



Ownership Structures and Ideological Framing in Asian News Media: A Comparison of Marxist and Libertarian Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

News reporting is shaped not only by journalistic practices but also by the institutional and ideological environments in which media organisations operate. While earlier scholarships have examined news sources in relation to media use, cultural practices, political influence, and specific cases, comparatively less attention has been given to how ownership structures affect the selection and representation of news sources. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between media ownership, ideological orientation, and source selection through a comparative analysis of Marxist and libertarian media systems. Mongolia and China offer a valuable comparative setting because of their contrasting political structures and media environments. The study examines a selected daily newspaper from Mongolia, representing a comparatively liberal and market-oriented press environment, alongside a Chinese daily newspaper operating within a state-oriented Marxist media framework. The comparison focuses on the diversity, prominence, and orientation of sources used in news coverage. The findings indicate clear differences in sourcing practices between the two media systems. The Mongolian newspaper demonstrates greater diversity of sources, with comparatively broader representation of public, institutional, and independent voices. In contrast, the Chinese newspaper relies more heavily on government officials, state institutions, and other authorised sources, resulting in a narrower source structure. Overall, the study suggests that media ownership and ideological frameworks play an important role in determining whose perspectives enter news discourse and how information is presented to audiences.

KEYWORDS: Media Ownership; News Source Selection; Libertarian Press; Marxist Media; Ideological Orientation; Government Sources; News Discourse; Media Systems

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the way people encounter, interpret, and evaluate news. Information now circulates through newspapers, online platforms, social networks, and other digital channels at an unprecedented pace. Alongside these opportunities, however, the spread of unverified claims, anonymous content, and information without clear sources has created growing concerns about credibility and public trust. In this environment, established newspapers continue to present themselves as sources of verified and professionally produced information. Nevertheless, news organisations do not simply reproduce events as they occur. The selection of sources, the prominence given to voices, and the way statements are incorporated into news stories can influence how audiences understand an issue. These practices become particularly important when media organisations operate within different ownership structures and ideological systems [1].

News sources occupy a central position in the construction

of journalistic narratives. A source does not merely supply information to a journalist; it can also influence the interpretation, emphasis, and direction of a news story. The choice of who is invited to speak, whose account receives greater prominence, and which perspectives are excluded can affect the boundaries of public discussion. Hall and colleagues argued that powerful social actors frequently act as “primary definers” of events by providing interpretations that journalists subsequently incorporate into news reports. In this sense, journalism is not an entirely independent process of describing reality but involves selecting, evaluating, and organising information obtained from different social actors [1]. This perspective has encouraged scholars to examine news production as a process in which access to the media is closely connected with the distribution of social and political power. The study of news sources has consequently developed into an important area within journalism, mass communication, sociology, and media studies. Research has examined how journalists identify potential sources, assess their credibility, establish relationships with them, and decide

which voices should appear in published reports. Cottle [2] notes that news production is influenced by institutional routines, professional practices, political circumstances, and relationships between journalists and sources. These relationships are not necessarily equal. Government officials, political leaders, corporate representatives, experts, and institutional spokespersons often have greater access to journalists than ordinary citizens or marginalised groups. As a result, patterns of source selection can reproduce existing inequalities in the public sphere. The significance of source selection becomes even more apparent when media organisations are examined within contrasting political and ownership environments. Media ownership can influence editorial priorities, organisational practices, and the degree of autonomy available to journalists. In relatively liberal or libertarian media systems, newspapers are generally expected to provide space for competing viewpoints and to maintain a degree of editorial independence from direct governmental control. This does not mean that such media are completely free from political, commercial, or institutional influences. Rather, their sourcing practices may provide comparatively greater opportunities for disagreement, alternative interpretations, and diverse voices. By contrast, media organisations operating within strongly state-centred systems may function within institutional arrangements in which official information and government-defined interpretations receive greater visibility. The relationship between media structure and source selection is particularly relevant to comparative research involving Mongolia and China. Although the two countries share geographical proximity and historical connections, their contemporary media environments have developed under substantially different political and institutional conditions. Mongolia has experienced a relatively pluralistic media environment following its democratic transition, with privately owned and politically diverse news organisations operating alongside public media. China, in contrast, maintains a media system in which the state and the ruling political establishment retain substantial influence over major news organisations and the circulation of politically sensitive information. These contrasting environments provide a useful basis for examining whether differences in ownership and ideological orientation are reflected in the voices selected for daily news coverage [2].

