Understanding the Changing Chinese Media:
Through the Lens of Crises

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Abstract: Guided by the framing theory, this study compared the Chinese media's coverage of SARS in 2003 and the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. Findings suggest party media and market-oriented media demonstrated considerable differences in their crisis coverage. More diverse discourses are tolerated in the Chinese media and political system. Both party media and market-oriented media showed signs of improvement in terms of framing strategies and news source usage. Discussion and implications were also presented. [China Media Research. 2012; 8(2): 63-75]

Key Words: SARS, Sichuan Earthquake, Crisis Coverage, Chinese Media

In times of influential crises, attention of the whole society can be intensified (Wang, 2007). Considerable media resources concentrated on covering issues that involved thousands of human lives. Media coverage of national and international crises often attract a great deal of attention in the field of communication (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007; Luther & Zhou, 2005; Tian & Stewart, 2005). This is because the quality (e.g., openness, timeliness, fairness, etc.) of crises coverage could demonstrate the professional standards of media practitioners (Beaudoin, 2007b). Media coverage of crises is also important because of its strong social effects. Research has reported that crises coverage could powerfully affect people's perception and awareness of crises (Beaudoin, 2007a; Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007). Since crises coverage has significant social influence, it is reasonable to expect governmental regulation over crises coverage would be more cautious, especially in countries such as China where the government has a reputation for masking information to protect the government's image (Swain, 2007). Therefore, crises coverage also reflects the level of governmental information control.

Recognizing the unique values of crises coverage, this study proposes to compare the Chinese media coverage of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003 and the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. SARS broke out in March 2003 (Tian & Stewart, 2005). Within several months, thousands of people were infected or killed by the deadly epidemic and the global economy also suffered severe losses (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Wallis & Nerlich, 2005). On May 12, 2008, five years after the SARS crisis, China suffered a brutal earthquake. The quake was measured at 8.0 Ms and 8.3 Mw according to the China Seismological Bureau. Cities, towns and villages in Sichuan Province were seriously damaged. The Sichuan Earthquake took the lives of over 6,900 people. About 3 million people were injured and more than 5 million people were left homeless. It was estimated that this

earthquake has caused more than $1 billion in economic losses (Xinhua News Agency, 2008).

Although the nature, cause and consequences of SARS and the Sichuan Earthquake are different, both crises attracted nationwide attention in China and were covered in-depth by the Chinese media. A comparison of the media coverage in these crises provided a rare opportunity to examine if Chinese journalism had changed after the SARS crisis. If Chinese journalism had positively evolved, the pattern of change could be examined.

These questions are meaningful for several reasons. First, after the SARS crisis, the performance of the Chinese media was widely discussed by Chinese intellectuals and journalism practitioners (Cen, 2008; Wang, 2003; Zhang, 2003). There is a consensus that the performance of the Chinese media during the initial stage of SARS was extremely harmful to their credibility. For media to re-establish credibility, openness and timeliness should be weighed over information control (Zhang, 2003). After the Sichuan Earthquake, many observers noted that Chinese media coverage was significantly different from the SARS coverage (Cai, 2008; Cen, 2008; Hang, Quan & Du, 2008). However, besides empirical observations, no rigorous research to date has examined whether new trends emerged from the 2008 coverage, and how different media outlets responded to the Sichuan Earthquake. Second, the Chinese media are undergoing a historically important period. Reformation, changing social power relationships and tension between different demands are shaping the development of the current Chinese media system. As Huang (2007) notes: "the 2000s is a period of the start of a transition of media regulation in China from a rigid totalitarian state control mode to a state–media–market–society negotiation model" (p.408). Documentation of changes in Chinese media could contribute to revealing the trajectory of its development.

Guided by the framing theory, this study examined how Chinese media framed the two crises. In the

analysis, the study acknowledged the difference between party media and market-oriented media. Comparisons were made not only between different time points, but also between media types. Therefore, the study documented the news frames used by the changing Chinese media to cover national crises, and the significant difference between party and market-oriented media. In the following sections, the theoretical framework of this study is introduced, followed by a description of the SARS epidemic and the Sichuan Earthquake. A quantitative content analysis is conducted, and the results and discussion are presented in the final section.

Theoretical Framework

The framing theory has been widely studied by researchers from different disciplines with different perspectives and methodologies (Gorp, 2007; Sheufele, 1999). Reese (2001) defines frames as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (p. 11). This definition of frames suggests that longstanding cultural norms (Abraham & Appiah, 2006), context (Entman, 1993), in the case of mass communication, journalism routines (Deviit, 2002) and audience's world view (de Vreese, 2005) all contribute to the formation and perpetuation of frames. Framing, therefore, is a process which involves message construction, presentation, interpretation, and has effects on the audience's cognitive, affective and behavioral responses (Yang, 2008). The view of framing as a process illustrates the underlying relationship between communicators, audiences, media content and the social context where the process takes place.

