothesis but fluctuated by event and stage. Nonetheless, when we examined China and the United States separately, China's news media use of nonelite sources and competing frames increased over time which provides some support for the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis, but the United States did not follow the foreign market policy market equilibrium hypothesis. Finally, we compared the war and peace journalism scores of the U.S. news media and Chinese news media across the three stages. The U.S. news media had higher war journalism score than their Chinese counterpart throughout the three stages. In the initial stage, their war journalism

Table 3
Comparison of Types of Sources Used in US–China Trade War Stories

	US, N = 339	China, N = 400
Government sources	78.7%	74.3%
Think Tank/Consultant**	39.0%	28.3%
Academic/University*	11.9%	18.5%
Agriculture sector**	7.3%	13.5%
Retail/trade sector**	23.7%	40.6%
Manufacturing sector*	11.9%	17.5%
General public	8.3%	7.8%
Other sources (e.g., other media, commentators, journalists' own interpretation)	11.1%	14.4%

Note. * $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Diversity of Sources, Competing Frames, War, and Peace Journalism Scores by Stages of Conflict

	US			China		
Number of Sources Per News Story						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Stage 1	4.16	2.24	92	4.79	2.31	200
Stage 2	3.79	2.08	104	4.20	2.22	100
Stage 3	4.32	2.15	143	4.53	2.03	100
Total	4.11	2.16	339	4.58	2.29	400
	$F = 1.79, p = .17, p = .076$			$F = 2.25, p = .11$		
Use of Nonelite Sources						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Stage 1	0.16	0.37	92	0.06	0.24	200
Stage 2	0.15	0.36	104	0.04	0.27	100
Stage 3	0.08	0.27	143	0.16	0.35	100
Total	0.12	0.33	339	0.08	0.27	400
	$F = 2.55, p = .08$			$F = 6.12, p = .02$		
Presence of Competing Frames						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Stage 1	0.57	0.50	92	0.13	0.23	200
Stage 2	0.58	0.50	104	0.13	0.34	100
Stage 3	0.35	0.48	143	0.21	0.40	100
Total	0.48	0.50	339	0.15	0.36	400
	$F = 9.12, p < .001$			$F = 5.04, p = .007$		
War Journalism Practice						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Stage 1	4.42	2.15	92	3.27	2.02	200
Stage 2	4.16	2.63	104	3.55	2.06	100
Stage 3	3.76	2.25	143	3.42	2.19	100
Total	4.06	2.35	339	3.38	2.07	400
	$F = 4.61, p = .01$			$F = .64, p = .53$		
Peace Journalism Practice						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Stage 1	5.50	2.53	92	4.55	1.43	200
Stage 2	4.66	2.66	104	4.01	1.73	100
Stage 3	4.47	2.62	143	4.70	2.00	100
Total	4.81	2.63	339	4.45	1.68	400
	$F = 2.36, p = .10$			$F = 5.00, p = .007$		

score was the highest, showing more combative framing of their news reports than their Chinese counterparts. Yet their peace journalism score was also higher than their Chinese counterpart in the first two stages.

Discussion

This comparative study of trade conflict news coverage between China and the United States shows that overall, the news reports were framed more as peace journalism than war journalism as the score of war journalism was lower than peace journalism. Similar to what Lee and Maslog (2005) found, the *here and now* focus and the *elite orientation* dominated the war journalism practices in both countries. But the proportion of war journalism indicators in the US–China trade conflict was higher than their Asian military conflict articles. However different from what they found, we also found much more peace journalism language used in both countries. As expected, for the United States as the initiator of the tariffs and under commercial pressure, its news media were more eager to have the United States be the victor of the trade war, blaming China for the trade deficit and were more likely to use war journalism practice than its Chinese counterpart. A good example can be seen from a *New York Times*’ September 17 report of the additional tariff (Tankersley & Bradsher, 2018) with a war journalism headline: “Trump hits China with tariffs on \$200 billion in goods, escalating trade war,” and the first few paragraphs justified the action of Trump: “President Trump, emboldened by America’s economic strength and China’s economic slowdown, escalated his trade war with Beijing on Monday, saying the United States would impose tariffs on \$200 billion worth of goods and was prepared to tax all imports.” The story began by telling the readers that US was strong and China’s position was weak. Hence, we can see that war and peace journalism practice is affected by the position of the country in the conflict as initiator of or responder to the conflict.

This discovery has important implications to the research of peace and war journalism as well as international peace because it highlights the role of conflict initiator and responder as a factor that should be considered in addition to culture, journalistic and institutional constraints in journalism practices. To facilitate conflict resolution, news media in the country initiating the conflict should minimize its war journalism framing and increase its peace journalism framing. The burden of peace journalism should not be only on the news media of the country responding to the conflict. In this study of the trade conflict, the U.S. news media much more often referred it as a trade “war” on China than Chinese media and were highly dependent on elite sources including the government and think tanks and consultants widely available in the U.S. But the views of the sectors most affected by the conflict were largely ignored. In addition, its much higher use of emotive words and demonizing language on China and focus on differences between the two countries were the main cause of its higher score in war journalism. So, the U.S. media were more likely to use combative rhetoric. As a responder to the conflict, Chinese media were more likely to discuss similarities/mutual interests between the countries involved and covered those sectors which were most affected by the tariffs. As a state controlled press, they also followed the government’s cautious approach in the trade negotiation and mostly focused on the current happenings as the Chinese style of war journalism.