From this perspective, the distinction between libertarian and Marxist approaches to the press provides an important theoretical foundation for the present study. Libertarian theory traditionally places greater emphasis on freedom of expression, competition among ideas, and a press that operates with limited direct governmental intervention. Marxist perspectives, meanwhile, view the media in relation to the wider structures of political and economic power and emphasise the role of media institutions in reproducing dominant social and ideological interests.

These perspectives should not be understood as completely uniform descriptions of contemporary media systems; rather, they provide contrasting analytical frameworks for examining how institutional arrangements may influence journalistic practices [3].

The selection of news sources therefore becomes an important indicator of the relationship between media institutions and the production of public knowledge. When newspapers repeatedly rely on government agencies, political authorities, or official spokespersons, their coverage may privilege institutional interpretations of events. Conversely, when journalists draw upon a broader range of governmental, expert, civil-society, professional, and public sources, news reports may provide audiences with a wider range of interpretations. Such differences are not simply matters of journalistic style. They can influence which actors become visible in public debate and which interpretations acquire legitimacy [4].

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Data Collection

The study employed a quantitative content-analysis approach to examine patterns of news-source selection in daily newspapers operating within contrasting media systems. Newspaper news reports were chosen as the primary unit of analysis because they provide a consistent and observable basis for examining who is quoted, referenced, or otherwise represented as a source in journalistic reporting. Focusing on news stories also makes it possible to compare sourcing practices across publications, topics, and different periods while maintaining a common analytical framework [5].

Three daily newspapers were selected for the study. The Mongolian sample consisted of *Odryn Sonin* and *Zuuny Medee*, which represent important examples of the country's comparatively liberal and pluralistic newspaper environment. The Chinese sample consisted of *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), the central newspaper of the Communist Party of China. The selection of these publications was intended to provide a meaningful comparison between newspapers operating under substantially different institutional and ideological conditions [6] (Table 1).

Coding Procedure

Each news item was treated as an individual unit of analysis and coded using a structured coding framework. The coding process followed predetermined definitions so that the same criteria could be applied consistently across all three newspapers and across the four sampling periods [7].

The first variable concerned the format of the news story. Articles were classified as either in-depth features or brief news reports, depending on the extent of reporting and presentation of information.

Table 1: Distribution of Sourced and Unsourced News Items by Newspaper and Year.

Newspaper	Year	Total news items	Sourced news	Unsourced news	Sourced (%)
<i>Odryn Sonin</i>	2004	420	302	118	71.9
<i>Odryn Sonin</i>	2014	438	325	113	74.2
<i>Odryn Sonin</i>	2019	451	341	110	75.6
<i>Odryn Sonin</i>	2024	467	365	102	78.2
<i>Zuuny Medee</i>	2004	398	246	152	61.8
<i>Zuuny Medee</i>	2014	416	270	146	64.9
<i>Zuuny Medee</i>	2019	429	291	138	67.8
<i>Zuuny Medee</i>	2024	445	311	134	69.9
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	2004	512	164	348	32.0
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	2014	528	183	345	34.7
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	2019	541	201	340	37.2
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	2024	556	223	333	40.

The second variable recorded the presence or absence of identifiable sources. A story was classified as sourced when it clearly attributed information, statements, opinions, or claims to an identifiable person, organisation, institution, document, or other recognisable source. Reports without an identifiable source were classified as unsourced [8].

The third variable concerned the primary topic of the article. To avoid overlap between categories, every news item was assigned one principal topic from the following four categories:

- **C1 – Society:** crime, accidents, healthcare, education, employment, labour, social welfare, and quality-of-life issues.
- **C2 – Politics:** parliamentary activities, government affairs, official visits, legislation, government resolutions, public policy, and political or party activities.
- **C3 – Economy:** business activities, taxation, prices, markets, investment, economic development, and related financial matters.
- **C4 – Culture/Sports:** cultural activities, arts, festivals, sporting events, and achievements of athletes or cultural figures.

Each article received only one primary topic code. For example, a report examining the causes of increasing meat prices was classified under C3 – Economy, whereas a report concerning the passage of a new parliamentary law was classified under C2 – Politics. This single-category approach reduced ambiguity when comparing the distribution of news topics between newspapers [8].

Assessment of Source Balance

For reports dealing with conflict, disagreement, controversy, or competing positions, the analysis also considered the balance of sources. Attention was given to whether the article presented voices representing different sides of an issue or

relied predominantly on one group of sources. A broader representation of competing perspectives was interpreted as indicating a more pluralistic sourcing pattern, while a strong dependence on a single institutional or ideological position was recorded as comparatively less balanced [9] (Figure 1).