The framing setting and consequences of news framing have been widely studied (D' Angelo, 2002; Sheufele, 1999; Vreese, 2005), and researchers have found evidence that news frames can influence audience's perceptions and attitudes on social issues (Abraham & Appiah, 2006; Devitt, 2002). The framing-building process, on the other hand, has not yet been fully explored (Sheufele, 1999). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) developed a hierarchical model to describe how five levels of factors influence media content. The levels are ideological, extra-media, organizational, media routine and individual (p. 209). Ideological level influence refers to the social level influence. Ideology is considered as an overarching structure, the foundation of other levels of influence, and is "the most macro level of the hierarchical model" (p. 184). Extra-media level factors refer to the influence from other organizations, interest groups, public relations campaigns, advertisers and audiences. Organizational level factors include the influence from the structure and policy of media organizations. Media routine level factors refer to "those patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their job" (p.85). Individual level influence refers to the influence introduced by the personal traits of journalists and editors.

Although this model does not deal directly with frame-building, it sheds light on possible factors that can shape frames. Based on this model, Sheufele (1999) concludes there are three potential sources of influences on media frames: journalist-centered influences, organizational routine of the medium and external sources of influence (p.115). The entities of interaction can be linked to individual journalists, media and other social actors.

The framing-building process is further reflected by the media product. Entman (1993) defines news framing as, "To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In other words, the effect of framing-building is reflected by the choices of news frames and other important aspects of media context. In content analysis, researchers often operationalize these aspects of context such as media tones (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), themes (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001), source selections (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003), frame types (Iyengar, 1991; Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2000) and visual features (Abraham & Appiah, 2006) to study media's framing strategies. To influence media frames, therefore, is to influence these aspects of media context and potentially affect public discourse through media (Hallahan, 1999).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) developed five frame genres: *responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and conflict*. These genres have been widely used in framing analysis, especially framing of controversial or sensational social events (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007), natural disasters and epidemics (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Huang & Leung, 2005) that have been intensely covered by media from a variety of perspectives.

In sum, according to framing theory, the framing-building process is influenced by the complex and dynamic interaction among journalists, media institutions and other social actors. The outcome of the framing-building process, namely news stories, further reflects such dynamic relationships. To understand what factors shape Chinese media news frames, it is necessary to review the current Chinese media situation.

Chinese Media in Change
The Brief History and Changes of Chinese Press

After the Chinese Communism Party (CCP) assumed power in 1949, the CCP adopted the communism media model of Soviet Russia, and

gradually developed a national media system. This media system has a clear hierarchical structure. At the national level, the *People's Daily* represented the mouthpiece of the central government. Each province has a central party press (dangbao). Each city, and in some areas, each county also has a central party press. Other publications should not conflict with the guidelines of party media. At that time, the media system was considered an organ of the government, and media institutions were completely subsidized by the state (Yan, 2000). During the Cultural Revolution (1966−1976), in the stifled political environment, the intensity of the CCP's control over the media system culminated. During that period, although China had developed a considerable number of media outlets, the professional level of journalism practitioners and the journalism technological infrastructure were relatively poor (Zhao, 1998). The media content, as noted by Siebert et al (1956), was characterized by repetitious and inane contents.

Since the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping has lead a profound social reformation. For more than 20 years, the GNP of China has grown at an average annual rate of 8.5% (Li & Gu, 2003). As the economic system changed to a market-oriented direction, Chinese media also evolved (Huang, 2003).

First, economic considerations forced the government to adjust its media policy. At the structure level, since the 1990s, although some Chinese media were still categorized as government departments, besides important party mouthpiece such as the *People's Daily*, governmental subsidizes for other media outlets have been gradually reduced (Yuan, 2008). Luther and Zhou (2005) noted, "Marketing is of increasing concern to China's news media as growth in number of available news outlets has made commercial survival imperative" (p. 858). Media institutions that receive little aide from the government and are responsible for their own survival in the marketplace are market-oriented media. Market-oriented media not only operate under the profit-driven business model, but also increasingly adopt more diverse property rights. Although there is no privately owned media in China, since 2004, the General Administration of Press and Publication of China has enacted a series of new policies to allow foreign and private investors to invest in market-oriented media (Wu, 2006; Zhang, 2007).

Market-oriented media gradually commercialized their content to appeal to audiences and advertisers. Competition brought these media severe challenges. Some were shut down or merged with other media. The surviving media tried to become national media corporations or to cater to small audience niches (Zhang, 2005). Acting within the political bottom line still concerns market-oriented media, but greater attention is directed to the search for a developing pattern that will

guarantee long-term development and prosperity (Zhang, 2005; Zhao, 1998).

Second, as market-oriented media struggles to attract more audiences (Zhang, 2005), the audience's changing needs also powerfully drive changes in the media. A review of Chinese journalism scholars' discussions reveals the following current trends. First, as the difference between the audience's education and income levels increased due to social reformations, Chinese audience needs are increasingly diversified (Jia, 2008a). Second, media production from countries such as the US, Japan and South Korea is now available to millions of Chinese people. This situation raises audience's expectation for the quality of media content; but puts more pressure on the Chinese media (Wang, 2006). Third, by the year 2008, China had 2.2 million Internet users (Jia, 2008b). According to statistics published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the majority of Internet users are not using it for online shopping, but for online news consumption and engaging in news groups and bulletin board activities (Yang, 2003). Online grassroots journalists and bloggers increasingly use the Internet to criticize social actors and government policies. The Internet has become an alternative information source to millions of Internet users (Yang, 2003). These messages not only compete with traditional media content, but also bring changes to the traditional journalism routines (Li & Gu, 2003). For example, research reported that salient online discussion topics increasingly set the agenda for mainstream Chinese news media. Local events often transformed into nationally prominent issues with the help of online discussion (Zhao & Moy, 2007).

