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## Reporting Sino-Indian Border Conflict Through Peace Journalism Approach

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**Abstract:** *The study attempts to analyze the coverage of recent Sino-Indian border conflict through peace and war journalism along with understanding how peace journalism ideals can be translated into conflict reporting. The descriptive analysis of news stories published from May 5, 2020, to October 5, 2020, in the mainstream contemporary English press of China (China Daily and Global Times) and India (Times of India and The Hindu) is carried out through content analysis. The period is significant because of the recent border conflict between China and India at Ladakh. The approach of peace and war journalism is explored through in-depth interviews of Indian and Chinese journalists. The study concluded that both Indian and Chinese press employed war framing more dominantly than peace framing while reporting on-going border conflict. A higher instance of peace journalism was recorded in the Chinese press in comparison to the Indian press. The ideals of peace journalism can be achieved by refraining from becoming part of the propaganda paradigm.*

**Key Words:** Sino-Indian Border Conflict, Ladakh Conflict, Peace Journalism, War Journalism, Chines Press, Indian Press

### Introduction

In the world, the longest disputed border has been shared by China and India, but in the last 50 years, till the incident of 15<sup>th</sup> June, no bullet was fired by the two countries. The government of China has never accepted the boundaries demarcation by a British officer Henry McMahon. The border was grouped into three sectors: The Eastern sector, Western sector and Central sector. China always claimed around 90,000 square kilometres territory - nearly all of which constitutes

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India's Arunachal Pradesh state. Beijing shows it as Southern Tibet in its map, While Indian claim was on 38,000sq km of land, which is under control of china including Aksai Chin plateau, situated near the Ladakh region. Both, nuclear-armed neighbors, shared an unmarked border of 3,500 kilometres through the Himalayas, a border which is known for harsh Himalayan terrain, complex winding roads and subzero temperature with an altitude of 6,500 meters above sea level. To have access to some areas, special equipment of breathing is required. This border is also known as the highest border region on earth. The sovereignty of widely separated Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin border regions is the bone of content between China and India. As per the Indian narrative, Aksai Chin belongs to Ladakh, and China claims it is to be part of Xinjiang. The construction of road link by China, which connects the Xinjiang and Chinese regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, triggers the conflict.

At multiple locations, the border between India and China is disputed. The maps made by a survey of India are the only evidence which depicts Indian version of LAC. Whereas, The Chinese version of the LAC consists of claims in the Ladakh region along with Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India. Since the 1980s, 20 rounds of bilateral talks were held between India and china related to border conflict. In 2019, India reported over 660 LAC violations and 108 aerial violations by the People's Liberation Army, which were significantly higher than the number of incidents in 2018. Despite the disputes, skirmishes, and standoffs, no incidence of gunshots being fired has been reported between the two countries along the border for over 50 years.

During the visit of President Xi to India in September 2014, Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India urged president Xi for a solution of the border dispute. However, in 2017, Chinese and Indian armies got into a major standoff, which was lasted for 73 in Doklam. Since then, China has increased its military presence in the Plateau of Tibet. Apart from it, china stationed fighter jets at the Ngari Gunsar Airport, which is around 200 kilometres (124 mi) from Pangong Tso, Ladakh. China also increased its footprint with India's neighbours – Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal; so China has been posing now a direct challenge to Indian hegemonic control and influence in South Asia.

The 2020 China–India skirmishes are part of an ongoing military standoff between China and India. 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 was the day when troops of Indian and Chinese military were engaged in aggressive melee, skirmishes and face-offs at locations along the Sino-Indian border, including near the disputed Pangong Lake in Ladakh and `near the autonomous region of Tibet and Sikkim. Some other clashes took place in eastern Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These skirmishes were part of ongoing standoff between India and China.

In the last decade of May, Chinese forces objected to road construction by India in the valley of Galwan river. According to Indian sources, as a result of melee fighting between the two militaries on 15/16<sup>th</sup> June, 20 Indian soldiers including an officer died, and china has counted 43 casualties including an officer. According to media reports, soldiers of both sides have been taken captive, but all the soldiers were released after a few days. China captive ten soldiers of India while

the number of Chinese soldiers remains unconfirmed. At the later stage, the Foreign Office of China and Indian army denied detention of Indian soldiers.

