Louisa Ha and Lars Willnat (Eds.), **The U.S.–China Trade War: Global News Framing and Public Opinion in the Digital Age**, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022, 244 pp., $49.95 (paperback).

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Thinking about the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, the most salient image for many is the COVID-19 pandemic, or, more specifically, its location of origin in the city of Wuhan. However, this accounts for only a small fraction of the tension between the two countries. Despite increased efforts on both sides over the last 50 years, the political and economic relationship between the United States and China has always been difficult. In more recent years, tensions have grown due to the countries' disagreement on a variety of key issues related to global leadership, trade relations, and power. At the center of these tensions were topics such as military spending, intellectual property theft, and cybersecurity threats. In 2018, growing disputes, in addition to a volatile combination of government leaders, with Donald Trump on one side and Xi Jinping on the other, culminated in what *The New York Times* (2018) called the "biggest trade war in economic history."

The Sino–U.S. trade war, which officially started in January 2018 when then-president Donald Trump imposed the first of many tariffs on Chinese imports (Liu, 2020), has sparked interest among researchers across a variety of disciplines, from business and economics to discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and media effects analyses. **The U.S.–China Trade War: Global News Framing and Public Opinion in the Digital Age**, edited by Louisa Ha and Lars Willnat, is a collection of research studies that, in combination, provide a comparative analysis of the trade war's media coverage in both the United States and China. The analyses include traditional news media coverage, as well as the interaction with user-generated social media content and its effects on public opinion.

The editors open the introduction with an overview of the events leading up to the trade war, as well as a timeline of the "phase one" key events (January 22, 2018–January 15, 2020). Setting the tone for the following chapters, the authors try to incorporate a variety of perspectives in their discussion of how the governments, their politicians, and the media of both countries framed the trade war narrative. The book is divided into three parts, with three chapters each. Part 1 focuses on the analysis of political and economic contexts leading up to the trade war, Part 2 examines how traditional news and user-generated content affected Americans' perception of the trade war, and Part 3 analyzes how Chinese media outlets covered the trade war, how Chinese social media users discussed and framed the issue, and how both social media and news media coverage differed between the United States and China.
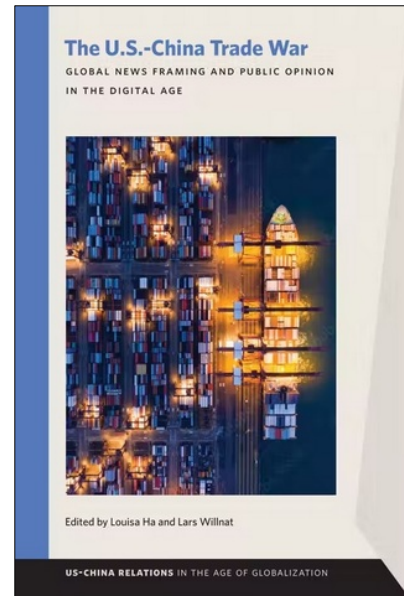
In Part 1, Steven Beckman and Stephen J. Hartnett (chapter 1), Hamilton Bean (chapter 2), and Lars Willnat, Shuo Tang, Jian Shi, and Ning Zhan (chapter 3) respectively review the recent economic history of the two countries and their progression through the three stages of international trade theory; conduct a transnational rhetorical analysis, demonstrating the media's use of foreign investment reporting to perpetuate a xenophobic threat narrative; and analyze empirical data of two national surveys that demonstrate how media exposure and preexisting beliefs and stereotypes shape people's opinion about the trade war.

Part 2 focuses on media coverage and effects within the United States. Rik Ray and Yanqin Lu (chapter 4) analyze how traditional news media frame their coverage of the trade war and to what extent their reporting adheres to professional journalistic norms. Louisa Ha, Rik Ray, Frankline Matanji, and Yang Yang (chapter 6) complement this with their investigation of secondhand news sharing via Twitter. Contrary to what was expected, influencers, rather than bots, were identified as the main source for biased content, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. In chapter 5, Ruonan Zhang, Louisa Ha, and Nicky Chang Bi focus again on the public's perception of the trade war, this time in relation to media exposure and their preexisting beliefs. The authors' approach was particularly interesting because their survey questions differentiated between Americans' attitudes toward mainland Chinese people and Chinese immigrants living in the United States.