Third, the reformation in China's journalism education is also worthy of mention. In the last decade, the number of journalism schools has increased dramatically in China. For example, in 2004, the Communication University of China was formally founded. The university was composed of 13 different colleges and has over 15,000 registered students (Communication University of China, 2008). In Chinese journalism schools, future journalists are taught professional journalism values such as timeliness, objectivism and social consequence in order to produce high quality media products (Luther & Zhou, 2005). The reformation in professional training gradually changed journalism practices and these changes have been reflected by the media coverage. For example, Luther and Zhou (2005) found that despite ideological differences, Chinese and the U.S mainstream media used similar news frames to cover SARS. Burgh (2003) found Chinese journalists working in market-oriented media and belonging to younger generations are more detached from the "mouthpiece ideal" and are more likely to value journalism ethics over party guidelines.

Previous framing analysis of SARS provided valuable literature to help understand the Chinese media system in a post-Communist market-authoritarian society. Generally, studies of the SARS coverage suggest the Chinese government has loosened regulations over market-oriented media. For example, researchers found that different Chinese media outlets demonstrated considerable diversities in their choices of news frames (Beaudoin, 2007a). While most party media were still conservative and underscored party lines, market-oriented media is shown as more critical and catering to the interests of audiences (Hong, 2007). Therefore, it is reasonable to propose the following hypotheses.

H1: There is a significant difference between party media and market-oriented media in terms of how they use news sources.

H2: There is a significant difference between party media and market-oriented media in terms of how they use news frames.

The aforementioned trends have gradually changed Chinese media and media content. To be sure, these changes did not happen in a linear pattern (Yan, 2000). Some events accelerated the progress while others exerted the opposite effect. The future of Chinese media is still not clear (Zhao, 1998). However, evidence has shown that the SARS crisis, as will be discussed in the following section, may have considerable influence on the promotion of openness in crisis coverage.

Case Description

In March 2003, SARS initially broke out in the Guangdong Province of China, and soon spread to Hong Kong, Vietnam, Toronto and the US (Tian & Stewart, 2005). Within several months, thousands of people were infected or killed by the deadly epidemic. The global economy also suffered severe losses (Luther & Zhou, 2005). Recognized as a global threat, SARS was intensively covered by international media (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005). Contrary to the response of international media, the performance of Chinese media was more cautious and controversial (Luther & Zhou, 2005). At the initial stage of the SARS crisis, the Chinese government chose secretiveness over openness and controlled the media coverage of SARS. During this period (from February 12 to April 20, 2003), most Chinese media were virtually silent about SARS (Tian & Stewart, 2005). Chinese media began to significantly increase the SARS coverage after the Chinese government changed its attitude towards SARS and began to actively control the spread of the epidemic (Beaudoin, 2007a).

In March 2003, SARS epidemic coincided with a power transition in the high place of the Chinese government. Hu Jingtao succeeded former President Jiang and became the state president of China. Former President Jiang and his faction stood for a nationalist ideology that valued state control (Tkacik, Jr., 2004). The cover-up policy of SARS endorsed by Jiang has been criticized by international observers and caused considerable domestic dissatisfactions as well (Huang & Leung, 2005). President Hu and his faction, in contrast, represented the interests of reformists. They emphasized balanced and sustainable development and believed international cooperation was beneficial to the strategic development of China (Elegant, 2007). At the time President Hu took over the supreme power, the SARS crisis had become increasingly severe. The Chinese economy and a large number of people's lives were affected by the epidemic (Wang, 2004). The SARS crisis was not only an opportunity for Hu to demonstrate his ability to govern emergency situations, but also a chance to establish prestige for the new government. President Hu distinguished his policy from the Jiang faction by urging the open coverage of the SARS crisis, nationwide treatment for the epidemic and close cooperation with international aids (Meng & Berger, 2008). After more than 40 days of tight control measures against SARS, this epidemic began to clear up and WHO lifted its travel warning against China (Huang & Leung, 2005).

After the SARS crisis, Chinese intellectuals and observers intensely discussed the role of Chinese media in this crisis (Cen, 2008; Wang, 2003; Zhang, 2003). It has been widely agreed that the performance of Chinese media during the initial stage of SARS was disappointing (Zhang, 2003). Besides urging journalism practitioners to improve their professional standards, Chinese intellectuals also advised the government to enact a new policy to legitimize the media's right to timely and accurately inform people (Cen, 2008).

