

News Events, News Values and Editors' Judgments: The Cases of China, Taiwan and Japan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare the rankings of the top ten world and domestic events by three prominent Asian news agencies, the Central News Agency from Taiwan, the Kyodo News Service from Japan, and the Xinhua News Service from China, from 1992 to 2001. Findings reveal some congruence as well as deviance in the patterns of evaluating news events by the three agencies. They all kept a close eye on events in the Asia-Pacific area, followed by North America; Latin America was the most inconspicuous to them. Each news agency had different types of events to look for from its neighboring nations and its own territory. The “good news” syndrome with Xinhua and the “bad news” mentality with Central News and Kyodo in their approaches to domestic news were also unmistakable. The selections of top events by each news service also reflect its particular stance and value judgments on Asian geopolitics.

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Introduction

At the start of the new millennium we are experiencing tremendous transformations in the communication infrastructure worldwide. Never before has the flood (or overflow, if you will) of information been able to travel to so many in such vast proportions at such a great speed. The dazzling technological improvements notwithstanding, many of the basic problems with the collection, presentation and dissemination of a particular kind of information called ‘news’ essentially remain unsolved.

As part of the tradition of mass communication research, what news and how this news is presented – or not presented – to the local and global audience is of special significance in understanding the dynamics of the reality-construction process by the mass media. This issue is no less serious today than it was yesterday in spite of the changed environment. Faster speed, greater quantity and easier access should not blind us to the mediated nature of the newsmaking process.

On the one hand, the improved means to deliver news has created the need for ever more information both for the media to fill in an increasing array of news holes around the clock and for the audience to understand a world growing in complexity; on the other hand, the rising expenses involved in the production of news and the business model of mass media operations have led to sustained cuts among major news organizations in the number of staff reporters stationed in localities where news events may occur. The result is the heavy reliance by most mass media on a few influential news agencies as purveyors of news (Boyd-Barrett, 1998; Hester, 1991; Paterson, 1998), both at the national and international level. The role of the major news services as ‘agenda setters’ for the mass media both in covering national and global events has been well researched (e.g., Hirsh, 1977; Tuchman, 1981; Whitney and Becker, 1982). Within this context, then, a better understanding of news agencies may illuminate our comprehension of journalism and news production practices in the growingly globalized communication culture. This study is an effort to compare three news agencies from Taiwan, Japan and mainland China in their annual rankings of the top ten news domestic and world

events over the past ten years.

Review of Literature

One central yet contentious point in international mass communication research is a deceptively simple question: what makes 'news?' An extension in relation to this question is the debates about the kind of 'news values' that journalists should uphold and the nature and extent of the proper role that mass media should assume in the building of national identity and in the economic, political and social operations in the armory of the 'nation-state' (Meyer, 1988; Stevenson, 1988). Dominating the various approaches to defining news in different societies and cultures are the Western conception of news as a commodity and the Third World philosophy of news as a social source for national development. To a lesser extent, there is also the once influential but now declining Communist model of news as an ideological mass mobilization and propaganda tool.

In the cohort of Western industrialized nations led by the United States, news is provided as 'a merchandise rather than a service' (Righter, 1978: 41), that is, news is treated as a commodity to satisfy an audience demand with the market as its driving force. The economic model of news as a commodity was first developed by the British news agency Reuters in the 19th century (Desmond, 1980) and later followed by the Associated Press and other major Western news services (Meyer, 1988). Textbook definitions of news in this model stress with little variation the following values: timeliness, impact, prominence/importance, proximity, conflict/controversy, and unexpectedness/novelty (e.g., Brooks et al., 1992; Mehcher, 1994). One pioneering study in this tradition is the exploration by Galtung and Ruge (1965) of what Norwegian editors thought was newsworthy for four newspapers in Norway. The set of criteria identified by this study are: news should be recent, intense or splashy, unambiguous of interpretation, directly related to national interests, predictable but slightly unexpected, involving elite persons or countries, individualized or personalized, negative or conflictual. Similar news values have been later found to be followed by media in the United States and other industrialized nations (e.g., Edelstein, 1982; Ogan and Fair, 1984).

While the Western conception of news as a commodity took shape in the age of 19th century colonialism, the development doctrine of news as a social good was developed in a host of Third World countries during the 20th century amidst their campaign for decolonization (Meyer, 1988). Development journalism considers mass media and their related products as social good which must be controlled and directed by the state as resources for national development. News becomes part of national assets just as mineral deposits and oil reserves, and is a tool for the state to educate the public about national and international situation and to build a national identity free from the damaging influence of imperialist powers. Dissatisfied with Western coverage of Third World nations, advocates of development journalism urge mass media to focus on the 'positive news of development' (Stevenson, 1988: 141) about those nations that are on their road to modernization.

In the Communist press system, the Communist Party holds complete control over mass media, and uses the media 'as agitator, propagandist, organizer' (Siebert et al., 1963: 124). Censors representing the Communist Party interpret news stories and determine what the masses see and read. Mass media become an instrument of the Party and the state to integrate other elements of the government and to unify all organs of the state. Private ownership of the media is prohibited and all news organizations are operated by the Party or its protégés. The fallacy of this system is now well-known with the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet blocs and Eastern Europe and the massive transitions to a market-oriented economy and reforms in the mass media in China for the last two decades.

