

Journalistic construction of congruence: Chinese media's representation of common but differentiated responsibilities in environmental protection

Abstract

This research clarifies China's mediated international communication of China's responsibility in environmental protection under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The topic is explored within the context of China's media "going global" project, a key initiative of China's soft power projection. Gauged by the notion of cultural and political congruence, this study also compares China's journalistic discourse with those in the US and UK. It found that Chinese mainstream media achieved a certain degree of congruence in media representations of China's responsibility with their Western counterparts. Chinese media constructed the notion of responsibility in a mixed manner: they differentiated the target of blame and existing treatment measures between China and other countries or institutions but gave more exposure to China's future obligations and duties. American and British media applied nearly identical coverage patterns in reporting China's and others' existing and future treatment but showed opposite patterns in covering the target of blame in environment and climate issues. This paper contributes to the study of China's journalism practice in international communication. It also offers suggestions to the resolution of the stalemate in global environmental negotiations and China's media "going global" initiative.

Keywords: international responsibility; environment and climate; journalistic construction; cultural and political congruence; Chinese media

Introduction

Whether a country's political or socio-cultural messages can be acknowledged and even practiced with willingness by other countries may impact the 'international political process and outcome' (Wang, 2006: 91). This is what Joseph Nye (1990, 2004, 2008, 2010) refers to in his notion of 'soft power', which justifies the American cultural and political values. The notion was soon embraced by other countries, including China. It is notable that mainstream Chinese intellectuals and politicians have their own interpretations of China's soft power. They mainly regard China's cultural attractiveness, as well as its political power, as China's core soft power resources and view soft power as both domestic and international development strategies (Glaser and Murphy, 2009). Nevertheless, both explanations agree on the idea of using messages and values, instead of weapons or sanctions, embedded in culture or policies to influence others and obtain what you want. Guided by this philosophy, the Chinese government proactively mediated messages of, for example, a 'correct version' of China through the Confucius institutes (Hartig, 2015), an ascending prosperous and well-organised nation through Beijing Olympic Games (Brownell, 2013), China's understanding of global order through China Central Television (Zhang, 2013), and the globalisation of China's culture through media products of commercial and state-owned media institutions (Lee, 2014).

1
2
3
4 This study put foci on the mediated messages of the principle of common but
5 differentiated responsibilities (hereafter, CBDR) constructed and delivered by China's
6 mainstream international media which are dedicated to China's image management and
7 soft power generation initiatives. The principle of CBDR is the core of international
8 climate politics (Post et al., 2018). However, it is diversely interpreted because of its
9 loose definition (Matsui, 2002; Stone, 2004). Taking advantage of the national strategy of
10 soft power projection, the Chinese government may construct its interpretations of the
11 principle of CBDR and strive to make this discourse accepted by others through mediated
12 channels. This presumption is based on the following considerations. By emphasising the
13 dynamism of attraction, Joseph Nye argued that three major resources, 'its culture (in
14 places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at
15 home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having
16 moral authority)' (2004: 11), can generate soft power for a country. It is safe to presume
17 that the messages of China-related responsibilities in environmental protection, which
18 form one of the core elements in China's foreign policies, are included in China's soft
19 power initiatives. One piece of evidence is China's pledges to the 2015 Paris Agreement,
20 which was dissected by Harris (2017) as one of China's endeavours to make China's
21 foreign policies recognised by the international community and generate soft power. The
22 outbound communication through transnational news media institutions may be
23 employed as the key channels, especially after the launch of the media "going global"
24 project, which was lavishly invested by the Chinese government as an essential element
25 of China's impression-improvement strategies (Hu et al., 2013). Moreover, the Chinese
26 leadership stressed the necessity of conveying China's perspectives in outbound
27 communication (Li, 2010), which is commonly defined as securing the power of
28 discourse by the Chinese politicians (Cunningham, 2012). Therefore, China's mainstream
29 transnational media institutions probably constructed the messages in their own frames,
30 aspiring to be accepted by overseas audiences and generate soft power.
31
32
33
34

35
36 The notion of mediated public diplomacy and cultural and political congruence
37 (Entman, 2008; Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009) illuminates the direction of the construction
38 of mediated messages in effective international communication. It stresses the importance
39 of overlap of the dominant political cultures between the projecting and the receiving
40 nations in the acceptance of the mediated messages. The journalism scholarship is rich in
41 examining the outcome of China's mediated public diplomacy. For instance, scholars
42 found their limited influence on global information flow and foreign audiences'
43 perceptions of China's national branding (Zhang, 2008) and the image of Chinese
44 leadership (Cheng et al., 2016), or their substantial influence on international news
45 coverage on the 2014 Hong Kong Protest (Zhang et al., 2018) and on major global affairs
46 marginalised by Western media (Zeng, 2010). The academia also extensively explored
47 the underlying problems in China's international communication, such as the production
48 values, professionalism, credibility, and market structures (Lee, 2014; Xin, 2009), the
49 politicised messages and values employed by the Chinese government (Hartig, 2015), the
50 wider Chinese socio-political and ideological environment (Ding, 2011), and its
51 difference with that in other countries, especially Western countries (Sun, 2014).
52 However, there is a lack of research on how the mechanism of cultural and political
53 congruence impacts the journalistic construction of international communication
54 messages. This study will be the first one that delves into this topic. Through clarifying
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 China's mediated messages of China's responsibility under the principle of CBDR, this
4 study is theoretically significant in revealing the application of cultural and political
5 congruence in China's international communication. It is also of vital empirical
6 importance to China's, as well as other countries', future strategic international
7 communication, especially in breaking the stalemate in global environmental
8 negotiations.
9

10
11 Following the introduction, this paper reviews existing studies on China's role in
12 the global environmental protection under the principle of CBDR and the theoretical
13 framework of mediated public diplomacy and cultural and political congruence. It then
14 details the sampling procedures of Chinese and Western media and the research method
15 of qualitative content analysis. The research findings are displayed according to the
16 themes of emission issues, international assistance, international cooperation, and the
17 compliance with the principle. In the discussion section, this paper explains the research
18 findings based on the theory of cultural political congruence, clarifies the theoretical and
19 empirical contributions, and proposes future research agendas.
20
21

