

## **SINO-PAK RELATIONS (THE DOMINANT DIMENSION THROUGH THE LENS OF PRINT MEDIA)**

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### **Abstract**

*Media, influences topics of public importance. In academia, the recent crescendo in Pak-China relationship is interpreted variedly, such as economic, political, security/strategic, social and even a section of society conjectures China as the second East India Company. The increasing reputation of China in Pakistan, projection of projects such as CEPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) and frequent reflection of the same in national media, also triggers the academic discussion. This study attempts to highlight various Dimensions of Pak-China relations under the framework of Agenda setting theory and to find out what dimensions, in particular, economic, political, security/strategic and social, dominate this relation? The methodology employed is mainly qualitative, sprinkled with empirical elements, such as data on Pak-China relation, drawn from print media of Pakistan. This might prove one modicum way to determine the nature of Pak-China relationship.*

**Keywords-** Sino-Pak, media, Newspaper, BRI, Print media.

### **Introduction**

A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself. However, on the contrary, in current times, especially in developing states the print media sways the nation's perception on many significant subjects. Wisely, the Russian historian portrayed the role of media, in the late imperial period, however, very close to current reality and said, "The print media teaches the reader to think about what he does not know, and know what he does not understand". The shrewd assessment regarding media, in the late nineteenth century, still relevant and insightful, in understanding the worldview of

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individuals and nations at large. Sometimes it so happens that the media focus so much on a single event and ignore other important subjects of public interests, in a way media news reporting controls which issues become the focus of community attention.

Agenda-Setting Theory built on the same notion that the mass media sets the agenda for what people should care about and by repeating publication of a specific news on a subject, in a certain way, finally commit it to public memory and consciousness. Why and on whose direction print media focuses some news and ignores others, though an important question, however, is beyond the scope of this study. Whereas, this study focuses onto find out the dominant dimensions through a perceptive study of print media.

This study, dominantly descriptive, focuses on frequency of news occur, in print media, on a specific dimension of Pak-China relations. Most of the time, the relationship between China and Pakistan has been highlighted by government functionaries and leaders, mainly as economic and trade oriented. While certain quarters look at it as mainly strategic. This study hypothesizes that frequency of appearing of either dimension, economic, political, strategic or social, in print media, determines and will help in understanding the nature of Pak-China relations. What and which dimension of Pak-China relations, dominate the print media? The study mainly assesses four dimensions, economic, political, and geostrategic or social, and finds out which one dominate Pak-China relationship. Whereas, English language newspapers published in Pakistan, considered comparatively more open and a viable source of data on Pak-China relations, have been picked up as a source of data.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory of Agenda-Setting is more appropriate to employ to the subject. Its first key assumption Agenda Setting theory is that media filters and shapes rather than just reflecting stories to the audience. Media concentrates on topics and sways the masses to recognize it as more important, although the same might not be popular and of public interest. Hence, media concentrates on few issues, and sways masses to recognize it more important than others, manipulating public prioritization on issues<sup>1</sup>. This research is

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<sup>1</sup> Comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw were able to determine the degree to which the media determines public opinion. Since the 1968 study, published in a 1972 edition of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, more than 400 studies have been published on the agenda-setting function of the mass media, and the theory continues to be regarded as relevant. Studies have shown that what the media decides to expose in certain countries correlates with their views on things such as politics, economy and culture. Countries that tend to have more political power are more likely to receive media exposure. Financial resources, technologies, foreign trade and money spent on the military can be some of the main factors that explain coverage inequality

dominantly descriptive, focusing on frequency of specific themes/dimensions, economic, political, security/strategic, cultural, appeared in print media, regarding Pak-China relation. Hence, in a way determine which one dimension is prioritized by media and why.

The second assumption, more attention print media gives to an issue, the more important it becomes for masses. Linking to this assumption, while analyzing the news data, regarding Pak-China relationship, the paper will assess that why a certain dimension or dimensions, are more highlighted in media than the others, what is the underlying factor that forces it to do so?