It is axiomatic to say that news does not exist in a vacuum but rather it is situated within a particular framework of understanding. The structuralist view of mass media, for example, postulates that ideologies and ownership have created the social forces that determine the nature of news and how it is perceived and produced (e.g., Adoni and Mane, 1984; Gerbner and Gross, 1976). The same line of argument has been proposed by critical scholars, who focus on showing how media content systematically serves to further the interest and power of certain groups in society

(e.g., Thompson, 1990). Other scholars have noted that mass media work closely with the government in routinely supporting its foreign policy goals (e.g., Berry 1990; Chang, 1993; Cohen, 1963).

In addition to the above perspectives which understand the functionality of news at the macro (national/system) level, there is also a plethora of theories which try to dissect the newsmaking process at the micro level. Social construction of reality, the cognitive psychological perspective about social knowledge and the essence of the treatise of Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their seminal classical social psychological work, has been vigorously applied to the study of news. For example, Nimmo and Combs (1983) analyzed the construction of 'politically mediated realities.' Bennett (1996) argued that news presents a superficial and distorted image of society – the 'politics of illusion.' Goffman (1974) and Tuchman (1978) have written about news as an artful construction of social life and studied news as a frame of 'strips' (Goffman, 1974: 10-11) of everyday reality and imposing order on it. News, then, 'presents a politically legitimated reality . . . (and) objectifies and reifies social and economic forces' (Tuchman, 1981: 90). Altheide (1976) and Gitlin (1980) have also suggested that global media messages are cast in recurrent frames which affect the content and form of these messages. The perspective of social construction of reality, therefore, may be helpful to examine the role of news in the social structure that determines the articulation and circulation of news flow in a cross-national context (Chang, Wang and Chen, 1994). Golding (1981), drawing on research conducted in three countries, argued that news is ideological due to the exigency of routine production procedures in the news rooms and the beliefs and conventions which support them (see also Golding and Elliott, 1979). He suggested that news provides a picture of the world in such a way that renders 'radical social changes invisible, undesirable, and unnecessary' (Golding, 1981: 81).

The selectivity in the news production process has been the theoretical focus of gatekeeping studies, which examine the role of editors, reporters and other media workers in filtering media content. In a critical review of research over the decades, Shoemaker (1991) looks at the process of gatekeeping at five different levels: the individual (e.g., attitudes and values), the professional routines (e.g., deadlines and styles), the organizational/institutional (e.g., ownership, markets), the external (e.g., audience, interest groups, advertisers, and other media), and the ideological (e.g., news paradigms, cultural practices, political elites). Factors at these five levels are further elaborated in Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) effort to develop a comprehensive theory of influences on mass media content.

Media organizations have developed standardized and institutionalized routines in effectively evaluating their raw material for news, as Shoemaker and Reese (1996) observe. The purpose of these media routines is partly to help editors and reporters meet the needs of the system (e.g., deadlines and media space) and cope with the infinite number of occurrences in the daily world. One way for editors to help manage the flow of information in the newsroom is to classify news stories into various categories: the predictable, the unexpected, the hard and the soft, crime, political, the court, and so on and so forth. Classification or categorization helps editors understand the significance and the newsworthiness of certain events, and thereby helps them choose one story over another.

Research on how editors catalogue news has had a long tradition in mass communication scholarship. One of the earliest and most frequently cited efforts is the classic study of 'Mr. Gates' by David M. White (1950), which examined the criteria media workers use in their selection and display of news stories. Numerous researchers have followed suit and have investigated, either systematically or impressionistically, the process in which editors sort, typify and classify news (e.g., Gieber, 1960; McCombs and Shaw, 1977; Tuchman, 1973; Whitney and Becker, 1982).

Of all the mediating factors and people that shape media content, the news editors are the most immediate gatekeepers in deciding what becomes available to the audience. Their particular news values and judgments are of special significance to our understanding of the process of news selection and articulation. This study, therefore, compares both quantitatively and qualitatively results from annual survey of editors and news directors in Taiwan, Japan and China in their rankings of the top ten world and domestic events from 1992 to 2001.

Media Systems in China, Taiwan and Japan

After Mao's Communist Party took over China in 1949, it put in place a Communist press system – the Communist Party held a monopoly over state power and national resources, including complete control of the press. Substantial changes have taken place in China's media system since the start of economic reforms in the late 1970s. Although the media are still considered ideological apparatuses by the state, they are often caught in deep-seated contradictions between political control by the Party and increasing commercialization of the financial structures of the media system (Ma, 2000; Zhao, 1998). The media often find that they face a daunting task of serving two masters: the Communist Party and the audience.

When Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (KMT) retreated to Taiwan after losing a civil war to Mao's communists in 1949, Taiwan's media were put in tight control under martial law. The media became state ideological organs of repression and cooption in legitimating the KMT authoritarian rule. Since the lift of martial law in 1987, the press has enjoyed increased freedom and journalists have embraced the norms of professionalism as well as the 'watchdog' rhetoric in Western journalism (Lee, 2000).