22 China's involvement in global environmental protection and the 23 principle of CBDR 24 25

26 The battle of discourses seemed intensive between China and other national and
27 institutional members on China's role in global environmental protection. China was
28 criticised for becoming 'the largest national source of pollution causing climate change'
29 (Harris, 2011: 2). Nevertheless, the Chinese government hesitated to accept its
30 responsibilities in, for example, fulfilling mandatory emissions-reduction targets since the
31 1980s when global negotiations on climate change initiated (Harris, 2011). The major
32 ethical reasons that the Chinese government insisted were: one, the developed countries
33 should shoulder the responsibility ahead of others since their development was at the cost
34 of the environment; two, China as a developing country should prioritise domestic
35 development (Harris, 2011). With the disasters caused by environmental damages
36 escalating, the rest of the world exhorted the Chinese government to undertake
37 responsibilities in environmental protection. In 2005, former US deputy secretary of state
38 Robert Zoellick (2005) claimed that 'We need to urge China to become a *responsible*
39 *stakeholder* in that system' (emphasis in original). Echoing this statement, in the domain
40 of environmental protection, various institutions and politicians specified China's, along
41 with other countries', responsibilities in climate change, energy policy, and other areas of
42 environmental protection (see Commission of the European Communities, 2006; Merkel,
43 2007; The White House, 2010).
44
45
46
47

48 Hoo (2013: 171) observed that 'Washington never explicitly specified what it
49 thought these responsibilities should be' and 'At the official level, Chinese leaders... did
50 not go beyond general assertions or claims'. The vagueness of the political languages
51 perhaps can be attributed to the trickiness of defining *responsibility*. Furthermore, as to
52 the question '[Is] China responsible for climate change', Harris answered that 'Not
53 surprisingly, the answer must always be prefaced by 'it depends'' (2011: 18). In other
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 words, there is still much space to interpret China's involvement in global environmental
4 protection issues by China itself and by others.
5

6 The situation shows no difference when it comes to the core principle of
7 international climate politics, the principle of CBDR (Post et al., 2018). It was firstly
8 explicitly addressed in the Rio Declaration at the 1992 United Nations Conference on
9 Environment and Development (Rajamani, 2000; Stone, 2004). It was defined in
10 Principle 7 which reads:
11

12
13 States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore
14 the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different
15 contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but
16 differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the
17 responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development
18 in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the
19 technologies and financial resources they command. (United Nations, 1992)
20
21

22 The principle is of vital importance in global environmental protection that it has
23 guided the law-making of global environmental protection conventions including the
24 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto
25 Protocol (Matsui, 2002).¹ Nevertheless, the loose definition of the principle induces
26 different interpretations, such as different emphasis of the two elements of the principle,
27 namely the common responsibilities and the differentiated responsibilities (Matsui,
28 2002). The scholarly debates well reflected the discursive conflicts among countries
29 concerning the international environmental protection issues. Adding to the discursive
30 chaos is the fact that as a 'fundamental principle of international environmental law', this
31 principle can not initiate 'concrete legal operations or consequences' but only be
32 activated when using along with conventions and judged by the context (Matsui, 2002:
33 166).
34
35

36
37 The diverse interpretation of a country's responsibilities in global environment and
38 climate issues not only appears in the domain of international law but also in
39 environmental communication. For example, Post and collaborators (2018) found that
40 media in developed and developing countries significantly less attributed the casual
41 responsibility, i.e. blame for environmental problems, to the in-group members,
42 evidencing the 'in-group-protecting patterns' (p. 13). Similar conclusion was also
43 obtained by Liang et al.'s (2014) research on Chinese TV which shifted the blame to
44 developed countries in its news coverage of the 2009 UN climate change conference in
45 Copenhagen.
46
47

48 However, the journalistic representations of 'in-group favoritism' and 'out-group
49 derogation' (Post et al., 2018) are not helpful for achieving agreement in global
50 environmental negotiations. It further induces three questions. Firstly, does that mean
51 there is no common ground between different countries in their journalistic
52 representations of environmental protection issues and there will be never-ending
53 arguments on the notion of responsibility? Secondly, as to the case of China, who is
54 proactively engaging in the media "going global" project and soft power projection, is it
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 applying the same or a different way of mediated communication in representing China's
4 involvement in the principle of CBDR? Thirdly, if China does apply a different manner
5 of journalistic representation, then how? Discussing China's journalism practice in
6 international communication under the backdrop of China's soft power projection, this
7 study assumes that it will comply with the mechanism of cultural and political
8 congruence.
9

10 11 Mediated public diplomacy and cultural and political congruence 12

13
14 The process that the practicing country promotes its agendas and messages, especially of
15 its foreign policies, through mediated channels and tries to exert influence on the target
16 country's mediated channels is defined by Entman (2008) as mediated public diplomacy.
17 The concept links the scholarly interest in the mutual influence of media agendas and/or
18 frames, which is widely discussed in the intermedia agenda setting scholarship (e.g.
19 Vonbun et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2017), with the political intentions of gaining acceptance
20 and trust in the international area. It is viewed as one of the most important mechanisms
21 of garnering attraction in soft power practices (Entman, 2008) since it is effective 'to
22 create consensus around shared meaning' (Roselle et al., 2014: 72) and 'to increase
23 mutual understanding and respect of differences through positive media messages'
24 (Servaes, 2016: 440). The reason is that it goes beyond the ideas such as glocalization
25 (Robertson, 1995) and the technical measures such as adapting to local media languages
26 and formats (Chang, 2003; Wu, 2008) by considering the acceptance of messages and
27 values in the media products in other countries to achieve the above communicative
28 purposes.
29
30

31
32 Scholars including Entman (2008) and Sheafer and Shenhav (2009) thus
33 concluded the essence of mediated public diplomacy with the notion of cultural and
34 political congruence, which refers to the degree of overlap of the dominant political
35 cultures between the projecting and the receiving nations. Existing studies evidenced the
36 importance of cultural and political congruence in international communication. For
37 example, Sheafer and Gabay (2009) confirmed the in regards to the issues of Israel's
38 disengagement from Gaza and the general elections in the Palestinian Authority, media
39 agendas and framings from Israel were better received in the US than in British media
40 and the opposite happens to the Palestinian Authority, and the higher cultural political
41 proximity between an antagonist and a foreign country plays a positive role in the
42 acceptance of media language in another country. Once again, Sheafer et al. (2014)
43 identified that the relative political proximity between Israel and a foreign country is an
44 effective indicator of the acceptance of Israel's news framing in the Gaza War.
45
46