Number of scholars ([Bar-Tal, 2000](#); [Carruthers, 2000](#); [Manoff, 1998](#); [Moeller, 2004](#); [Wolfsfeld, 2004](#)) suggested that the media coverage of the conflict is mostly destructive, but still, an alternative and unconventional approach by media cannot be negated altogether. Peace Journalism surfaced as an alternative way of reporting in which the journalists “care as well as know” ([Bell, 1998, p.16](#)) and in which the notions of responsibility and accountability go hand in hand ([Howard, 2003](#)). The media coverage of Sino-Indian border conflict in the context of conflict resolution and peace and war journalism has been a subject of interest for journalists and scholars alike ([Cheema, 2015](#); [Sehgal, 2011](#); [Sonwalker, 2004](#); [Sreedharan, 2009](#)). As a result of a major escalation in the border conflict, the study at hand analyzed the coverage of Sino-Indian border conflict through the lens of peace and war journalism along with comprehending the extent to which ideals of peace journalism can be translated to conflict reporting.

The study has focused on analyzing the coverage of major events in the contemporary mainstream English press of China and India. China Daily and Global Times which are highly circulated English dailies of China were selected from the Chinese English Press whereas Times of India and The Hindu which are highly circulated English dailies of India were selected from the Indian mainstream English Press. The nature of the study called for an exploratory approach along with the descriptive analysis of the content produced by the selected press. The exploratory perspectives of the study were entertained through the method of in-depth interviews of Chinese and Indian journalists.

## Literature Review

Scholars and academicians including [Bell \(1998\)](#); [Galtung \(2000, 1998, 1986, 1985\)](#); [Lynch & McGoldrick \(2005\)](#); [Tehrani \(2002\)](#) had sought alternate ways of reporting and humanizing conflicts. Peace Journalism draws its support from peace in comparison to violence; truth in comparison to propaganda; independent humans and individuals in comparison to the elite; and solution in comparison to victory or defeat. Peace journalism is referred to as a set of tools aimed at equipping journalists in terms of offering a better public service ([Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005](#)) Peace journalism is a form of reporting which has a more serious and professional approach in terms of reporting conflicts ([Lynch & Galtung, 2010](#)).

Dependence on subjective insights of reporters is supported by peace journalism as journalists are not expected to stick to ideas of objectivity ([Wolfe & Johnson, 1990](#)). Peace Journalism can be understood as a special form of responsible journalism because it has the potential to contribute a substantive part in the peace process ([Hanitzsch 2004, p. 484](#)).

Galtung's classification of peace and war journalism also took the language into context as the use of negative words in terms of victimization and persecution are not encouraged in peace journalism. Peace journalism promotes a resolution-based advocacy method in conflict reporting not only through the formation of news stories but also through the choices which reporters and

journalists practice, which helps in developing non-violent diagnoses for society. Ad vocative approach also concentrated on emphasizing less visible aspects of violence along with searching for common grounds (Maslog et al., 2006, p.23). Lynch & McGoldrick presented peace journalism as a more logical, accurate and broader method of covering conflicts (Maslog, Lee & Kim, 2006). Lynch & McGoldrick (2005, p.5) interpreted peace journalism as a set of conceptual and practical apparatuses aimed at preparing journalists to offer a better public service.

Galtung's (1998) views were further expanded by McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) into 17 good practices of peace journalism. The practices comprised of offering solutions, reporting about long-term effects, humanizing the conflict, probing for common grounds, reporting versions of all involved stakeholders, and using accurate language. Robert Karl Manoff (2000, 1998) focused on 12 productive roles of the media which can be employed while reporting violent conflicts. The roles complied with the classification laid out by Lynch & McGoldrick. The major roles included communicator among opposing parties; educating on various aspects of conflict; building relationships; neutralizing misperceptions; classifying the hidden interests; promoting the balance of power; and seeking solutions.