Although some have classified Japan's media system as Western (e.g., Stevenson, 1994), most scholars tend to think that the idiosyncrasies in its societal, political and journalistic conditions make such a classification very much an oversimplification (e.g., Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000; Krauss, 1996). The end of World War II ended the Japanese authoritarian regime along with its severe restrictions on the press, and witnessed the emergence of the media as a catalyst in the democratization of Japan. Over the years, however, information cartels (Freeman, 2000) and the press club systems (Cooper-Chen, 1997) have not only cultivated a special semiotic relationship between journalists and Diet members (Feldman, 1993), but homogenized news and opinion among mass media as well. Freeman (2000: 21-22) characterizes the role of the press in Japanese politics as that of *coconspirator*: forming close and mutual-beneficiary ties with news sources, excluding outsiders from those ties, and occasionally breaking out of those ties to their own advantage.

The media systems in mainland China, Taiwan and Japan provide interesting cases for comparison – Japan and Taiwan represent a free and independent press arrangement whereas China enforces a quasi-authoritarian-Communist media philosophy. At the same time, the deep-rooted cultural affinity and the long-time political animosity between mainland China and Taiwan have made their relationship a love-and-hate one.

The news agencies chosen for this study, Xinhua, Central News and Kyodo, are ideal for comparison because of their manifold commonalities: each is the largest and most influential news agency in its own country/territory, and they all offer wire news services to a variety of domestic and global clients in multiple languages. China's Xinhua News Agency, founded in 1931 by the Chinese Communist Party, is the largest news collection and distribution center in China. It has stations in all major Chinese cities as well as 100-plus nations/territories worldwide. In addition to providing domestic and world news services to clients globally, Xinhua also publishes over 40 newspapers and news magazines in seven languages (Xinhua News Agency, 2002).

Xinhua's Taiwanese counterpart, the Central News Agency, was established in 1924 by the Chinese Nationalists (KMT) and obtained its legal status as the single national news agency in Taiwan in 1995. Its domestic and world news services are the major source of news for electronic and print media in Taiwan; besides, it also has partnership agreement with more than 20 news agencies globally and has services in English and Spanish (Central News Agency, 2002).

The Kyodo News Service matches every aspect of Xinhua and Central News. Founded in 1945 after the end of World War II, Kyodo is now a cooperative organized by 63 major newspapers and NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corp.) (Cooper-Chen, 1997: 71-81). Its Japanese domestic

news service serves nearly 100 national news agencies and is a formidable agenda-setter for the Japanese news media. It also has bureaus in a host of countries and its world service distributes daily stories in English and Spanish worldwide.

The Rankings of the Top Ten World and Domestic Events and Data Gathering

Over the years, the three news agencies have routinely conducted annual surveys of news editors and executives on what they think are the top ten domestic and world events of the year as each year draws to an end. Although the exact numbers of editors polled may vary from year to year, the results have been quite consistent for the period under investigation for all three agencies.

Xinhua's annual survey of top domestic and international events polls editors-in-chief of about a dozen Beijing-based newspapers as well as its own editors. In a like manner, the Central News Agency's annual poll is conducted among editors-in-chief, news department heads and executives of Taiwan's news organizations including itself. Kyodo conducts its annual survey by polling its own senior editors as well as those from its member newspapers and subscriber organizations on what they consider to be the most important items of the year on the domestic and global news lists. The procedures followed and the subjects surveyed by each agency are quite similar and their results are remarkably comparable.

Starting from 1997, Central News Agency survey has also contained a ranking of the top ten mainland Chinese stories of the year. The results of this survey have been included in the following comparisons between Taiwanese editors' votes and those by their mainland counterparts on the rankings of mainland China-related events.

Data for this study was collected from the annual survey results published by the Xinhua News Agency, the Central News Agency, and the Kyodo News Service for a 10-year period covering 1992 to 2001. Both the rankings of top domestic events and world news items were included in the data gathering. For Taiwan's Central News Agency, as just mentioned, we also included its surveys on what were the top ten mainland Chinese events. We were able to collect data for all the chosen ten years for both Xinhua and Kyodo, but not for Central News. Survey results from Central News on what made the top ten world events were only available for four years: 1993, 1999, 2000, and 2001. Also available for four years was data for its surveys on the top ten mainland Chinese events, from 1998 to 2001. The most complete data set for Central News was its rankings of the top domestic events, which covered six years (1993, 1997 to 2001). This is an unfortunate drawback because lack of data for some years may hinder us from detecting some consistent or peculiar patterns in the following comparisons. We have decided to include the data, incomplete as it was, from Central News for our subsequent inter-media analysis, because we think that they can still provide interesting comparisons for the relevant years they cover. The readers, therefore, are advised to bear this in mind when interpreting the findings involving the Central News Agency.

Purpose of This Study and Data Coding

Tai (2000) compared the rankings of the top ten world events from 1988 to 1998 by news sources from eight countries and found some interesting cross-national similarities and differences. In a sense, the present study is a continuation of Tai's effort with a specific Asian emphasis as well as an extension of it by including the rankings of the top ten domestic events. This inclusion is a significant addition because editors may display different sets of news judgments in their dealings with home news and world events.