Problems revealed through the SARS crisis and pressure from the public indeed influenced the Chinese government's policy regarding media coverage in times of crises. In 2004, one year after the SARS crisis, the Chinese government enacted a new law: *Policy of Government Information Transparency*. This law clearly states that in times of crises or events that involve a large number of human lives or property, any individual or group that attempts to cover up information will face legal punishment. The policy also states that government departments are obligated to cooperate with media in times of crises. This law provided the legal basis for more open and transparent media practices (Fan, 2008).

In sum, social changes, media system reformation and the law: *Policy of Government Information Transparency* have paved the way for more open crisis coverage. Some Chinese observers noted that in the post-SARS period, the Chinese media have improved their coverage of crises. In 2008, the aforementioned improvements were visible through the coverage of the

Sichuan Earthquake (Cai, 2008; Hang, Quan & Du, 2008).

Evidence showed Chinese media covered the SARS epidemic and the Sichuan Earthquake differently. For example, in 2003 the first coverage of SARS appeared in April, almost one month after WHO stated the epidemic was a severe problem. In 2008, the first detailed coverage about the earthquake appeared on *People's Daily*, the second day after the earthquake hit Sichuan and the media covered the disaster intensely thereafter. When compared with similar situations of earthquake coverage in Chinese history, this was a remarkable change. For example, 34 years ago, in Tangshan City, an earthquake took the lives of 24,000 people, but the Chinese people were not informed about the number of casualties until three years later. In 1970, the Tonghai County Earthquake in Yunnan Province took the lives of 15,000 people, but the information was not published until 2000 (Li & Pu, 2008).

In sum, the literature and empirical observations suggest that Chinese media may have improved crisis news coverage after the SARS epidemic. To examine if such changes have actually taken place in China, the following research questions are proposed to guide the analysis.

RQ1: Did the same type of media (party media or market-oriented media) cover SARS and the earthquake with different news frames in 2003 and 2008?

RQ2: Did the same type of media (party media or market-oriented media) cover SARS and the earthquake with different news sources in 2003 and 2008?

Methodology
Choice of Media

To compare the difference between party and market-oriented media, one representative newspaper from each type was selected. *People's Daily* was chosen because it was the "mouthpiece of the CCP Central Committee" (Huang, 2003, p. 449), and was directly guided by the CCP. The *Nanfang Weekend* was chosen because: 1) *Nanfang Weekend* belongs to one of the most successful and influential market-oriented media corporations in China. 2) In terms of media reformation, *Nanfang Weekend* always played the role of bellwether (People.com, 2007). The high quality of this paper has attracted audiences nationwide. After the Sichuan Earthquake, within about 20 days, 17 million people visited the website of *Nanfang Weekend* for its in-depth coverage of relief efforts(Yi, 2008).

Sample Collection

The search function of the China Core Newspapers Full-Text Database was used to download the samples. For the SARS coverage, two key words: SARS and feidian (SARS in Chinese) were used. The search was restricted within the period from April 21, 2003 (the

first coverage about SARS appeared on *People's Daily* and *Nanfang Weekend*) to June 24, 2003, "when the WHO lifted its travel warning for China" (Huang & Leung, 2005, p. 306). In all, 598 articles from *People's Daily* and 81 articles from *Nanfang Weekend* were identified and downloaded.

To search the Sichuan Earthquake coverage, key words such as Sichuan Earthquake (*Sichuan dizhen*) and names of cities that were destroyed by the Sichuan Earthquake (e.g., Wenchuan City, QingChuan City, etc.) were used. The search was restricted within the period from May 13, 2008 (the first coverage about the Sichuan Earthquake appeared on *People's Daily*) to August 8, 2008 (the Beijing Olympic Games began and the focus of media coverage shifted to the Olympic Games). In all, 56 articles from *People's Daily* and 44 articles from *Nanfang Weekend* were identified and downloaded. In order to have a similar sample size for each group, coverage from 2003 should be reduced. Among the 598 SARS articles from *People's Daily*, starting with a random article, every other tenth article was selected, and 59 random samples were selected for further analysis. With the same method, 41 SARS articles were randomly selected from *Nanfang Weekend*. In all, 200 articles were analyzed, namely, 59 SARS reports from *People's Daily*; 41 SARS reports from *Nanfang Daily*; 56 earthquake reports from *People's Daily*; and 44 earthquake reports from *Nanfang Daily*.

Variables

Frame genres. Since little morality information or conflict of interest were involved in the relief or treatment process, the morality and conflict frames were not applicable to this study context. Other frames might work well in the current context. Previous studies have examined how different media framed SARS (Beaudoin, 2007a; Hong, 2007; Luther & Zhou, 2005; Tian & Stewart, 2005). The literature suggests the *denial frame* (assessed by questions like: Does this news story specifically mention that SARS/ earthquake is not a major problem?) and the *leadership frame* (assessed by questions like: Does this news story mention the party leaders' activities in the treatment/rescue process?) are frames that should also be applied. A pre-examination of samples indicated that another news frame-rescue/treatment frame (assessed by questions like: Does this news story mention a government organized treatment/ rescue for SARS/ earthquake?)-was identified.