Part 3 arguably provides the most novel contribution. It examines how the Chinese news media framed the trade war narrative, how the public engaged in discussions on social media, and how these differ between the two countries involved in the trade war. Peiqin Chen and Ke Guo (chapter 7) discuss their content analysis of four major Chinese media outlets, including television, traditional newspaper, tabloid, and a news app. Louisa Ha, Yang Yang, Rik Ray, Frankline Matanji, Peiqin Chen, Ke Guo, and Nan Lyu (chapter 8) then draw a direct comparison between Chinese and U.S. news media. Multiple coders from universities in China and the United States were involved so that sources from both countries' major news outlets could be analyzed in their original languages. Louisa Ha, Peiqin Chen, Ke Guo, and Nan Lyu (chapter 9) complete the cross-cultural comparison with an analysis of influencers' and regular social media users' discussion of the trade war on Weibo (the Chinese equivalent to Twitter). Due to the absence of bots, the goal of the analysis was to identify potential differences in opinion between influencers and regular users, and to see if the platform allows for a more diverse perspective compared to the one presented by CCP-controlled news media outlets.

Each chapter is a stand-alone research project but also a well-integrated piece in this collection's research narrative. Seventeen scholars from universities across the United States and China drew on data from three national surveys, three content analyses, computational topic modelling, and rhetorical analysis. This multifaceted approach to research and data analysis is one of the book's main strengths. It may seem self-evident to include authors from both countries in a cross-national analysis. However, research examining the Chinese media system, especially in comparison to U.S. media, rarely incorporates a non-Western perspective. This often results in a distorted image of the Chinese media, "treat[ing] the leadership of the CCP as propagandistic [. . .] while ignoring its role of providing information and checking corruption" (Chen & Guo, 2022, p. 160).

This latter point is particularly interesting for the comparison of Chinese and U.S. social media content. Considering a spectrum with varying levels of freedom of speech and press, the United States and China are located on opposite ends, each with its own unique challenges. One such challenge of mostly

unregulated social media is the spreading of misinformed and misleading content, which is even more impactful when distributed by popular influencers. In Ha and colleagues' analysis of trade war–related tweets, two of the three most retweeted posts involved conspiracy theories created by influencers. In contrast to U.S. influencers, who tend to share their opinions and interpretations of events, the analysis of Weibo posts revealed that Chinese influencers predominantly share posts to distribute information, without adding any opinion or personal commentary.

In addition to a more nuanced analysis of the Chinese media ecosystem and its role in shaping the public's opinion on international events like the trade war, this book offers a new perspective on the competing yet complementary roles of traditional and user-generated news. Social media's contribution to news-sharing is generally viewed as misleading, misinformed, and nonfactual, and by supporters of traditional media considered a poor alternative to traditional news consumption. However, the research presented in this book identifies a more complex dynamic.

On the one side, traditional news media in both China and the United States based their reporting predominantly on government sources and often mirrored their respective government's point of view. As the trade war progressed, the partisan news outlets in the United States began to shift their focus away from reporting about the two countries' economic disputes, and instead toward the narrative of a political feud between the nations' leaders and the journalists' respective support or disagreement with the current administration.

On the other side, while mainstream media were still the most frequently cited source on both Weibo and Twitter, the platforms provided a much more diverse perspective, with both supporters and critics of the trade war voicing their opinion. Contrary to the unidirectional approach to news-sharing by traditional media, social media provides people with a network of users who share their different political ideologies and opinions. This mechanism of uncontrolled information flow does lead to the distribution of misinformation and conspiracy theories, but at least within the context of the U.S.–China trade war, social media users from both countries were less nationalistic and showed more positive opinions toward the other country than their respective government-informed media outlets.

While the chapters in this edition focus on the U.S.–China trade war, their findings have much larger applications for the role of professional journalists in a time shaped by growing international trade relations and a continuous move toward globalization. Both professional and user-generated media significantly influence the public's understanding of foreign affairs and their attitudes toward international relations.

References

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