In a broad sense, this study intends to examine the deviance and congruence of each news agency in its rankings of top news events both in the domestic context and at the global stage. Every year, the selections of the top ten world events by all three news services are made out of the same pool of international events; comparisons between them, then, should reveal the particular news values of the news agencies in evaluating

these events. For domestic events, however, the above is no longer true because the voting of the top ten events is conducted from a pool of news occurrences unique to each country/territory by its news agency from year to year. Nonetheless, the specificities of events for each news agency should not lead us to the conclusion that some persistent patterns cannot be detected. Instead, a different set of commonalities or differences may be revealed from comparing these events from agency to agency. Cataloguing of news stories, as we have highlighted in the literature review, is one common practice in the newsroom by editors to make sense of the news world through their own lenses.

In analyzing the pool of events that were collected for this study, each item was content analyzed for inter-agency comparison. This content analysis was performed both quantitatively by counting the number of certain types of stories and qualitatively by looking at the news frame of each particular event within a broader socio-political context. The specific criteria adopted for findings in each of the following tables will become obvious in the next section.

Findings and Discussions

The three wire services displayed a remarkable similarity in their attention to the various regions of the world in their rankings of world news events. As might be expected, they all place an overwhelming emphasis on news originating from or involving Asian-Pacific countries: 40 percent of all world stories mentioned by the Central News Agency and the Xinhua News Agency were Asia-Pacific-related, while 38 percent of global stories ranked by the Kyodo News Service focused on the same region. Obviously, geographical proximity is the most important determinant in the selection of top news events among all three news agencies – editors have good reasons to be attentive to what is happening in their vicinities. The patterns in geographical distribution of world news events that were ranked important for all three news services are reported in Table 1.

Closely trailing behind Asia-Pacific was North America in terms of the frequency of mentions by all three agencies: 35 percent of all stories from the Central News Agency, 29 percent for Kyodo News Agency, and 31 percent of all Xinhua news items directly involved North America as a major player. Specifically, all those North America-related stories featured the United States either as a single or principal newsmaker. Clearly, the status of the United States as a sole superpower in world geopolitics has made its presence felt in the Asian news arena.

Other stories that were of some interest to the Asian news services involved events in Europe or those of a global nature. Latin America was the region most likely to be ignored: it was mentioned only once by Xinhua for a period of ten years (i.e., the return of Panama Canal to Panama by the U.S. in 1999) probably because of the involvement of the United States, and the three mentions by the Japanese Kyodo News Service seemed to be skewed cases, too – one was the devastating natural disasters in Latin America of 1998 and two others were about the start (1996) and end (1997) of the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Lima, Peru.

It is worth noticing here that all three news agencies have displayed a varying degree of self-centeredness, that is, attention to events directly involving the nation the news service serves. Eleven percent, or 11 out of the 100 world stories ranked by Kyodo involved a direct role played by Japan, and China was explicitly mentioned in 24 percent, or 24 out of the 100 world news items listed by Xinhua. For Taiwan, it was a little

Table 1: Regions of Focus*

	Central News Agency	Kyodo News Service	Xinhua News Agency
Africa	2.5%	4.0%	9.0%

Asia-Pacific	40.0%	38.0%	40.0%
Europe	12.5%	16.0%	14.0%
Former Soviet Republics	7.5%	11.0%	8.0%
Latin America	0%	3.0%	1.0%
Middle East	2.5%	6.0%	10.0%
North America	35.0%	29.0%	31.0%
United Nations/Global	25.0%	14.0%	21.0%

Note

* Totals add up to more than 100% because of coding procedure. When news events involve more than one region, they are coded to cover multiple regions. So for the 1999 story in which the United States and China reached the WTO deal, it is coded to have involved two regions: Asia-Pacific and North America.

deviant, with only five percent, or two items of all 40 world news events ranked by Central News directly involving Taiwan. However, because of the special geopolitical relations between Taiwan and mainland China, Central News displayed a substantial interest in news in which China played a part: 17.5 percent (seven out of 40) of all world events ranked by Central News Service were China-related.

It is insightful to see not only how often a news agency ranks self-related events, but also what are the specific self-related stories that are included in the rankings. For the period of ten years under study, the Chinese Xinhua News Agency, as reported above, mentioned most frequently self-related news events. Dominating the China-related world news events on Xinhua's list were those about Chinese diplomacy or China's involvement in international/regional organizations. Together they made up 62.5 percent of all Xinhua's mentions of China. Apparently, this is consistent with China's self-projected image of an international power in world politics and diplomacy. Top on the list of China's diplomatic activities were China-U.S. bilateral relations, which were specifically mentioned in 60 percent (six out of ten stories) of China's diplomatic efforts. The Xinhua News Agency was attentive to all trends in China-U.S. relations, in good (e.g., Clinton's visit to China in 1998 and Jiang Zemin's trip to the U.S.) as well as bad times (e.g., deterioration in China-U.S. relations after Lee Teng-Hui was granted a private visit to the United States in 1995). China's involvement in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forums and informal meetings as a major participant was seen by Xinhua to be an arena for China's global/regional influence (four out of five stories in the global/regional organization category).