Although US partisan liberal news media such as MSNBC and CNN are known for opposing the Trump administration, in presenting the news on the US–China trade conflict, sometimes they sided with the administration’s policy and sometimes they opposed it or even more often, they took a neutral stance. The proportion of support and opposition is almost the same which shows that when it comes to international conflicts, partisan liberal news media will not one-sidedly criticize their own government, but choose situations to support and situations to oppose the government’s foreign policy. This shows that economic arguments and national interest can prevail over political ideology in the news coverage of the trade war. The US news media still had considerable independent judgment on the issue. The pluralism in the U.S. news media allows diverse opinions to exist, both criticizing and supporting the government. In general, we found U.S. news media had mixed support for the U.S. trade tariff policy, instead of overwhelmingly supporting it. More than 30 news articles did not see the trade policy as effective or advancing national interest and saw more harm than benefit to the country. Yet it should be noted that

while U.S. news media showed different opinions about the tariffs, they were in high agreement on U.S. official accusation of China's intellectual property theft and forced technology transfer as discussed in the *Wall Street Journal* article with the headline, "How a History of Discord Fuels Today's U.S.-China Trade Tensions." (Seib, 2018).

Chinese party news media, following their expected role in supporting the government, were overwhelmingly supportive of the Chinese government and were less likely to offer competing frames than US news media. Elite party press such as the *Global Times* and the *People's Daily* were also less likely to use peace journalism as market-oriented media such as *The Paper*. Yet Chinese media especially CCTV's lowest use of the term "Trade War" compared to other Chinese and U.S. news outlets showed that the Chinese government was very cautious in presenting the conflict to its billions of citizens who are watching. The elite party press such as the *Global Times* and the *People's Daily* was the news media outlets that engaged more in war journalism practices.

The most surprising result is that the foreign policy market policy equilibrium hypothesis, which was proposed based on western democratic country experience, was not supported by the U.S. data but by the Chinese data in this trade conflict. We suspected that the unequal proportion of news in each stage between China and the United States may be responsible for the difference, even though the standard deviations of the mean values were rather stable across the stages for the U.S. But after randomly sampling equal amount of news items for each stage and each country, the pattern remained the same. Our analysis of the news sources showed that the overall emphasis of Trump administration in news coverage of the trade war constrained US journalists to government and elite sources. Only when there were big moves by the U.S. and Chinese governments on the tariffs, then more effort and diverse sources were being used (which were the first and the second stage). Despite the U.S. having higher overall use of competing frames across all stages than China, the trend decreased rather than increased over time. Instead of having more varying perspectives, the US news media increasingly focused on one frame such as the unfair trade practices of China rather than looking out for other frames to present the news about the trade war and progress on the trade talks. The overall lower US news media coverage and especially in the first stage than Chinese news media shows that US news media saw the trade dispute as a topic of low interest to the general public. The increasing amount in US news coverage in the third stage seemed to relate to the domestic mid-term election, rather than for showing new perspectives or more competing frames of coverage. Most notably, toward the end of the year in 2018, the U.S. mid-term elections became the top of the news media agenda and trade war coverage became closely tied to the election with an increase of 50.0% more news items on the trade war than earlier in the year. During election time, liberal news media used the negative effects of trade war to attack Trump with a single frame and conservative news media use the single frame of the trade war to show how Trump's tariffs could reverse the trade deficit with the high tariffs on over 200 billions of goods and put pressure on China for a long overdue payback.

But in China, the support of the government and heavy attention by news media on the topic was immediate. When the conflict developed, people wanted to learn beyond what the government told them and news media needed to diversify sources and provide other frames of references to the people such as reflection of China's international position or development in technology. The preliminary support to the hypothesis in China's data is intriguing, but still the change is rather modest, and a majority are using elite sources and noncompeting frames.

As this US-China trade conflict is only one case, more types of conflicts should be examined in future research to test the foreign policy market equilibrium hypothesis. The overall higher war and peace journalism scores in the United States than China showed the higher presence of the different indicators per U.S. story. But the fluctuation over stages was also higher in the United States with the initial stage showed more diversity, and the later stage less diversity. In contrast, the relatively stable low war journalism score and peace journalism score showed only a dip in the second stage but bounced back in the third stage in China.