This aspect of the coding was especially relevant to the study's central question because source diversity provides an observable way of examining how different media environments allow competing interpretations to enter news coverage. The analysis therefore considered not only whether a source was present but also the range of perspectives represented within relevant stories [10].

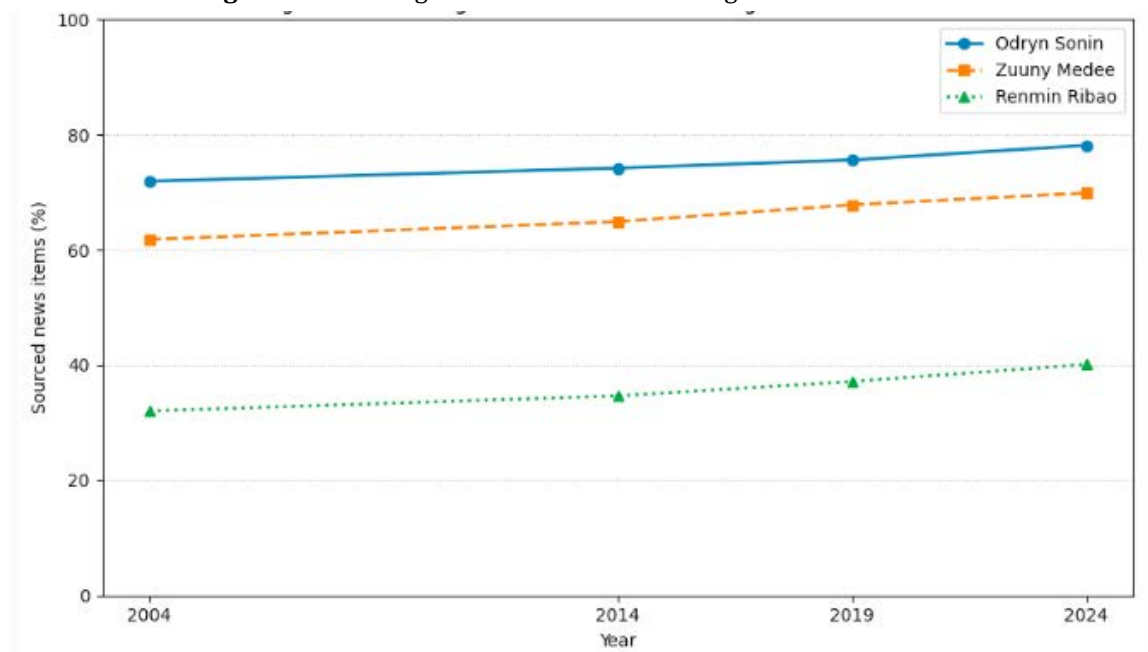
Validity and Reliability

Several measures were incorporated into the research design to strengthen the validity of the content analysis. Content validity was addressed by developing coding categories that directly reflected the main concepts examined in the study, particularly news-source presence, story format, subject matter, and source balance. The categories were defined before the analysis so that they could be applied systematically to the selected newspaper material [11].

Measurement validity was supported through operational definitions for each major variable. Terms such as *in-depth news*, *brief news*, *sourced news*, and *unsourced news* were translated into observable coding criteria rather than being assessed solely on the researcher's general impression. Similarly, the four topic categories were accompanied by examples to guide classification and reduce inconsistent interpretation.

The coding framework was applied consistently across the sampled publications and years, allowing the resulting patterns to be compared within and between the two media environments. Care was taken to distinguish the presence of a source from the broader question of source balance, since an article may contain a source while still presenting a relatively narrow perspective [12].

Figure 1: Percentage of News Items Containing Identifiable Sources.



RESULTS

The content analysis produced a total sample of 22,930 news items drawn from the three selected newspapers across the four study periods. The articles were first examined separately for each publication and subsequently compared using the common coding framework described in the methodology. This approach made it possible to identify differences in the use of identifiable news sources and to examine how sourcing practices changed over time.

The distribution of the sample across the newspapers was as follows. *Odryn Sonin* (Mongolia) contributed 7,826 articles, comprising 1,861 articles in 2004, 2,053 in 2014, 2,184 in 2019, and 1,728 in 2024. *Zuuny Medee* (Mongolia) contributed 8,040 articles, with 1,864, 1,996, 2,208, and 1,972 articles respectively across the four sampling periods. *Renmin Ribao* (China) contributed 7,064 articles, consisting of 1,371 articles in 2004, 1,781 in 2014, 1,853 in 2019, and 2,059 in 2024. Together, these publications provide a substantial basis for comparing sourcing practices across the two contrasting media environments [13].