### **Methodology**

Employing Agenda Setting Theory to address research question such as, to find out dominant dimension in Pak-China relation which is reflected by Pakistani print media and to ascertain the reason. Epistemologically, the problem is placed in constructivism that entails dominantly a qualitative approach to the study, focusing the four years period (2013-2016). One way to address these questions is to employ the qualitative methodology, the thematic analysis, of the text, the news reports, and editorials, published on Pak-China relations, in five English language newspapers of Pakistan. Subsequently, data was collected from five English language newspapers, Daily Times, Dawn, Frontier Post, The News, and Express Tribune. The print media data, regarding Pak-China relation, is appropriate in the local context, being less expensive, less time consuming and cheap source. An issue or limitation, print media as a source of data might not provide the whole truth but at least some partial understanding on the subject may take place.

### **Operationalization of Variables:**

The paper attempts to understand Pak-China relations through a correlation between two variables, 'frequency of dimension' in print media and 'nature of relationship' between the two states. Thus, a correlation between 'frequency of appearance of a dimension', economic, political, security/strategic, cultural, in the print media (newspapers) and 'nature of relationship' between Pakistan and China relation, is to be ascertained. If the frequency of news is dominated by economic dimension, then the nature of the relationship will be economic or otherwise. Thus, whatever dimension dominate the variable 'frequency of a dimension' in news, determines the nature of Pak-China relationships. Therefore, each news item regarding Pak-China relations published in any newspaper was underlined, assessed for the dimension and labeled accordingly either as economic, political, security/strategic, cultural.

During research it was observed that a single publication sometimes contains more than one dimension/themes. Many publications were found highlighting security and economic dimensions at the same time. However,

to keep the study more focused each publication was selected only for one dimension/coding. The dominant coding was decided in light of the heading or title of the news chosen.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Data**

Data, identified in five English newspapers, regarding Pak-China relations; categorized into four dimensions/theme: economic, political, security/strategic and social. The data displayed a broadened role of China vis-a-vis the world and with regard to Pakistan. It ranges from China's action in the strategic South China Sea to ETIM. A number of dimensions were found reflected in the contents of the news, however, only four dimensions, economic, political security/strategic and social, were focused. The period of data collected is extend over four years (2013-2016), in various newspapers.

Table. 1 presents the year-wise classification of different dimension as follow.

- Each year, from 2013 to 2016, strategic dimensions dominate the print media as the dominant trend in Pak-China relationships.
- the years, 2013 and 2014, are dominated by economy, however, second to strategic interests,
- The year 2015 is dominated by political dimension after strategic dimension.
- The year 2016 is dominated by strategic dimensions.

Table. 1 presents the year-wise classification of different dimension as follow.

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Total Publications</b>	92	116	127	91
<b>Economic</b>	31	33	26	21
<b>Political</b>	18	14	47	29
<b>Social</b>	4	12	5	3
<b>Security / Strategic</b>	39	57	49	38

**Source:** Newspaper Data available Area Study Centre (Russia, China and Central Asia), (2013-2016)

Out of total news items published during four years, strategic themes dominate each year. The theme topped 39, (in 2013), 57, (in 2014), 49, in

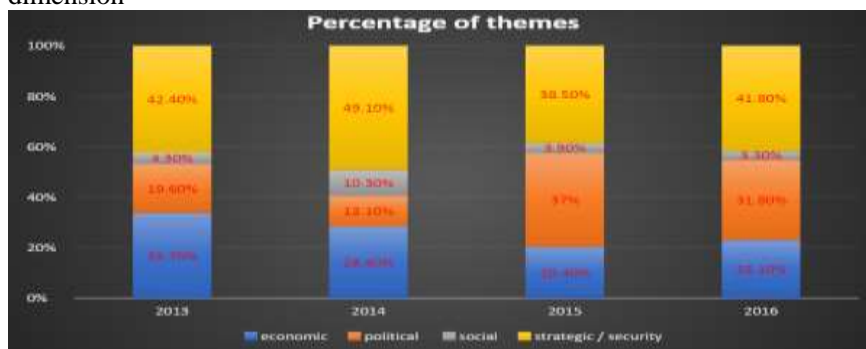
(2015) and 38, in (2016), respectively. The second prominent dimension, after the strategic dimension, is the economic one. However, it dominates the years 2013-14 only and that too after strategic at top. The political dimension stood third after economics, it dominated the year 2015, however, second to the strategic dimension. The year 2016 saw the sheer rise of security dimension, leaving far behind the economic dimension.