Despite the contribution of this study to peace journalism research with a comparative setting and the provision of empirical evidence of the foreign policy market equilibrium in the case of China and differences in US–China source and frame diversity over time, there are some limitations. First, Lee and Maslog's (2005) war and peace journalism indicators were heavy on the language use so they may not be the best measure for war and peace journalism especially in economic conflicts. The duality problem was most acute when used as an aggregate average representing different stories. Both peace and war journalism scored high in the U.S. than China in the initial coverage of the trade war. A news story can have both peace and war journalism indicators, the use of differentials may help to determine whether peace or war journalism prevails in the story. Our comparison of the U.S. and Chinese peace and war journalism score in the trade war coverage shows that Chinese news media were more likely to employ peace journalism with its higher use of objective language, avoidance of victimizing language and demonizing language in the coverage the U.S. trade tariffs and the lower use of the term trade war to describe the conflict. But in other peace journalism indicators, Chinese news media scored lower than the U.S. especially on the damage to society and culture, and the causes and consequences of the conflict, and give diverse voices. Language as a factor is present in every article. Other items such as damage to society and culture, may not be applicable to every news story. So, the language can inflate the war and peace journalism score in aggregating news stories.

Hence, there is a need to refine the war and peace journalism measurement to put different weights on different indicators, instead of equal importance. For example, should language be given more importance as it is right now with three of the 13 indicators specifically devoted to language use (avoid victimizing language, avoid demonizing language and objective and moderate wording) and present in every news article? Probability of the item being present in a news story should be taken into consideration. Language and use of source can be present in every story so should form the base calculation. Those items that are more context-specific such as *win–win orientation* and *focus on agreement* may be more useful in talks and negotiation news, but not other routine trade tariffs implementation reports. By separating routine factors (language and source) with context-specific factors such as win–win orientation, reporting on damages, journalists can also be trained on using the proper language and necessary sources in covering a news story under conflict situations as the basic and add on more sophisticated context interpretation and framing. It will help promote the use of peace journalism for journalists.

If language is found to be most significant among all the indicators in influencing the audience's perception, then journalists and editors should be specifically trained on the cautious choice of language in reporting conflicts. For example, the U.S. news media were more often found to use emotive words against China in their news reports as justification for the trade war such as “manipulate the currency,” “theft,” “unethical,” “unfair trade practices,” “devastation to the Chinese economy.” Chinese news media used words such as “bully,” “violating free trade” on U.S. tariffs. These uses of emotive words can influence the public perception of the conflict and the attribution of responsibility of the conflict.

Another limitation of peace journalism as shown in this trade war analysis is the dilemma journalists face with the expectation of advancing national interest versus achieving peace which usually mean giving concessions probably from both sides in the conflict. Journalists' role as a fair global citizen is assumed in peace journalism. But whether journalists and news organizations adopt such transcending “global” role is unclear. For example, a win–win agreement may still be considered as concessions to the other party in conflict by nationalist people who insist on getting all the terms they wanted. Any deviation from the expectation can be considered betraying the country or threatening national interest. Will a journalist dare to ignore the national interest expectation of the audience at large and the government by advocating a win–win solution in the news story? The most recent first phase trade agreement signed between the U.S. and China on January 15, 2020, was hailed as a win–win agreement by both governments in China and the U.S., but was criticized as conceding too much to the other party by analysts in both United States and China. *The New York Times* saw it as “some victories for Trump. . . But text of the accord does not provide enough information to determine how it will work in practice.” (Swanson &

Rappeport, 2020, para 2). The *Global Times* also said, “On each side are people that argue their country made too many concessions or did not gain enough from the deal” (Wang, 2020, para 19).

Conclusion

This study shows that peace journalism can be practiced in both western democratic and Chinese communist media in a conflict. In the case of the US–China trade conflict, peace journalism practices were more prevalent than war journalism practices based on the scores of the news items. Whether the truce between US and China in December 2018 has anything to do with the peace journalism practices of Chinese and U.S. news media cannot be determined as of now as many other factors could have contributed to the truce. But at least temporary peace was achieved at that time which aligned with the predominant peace journalism practice during our study period. Although the Chinese government is not elected by the people, the government still has to monitor the public’s opinion and manage people’s expectations so that they would support the government’s policies instead of fostering discontent with the government. The Chinese media’s higher use of peace journalism was in line with the Chinese government’s tactic of negotiating a better deal for the China during the trade war by creating a vision for common ground and emphasizing the benefit of free trade. The retaliation to the tariffs was positioned by the Chinese government as a defense to the attack by the U.S. whose purpose was to contain China’s economic growth and technological advancement. The heavy coverage by the Chinese media helped to create salience of the government’s position, shaped the public’s understanding of the conflict and facilitated reflection on China’s economic and technological development by providing competing frames on the topic as the conflict evolved.

The trade conflict between China and the United States is still going on at the time of writing despite the signing of the first phase agreement on January 15, 2020, and our analysis of news coverage was limited to the year of 2018. The stages of development of the conflict would need to be altered after the truce in December 2018. Nonetheless, this study offers an explanation for the different coverage of an international conflict by the country’s role as initiator or responder in the conflict, medium difference, and partisanship: News media in the conflict initiating country tended to use war journalism more than the responding country. Newspapers were more likely to use war journalism than television. Despite the general adversarial relationship between the news media and the president, when it came to international conflict, the liberal U.S. news media selected situations to oppose or even supported the policy or kept neutral in most cases to the trade policy of the government. Our result shows that peace journalism can be practiced in an international trade conflict, which can lead to more world peace through building an atmosphere favoring negotiations and compromise.

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