47
48 The key of China's media "going global" project, as required by the Chinese
49 government, includes 'enabling foreign people to hear the voice of China' (Hayden,
50 2012: 181) and prioritising the dissemination of China's 'social development, and
51 internal and external policies' (Zhao, 2011) through the channel of mediated public
52 diplomacy. Existing studies have documented the proactive measures that the Chinese
53 government adopted in promoting mediated public diplomacy (e.g. Cheng et al., 2016;
54 Zhang et al., 2018). To overcome the pre-existing cultural and political distance between
55 the Chinese and the Western society, this study assumes that China's outbound media
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 will strive to construct journalistic messages concerning China's foreign policies in
4 congruence with those in other countries. Based on Entman's (2008: 94) illustration of
5 the interrelationship between the degree of cultural and political congruence of two
6 societies and US's projection of soft power messages in receiving countries' mainstream
7 media institutions, this study proposes another one which is specific to China's
8 journalism practice in international communication (see Figure 1).
9

10
11 [insert Figure 1.]
12

13 Previous studies have contributed to the examination of Chinese media's
14 endeavours in the construction of mediated messages in international communication. For
15 example, Boc (2015) argued that China's construction and promotion of the notion of
16 African Dream was based on their shared colonised historical background and similar
17 development objectives. Although the primary purpose, as contended in the study, was to
18 make attractive and acceptable China's new political slogan of 'the Chinese Dream', the
19 above construction and dissemination strategies may probably produce promising
20 outcomes in Africa (Boc, 2015). On the contrary, Hartig (2015) concluded that the
21 messages communicated by the Confucius Institutes largely bypassed politically sensitive
22 issues and mapped a 'correct version' of China to others, inducing credibility issues
23 among foreign audiences. Focusing on the construction of China's responsibility in
24 global environmental protection under the principle of CBDR, the first research question
25 this study aims to answer is:
26
27
28

29 RQ1: What were China's mediated messages of China's involvement in the principle of
30 common but differentiated responsibilities during China's media "going global" project?
31

32 To better illustrate how much congruence of journalistic messages that Chinese
33 outbound media achieved with those in the media outlets in other countries, this study
34 also tries to unearth the journalistic representations in American and British media by
35 asking:
36
37

38 RQ2: How did American and British mainstream media portray China's involvement in
39 global environmental protection issues when they interpreted the principle of common
40 but differentiated responsibilities during China's media "going global" project?
41

42 Research Methods

43 Selection of Chinese media and sampling

44 This study used English-language news articles from the newswire of Xinhua News
45 Agency and the newspapers (including their online data) of *China Daily*, *People's Daily*,
46 and *Global Times*. These media institutions were selected because they were among the
47 most supported media institutions during China's media "going global" project and serve
48 as a significant part of China's international discourse construction initiatives (d'Hooghe,
49 2011; Hu and Ji, 2012). Table 1 provides a brief introduction of the selected Chinese
50 media.
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

This study retrieved news articles from 1st January 2009, a year witnessing China's launch of the media "going global" expansion scheme, to 31st December 2016, the last year before Donald Trump's 2017 presidency which reshaped the world's political landscape. For example, environmentally, his announcement that he would withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement was regarded as handling the global leadership on climate change to China (Sanger and Perlez, 2017). It located news articles with the exact phrase "common but differentiated" from the Dow Jones Factiva database. The source of the database was restricted to the "Xinhua – All sources" "China Daily – All sources" "People's Daily Online (China)" "Global Times (China, National Edition)" and "Global Times (China, Web Edition)" and the region was restricted to "China". A total of 345 news articles were selected after excluding the news articles covering non-environmental issues and with non-national level perspectives and duplicated ones. The basic information about the Chinese media and the amount of selected news articles respectively were recorded in Table 1.

Table 1. Information about the Chinese media institutions

Media names	Type	Slogan	Start of English-language service	Amount of news articles
Xinhua News Agency	Press agency	'Xinhua News Agency should manage the world, so that the whole world can hear the voice of China.'	1944	186
China Daily	Daily newspaper	'A voice of China on the global stage'	1 June 1981	150
Global Times	Daily newspaper	'Discover China. Discover the world.'	20 April 2009	7
People's Daily	Daily newspaper	N.A.	14 January 1998	2

Note: Information were retrieved from the official websites of the media institutions.

Selection of American and British newspapers and sampling

This research put specific foci on pertaining media representations in American and British newspapers. The selection of American and British newspapers was based on two considerations. Firstly, they paid attention to the principle of CBDR and involved China in their interpretation of the principle. This study narrowed down the search scope with

the aid of the sources of “Major US Newspapers” and “UK Newspapers” in the database of Nexis UK by restricting the country to “China” and requesting documents with “common but differentiated” in the body. Secondly, they are daily quality newspapers with large circulation size. They may set Western media, political, and public agendas and frames and may be the target of China’s mediated public diplomacy. This study complemented the above database with Dow Jones Factiva. Table 2 and 3 list the information about the American and British media.

Table 2. Information about the American newspapers

Newspaper names	Daily circulation (print and digital) in 2017	Amount of news articles
<i>The New York Times</i>	360,000 ^a	7
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	2,520,000 ^b	6
<i>The Washington Post</i>	425,420 ^c	3

Note: a. Retrieved from “The New York Time Company-2017 annual report” (http://www.annualreports.com/HostedData/AnnualReports/PDF/NYSE_NYT_2017.pdf) ; b. Retrieved from “News Corp- Report 2017” (<https://newscorpcom.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/3-attachment-2017-annual-report.pdf>); c. Retrieved from its official website (https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-stat/ad/public/static/media_kit/2018AdBook.pdf) and the news report by NBC News (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/washington-post-still-plays-catch-gaining-times-n833236>).