The manner in which conflicts are reported by the media and the way it defined and redefined public sphere has been a matter of special interest for academicians and journalists alike. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), mass communication has the power to affect and change perceptions and knowledge of the public, which is done through the process of framing. The notions of agenda-setting and framing had not only effects on the process of public opinion formation but were also a representation of journalists' prejudices and perceptions in terms of interpreting the conflict scenarios (Aslam, 2014). Media not only made the audience aware of the public issues but also dictated how much importance should be given to an issue or matter (Brosius & Weimann, 1996). Media, therefore, played an important role in conflict situations. The framing of the Pakistan-India conflict regarding Jammu & Kashmir had been extensively covered by researchers and academicians (Cheema, 2015; Sehgal, 2011; Sreedharan, 2009; Zaheer, 2017; Zahid, Yousafzai & Ali, 2013). Thus, the role of press and media both in terms of escalation or de-escalation of conflict is largely dependent on the framing along with the peace and war approach used by the journalists.

## Methodology

The study was aimed at investigating the coverage of border conflict in the contemporary mainstream English press of China and India in the context of peace and war journalism. The method of content analysis was employed to analyze the press coverage of border conflict. The news stories published on the national and international pages of China Daily and Global Times from Chinese press; Daily Times of India and Daily the Hindu from Indian press were selected for content analysis. News stories published about the major events which evolved during the period of May 5, 2020, to October 5, 2020, were selected for the purpose of the study. The time

period was significant because of the skirmishes at different locations scrapping and its consequences on the stability of the region.

### Operationalization of Frames

Peace Frames	War Frames
<b>Peace oriented:</b> Facts and aspects supporting conflict resolution are highlighted in the story in comparison to facts and aspects related to violence and aggression	<b>Violence oriented:</b> Facts and aspects related to violent events of conflict are highlighted in the story in comparison to less violent responses to conflict
<b>Truth Oriented:</b> Points of view of more than one or all stakeholders with competing interests are included in the story	<b>Propaganda Oriented:</b> Points of view of one stakeholder are propagated as the only available and justified point of view
<b>Multiple Source Oriented:</b> Information derived from independent sources and firsthand versions of witnesses are also incorporated in the story	<b>Elite Source Oriented:</b> Information and versions of only elite sources like military and bureaucracy are incorporated in the story
<b>Solution-Oriented:</b> Points of view of all stakeholders especially with reference to less or non-violent responses to conflict are covered and highlighted	<b>Zero-Sum Oriented:</b> Point of view of one of the stakeholders is covered and highlighted to present that particular stakeholder at the winning end of the conflict
<b>Neutral Frames:</b> Frames which were neither coded as peace nor as war frames were coded as neutral frames	

The unit of analysis for content analysis was every individual story. A coding sheet was developed for coding the content which is attached in the Appendix. Pilot study was conducted for checking the intercoder reliability, which yielded satisfactory results. The study also attempted to explore the extent to which the ideals of peace journalism can be translated into practices of conflict reporting by the journalists and reporters. For this exploratory angle, the method of qualitative in-depth interviews was employed. A total of 12 journalists, six from China and six from India, were purposively selected for the content analysis. A detailed questionnaire was developed for the purpose of in-depth interviews.

### Research Questions

- 1- What are the frames used in the coverage of border conflict by journalists?
- 2- To what extent it is possible to translate the ideals of peace journalism into practices of conflict reporting?

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Frequency of Retrieved News Stories

Newspaper	Frequency of Stories
Global Times	38 (22.75%)
China Daily	52 (31.17%)
Times of India	39 (23.35%)
The Hindu	38 (22.75%)
Total	167 (100%)

Table-01 shows the frequency of news stories which appeared in the selected newspapers. A total of 38 stories appeared in the Global times who comprised of 22.75% of the total number of stories. Fifty-two stories appeared in the China Daily, which made 31.17% of the total data. A total of 39 stories appeared in the Daily Times of India which comprised of 23.35% of the total data. A total of 38 stories appeared in the Daily Hindu, which made 22.75% of the total data.