Using the coding categories established for the study, each article was assessed according to whether it contained an identifiable news source. The resulting figures demonstrate noticeable differences among the three newspapers. The aggregate findings are presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the distribution of sourced news across the four sampling periods.

Overall Pattern of Sourced News

When the four study periods are considered together, *Odryn Sonin* recorded 5,674 sourced articles, compared with 5,164 for *Zuuny Medee* and 4,002 for *Renmin Ribao*. These totals provide an initial indication of differences in sourcing

practices, although the absolute number of sourced articles must be interpreted alongside the total number of articles published by each newspaper.

The proportion of sourced material is therefore more informative than the raw counts alone. The Mongolian newspapers generally demonstrate a stronger presence of identifiable sources across the study period, while *Renmin Ribao* records a lower proportion overall. This difference suggests that the three publications do not rely on sources in the same way and that the institutional environment in which a newspaper operates may be relevant to its sourcing practices [14].

The pattern also varies across individual years. *Odryn Sonin* shows substantial variation in the number of sourced reports between 2019 and 2024, while *Zuuny Medee* displays a comparatively smaller change. *Renmin Ribao*, in contrast, records an increase in the number of sourced reports during the same period. These developments are important because they indicate that sourcing practices cannot be understood solely from the overall ranking of the newspapers; changes over time also need to be considered.

Changes in Sourced News Between 2019 and 2024

A more focused comparison of the 2019 and 2024 results provides further insight into recent changes in sourcing patterns.

Table 2: Change in Sourced News Items Between 2019 and 2024.

Newspaper	2019 (n)	2024 (n)	Change (n)	Change (%)
<i>Odryn Sonin</i>	1,722	1,356	-366	-21.25%
<i>Zuuny Medee</i>	1,328	1,202	-126	-9.49%
<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	1,146	1,295	+149	+13.00%

The figures in Table 1 point to two contrasting developments. Both Mongolian newspapers recorded fewer sourced articles in 2024 than in 2019. The reduction was particularly pronounced for *Odryn Sonin*, where the number of sourced articles fell by 366, representing a 21.25% decrease. *Zuuny Medee* experienced a smaller reduction of 126 articles, equivalent to 9.49%. These declines should, however, be considered in relation to the overall volume of articles published during the respective periods rather than interpreted automatically as a decline in journalistic sourcing quality.

Renmin Ribao shows the opposite pattern, with sourced articles increasing from 1,146 in 2019 to 1,295 in 2024. This represents an increase of 149 articles, or 13.00%. The rise indicates greater use of identifiable sources in the 2024 sample. Nevertheless, the number of sourced articles by itself does not establish greater source diversity or editorial independence. The identity and institutional position of those sources, particularly in political reporting, remain important for interpreting the finding.

Comparative Interpretation

Taken together, the findings indicate meaningful differences in sourcing practices between the Mongolian and Chinese newspapers. The two Mongolian publications recorded higher aggregate numbers of sourced reports, while *Renmin Ribao* showed a lower overall level but a notable increase during the most recent comparison period. These differences provide empirical support for examining media ownership and institutional orientation as possible factors associated with source selection.

The results also demonstrate why source quantity should not be treated as the only measure of journalistic diversity. A news report may contain an identifiable source while still presenting information primarily through a single institutional perspective. For this reason, the subsequent analysis considers the type, affiliation, and balance of sources,

particularly in political and conflict-related reporting. This additional examination is important for determining whether differences in sourcing frequency are accompanied by differences in the plurality of viewpoints represented in the news (Figure 2).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that media ownership and ideological orientation are closely associated with the way news sources are selected and presented. The comparison between the Mongolian and Chinese newspapers suggests that sourcing is not simply a technical part of news production. It is also connected to the institutional environment in which journalism takes place. In particular, the results provide support for the second research question by showing that *Renmin Ribao*, operating within China's state-oriented media structure, relies more strongly on official and institutional sources, while the Mongolian newspapers display a comparatively broader sourcing pattern. At the same time, the Mongolian press is not entirely free from unattributed reporting or limitations in source diversity.

Media Structure and the Hierarchy of News Sources in China

The sourcing pattern observed in the Chinese newspaper can be understood in relation to the country's highly structured media system. Chinese newspapers have traditionally operated within different administrative and geographical levels, including national, provincial or regional, municipal, and specialised publications. These levels differ in political status, audience, editorial responsibilities, and access to information. Consequently, the sources available to journalists are also influenced by the institutional position of the newspaper.