Furthermore, the in-depth analysis of individual dimensions offers more insight into the data collected from 2013 to 2016.

#### Strategic

Out of total 426 news publications, 183 alone were published on 'strategic dimension' which is 42.9 % of the total news. These news items and publications highlighted China's strategic and security related actions and policies.

**Figure. 1** presents the Frequency wise distribution of news of particular dimension



**Source:** Newspaper Data available Area Study Centre (Russia, China and Central Asia), (2013-2016)

#### Economic

'Economic dimension' was second to 'strategic dimension', in print media from the year 2013 to 2016. The economic dimension embodied various economic subjects ranging from China's economic rise to her aids to other states, Gawadar Port, CPEC, India related and much more.

#### Political

Out of the total 426 published news items, 111 were related to the 'political dimension' which is 26.1 % of the total. In the period of study, the 'political dimension' moved back and forth between the highest 33.70%, in 2015 to its lowest 20.4 %, in 2016. This way, the political dimension stood third on the scale, after 'economic dimension' as second and 'strategic dimension' at top. Daily, the Dawn, published on political dimension, out of total, 52 news items were of political nature which is 25% of total

publication. The News, Express Tribune and Daily Times maintained low emphasis on ‘political dimension’. In four year, 2013-16, the percentage share of the newspapers to ‘political dimension, remained as, The News 18.03%, Express Tribune 12.7% and Daily Times 17.2%, respectively.

### **Social Dimension:**

News items appeared in print media on ‘social dimension’ of Pak-China relation is dismally low. Out of total 426 publications of Pak-China relation, only 24 could be published on social dimension, a paltry part, about 5.7 % of total publications. The daily, the Express Tribune, had the highest number of publications as news items on ‘social dimension’ of Pak-China relation. The daily could publish 11 news items on ‘social dimension, out of total 60 items, a 17.4% of total publications on Pak-China relations. ‘Social dimension’ covered by Daily Times, Dawn, Frontier Post and The News stood at 3.7 %, 3.12 %, 3.13% and 4.9 %, respectively.

### **The Context of Agenda Setting**

Interestingly, the newspapers seem also influenced by their specific context, circumstance and environment. Newspaper operating from Peshawar media house is found focusing more on the political and strategic aspect of Pak-China relations. The newspaper allocated almost 45 % of its new items, 78 out of 176 news items, in highlighting the ‘strategic dimension’ of Pak China relationship. Additionally, the daily, published highest number of news items on ‘political dimension’, 62 items out of total 176, a 35 % of total publications, from 2013-2016.

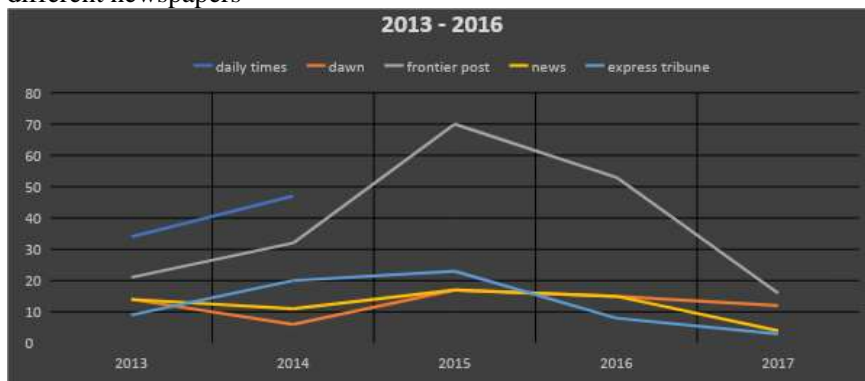
The daily ‘Dawn’, Karachi based, a business hub, and ‘The News International’, Islamabad based, capital of Pakistan, preferred to highlight the ‘economic dimension’ of Pak-China relations. The Dawn, out of its total 52 published news items on Pak-China relation, 19 were related to ‘economic dimension’ a 36 % of total publications on ‘economic dimension’. The newspaper could publish 18 out of total 52 on ‘strategic dimension’.