The past decade also witnessed China's intensified effort to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Xinhua devoted a fair amount of space to a series of events related to China's negotiation process – the China-U.S. WTO deal reached in 1999 after 13 years of tough bargaining, the granting of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status to China in 2000 by the United States as an immediate result of the China-U.S. WTO deal, and China's eventual accession to the WTO in 2001. At the same time, two significant events that were perceived to boost China's national pride worldwide were the return of Hong Kong (1997) and Macao (1999) to Chinese sovereignty. Expectedly, both were featured prominently by the official Chinese Xinhua's News Agency.

Of special significance is Xinhua's inclusion of two purely domestic events in its rankings of world news events: the decision by the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of China to adopt capitalist-style economic reforms while keeping firm political control (1992) and a similar decision by the Chinese Communist Party's 14 th Central Committee to build a 'socialist market economy' (1993). Both had to do with the changing ideology of the ruling Chinese Communist Party at a time of international isolation after the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989. At the delicate moment when there was a widespread speculation that China might revert to the politics of the Mao Tse-Tung era, these two postures by the CPC were gestures to the world that it would continue its market-oriented reforms. Xinhua was not to miss the opportunity to propagandize these moves to the world by putting them in its top world event lists.

In the limited number of years for which data were available for Taiwan's Central News Agency, two Taiwan-related events were listed among the top world event lists: the devastating earthquake in Taiwan in 1999, along with those that struck Colombia, Turkey and Greece in the same year, and the APEC ministerial meeting of 1993, which, the Central News Agency specifically pointed out, was attended by delegates dispatched by the Taiwanese government. Considering Taiwan's sustained efforts to gain international recognition over the years, making official appearance at such an important occasion as the APEC was too significant a breakthrough to be ignored by its national news agency.

Of special interest to the Japanese Kyodo News Service are, first of all, global terrorist activities that directly involved Japanese victims. Kyodo included three such events in its top ten world event lists over the past ten years: armed guerrillas' holding of several hundred hostages at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru (1996), the end of the Lima hostage crisis (1997), and the hostage crisis in central Asia (1999), in which four Japanese were abducted along with three Kyrgyz nationals. Next on its list were activities sponsored by global organizations in which Japan took an active part: the APEC summit meeting of 1992 and the Kyoto climate conference of 1997. Also on the list were economic/financial turmoils, which included the widespread Asian economic crisis of 1998 and the Asian currency crisis of 1997, the combination of which put Japan into the longest recession after World War II. Other Japan-related news events included the fire of a rocket over Japan by North Korea (1998), the abnormal weather patterns (1997) and the U.S. pullout from the Kyoto Protocol (2001).

It is illuminating to see how China, Japan and Taiwan are mentioned not only by their own news services, but by news from other national settings as well. For the sake of comparison, this paper has also investigated how the above nations were perceived by news sources other than its own. Table 2 lists results from the rankings of events in relation to a nation/territory by its own agency and other news services.

How each news service ranked events related to its own nation has been analyzed in the previous paragraphs. The focal point here is in what ways China, Japan and Taiwan were of interest to each other's news services. First, China's international diplomacy seemed to be recognized by both Central News and Kyodo, and China's WTO bid was also considered by both to be of significance. Kyodo, however, also featured the death of the late Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1997 in its top ten list of that year. China's military power caught the attention of both Central News and Kyodo, but in different ways – the Japanese news source was interested in the Chinese nuclear tests in 1996 while its Taiwanese counterpart followed closely the mid-air collision between a

Table 2: How Each News Agency Looks at its Own Nation/Territory and Others

Categories of News	China-Related Stories by Central	China-Related Stories by Kyodo	China-Related Stories by Xinhua	Taiwan-Related Stories by Xinhua	Taiwan-Related Stories by Kyodo	Taiwan-Related Stories by Central	Japan-Related Stories by Xinhua	Japan-Related Stories by Central	Japan-Related Stories by Kyodo
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Domestic politics/law		12.5%	8.3%				14.3%		
Diplomacy/visits/talks	14.3%	37.5%	41.7%	100%		50%	14.3%		9.1%
Scandals/corruptions									
Elections/campaigns					66.7%		14.3%	100%	
UN/int'l organizations	14.3%		20.8%			50%			18.2%
WTO/GATT/trade	14.3%	12.5%	12.5%						
Finance/economy			4.2%				42.9%		18.2%
Celebrities/elites									
Natural disasters/accidents		12.5%			33.3%		14.3%		
Violence/terrorism/crime									27.3%
Military/war/conflict	14.3%	12.5%							9.1%
Science/technology/space			8.3%						
Health/environment									18.2%
Sports	28.6%	12.5%							
Other	14.3%		4.2%						
Total N	7	8	24	5	3	2	7	1	11

U.S. surveillance aircraft and a mainland Chinese fighter jet in 2001. The reasons should be obvious: the Japanese have always been an adamant opponent of nuclear tests worldwide, and the mid-air collision was a result of the U.S. effort to monitor Chinese military exercise along the coast with Taiwan as the primary imaginary target. Both Central News and Kyodo gave prominence to Beijing's winning bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games (2001). When the Chinese exiled writer and political dissident, Gao Xingjian, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, it was a historic breakthrough for Chinese literature. This event made to the top ten list of Taiwan's Central News only; however, it was not even covered by the mainstream state-controlled media in mainland China, let alone considered a top news event by Xinhua.