Sixteen items were constructed to assess the six frames' genres. To examine if the six frames were the minimum number of components that can account for the maximum amount of variance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), an exploratory factor (with varimax rotation) analysis was conducted. Two items were deleted because they caused cross-loading problems. After

deleting the two items, there were no more cross-loading items. The factor analysis suggested that the following six frames: attribution of responsibility (eigenvalue=1.430, percent of variance account for=10.214, α=.38), human interests (eigenvalue= 2.667, percent of variance account for=19.052, α= .41), economic consequences (eigenvalue=1.566, percent of variance account for=11.185, α=. 39), denial frame (eigenvalue=1.286, percent of variance account for=9.183, α= .66), leadership frame (eigenvalue=2.013, percent of variance account for=14.380, α=. 80), and the rescue/treatment frame (eigenvalue=1.146, percent of variance account for=8.187, α=.38), should be extracted (See Table 1 for details). Cumulatively, the six frames accounted for 72.202% of variance of the original items. Overall factorability was good (MSA=. 579). A threshold of .50 was used to exclude any items with factor loadings lower than this value (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In the coding process, each item was treated as a binary variable with "present" equal to 1 and "absent" equal to 0. Frames were composed based on the scores of items.

Table 1. Varimax-Rotated Factor Solution for the 14 Framing Items

	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Attr.	Human	Econ.	Denial	Leader	Rescue
Framing Items	Resp.	Interests	Cons.			
Attribution of responsibility						
Does this news story suggest that the Chinese government is responsible for control information?	**.755**	.046	-.014	.101	-.017	-.125
Does this news story mention that local governments etc. are responsible for problems existing in the treatment or rescue of SARS/ earthquake?	**.764**	-.004	-.165	-.136	-.248	-.017
Does this news story mention any other social problems caused by SARS/ Earthquake?	**.644**	-.028	.231	-.051	.114	.119
Human interests frame						
Does this news story discuss individuals who have been directly affected by SARS/ Earthquake?	-.076	**.820**	-.200	-.213	.062	.087
Does this news story use photos or adjectives that can generate feelings or emotions?	.001	**.862**	-.214	-.128	.068	.098
Does this news story mention SARS/ Earthquake affect the quality of people's everyday life?	.079	**.736**	.155	.103	-.045	-.069
Economic Consequences						
Does this news story mention financial losses caused by SARS/ Earthquake?	-.050	-.146	**.871**	-.108	-.037	.096
Does this news story mention economic consequences for a local or the whole Chinese economy?	.139	-.046	**.788**	.252	-.130	-.304
Denial frame						
Does this news story specifically mention that SARS or Earthquake is not a major problem?	-.025	-.068	.218	**.770**	.057	.017
Does this news story specifically mention that SARS was not original from China? Or the earthquake cannot be predicted?	-.030	-.086	-.155	**.846**	-.020	-.022
Leadership frame						
Does this news story mention the party leaders' activities?	.000	.055	-.080	-.021	**.911**	.028
Does this news story make reference to party leaders' opinions?	-.102	.013	-.040	.053	**.893**	.070

Rescue frame

Does this news story mention a government organized treatment for SARS? Or the government tried to rescue people injured in the earthquake?	.128	-.134	-.263	-.011	.304	**.703**
Does this news story mention how volunteers, or other provinces, or any organizations take action to rescue victims of SARS/ earthquake?	-.119	.181	.084	.008	-.093	**.839**

Heading & source. Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) framing generics reveal limited information about how important a particular frame is in one particular article. Therefore, another framing device, the heading, was used to demonstrate the important level of frames. The same 14 items identified by the factor analysis were used to assess the new frames used in each heading.

Source is also an important framing device (Poindexter, Smith & Heider, 2003). To assess if the news stories differed in the type and frequency of governmental source, non-governmental source and international source cited, the dependent variable for source was measured by 10 questions (See Appendix _ A for details).

Two graduate students were trained to code the sample. Before the whole sample was analyzed, a random sample of 20 stories (about 10% of the total) was coded to estimate the reliability. The average intercoder reliability across the measures was 84% agreements. The coders further discussed the disagreements and made notes to improve the further coding process.

Results

An examination of the frequency of news frames used by *People's Daily* in 2003 and 2008 yield the following finding (See Table 2 for details). First, the rescue and treatment frame (frequency of present for 2003= 62.7%, frequency of present for 2008= 82.1%) was the most frequently used frame in articles for both years. The rescue and treatment frame was also the most frequently used frame (frequency of present for 2003= 42.2%, frequency of present for 2008= 60.7%) in headings for both years. Second, in terms of the use of leadership frames by party media, in 2003, when SARS caused negative responses to the government's policy, it was the third used frame (frequency of present = 42.4%) in articles and the fourth used frame in headings (frequency of present = 16.9%). However, in 2008, when the government's handling of the earthquake was considered successful, the leadership frame was the third used frame in articles (frequency of present = 58.9 %) and second used frame in headings (frequency of present= 32.1%). Party media demonstrated skillful image maintenance and building strategies to serve the government. Third, for both years, the denial frame (frequency of present for 2003= 18.6 %, frequency of present for 2008= 8.9 %) was the least frequently used frames.