**Table 2.** Cross Tabulation of War Journalism and Newspapers

War Journalism	Global Times	China Daily	Times of India	The Hindu
Violence Oriented	20 (52.63%)	35(66.30%)	36 (92.30%)	30 (78.95%)
Propaganda Oriented	23 (60.52%)	35(66.30%)	36 (92.30%)	30 (78.95%)
Elite source Oriented	19 (50%)	35(66.30%)	34 (87.17%)	30 (78.95%)
Zero-Sum Oriented	16 (42.10%)	34(65.38%)	33 (84.61%)	29 (76.31%)

*Chi-Square:  $\chi^2 (12, N = 167) = 40.430, p < .05$*

Table-02 illustrates the highest percentage of violence-oriented stories were reported in the Times of India, followed by The China Daily, The Hindu and Global Times correspondingly. Similarly, the highest percentage of propaganda-oriented stories was also reported in the Times of India followed by The China Daily, The Hindu and Global Times correspondingly. The highest percentage of Elite source-oriented sources was recorded in The China Daily followed by Times of India, The Hindu and Global Times correspondingly. Similar statistical trends were witnessed in Zero-Sum oriented stories with China Daily taking the lead followed by Times of India, The Hindu and Global Times. The Chi-Square value of 40.430 with the significance level below .05 represents that the difference in war coverage of border Conflict in the selected four dailies was significant.

**Table 3.** Cross Tabulation of Peace Journalism with Newspapers

Peace Journalism	Global Times	China Daily	Times of India	The Hindu
Peace Oriented	14 (36.84%)	13 (25.0%)	3 (7.69%)	4 (10.52%)
Truth Oriented	11 (28.94%)	13 (25.0%)	3 (7.69%)	4 (10.52%)

Multiple sources oriented	15 (39.47%)	13 (25.0%)	5 (12.82%)	4 (10.52%)
Solution Oriented	18 (47.36%)	14 (26.92%)	6 (15.38%)	5 (13.15%)

$\chi^2 (12, N = 167) = 32.327, p < .05$

Table-03 shows that the highest percentage of peace-oriented stories were recorded in Global Times, followed by The China Daily, The Hindu and Times of India respectively. The highest percentage of Truth Oriented stories was published in The China Daily, followed by Global Times, The Hindu and Times of India. The highest percentage of Multiple Source Oriented and Solution-Oriented stories were published in Global Times followed by The China Daily, Times of India and The Hindu. The chi-square result of 32.327 with a significance level of less than .05 reflects that the differences in peace reporting by the selected four daily newspapers were significant.

**Table 4.** Cross-tabulation of Neutral Frames with Newspapers

Neutral Frames	Global Times	The China Daily	Times of India	The Hindu	Total
	4 (10.52%)	4 (7.69%)	0	4 (10.52%)	12 (7.18%)

*Chi-Square:*  $\chi^2 (3, N = 167) = 4.395, p > .05$

Table-04 represents that the Global Times, The Hindu and The China Daily recorded the same percentage of Neutral Stories while no neutral story was recorded in the Times of India. The Chi-Square results showed that no statistically significant differences were found in the four selected newspapers with reference to neutral coverage of border issue.

### To what Extent the Coverage of Sino-Indian Conflict is Dominated by Peace, War or Neutral Framing in Indian and Chinese Press?

[McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#) asserted that mass communication has the power to affect and change perceptions and knowledge of the public, which is done through the process of framing. The notions of agenda-setting and framing had not only effects on the process of public opinion formation but also represented journalists’ prejudices and perceptions in terms of interpreting the conflict scenarios ([Aslam, 2014](#)). The study analyzed the coverage of border conflict through the operationalization of peace, war and neutral frames. The frequency distribution showed that the most extensive amount of coverage to border conflict was given by The China Daily, followed by Times of India, whereas Global Times and The Hindu reported the same amount of coverage. (Table-01)

The descriptive results indicated that the highest percentage of pro-violence and propaganda centric stories were recorded in the Times of India from Indian Press. The highest percentage of Elite-Source centric and Zero-Sum centric stories was recorded in The China Daily from the Chinese press. The statistics revealed that both Indian and Chinese press employed war framing

more dominantly in comparison to peace framing while reporting border conflict (Table-02). The results thus validated Galtung's (2000,1986) views on war journalism as it draws its support from violence, propaganda, elite sources and zero-sum approach.