Table 3. Information about the British newspapers

Newspaper names	Daily circulation (print and digital) in 2017	Amount of news articles
<i>The Guardian</i>	230,000 ^d	15
<i>The Independent</i>	1,354,000 ^e	7
<i>Financial Times</i>	910,000 ^f	5
<i>The Telegraph</i>	476,466 ^g	2
<i>The Times</i>	619,905 ^h	1

Note: d. Retrieved from “Working report, Guardian Media Group 2017-2018” (<https://www.theguardian.com/info/ng-interactive/2018/jul/24/working-report>); e. Retrieved from “<https://www.newsworks.org.uk/the-independent>”; f. Retrieved from

1
2
3 “Financial Times Annual Results 2017” (<https://aboutus.ft.com/en-gb/announcements/financial-times-annual-results-2017/>); g. Retrieved from “Audience” (<http://spark.telegraph.co.uk/toolkit/advertising/audience/>); h. Calculated based on data from “News Corp- Report 2017” (<https://newscorpcor.com.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/3-attachment-2017-annual-report.pdf>)

10 Qualitative content analysis and data

12 The research method of qualitative content analysis was applied in this study to interpret and analyse the content of the news articles ‘through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’ (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). This study applied the approach of directed content analysis by applying the key categories of the notion of national responsibility in environmental protection examined in previous studies (Liang et al., 2014; Post et al., 2018; Zhao, 2017) and then defining the operational definitions for each category (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Specifically, this study investigated how the news articles defined common blame for, common treatment of, differentiated blame for, and differentiated treatment of environmental problems. Accordingly, it designed the categories as “blame China”, “blame others”, “China’s existing treatment”, “China’s future treatment”, “others’ existing treatment”, and “others’ future treatment”, whose operational definitions are displayed in Table 4. After sifting through the news articles thoroughly, this study chose to focus on the following themes: emission issues (including causes of the polluted air, setting of emission reduction targets, and negotiation of emission reduction), international assistance in finance and technology, international cooperation in finance and technology, and the principle in a general sense (including stances towards and actions under the principle in a general sense). These themes are consistent with existing studies on the notion of responsibility in environmental protection (Post et al., 2018; Zhao, 2017). To complement the descriptive interpretation of the patterns in the Chinese and Western news articles, this study also illustrated the ‘rank order comparisons of frequency of codes’ (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1283).

38 Table 4. Operational definitions of categories and quotations

41 Category	42 Operational definition	43 Quotation
44 Blame China	45 The Chinese government or 46 China overall is the cause of 47 environmental and climate 48 problems.	49 ‘China, as one of the world’s 50 biggest GHG emitters’ (<i>China 51 Daily</i> , 24 August 2009)
52 Blame others	53 Other country or institution is 54 the cause of environmental 55 and climate problems.	56 ‘Most industrialized countries, 57 which contributed three 58 quarters of the world’s total 59 GHG emissions in the second 60 half of last century, fell short of commitments that they

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	China's existing treatment	The Chinese government or China overall is providing or has provided solutions to environmental and climate problems.	signed up in the Kyoto Protocol' (Xinhua News Agency, 25 August 2009)
8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	Others' existing treatment	Other country or institution is providing or has provided solutions to environmental and climate problems.	'African countries (...) have been receiving a lot of support from China, which showed a major power's responsibility over global environmental protection' (<i>China Daily</i> , 19 May 2013)
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27	China's future treatment	The Chinese government or China overall will provide or is asked to provide solutions to environmental and climate problems.	'(...) some \$28 billion had already been committed by developed countries (...) that will assist mostly developing countries in mitigating the effects of climate change between 2010 and 2012' (<i>China Daily</i> , 5 October 2010)
28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47	Others' future treatment	Other country or institution will provide or is asked to provide solutions to environmental and climate problems.	'China fully (...) advocates effective multinational collaboration and common efforts' (Xinhua News Agency, 25 August 2009)
48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	<hr/> <h2 style="color: #A52A2A; margin: 0;">Findings</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">[insert Figure 2.]</p> <p style="margin: 0;">[insert Figure 3.]</p>		

Emission issues:

Regarding the target of blame in emission issues, the Chinese mainstream media constructed responsibilities as being differentiated between China and other countries or institutions. They blamed other countries or institutions in a slightly more frequent way (21.45%) than China (13.62%) as the cause of the emission issues. What is unexpected is that instead of isolating China itself from the targets of blame, the Chinese media had a considerable amount of news articles (13.62%) mentioning that the country is also a part of the air problems. The differentiation of responsibilities in regards to the treatment of emissions issues also happens in the media's coverage of existing measures that China and other countries or institutions have adopted. As shown in Figure 2, the journalistic foci on the previous and ongoing treatment conducted by the Chinese government (21.45%) obviously outweighed those by other countries or institutions (2.32%). However, the Chinese media also had more coverage of China's future treatment of emission issues and others' urges of China for future measures (38.84%), and the frequency of the application of this category even bypassed that of the coverage of future measures acclaimed by other countries or institutions themselves or requested by others (27.54%). In a word, concerning China's stance towards the CBDR principle in emission issues, the common and differentiated characteristics of the notion of responsibility was blurred in Chinese media's journalistic construction. It tended to blame others more in the cause of air issues and highlighted more of China's existing efforts, but also contributed more news articles to mention China's future missions and burdens.

The trend was also mixed in the news coverage by American and British media as shown in Figure 3. On the one hand, they blamed China more frequently (58.70%) as the reason for air issues than others (34.78%) and did not follow Chinese media's manner of coverage. On the other hand, same with the coverage by the Chinese media, they also gave more exposure to China's existing (43.48%) and future (65.22%) treatment measures for emission issues than those by others (26.09% and 54.35% respectively).

International assistance:

When reporting China's stance in international assistance for environment and climate issues under the principle of CBDR, Chinese media put sole foci on others (3.77%) when applying the blame category. It indicates that the target of blame, one aspect of the notion of responsibility, was differentiated by Chinese media's construction. Different with their coverage of emission issues, Chinese media treated the existing treatment measures by China and others equally (4.35%) in news reports, implying the common characteristics of responsibility between China and other international members. Nevertheless, the aspect of treatment in the notion of responsibility was constructed as being differentiated regarding the future obligations. According to Figure 2, there were more coverage of others' stances, missions, measures, and burdens (29.86%) than those of China (4.06%). Once again, there was no obvious trend in Chinese media's construction of blame or treatment in interpreting the idea of responsibility in the CBDR principle.