For *Nanfang Weekend*, in 2003(See Table 2), the attribution frame (frequency of present= 70.1 %) was the most frequently used frame in articles, and economic consequences (frequency of present= 51.2 %) was the most frequently used frame in headings. In 2008, the human interests frame (frequency of present for=81.4%) was the most frequently used frame in articles and headings (frequency of present=52.3%). In 2003, the leadership frame was the fifth frequently used frame in articles (frequency of present=14.6%) and the least frequently used frame in headings (frequency of present= 0 %). In 2008, the denial frame was the least used frame in articles and headings (frequency of present for both years =0%).

Table 2 The Presence of Frames in Articles.

		2003		2008
	Rank	Frequency of Frames Use	Rank	Frequency of Frames Use
		N= 59		N=56
People's Daily	1	Rescue Frame: 62.7%,	1	Rescue Frame: 82.1%
	2	Human Interests: 44.1%	2	Human Interests: 62.5%
	3	Leadership frame: 42.4%	3	Leadership frame: 58.9%
	4	Attribution: 35.6%	4	Attribution: 53.6%
	5	Economic Consequences 28.8%	5	Economic Consequences 25.0%
	6	Denial Frame: 18.6%	6	Denial Frame: 8.9%
		N=41		N=44
Nanfang Weekend	1	Attribution:70.1%	1	Human Interests: 84.1%
	2	Human Interests: 66 %	2	Rescue Frame: 81.8%
	3	Rescue Frame: 58.5 %	3	Attribution:65.9%
	4	Economic Consequences 36.6%	4	Economic Consequences: 38.6%
	5	Leadership frame: 14.6 %	5	Leadership frame:25.0 %
	6	Denial Frame: 2.4%	6	Denial Frame: 0%

Hypothesis 1 predicted the use of sources will vary significantly by media type. H1 was supported. An independent samples *t* test comparing the mean scores of the two media types found significant differences between the means of party and market-oriented media on the use of nongovernment sources (t (198)=5.18, p <.001). The mean of the party media (m =.79, sd =1.54) was significantly lower than that of the market-oriented media (m =2.82, sd =3.34). Significant differences were also found on the use of governmental sources (t (198) =2.17, p <.05). The mean of the party media (m =1.01, sd =1.63) was significantly higher than that of the market-oriented media (m=.58, sd=.98). The result showed that for the party media, governmental sources dominated coverage, while for the market-oriented media, non-governmental sources provided most information.

Hypothesis 2 predicted the use of frames will vary significantly by media type. H2 was supported (see Table 3, 4). A MANOVA test was used to investigate whether the use of frames varied by media. Frame genres were used as dependent variables, and two news outlets were used as independent variables. For 2003, the Wilks' criterion indicated a significant main effect of frame genres, F (6, 93) =7.28, p<.05, η^2 =.32. Significant main effects were found on attribution frame, F (1, 93) =24.14, p <.05, η^2=.20. As Table 4 showed, the main differences between the frames from the two types of media were: 1) The attribution frame was used very rarely by *People's Daily* (m=.44, sd=.65), but was frequently employed by *Nanfang Weekend* (m=1.32, sd=1.13); 2) Denial frame was the least used frame by *Nanfang Weekend*(m=.02, sd=.16), while *People's Daily* used this frame more often (m=.25, sd=.58); 3) The

leadership frame was one of the most used frames in *People's Daily* (*m*=.69, *sd*=.88), but used least often by *Nanfang Weekend* (*m*=.21, *sd*=.57).

For 2008, the Wilks' criterion indicated a significant main effect of types of news frames, F (6, 93) =8.25, *p* <.05, η^2 =.35. Significant main effect was found on the leadership frame, F (1, 93) =12.50, *p* <.05, η^2 =.11. As shown by Table 5, the main differences between the frames from the two types of media were:1) The leadership frame was used more often by *People's Daily* (*m*=1.02, *sd*=.93) than by *Nanfang Weekend* (*m*=.41, *sd*=.75); 2) The human interest frame was the most frequently used frame by both media outlets, however, *Nanfang Weekend* (*m*=2.27, *sd*=1.87) used it more often than *People's Daily* (*m*=1.63, *sd*=1.36).

Table 3. 2003 Mean Score of Frame Types of *People's Daily* and *Nanfang Weekend*.

News Frames	*People's Daily* (N=59)	*Nanfang Weekend* (N=41)
Attribution Frame	.44(.65)	1.32(1.13)
Human interests	.95(1.20)	1.51(1.28)
Economics Cons.	.31(.64)	.63(.89)
Denial Frame	.25(.58)	.02(.16)
Leadership Frame	.69(.88)	.21(.57)
Rescue Frame	.94(.84)	.73(.71)

df1=6, *df2*=93, *F* (6, 93) =7.28, *p*<.05, =.32

Table 4. 2008 Mean Score of Frame Types of *People's Daily* and *Nanfang Weekend*.