At the national level, newspapers such as *Renmin Ribao* occupy a particularly prominent position. As the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Renmin Ribao* has an important role in communicating party

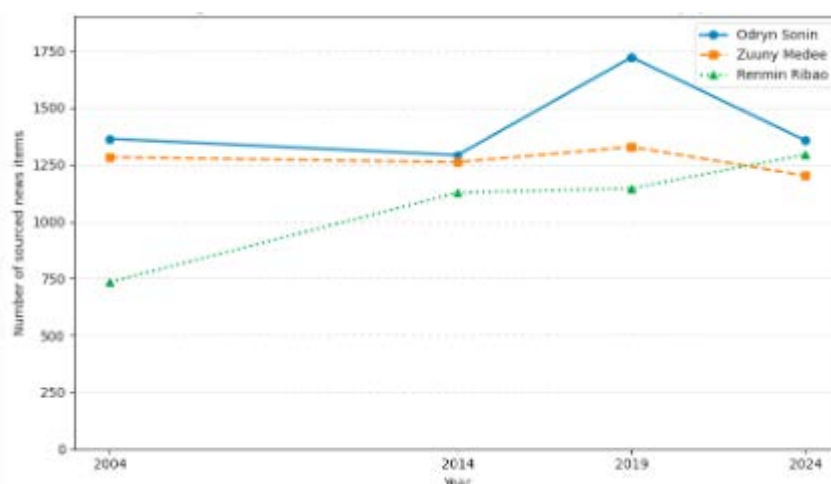


Figure 2: Trends in Sourced News Items Across the Three Newspapers

policies, interpreting major political developments, and presenting issues of national and international significance. Its reporting therefore gives considerable attention to central government institutions, party organisations, official meetings, policy announcements, and other authorised information channels. This institutional relationship helps explain why official voices appear so frequently in its coverage.

The concentration of authoritative sources does not necessarily mean that every report contains identical content or that journalists never undertake independent reporting. The newspaper also uses its own correspondents, specialist contributors, official documents, and expert commentary. Nevertheless, the overall structure gives institutional and politically authorised sources a particularly influential position. Consequently, the range of interpretations available to readers can be narrower than in media systems where journalists have greater organisational independence.

Source Selection and Ideological Orientation in *Renmin Ribao*

The results of the present study are consistent with this broader institutional pattern. In *Renmin Ribao*, news concerning politics and public affairs is particularly likely to draw upon government agencies, party organisations, official statements, and other institutional sources. Such sources provide authority and legitimacy to the information being reported, but their prominence can also influence how an event is interpreted.

Official announcements, government reports, statements issued after major meetings, and information distributed through established news agencies constitute important elements of the newspaper's sourcing environment. In addition, commentary and analytical material may be provided by scholars, policy specialists, journalists, and other experts whose interpretations generally operate within the boundaries of the prevailing political and institutional framework [15].

International reporting provides another useful example. Chinese media organisations have increasingly sought to provide interpretations of international events from perspectives that emphasise China's own interests and position. The use of domestic correspondents, Chinese experts, and locally produced commentary gives the newspaper greater capacity to construct its own narrative rather than relying exclusively on foreign news organisations. However, this development does not necessarily produce ideological plurality; instead, it can strengthen the prominence of nationally framed interpretations within international coverage [12].

Editorial and commentary sections are particularly significant in this regard. These forms of journalism do more than report events: they interpret their meaning and

place them within a broader political or social framework. When such interpretations are produced predominantly by editorial staff or invited experts associated with established institutions, they can contribute to the reproduction of dominant policy perspectives and reinforce the newspaper's role in shaping public opinion.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the newspaper sector in Mongolia has experienced a gradual contraction in the volume of news published, reflecting the growing pressure exerted by rapidly developing digital and online news platforms. Within this changing environment, the two Mongolian newspapers examined in the study have adopted noticeably different editorial approaches. *Odryn Sonin* places greater emphasis on in-depth reporting, while *Zuuny Medee* gives greater attention to brief news items. These contrasting approaches appear to influence the way sources are incorporated into news reports and demonstrate that editorial strategy is an important factor alongside media ownership and institutional orientation.

The sourcing practices of *Odryn Sonin* show a generally positive qualitative development, with the proportion of news supported by identifiable sources increasing across the study period. However, this improvement has occurred alongside a reduction in the newspaper's overall news output and a diminished role in providing rapid, breaking-news coverage. *Zuuny Medee*, in comparison, has maintained a comparatively stable level of sourcing, but its greater reliance on brief political reports presents continuing challenges. The finding that approximately 73% of its brief reports concern political subjects, together with an estimated 31–40% share of unsourced news, suggests that source attribution, verification, and the diversity of voices represented in short-form reporting remain areas requiring further attention.

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