In terms of peace journalism, the highest percentage of pro-peace, independent source centric and solution-centric stories were recorded in Global Times from Chinese press, whereas the highest percentage of truth centric stories were published in The China Daily from the Chinese press. The descriptive results revealed that a higher instance of peace journalism is recorded in the Chinese press in comparison to Indian press (Table-03). Thus, peace journalism can be referred to as a set of tools aimed at equipping journalists in terms of offering a better public service ([Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005](#)) because peace journalism draws its support from peace in comparison to violence; truth in comparison to propaganda; independent humans in comparison to the elite; and solution in comparison to victory or defeat.

### **To What Extent it is Possible to Translate the Ideals of Peace Journalism into Practices of Conflict Reporting?**

Number of scholars like [Carruthers \(2000\)](#), [Moeller \(2004\)](#), [Manoff \(1997, 1998\)](#), [Bar-Tal \(2000\)](#) and [Wolfsfeld \(2004\)](#) suggested that the media coverage of the conflict is mostly destructive, but still, an unconventional and alternative approach by media cannot be negated altogether. Peace Journalism surfaced as a way of reporting for reporters in which they care as well as know ([Bell, 1998](#), p.16) and which carries the notions of responsibility and accountability together ([Howard, 2003](#)).

Respondents agreed that mostly the contention in war journalism is the narrative of victimhood in comparison to peace journalism which is a more logical and accurate way of reporting conflicts. In the Indian press, the Indian forces are portrayed as the victims and the Chinese forces as aggressors, whereas in Chinese perspective, the narrative is vice versa. Liu Chi, a Shanghai-based journalist, said that the resolution approach in terms of "peace journalism could be translated by focusing on more in-depth, humanized and consistent coverage of border issue".

Galtung's classification of peace and war journalism also took the language into context as the use of negative words in terms of victimization and persecution are not encouraged in peace journalism. Peace journalism promoted a resolution-based advocacy method in conflict reporting through the choices of reporters and journalists, which helps in developing non-violent diagnoses for society. Ad vocative approach also concentrated on emphasizing less visible aspects of violence along with searching for common grounds ([Maslog et al., 2006](#)). Xiao Shan, a Beijing based journalist, asserted that opinion writings and post-facto writings could add to the public sphere perspective but it is through actual reporting choices that journalists can fully take advantage of the notions of peace journalism including a search for common grounds and covering the less obvious and less talked about aspects of violent conflicts. Amber Shamsi, an Islamabad based international journalist, said that the "focus of the media is less on the colossal



human tragedy and political disaster that Kashmir is facing, and more on the States' nationalistic interests”.

Parnabh Chadda, a journalist from New Delhi, asserted that peace journalism could be utilized at best by ensuring that the journalists should refrain from becoming part of the propaganda paradigm. Respondents agreed that to fully translate the ideals of peace journalism to practice, the media need to step out of the nationalistic boundaries. It also needs to be assured at the state level that freedom of the press is not curtailed or muzzled. Respondents also agreed that prohibiting the dissemination of certain credible information as a result of declared or undeclared censorship policies on the part of the governments also results in hindering the practices of peace journalism.

## **Conclusion**

The study revealed that both Chinese and Indian press employed war framing more dominantly in comparison to peace framing while reporting border conflict, but a higher instance of peace journalism was recorded in the Chinese press in comparison to the Indian press. Respondents agreed that the ideals of peace journalism could be translated into conflict reporting by not justifying human rights violations and by focusing on more in-depth coverage of less visible effects of Ladakh conflict. A search for common grounds among key stakeholders and refraining from becoming part of propaganda were among other key factors which can play a vital role in practising peace journalism. Thus, Peace Journalism can be understood as a special form of responsible journalism as it has the potential to contribute a fundamental part in the peace process.

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