Interestingly, Figure 3 shows that American and British media also paid equal attention to the previous and ongoing treatment policies and actions conducted by China

1
2
3 and other countries or institutions (2.17%), although the frequency indicates that media
4 reports from both countries, same as those by Chinese media, did not show many
5 interests in this topic. The differentiated feature of future treatment also appeared in
6 Western media's coverage, which put exclusive foci on others' future obligations and
7 duties (13.04%) in providing international assistance in global environment and climate
8 issues. Different from the differentiated coverage of the target of blame in international
9 assistance by Chinese media, American and British media contributed no news stories to
10 this category.
11
12

13 International cooperation:

14
15
16 Chinese media's interpretation of China's stance towards international cooperation in
17 environment and climate issues under the principle of CBDR showed a similar trend with
18 their coverage of emission issues. Although the target of blame was again constructed as
19 being differentiated by the Chinese media, the feature was not obvious that only 0.29%
20 news articles mentioned others' fault in this theme and no articles included China's
21 misconduct. Then China's existing solutions (18.84%) to environment and climate
22 problems were more frequently covered by Chinese media, although not in a distinct
23 advantage compared with the coverage of others' existing treatment (14.78%), indicating
24 a slightly differentiated focus by the Chinese media. Same with the reporting of emission
25 issues, Chinese media gave more exposure to China's future obligations and duties
26 (50.14%) in international cooperation than those of other countries or institutions
27 (35.65%). The journalistic construction indicates that China proactively involved in
28 international cooperation for the facilitation of resolution of global environment and
29 climate issues and treated this as a common obligation. In a word, Chinese media once
30 again blended the construction of common and differentiated features of responsibility in
31 covering international cooperation.
32
33
34

35
36 Same with the coverage by the Chinese media, American and British media
37 applied the category of existing treatment more frequently when mentioning China
38 (26.09%) than others (23.91%). As to future responsibilities in engaging in international
39 cooperation, American and British media devoted equal attention to China and others
40 (8.70%). There is no appearance of the application of the category of target of blame in
41 the media reports from both countries.
42

43 Compliance with the principle in general:

44
45
46 There are considerable Chinese, as well as American and British, news stories
47 constructed the notion of responsibility through the theme of compliance with the
48 principle of CBDR. Figure 2 illustrates that same with the coverage of the above three
49 themes, Chinese media also blamed others more frequently (9.57%) than China (2.32%)
50 for not complying with the principle of CBDR generally. Different with the coverage of
51 the themes of international assistance and international cooperation and same with those
52 of the theme of emission issues, Chinese media also surprisingly included China as the
53 target of blame, although not frequently. Chinese media's construction of existing and
54 future measures in the topic of principle abidance also showed similar trend with the
55 coverage of emission issues and international cooperation. They tended to put more
56
57
58
59
60

efforts in reporting China's existing (31.88%) and future (76.52%) treatment than others (7.54% and 55.07% respectively), depicting a China who took on more measures under the principle of CBDR and has common, and even more, future obligations. Once again, the construction of the notion of responsibility also showed no obvious trend of being common or differentiated.

Figure 3 displays that American and British media still did not share the same coverage pattern with those by Chinese media in the category of target of blame. Same with the reporting of emission issues, American and British media mentioned China (8.70%) as the violator of the principle of CBDR more frequently than others (2.17%). Nevertheless, similar with the reporting manner of Chinese media, media of both countries gave more discussion to China's existing (10.87%) and future (52.17%) stances and actions within the framework of CBDR than those by others (2.17% and 34.78% respectively).

Concluding discussion

This study uses Table 5 to facilitate the discussion of the conclusion. Table 5 clearly shows that there is high proximity between Chinese and Western media in representing China's existing measures and future treatment efforts in coping with environment and climate issues, but sheer difference in identifying the target of blame.

Table 5. Summary of research findings

Themes and categories		Target of blame		Existing treatment		Future treatment	
		China	Others	China	Others	China	Others
Emission issues	Media origin						
	China		√	√		√	
	US&UK	√		√		√	
International assistance	China		√	—	—		√
	US&UK			—	—		√
International	China		√	√		√	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
cooperation	US&UK		√	—	—						
Compliance with principle	China		√	√	√						
	US&UK	√		√	√						

Note: “√” means the frequency of the application of this category in the media outweighs those of the other category in the same theme; “—” means the frequency of the application of this category in the media is equal to those of the other category in the same theme.

The first research question asks China’s stance of responsibility in environment and climate issues under the principle of CBDR as constructed by Chinese mainstream media during China’s media “going global” initiative. This research finds that Chinese media constructed China’s involvement in the related responsibility in a mixed manner. They consistently constructed that the target of blame was differentiated that the news stories mentioned others as the target of blame more frequently than China across all the four themes. This trend also appeared in the coverage of the existing treatment, which is another interpretation of the notion of responsibility. China was more frequently mentioned when reporting existing measures in dealing with emission issues, international cooperation, and compliance with the principle, indicating that the existing treatment was differentiated and China devoted more efforts to the resolution of environment and climate problems. The existing measures adopted by others was only given equal attention when covering the theme of international assistance. Nevertheless, instead of hiding away from China’s future obligations, Chinese media gave more exposure to China’s future roles in emission issues, international cooperation, and compliance with the principle in general than others, indicating that the future treatment is a common mission for not only others but also China. The future treatment was only constructed as being differentiated when covering the theme of international assistance that others’ obligations were given more discussion.