Both Kyodo and Xinhua only showed a limited interest in Taiwan-related events. From 1992 to 2001, Kyodo's 'Top Ten' lists included the Taiwan direct presidential elections of 1996 and 2000, and the deadly earthquake in Taiwan in 1999. The Chinese Xinhua's interest on Taiwan was heavily focused on policies concerning cross-strait relations and bilateral talks between mainland China and the island (four out of five stories). The only other event was the Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui's private visit to the United States in 1995, and even that was framed in the U.S.-China-Taiwan diplomatic triangular context. Because the mainland government considers Taiwan to be a renegade province, Xinhua's mentions of Taiwan mainly occurred in its top ten lists of domestic events (e.g., cross-strait relations and talks), unless a third party became involved (i.e., Lee's U.S. tour in 1995 was the only item making the top ten world event list).

The election of Morihiro Hosokawa as Prime Minister of Japan and the formation of a new coalition government to end 38 years of Liberal Democratic rule in 1993 made to the top ten world event list of both Taiwan's Central News and China's Xinhua. This major shift in Japanese politics was considered to be of global influence. As the second largest economy in the world, the Japanese financial and economic ups and downs have an enormous impact worldwide and have been closely followed by Xinhua. Three such events in which Japan was a major player, the U.S. dollar's drastic slide against the Japanese yen (1995), and the financial crisis first in Southeast Asia (1997) and then throughout Asia (1998), were listed as top ten world events by Xinhua. Although there might not be anything unusual in Xinhua's inclusion of the powerful earthquake in West Japan which incurred over five thousand deaths in 1995 and the Japanese role in the meeting of East Asian leaders in 1997, its listing of a Japanese domestic event in which Japanese Prime Minister visited the Yasukuni Shrine where the tablets of 14 class-A war criminals are housed is noteworthy. Asian nations have been vigilant upon Japan's political orientations because of its war history with its neighbors, and the listing of this event reflects a significant part of Asian geopolitics.

This study next examines to what extent the three news agencies converged in their rankings of top world events over the years. Because the three news agencies' selections of the top ten world events were made by polled editors from the same pools of global events from year to year, any consensus or dissension on the part of each agency must have been attributable to its particular stance on issues or its particular news values. The findings are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Inter-Agency Agreement on the Top Ten World Events

(Mean out of a Total of Ten)

	Central News Agency	Kyodo News Service	Xinhua News Agency
Central News Agency	10.0		
Kyodo News Service	6.13 (1.49)	10.0	
Xinhua News Agency	5.88 (1.55)	4.40 * (1.76)	10.0

Note

* If calculation is based on data from Xinhua and Kyodo corresponding to the four years for which data was available for Central News (i.e., 1993, 1999-2001), the agreement between Xinhua and Kyodo turns to be a mean of 5.50 and a standard deviation of 1.0.

As shown in the table, among three news agencies, the most agreement can be found between Taiwan's Central News and the Japanese Kyodo, with a mean of 6.13 out of ten ranked events and a standard deviation of 1.49. The least agreement is between Xinhua and Kyodo, which has a mean of 4.40 and standard deviation of 1.76. However, it should again be borne in mind that data was not available for all the ten years under study for Central News. It might be the case that the four years for which data existed were somewhat different from other years. To test that, we performed another calculation for the agreement value between Xinhua and Kyodo by including only the years corresponding to the four years of Central News for which we had data (i.e. 1993, 1999, 2000 and 2001). Indeed, the above hunch proves to be correct. The new mean for the agreement between Xinhua and Kyodo thus calculated becomes 5.50 with a standard deviation of 1.0.

As mentioned in the literature review, how editors process news is essentially a matter of classification of various news types. In classifying news stories editors exercise their value judgments to evaluate the newsworthiness and significance of specific events. In order to understand the news values of the three Asian news agencies, therefore, the ranked events by the three news services are categorized into different news types. This categorization includes the rankings of both world events and domestic news items. The results are tabulated in Table 4.

As demonstrated in the table, all three news services displayed a different pattern between their treatment of domestic news and international events. In their rankings of world news events, all of them paid a fair amount of attention to domestic politics of global and regional powers, international diplomacy, military conflicts and warfare, financial and economic activities, elections, and international organizations such as the U.N. and the WTO. A deviance on the part of Central News was the unique amount of