The daily, the News international, stood highest, 44.2 % of its total publication, regarding Pak-China relations were focused on ‘economic dimension’. The paper focused 24 news items on the ‘economic dimension’ out of total 57 publications regarding Pak-China relationship.

### **Annual Frequency of News across Different Newspapers**

Graph No. 1 presents the annual frequency of news appeared in print media related to Pak-China relations. It is evident from the graph that there was a gradual rise in media coverage, on Pak-China relations, until it touches peak in 2015. Whereas, Pak-China relations touched its lowest in 2016, need to explore reasons for this.

**Graph. 1** presents the year wise Distribution of the news appeared in different newspapers



Furthermore the Analysis of Graph No. 2, 3, 4 and 5 reveals the following:

- The ‘strategic dimension’ in Pak-China relations, is followed by ‘economic and political dimensions, respectively.
- The media houses, Dawn, and the News International, put more emphasis on the economic scope of Pak-China relation. Both the papers reflect the interest of the center, main urban centers, and business class of Pakistan. Daily The Frontier Post, publications are dominated by ‘strategic dimension’ of Pak-China relation.
- Daily, the Frontier Post published highest number of news items on political dimension, 62 items out of total 176, during the four years period, a 35 % of its all publication.
- The least highlighted dimension, the ‘social dimension’ poorly reflected, 4% of the total publication, in print media.
- The daily, the Express Tribune, Karachi based, an urban area daily, had highest number of publications ‘social dimension’ of Pak-China relation, 11 news items out of total 60 new items which is 17.4% of total publications.
- Social aspect of China is barely touched by Pakistani print media. Social and culture are the most ignored category in print publications of Pakistan.

## Conclusion

Addressing the research question, what dimension, in Pak-China relation, is prioritized by media and why? What are underlying factors that forces print media to do so? Addressing these questions in light of key assumptions of Agenda Setting Theory, the relevant data in the newspapers was identified, collected and sorted out according to economic, political, social and strategic dimensions. After analysis of the data it clearly displayed that the more frequent dimension highlighted in newspapers is

strategic one. Thus, print media and media houses promoted strategic dimension more than the rest of three dimensions. What is the intervening variable, one that pushes the media houses, to highlight the strategic dimension need to be explored?

Moreover, the reasons for newspapers to have a bias towards a specific dimension may also base on urban-rural or center-periphery divide. The urban/ center based newspapers highlighted economic and rural/ periphery based newspaper like 'daily the Frontier Post' at Peshawar, focused more on strategic dimension. However, if the first key assumption of Agenda Setting Theory, *news does not reflect as it is rather shaped and filtered by the media* is employed to the results it leads to the reality that the dimension was promoted on purpose by print media.

A section of scholarship argues that media was influenced by the government as part of media campaign especially before launch of CPEC, in 2013, hence media was influenced. This reality is also reflected in the Graph No.1, year wise distribution of news above. Moreover, the news stories after the launch of CPEC are more informative and descriptive in nature as compared to the ones before launch of CPEC which was mainly part of media campaign. (Taj Muhammad Mengal 2018).

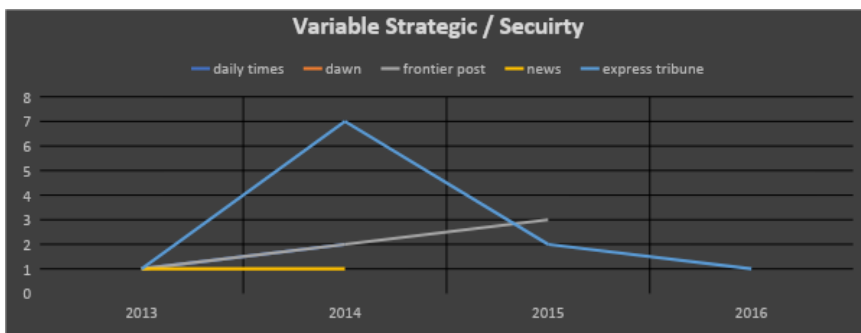
It is also argued that in light of likely failure of Pakistan to provide security to CPEC, in presence of many challenges such as, terrorism, geostrategic compulsions, both regional and international, forced her to present the relationship as geostrategic (Rubina Masum 2015). And it is in this vein that T.V talk shows and online articles were influenced to portray strategic nature of Pak-China relations instead of others. The State of Pakistan is quite conscious of the role of media and will never allow it to portray an independent picture of Pak-China relation.