The second research question inquiries Western countries’ journalistic construction of the notion of responsibility concerning China’s involvement in global environment and climate issues under the principle of CBDR. Unsurprisingly, American and British media had a different focus on the target of blame that they mentioned China more frequently as the cause of air problems and violator of the principle of CBDR. Both Chinese and Western media tended to construct the target of blame as being differentiated between China and others but pointing to opposite directions in these two themes. American and British media did not blame any member when covering the topics of international assistance and international cooperation. An interesting finding appears in the category of existing treatment that the pattern of coverage by American and British media was identical with those by Chinese media. They either highlighted China’s existing efforts in themes of emission issues, international cooperation, and compliance

1
2
3 with the principle or equalised the endeavours by China and others in international
4 assistance, which, in an overall sense, indicates the differentiated existing measures
5 undertaken by China and others. As to future treatment, the coverage patterns also
6 showed high similarity that China's future involvement was mentioned more frequently
7 in covering emission issues and obedience with the principle, others' involvement was
8 given more exposure in international assistance, and equal attention was devoted to
9 international cooperation issues.
10
11

12 The research findings add to the knowledge of cultural and political congruence
13 with the case of China. Driven by the political purpose of receiving resonance among
14 overseas audiences, the Chinese mainstream media were found that partially reached
15 congruence in coverage patterns with their Western counterparts. Empirically, this study
16 provides evidence to the deadlock of the ongoing international environmental
17 negotiations. Media both in China and the two Western countries were found by this
18 paper that shared almost identical coverage patterns in reporting what China has done,
19 has been doing, and is about to do in terms of treatment, that is, the resolutions in
20 environmental and climate problems. However, the causes of the environment and
21 climate problems were represented as being differentiated by Chinese and Western media
22 and showed no sign of congruence in media reports. To facilitate the global
23 environmental negotiations and fasten the environmental protection procedures, future
24 international communication by different countries may want to put more efforts to cover
25 the common resolutions to the environmental problems than blaming and scapegoating.
26 Accordingly, China's media "going global" initiative, which is a core of China's soft
27 power projection, is more likely to achieve congruence with other countries, and probably
28 better acceptance among their audiences, if it disseminates more of China's voices in the
29 actual, promised, and required resolutions to various problems than differentiating and
30 evaluating the rightness and falseness. This insight complements and extends Sheafer et
31 al.'s (2013: 1272) suggestion that 'a country should strategically structure its
32 international rhetoric so as to emphasize its core values in accordance with its targeted
33 countries'. However, it does not mean that 'respect of differences' (Servaes, 2016: 440)
34 can not be achieved in evaluating the midconduct and wrongness in international
35 communication. Future research may want to examine what strategies can be applied to
36 deal with the negative evaluative messages to bypass the deeply rooted cultural and
37 political differences between countries in the standards of evaluation and reach
38 congruence in the long run.
39
40
41
42
43

44 This study contributes clarity to the ongoing academic debate on China's
45 journalism practice in international communication under the backdrop of soft power
46 projection. Nevertheless, it is restricted by this study's focus on China's involvement in
47 the principle of CBDR in environment and climate issues alone and the sole focus on
48 certain media institutions in China, US, and UK within a short period. Future research
49 may also want to explore the journalistic constructions of China's international
50 responsibility in other global affairs, such as global security and financial issues, by more
51 media institutions in different time spans to expand the academic landscape of China's
52 international communication. Besides answering the question of what the coverages were
53 and how they were constructed guided by the mechanism of cultural and political
54 congruence, future research can also add more depth to this topic by exploring the "why"
55
56
57
58
59
60

question, for example, the influence of media system and journalists' ideologies on media constructions.

Notes

1 The UNFCCC is 'a framework for international cooperation to combat climate change by limiting average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change, and coping with impacts that were, by then, inevitable', and the Kyoto Protocol, linked to the UNFCCC, 'commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets'. Their introductions can be found at <https://unfccc.int/>.

References

- Boc A (2015) The power of language: Globalizing "The Chinese Dream". *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 8(4): 533-551.
- Brownell S (2013) "Brand China" in the Olympic context: Communications challenges of China's soft power initiative. *Javnost - The Public* 20(4): 65-82.
- Chang YL (2003) 'Glocalization' of television: Programming strategies of global television broadcasters in Asia. *Asian Journal of Communication* 13(1): 1-36.
- Cheng Z, Golan GJ and Kioussis S (2016) The second-level agenda-building function of the Xinhua news agency. *Journalism Practice* 10(6): 744-762.
- Commission of the European Communities (2006) EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities. *European Commission*, 24 October. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52006DC0631&from=EN>
- Cunningham M (2012) *Strategy, Identity Construction, & China's Quest for Influence: The Role of Rational Self-Interest in Beijing's "Responsible Great Power" Dialogue*. Master thesis, American University, USA.
- d'Hooghe I (2011) The expansion of China's public diplomacy system. In: Wang J (ed.) *Soft power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 19-35.