Table 4: Categories of World and Domestic News Events

Ranked in the 'Top Ten' Lists

Types of News	Central-World	Central-Domestic	Kyodo-World	Kyodo-Domestic	Xinhua-World	Xinhua-Domestic
Domestic politics/law	10.0%	25.0%	8.0%	16.0%	8.0%	21%
Diplomacy/visits/talks	10.0%	13.3%	18.0%	3.0%	18.0%	15.0%
Scandals/corruptions	0%	1.7%	3.0%	11.0%	1.0%	3.0%
Elections/campaigns	7.5%	11.7%	11.0%	5.0%	7.0%	2.0%
UN/int'l organizations	7.5%	1.7%	6.0%	2.0%	15.0%	3.0%
WTO/GATT/trade	10.0%	3.3%	4.0%	3.0%	7.0%	4.0%
Finance/economy	10.0%	5.0%	8.0%	17.0%	9.0%	19.0%
Celebrities/elites	2.5%	0%	2.0%	4.0%	0%	3.0%
Natural disasters/accidents	5.0%	15.0%	5.0%	9.0%	6.0%	2.0%
Violence/terrorism/crime	2.5%	8.3%	8.0%	8.0%	7.0%	0%

Military/war/conflict	12.5%	0%	16.0%	4.0%	14.0%	5.0%
Science/technology/space	15.0%	0%	2.0%	2.0%	6.0%	5.0%
Health/environment	2.5%	8.3%	5.0%	8.0%	2.0%	3.0%
Sports	5.0%	0%	4.0%	7.0%	0%	6.0%
Other	0%	6.7%	0%	1.0%	0%	10.0%
Total (N)	40	60	100	100	100	101*

Notes

* The total for Xinhua's domestic news events is 101 due to a tie with the last item in 1994.

Explanation of terms:

Central-World: Top ten world events ranked by the Central News Agency, Taiwan, 1993, 1999-2001.

Central-Domestic: Top ten domestic events ranked by the Central News Agency, Taiwan, 1993, 1997-2001.

Kyodo-World: Top ten world events ranked by the Kyodo News Service, Japan, 1992-2001.

Kyodo-Domestic: Top ten domestic events ranked by the Kyodo News Service, Japan, 1992-2001.

Xinhua-World: Top ten world events ranked by the Xinhua News Agency, China, 1992-2001.

Xinhua-Domestic: Top ten domestic events ranked by the Xinhua News Agency, China, 1992-2001.

space it gave to news events related to science and technology, such as (the anticipated Y2K computer problems in 1999 and the subsequent nonoccurrence of these problems in 2000), progress in human genome research (1999, 2000, 2001), and the cloning of the first human embryo (2001).

As far as domestic news is concerned, domestic politics topped the lists of both Central News and Xinhua, and came up second on Kyodo's list. Diplomacy was also a hot topic for Central News and Xinhua, but not for Kyodo. Natural disasters and elections also frequented the top ten lists of Central News, while Kyodo's distinctive obsession with scandals and official corruptions was evident. There has been a long history for the Japanese media to ferret out and expose official wrongdoings and incompetence over the decades, as Farley (1996) showed. Once a scandal breaks out, the Japanese media follow the development in painstaking detail day in and day out. Covering scandals is an important function of the press in a democracy like Japan, because 'scandals are essential for the media to make their self-proclaimed role of watchdog more than merely nominal' (Farley, 1996: 146).

Both Kyodo and Xinhua kept a close eye on financial and economic matters (17% and 19% of all stories respectively), but with a significant subtle difference in their approaches: while the Japanese news agency focused heavily on slides in the financial market and economic recessions, its Chinese counterpart almost exclusively gave prominence to what was good and promising – economic booms, growth in foreign exchange reserves and gains in stock investments. This contrast extended to other areas of coverage as well. Indeed, a noteworthy difference between China's Xinhua and the two news services from Taiwan and Japan was the 'good news' or 'bad news' syndrome. Xinhua's selections of its top ten domestic events leaned heavily toward the positive aspects of events while Central News and Kyodo placed a strong emphasis on the negativity of stories. Coding from the nature of the events and the language that was used to frame those stories, this study identifies 45.5 percent of Xinhua's chosen domestic stories as positive ones, and 10.9 percent as negative. Following the same coding procedure, the reverse is found to be true with Kyodo and Central News: 54 percent of Kyodo's mentions were stories with a clear negative tone and 10 percent of them had some positive flavor whereas Central News

listed 40 percent negative events and 18.3 percent positive ones. Since the three news agencies represent two totally distinctive journalistic systems – the state-owned/operated Xinhua on the one hand, and the independent, free Central News and Kyodo on the other, this difference can be called the system difference. In addition, this research also identifies a good proportion of what Stevenson (1988) calls ‘protocol news’ among Xinhua’s listed events; stories about goings, speeches, visits, tours, and meetings of Chinese state and Communist Party leaders made up about 34 percent of top Chinese domestic events ranked by Xinhua. By contrast, similar types of stories constituted 10 percent and 13.3 percent of the total for Kyodo and Central News respectively.

In Table 2, comparisons were made between the mentions of mainland China, Japan and Taiwan by their own and others’ news agencies in the rankings of top world events. For each country/territory, it is also interesting to find out if those same events that hit the top ten lists of news agencies from another country/territory were also included in the top event lists by its own news agency. Since data was incomplete for Taiwan’s Central News for the ten years under investigation, we here only perform a comparative analysis between Xinhua and Kyodo.