News Frames	*People's Daily* (N=56)	*Nanfang Weekend* (N=44)
Attribution Frame	.55(.54)	.91(.83)
Human interests	1.63(1.36)	2.27(1.87)
Economics Cons.	.29(.53)	.64(.87)
Denial Frame	.09(.29)	00(.00)
Leadership Frame	1.02(.93)	.41(.75)
Rescue Frame	1.23(.74)	1.32(.77)

df1=6, *df2*=93, *F* (6, 93) =8.25, *p* <.05, =.35.

Research Question 1 asked if the same types of media used different frames in 2003 and 2008 (see Table 5, 6). A MANOVA test was used to analyze the data. For *People's Daily*, Wilks' criterion indicated that there was not a significant main effect of years on types of news frames, F (6, 108) =2.70, *p* <.05, η^2=.13. As shown in Table 6, the main differences between the frames from 2003 and 2008 were:1) More human interests frames were used by *People's Daily* in 2008 (*m*=1.63, *sd*=1.36) than in 2003 (*m*=.95, *sd*=1.20); 2) The denial frame was used less often in 2008 (*m*=.09, *sd*=.29) than in 2003 (*m*=.25, *sd*=.57); 3) The leadership frame was used more in 2008 (*m*=1.02, *sd*=.92) than in 2003 (*m*=.69, *sd*=.88).

For *Nanfang Weekend*, the Wilks' criterion indicated that a significant main effect was found on the rescue frame F (6, 78) =13.29, *p* <.05, η^2=.14. As showed in Table 6, the main differences between the frames from the 2003 and 2008 were: 1) More human interests frames were used by *Nanfang Weekend* in 2008 (*m*=2.27, *sd*=1.87) than in 2003 (*m*=1.51, *sd*=1.27); 2) The rescue and treatment frame was used more in 2008 (*m*=1.31, sd=.77) than in 2003 (*m*=.73, *sd*=71).

Table 5. Mean Scores of Frame Types Used by *People's Daily.*

News Frames	*2003* (N=59)	*2008* (N=56)
Attribution Frame	.44(.65)	.55(.54)
Human interests	.95(1.20)	1.63(1.36)
Economics Cons.	.37(.64)	.29(.53)
Denial Frame	.25(.58)	.09(.53)
Leadership Frame	.69(.88)	1.02(.92)
Rescue Frame	.95(.84)	1.23(.74)

df1=6, *df2*=108, *F* (6, 108) =2.70, *p* <.05, =.13.

Table 6. Mean Scores of Frame Types Used by *Nanfang Weekend.*

News Frames	*2003* (N=41)	*2008* (N=44)
Attribution Frame	1.32(1.13)	.91(.83)
Human interests	1.51(1.27)	2.27(1.87)
Economics Cons.	.63(.89)	.63(.87)
Denial Frame	.02(.16)	.00(.00)
Leadership Frame	.21(.57)	.40(.76)
Rescue Frame	.73(.71)	1.31(.77)

df1=6, *df2*=78, *F* (6, 78) =4.35, *p* <.05, =.25.

Research Question 2 asks if the same type of media used different news sources in 2003 and 2008. For *People's Daily*, an independent sample *t* test comparing the mean scores of the two years found significant differences on the use of governmental sources (*t* (113)=2.15, *p* <.05). The mean of 2003 (*m* =.69, *sd* =1.07) was significantly lower than the mean of 2008 (*m* =1.34, *sd* =2.02). Significant differences were also found on the international source use (*t* (113) =2.16, *p*<.05). The mean of 2003 (*m* =.46, *sd* = 1.09) was significantly higher than the mean of 2008 (*m* =.13, *sd* =.38). For *Nanfang Weekend*, an independent sample *t* test compared the mean scores of the two years and found significant differences on the use of non-governmental sources (*t* (83)=2.35, *p*<.05). The mean of 2003 (*m*=1.95, *sd* =2.30) was significantly higher than that of 2008 (*m*=3.61, *sd* =3.94).

In 2003, *People's Daily* most frequently used the human interest frame in articles and rescue frames in headings. This combination may help to create an image of a responsible government. Both governmental sources and non-government sources were frequently cited. In comparison, *Nanfang Weekend* used the attribution frame more frequently to criticize government and other social actors. *Nanfang Weekend* also distinguished its style from party media by using fewer leadership frames, and cited less governmental sources. In 2008, *People's Daily* used rescue and treatment frame and leadership frame frequently both in articles and headings. Government sources were cited most frequently, while fewer non-government sources were used when compared with 2003. International sources were also cited less often. This phenomenon may due to the fact that SARS had international effects, while the Sichuan Earthquake mainly affected China. In 2008, *Nanfang Weekend* used more human interest frames than *People's Daily*. *Nanfang Weekend* also increasingly used more non-government sources (three times more than *People's Daily*), and fewer government sources (less than half of *People's Daily*).

For the same media, in 2008 *People's Daily* used more attribution frames, human interest frames and leadership frames than in 2003. Less denial frames were used in 2008. In terms of source use, in 2008 more governmental sources and less non-governmental sources were cited. In 2008, *Nanfang Weekend* used more human interest frames and rescue/treatment frames, and largely increased its use of non-government sources (two times more than in 2003).