- 1
2
3 Ding S (2011) Branding a rising China: An analysis of Beijing's national image
4 management in the age of China's rise. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46(3):
5 293-306.
6
7
8
9 Entman RM (2008) Theorizing mediated public diplomacy: The U.S. case. *The*
10 *International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(2): 87-102.
11
12
13
14 Glaser BS and Murphy ME (2009) Soft power with Chinese characteristics: The ongoing
15 debate. In: McGiffert C (ed) *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United*
16 *States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World, A Report of the CSIS*
17 *Smart Power Initiative*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International
18 Studies, 10-26.
19
20
21
22
23
24 Harris PG (2011) Diplomacy, responsibility and China's climate change policy. In:
25 Harris PG (ed.) *China's Responsibility for Climate Change: Ethics, Fairness and*
26 *Environmental Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press, 1-21.
27
28
29
30 Harris PG (2017) China's Paris pledge on climate change: Inadequate and irresponsible.
31 *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 7(1): 102-107.
32
33
34
35 Hartig F (2015) Communicating China to the world: Confucius Institutes and China's
36 strategic narratives. *Politics* 35(3-4): 245-258.
37
38
39
40 Hayden C (2012) *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts*.
41 Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
42
43
44 Hoo TB (2013) *A Responsible Great Power: The Anatomy of China's Proclaimed*
45 *Identity*. PhD thesis, University of Oxford, UK.
46
47
48
49 Hsieh H-F and Shannon SE (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis.
50 *Qualitative Health Research* 15(9): 1277-1288.
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Hu Z and Ji D (2012) Ambiguities in communicating with the world: The “Going-out”
4 policy of China’s media and its multilayered contexts. *Chinese Journal of*
5 *Communication* 5(1): 32-37.
6
7
8
9 Hu Z, Zhang L and Ji D (2013) Globalization, social reform and the shifting paradigms of
10 communication studies in China. *Media, Culture & Society* 35(1): 147-155.
11
12
13
14 Jang SM, Park YJ and Lee H (2017) Round-trip agenda setting: Tracking the intermedia
15 process over time in the ice bucket challenge. *Journalism* 18(10): 1292-1308.
16
17
18
19 Lee SE (2014) *Chinese Soft Power through Media Products: Its Projection and*
20 *Reception in South Korea and Japan*. PhD thesis, National University of Singapore,
21 Singapore.
22
23
24
25 Li C (2010) Treat the media well, use and manage the media effectively. *wenming.cn*, 4
26 January. Available at:
27 http://www.wenming.cn/djw/syjj/gcsy/201110/t20111031_369641.shtml
28
29
30
31 Liang X, Tsai J-Y, Mattis K, Konieczna M and Dunwoody S (2014) Exploring attribution
32 of responsibility in a cross-national study of TV news coverage of the 2009 United
33 Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. *Journal of Broadcasting &*
34 *Electronic Media* 58(2): 253-271.
35
36
37
38
39 Matsui Y (2002) Some aspects of the principle of “Common but Differentiated
40 Responsibilities”. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and*
41 *Economics* 2: 151-171.
42
43
44
45
46 Merkel A (2007) Opening Address by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal
47 Republic of Germany, at the World Economic Forum on 24 January 2007 in Davos
48 (transcript). 26 January. Available at:
49 http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Speeches_Interviews/January/0124BKinDavos.html
50
51
52
53
54 Nye JS Jr (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York,
55 NY: Basic Books.
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Nye JS Jr (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York, NY:
4 Public Affairs.
5
6
7
8 Nye JS Jr (2008) Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy*
9 *of Political and Social Science* 616(1): 94-109.
10
11
12 Nye JS Jr (2010) *The Future of Power*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.
13
14
15 Post S, Königslöw KK and Schäfer MS (2018). Between guilt and obligation: Debating
16 the responsibility for climate change and climate politics in the media.
17 *Environmental Communication* 1-17.
18
19
20
21 Rajamani L (2000) The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility and the
22 balance of commitments under the climate regime. *Review of European Community*
23 *and International Environmental Law* 9(2): 120-131.
24
25
26
27
28 Robertson R (1995) Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In:
29 Featherstone M, Lash S and Robertson R (eds) *Global Modernities*. Thousand Oaks,
30 CA: Sage, pp. 25-44
31
32
33
34 Roselle L, Miskimmon A and O'Loughlin B (2014) Strategic narrative: A new means to
35 understand soft power. *Media, War & Conflict* 7(1): 70-84.
36
37
38
39 Sanger DE and Perlez J (2017) Trump hands the Chinese a gift: The chance for global
40 leadership. *The New York Times*, 1 June. Available at:
41 [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/us/politics/climate-accord-trump-china-global-](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/us/politics/climate-accord-trump-china-global-leadership.html)
42 [leadership.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/us/politics/climate-accord-trump-china-global-leadership.html)
43
44
45
46
47 Servaes J (2016) The Chinese dream shattered between hard and soft power? *Media,*
48 *Culture & Society* 38(3): 437-449.
49
50
51
52 Sheaffer T, Ben-Nun Bloom P, Shenhav SR and Segev E (2013) The conditional nature of
53 value-based proximity between countries: Strategic implications for mediated public
54 diplomacy. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57(9): 1256-1276.
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Sheafer T and Gabay I (2009) Mediated public diplomacy: A strategic contest over
4 international agenda building and frame building. *Political Communication* 26(4):
5 447-467.
6
7
8
9
10 Sheafer T and Shenhav SR (2009) Mediated public diplomacy in a new era of warfare.
11 *The Communication Review* 12(3): 272-283.
12
13
14 Sheafer T, Shenhav SR, Takens J and Atteveldt WV (2014) Relative political and value
15 proximity in mediated public diplomacy: The effect of state-level homophily on
16 international frame building. *Political Communication* 31(1): 149-167.
17
18
19
20 Stone CD (2004) Common but differentiated responsibilities in international law.
21 *American Journal of International Law* 98(2): 276-301.
22
23
24
25 Sun W (2014) Foreign or Chinese? Reconfiguring the symbolic space of Chinese media.
26 *International Journal of Communication* 8: 1894-1911.
27
28
29
30 The White House (2010) National security strategy. Available at:
31 [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)
32 [.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf) (accessed 26 February 2018).
33
34
35
36 United Nations (1992) Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and
37 Development. *Un.org*, 12 August. Available at:
38 <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>
39
40
41
42 Vonbun R, Königslöw KK and Schoenbach K (2016) Intermedia agenda-setting in a
43 multimedia news environment. *Journalism* 17(8): 1054-1073.
44
45
46
47 Wang J (2006) Managing national reputation and international relations in the global era:
48 Public diplomacy revisited. *Public Relations Review* 32(2): 91-96.
49
50
51
52 Wu DD (2008) Patterns of global-local fusion in Chinese internet advertising. In: Wu DD
53 (ed.) *Discourses of Cultural China in the Globalizing Age*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong
54 University Press, 99-112.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Xin X (2009) Xinhua News Agency in Africa. *Journal of African Media Studies* 1(3):
4 363-377.
5

6
7
8 Zeng E (2010) *CNC World and China's Soft Power: How CNC World Reports Major*
9 *Global Agenda*. Master thesis, National Chengchi University, China.
10

11
12 Zhang T, Khalitova L, Myslik B, Mohr TL, Kim JY and Kioussis S (2018) Comparing
13 Chinese state-sponsored media's agenda-building influence on Taiwan and
14 Singapore media during the 2014 Hong Kong Protest. *Chinese Journal of*
15 *Communication* 11(1): 66-87.
16
17
18

19
20 Zhang X (2008) China as an emerging soft power: Winning hearts and minds through
21 communicating with foreign publics. China Policy Institute Discussion Paper 35.
22
23

24
25 Zhang X (2013) How ready is China for a China-style world order? China's state media
26 discourse under construction. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34(3): 79-
27 101.
28
29

30
31 Zhao Q (2011) Public Diplomacy at Early Stage. *China.org.cn*, 3 March. Available at:
32 [http://www.china.org.cn/china/NPC_CPPCC_2011/2011-](http://www.china.org.cn/china/NPC_CPPCC_2011/2011-03/03/content_22042058.htm)
33 [03/03/content_22042058.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/NPC_CPPCC_2011/2011-03/03/content_22042058.htm)
34
35
36