### **Acknowledgment**

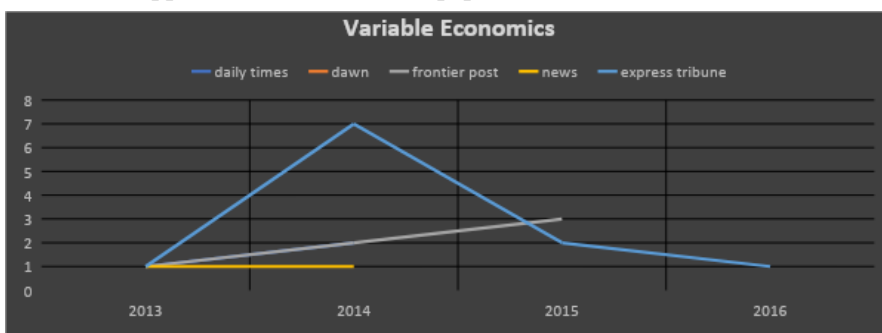
Data was collected from the newspapers available at Area Study Center, (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar. The data so collected has been scanned for record and reference.

**Graph NO. 2** presents the year wise Distribution of the news of different dimensions appeared in different newspapers

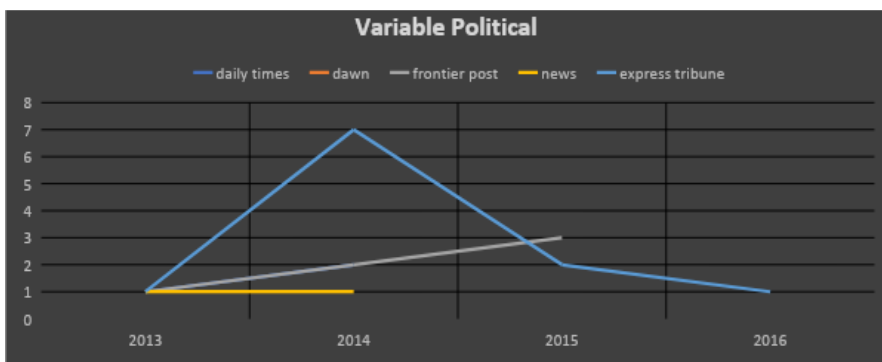




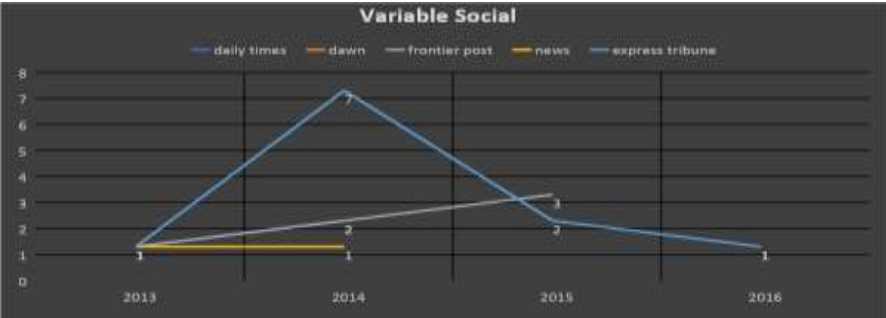
**Graph NO. 3** presents the year wise Distribution of the news of different dimensions appeared in different newspapers



**Graph NO. 4** presents the year wise Distribution of the news of different dimensions appeared in different newspapers



**Graph NO. 5** presents the year wise Distribution of the news of different dimensions appeared in different newspapers



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