Discussion

The framing theory suggests media routines are affected by social context, media structure, journalism education and other social actors that have prominent relationships with the media. Such influences will be further reflected in media coverage. This research revealed the significant difference between party media and market-oriented media in terms of their news frames and sources used, and therefore confirmed the predictions derived from the framing theory. Theoretically, this research suggests that the news framing process is not an isolated journalism practice.

To properly interpret the messages conveyed by the media, a deep understanding of a specific context is critical.

Methodologically, this research extended the previous framing analysis method developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) by combining frame genres with other framing devices, including headings and news sources. This method helps to extract more information from the text, and provides a more in-depth assessment of framing strategies utilized by the media. More specifically, three major findings that emerged from the analysis deserve detailed discussion.

Significant Differences between Party Media and Market-Oriented Media

Since the 1980s, dramatic changes have taken place in China. Influenced by the official ideology of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", China struggled to explore a development model that helps to maintain the authority of the Chinese Communism Party, but promotes sustainable and steady development (Zhang, 2009). The differences between party media and market-oriented media can be understood as profoundly influenced by this mainstream trend. As demonstrated by the findings, party media and market-oriented media covered crises with different framing strategies. In terms of frame use, party media tactically used the leadership frame to build a positive image of the government. In contrast, the market-oriented media frequently utilized the attribution frame to criticize social actors and the government, therefore representing the general public's concerns. The market-oriented media also used the human interests frame to appeal to the general public. In terms of news sources, the party media was dominated by governmental sources, while the market-oriented media increasingly used non-governmental sources. The findings revealed that party media and market-oriented media both have developed relatively stable styles.

The aforementioned differences between party and market-oriented media are consistent with the literature. It can be argued that factors such as economic considerations, the media's relationship with the audience and the government all exerted direct or indirect influences on the news framing process. The findings documented more dynamic and diverse discourses among different types of Chinese media. In comparison with the Chinese media model described by Siebert et al (1956), the current condition suggests promising improvements.

The Improvement in Journalism Professional Practices

The literature suggests that journalism education will influence journalism practices. This study documented the change in journalism practices as reflected in the coverage from both types of media. For the party media, instead of boldly repeating the party lines noted in *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956), certain framing strategies were adopted to build a responsible government image. Rescue frames and human interest frames were used to demonstrate the party's code of "people first".

For the market-oriented media, in 2003, when the government took improper strategies to control the crisis, and domestic dissatisfaction accumulated, the market-oriented media frequently used the attribution frame to criticize government policies. The frequent use of human interest frame and economic frame also helped to attract the audience's attention. In 2008, while most people were sympathizing with the victims of the earthquake, human interest frames and rescue frames were frequently used to resonate with the audience's feelings. What is worthy of mention is the significant increase of non-government sources. This factor could possibly be explained by the following reasons: 1) More sources were available to reporters. In other words, there were fewer limitations or regulations on interviews or other journalism activities; 2) Market-oriented media began to send out more reporters to interview more people. This can be interpreted as a sign of the improvement in professional practices.

The Difference between 2003 and 2008 Crisis Coverage

The findings also revealed considerable differences existed between the 2003 and the 2008 coverage. For party media, more leadership frames and human interest frames were used in 2008 than in 2003. More governmental sources were used in 2008 while less international sources were used. The difference may be due in part to the nature of the two crises, and also suggests that in 2003, party media made the effort to frame the Chinese government as willing to cooperate with international aid. In 2008, the Chinese government quickly responded to the crisis. The party media changed its strategy and framed the Chinese government as the leading force in solving the crisis. For the market-oriented media, human interest frames and the rescue and treatment frames were more frequently employed in 2008 than in 2003. Market-oriented media increased its use of non-governmental sources in 2008.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the Chinese media covered the two national crises in 2003 and 2008, and if there were significant differences across time and media types. The analysis showed that the party media still mainly served as propaganda tools, but with more refined framing tactics. The market-oriented media demonstrated considerable unique features when

compared with the party media. This sign suggests that more diverse discourses are tolerated in the Chinese social and political system. For the development of civil society and a functioning public sphere, a media system that can disseminate different voices is irreplaceable (Zhao & Moy, 2007). Future research may examine if diversified opinions are increasingly present in the Chinese media, and how this trend may affect the Chinese civil society.

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Appendix A: Sources

Domestic Government Sources
1) Chinese government official or government agency (Number of quoted source=)
2) Chinese health organization official or health organization (Number of quoted source=)

Domestic Non-Government Sources
3) Chinese physician/ scientist/researcher (Number of quoted source=)
4) People belong to Chinese non-governmental organization/ corporation (Number of quoted source=)
5) Ordinary Chinese people (with no mention of business affiliation/occupation)
   (Number of quoted source=)

International Sources
6) Non-Chinese government official or government agency (Number of quoted source=)
7) Non-Chinese health organization official or health organization(Number of quoted source=)
8) Non-Chinese physician/ scientist/researcher (Number of quoted source=)
9) People belong to non-Chinese non-governmental organization/ corporation (Number of quoted source=)
10) Ordinary non-Chinese people (with no mention of business affiliation/occupation)
   (Number of quoted source=)