37
38 Zhao X (2017) *Responsible China: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Soft Power*
39 *Projection through Transnational Media*. PhD thesis, Bangor University, UK.
40
41

42
43 Zoellick RB (2005) Whither China: From membership to responsibility? *U.S.*
44 *Department of State*, 21 September. Available at: [http://2001-](http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm)
45 [2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm](http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm)
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

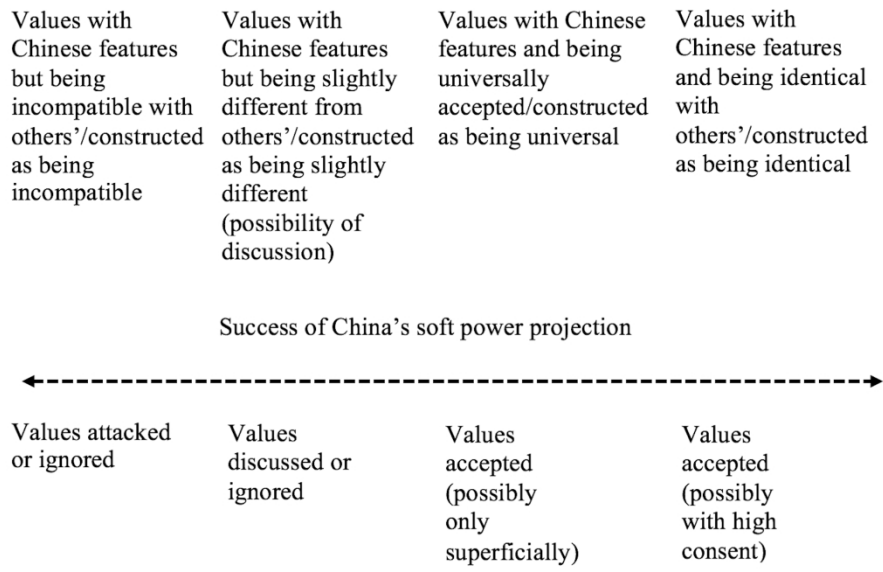


Figure 1. (Constructed) Values in Chinese media and acceptance in the receiving country.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

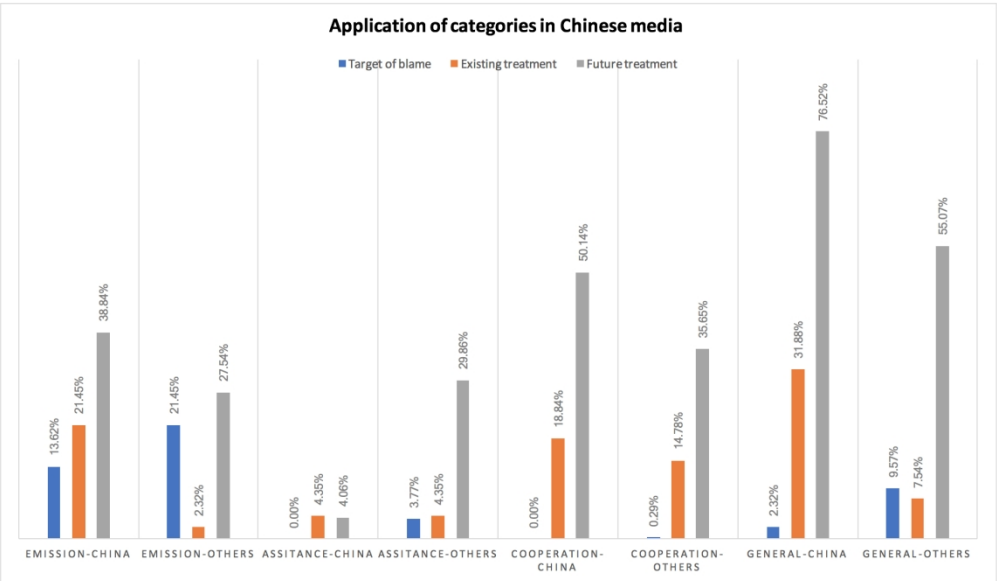


Figure 2. Coverage in Chinese media.

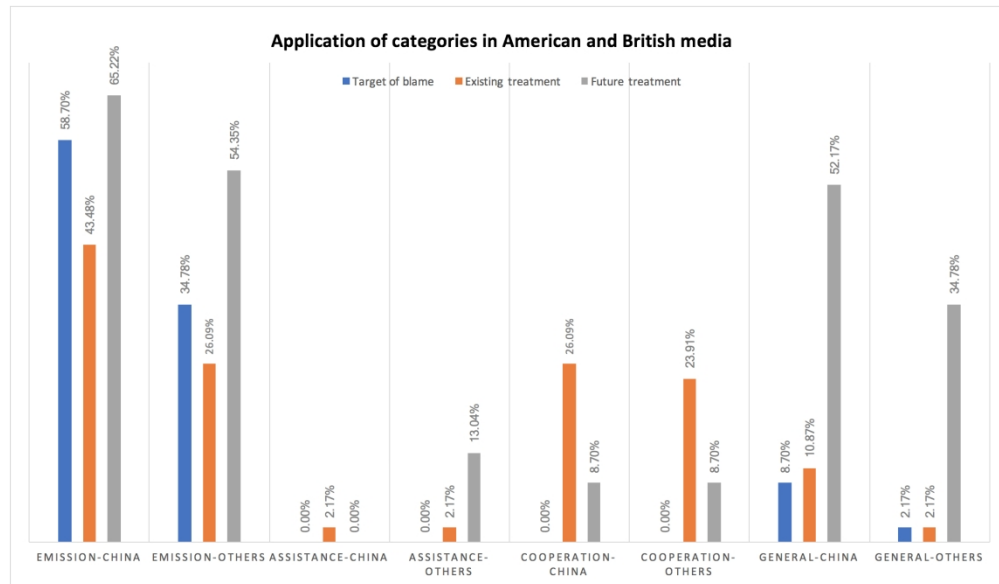


Figure 3. Coverage in American and British media.