As reported in Table 2, Kyodo mentioned eight China-related events whereas Xinhua included seven Japan-related stories over the 1992-2001 period. For the eight Kyodo-listed stories concerning China, seven were also included in Xinhua’s top domestic or world events. Interestingly, in its top event lists, Kyodo also agreed with Xinhua on six out of the seven Xinhua-mentioned stories about Japan. Thus there was a great consensus about the news values of most events between Kyodo and Xinhua. Yet the miss by either Xinhua or Kyodo may have significant implications for us to understand the particular newsworthiness or newsunworthiness assigned to it. The Japanese story called attention to by Xinhua but excluded by Kyodo was the Yasukuni Shrine visit by the Japanese prime minister in 1996; the Chinese story followed by Kyodo but dismissed by Xinhua from its top ten list was the nuclear tests conducted by China in 1996 before the U.N. passage of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). It might not be a coincidence that each news agency tried to avoid domestic events that would prove offensive to others.

How the Taiwan-based Central News Agency looked at mainland China is better reflected in its rankings of the top ten mainland news stories, which it started in 1998. Our subsequent analysis is based on the data for four years from 1988 through 2001. As can be seen from Table 5, Central News understandably paid a great deal of attention to stories concerning mainland-Taiwan relations, with 37.5 percent of all stories devoted to this topic. Next on the topic, quite naturally, was military movements by Taiwan’s long-time foe. Since the mainland has threatened to use force against Taiwan if the island

Table 5: Mainland China-related Events Ranked by the Central News Agency
(1998-2001)

News Categories	N	Percentage
Cross-strait relations/policies	15	37.5%
Military/defense	6	15.0%
Internal politics	3	7.5%
China-US/China-Japan relations	3	7.5%
WTO bid	2	5.0%
Hong Kong/Macao	2	5.0%
Religion	2	5.0%
Sports	1	2.5%

APEC	1	2.5%
Transportation	1	2.5%
Corruption	1	2.5%
Natural disaster	1	2.5%
Finance	1	2.5%
Space	1	2.5%
Total	40	100%

declares independence, any flexing of the mainland's military muscle may be of particular interest to Taiwan's news media. We have also compared the Central News Agency's lists of top mainland stories with those by the news agency from the mainland, Xinhua, for the corresponding four years to determine how much they saw eye to eye with each other. It turns out that the agreement averaged to 4.4 out of ten events, less than the mean for their agreement on world events (which was 5.88, we may recall from Table 3). It should be no wonder that Central News and Xinhua, more often than not, followed different events that took place in the mainland on their agenda.

Concluding Remarks

This study has compared the rankings of the top ten world and domestic events from 1992 to 2001 by three Asian news agencies: the Central News Agency from Taiwan, the Kyodo News Service from Japan, and the Xinhua News Agency from mainland China. Since these three agencies hold an enormous influence on the news profession in the territories of their location, the particular patterns or idiosyncrasies revealed in the comparison are helpful in our understanding of the news values or guidelines that each news service follows in its approach to news events.

Consistent with the findings of many past studies in international communication research, all the three Asian news services displayed a similar pattern in their selections of global news stories involving the different geographic locations in the world. Asia came first on the lists of all three agencies, with North America dominated by U.S.-related stories trailing closely behind. Also of interest to the Asian news agencies were events with a global impact, and Europe-related stories had a fair share of attention. The area most neglected by the Asian news services was Latin America, while Africa and the Middle East were only mentioned quite infrequently.

China's official Xinhua News Agency was the most likely to include self-related events in its top ten world event lists, while Taiwan's Central News Agency was the least likely to do so. International diplomacy and involvement dominated the lists of China-related stories for both Xinhua and Kyodo, whereas the Japanese financial ups and downs topped the list of Xinhua's world events in which Japan played a part. Leading Kyodo's Japan-related world news stories were international terrorism and crime involving Japanese victims, although it also paid attention to the financial market, health and environmental issues, and Japanese participation in global/regional organizations. Xinhua's interest in Taiwan, China's long-time political rival, focused solely on cross-strait talks and relations. The significant amount of attention by Central News to mainland Chinese policies and moves in cross-strait relations and military muscle-flexing was clearly demonstrated in its rankings of the top ten mainland Chinese news events.

All three news agencies showed a difference between their evaluations of domestic and world events. Hot international topics for all three agencies were diplomacy, war/conflicts, financial and economic affairs. Their rankings of domestic events, however, differed considerably from each other, although internal politics topped the domestic event lists of all three. Central News resembled Xinhua in the amount of attention to diplomacy and state visits, and Kyodo and Xinhua gave almost equal salience to financial and economic events. Central News stood out in its mentions of natural disasters as top domestic events, while Kyodo was the only one to single out political scandals and corruptions prominently in its home

news stories. The ideological imprint of Xinhua, on the other hand, was unmistakably shown in its systematic focus on 'protocol news' and glamorous achievements by the Party-state.

Findings from this study of news values, we hope, have cast light on our understanding of how editors and news executives interpret and make sense of the world within the nation-state framework. However, the present study is limited by the incompleteness of data from the Central News Agency for the ten years under investigation. Thus, the previous findings and analysis with Central News should be interpreted with caution. Moreover, the survey results with the three news agencies only reflected the opinions of news editors and executives, and might differ from the actual coverage of those events by these agencies. The congruence of what editors think are important and how the news organizations cover these events should be an interesting topic for future research.

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