

Watchdog or lapdog?

A critical discourse analysis on two Chinese newspapers



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¹ The image displays a 'word cloud' of selected articles on the Tianjin explosions from the Chinese newspapers the Global Times and the Southern Weekend. The bigger the words, the higher the frequency. Words that stand out most are: explosions (*baozha* 爆炸), Tianjin (*Tianjin* 天津), China (*Zhongguo* 中国), and accident (*shigu* 事故). Generated with Nvivo 11.

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1: Introduction: How to evaluate Chinese media sources

On August 12, 2015, pictures and videos of massive explosions found their way onto the internet worldwide. Initially, there were pictures and videos of flames extending high above the already high apartment buildings, the fire bulbs lighting the dark night-sky. Then, there were pictures of a car park, showing hundreds of broken cars, all burned out and damaged so badly by the fire that they could never be used again because of the explosions in the factory close-by. Later still, there were pictures of lots and lots of dead fish, washed ashore on sites not far from the explosion; they supposedly died as a result of hazardous chemicals that were released into the air and water during the explosions.

This is a description of the images that were seen by the world after the harbor explosions that took place in Tianjin, situated in the North-East of China, on August 12, 2015, making the big harbor-city world-famous overnight. For many people outside China, these were the first images they saw of the explosions, the fire, and the aftermath, complemented by news items on the television, radio, and in newspapers. Some people from outside China perceive Chinese media as closed and unreliable. They believe that Chinese journalists have to report in a way that conforms to the rules and guidelines of the authoritarian government, and that these journalists have no freedom in choosing what they want to report on, and the way they want to report it. Foreign reporting links this image to the human-rights discussion about China, and fear that journalists are severely punished or put into jail if they cross the line. A good example is the British newspaper *the Telegraph*, which holds a negative view on human-rights in China and links this discussion to many China-related news items. Other people (for example Chen 2007, Polunbaum 2008, Tong 2012), on the other hand, think that journalists in China are quite free and they can report the way they think is appropriate. Such authors think that the Chinese media has opened up, together with the opening-up of the economy.

This dichotomy also exists in academic writing. Therefore, unfortunately, turning to such sources on Chinese journalism cannot offer a solution when it comes to evaluating the freedom of the Chinese press. Thus, although there is already quite some academic literature about journalism in China, it would be useful to test the existing theories and ideas on a case study in the Chinese press.

From an academic perspective, it would be interesting to see how reporting in Chinese media is done on an important news topic that happened inside China. For this thesis, I will

conduct a discourse analysis of the reporting that covered the Tianjin harbor explosions in two major Chinese newspapers, the Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末) and the Global Times (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球网). The main research question for this research will be: How do two different Chinese newspapers report on a crucial crisis in the People's Republic of China, and what does this reporting suggest about the degree of freedom that Chinese journalism enjoys today?

I will start in the next chapter by outlining the background of newspapers in China, the overall media environment, the position of newspapers in this environment and the different views of academics on the freedom of press in China. In the third chapter I will outline the methodology I used for this research and give some background on the theory of critical discourse analysis. I will also explain the main research question and formulate three sub-questions for this research. In chapter four I will present the results of the analysis. In chapter five I will discuss the results by answering the sub-questions and the main research question. In the last chapter, the conclusion, I will summarize the results and the findings, present some possible implications and limitations of this research and make some suggestions for further research.

2: Studying newspaper journalism in China

In this chapter I will provide some background on newspapers in China. I will discuss the history of newspapers, propaganda and freedom of press, the overall media environment and the views of academic researchers on journalistic freedom in China. I will also explain the aim of this research.

2.1 History of newspapers in China and their role

Modern Chinese newspapers have played an important role in societal and political struggles. Almost all political campaigns since 1949 have been triggered by political editorials in newspapers and newspapers have a hugely influential role in Chinese society (Scotten & Hachten 2010: 43, 55). Although not all newspaper reporting is critical and revolutionary, and not all academic researchers agree on how much journalistic freedom is possible in China, investigative reporting is becoming more common and accepted by both the Chinese people and the state. Throughout this thesis I will use Zhou's definition of investigative reporting: news that exposes political corruption and social problems (Zhou 2000: 577).

The very first Chinese investigative journalists wrote reports that were only read within the government (Grant 1988: 53). This internal reporting is almost by definition investigative and problem-oriented, since these journalists were tasked to identify problems and highlight the need for specific reforms in order to help the government solve problems and set the agenda. However, since internal investigative reports are not available to the public, they do not have a mediating role between the state and society (Grant 1988: 55, Zhou 2000: 578).

Only since the early 1990s, investigative reports have been published for the general public to read. The incentive came from the government, with the objective to investigate the problems of society and to publicly reveal them. The government worried about hidden doubts of the general public about social problems (Tong 2011: 31). A few decades earlier, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Mao Zedong (then leader of the CCP) already described the PRC as relying on a system of 'democratic centralism' (Howland 2012: 1).² On a more practical level, investigative journalism helps the

² Democratic centralism is a government form in which the government relies on the masses for feedback, according to the Leninist idea of media and government (Howland 2012: 1). 'The masses' (*qunzhong* 群众) refers here to people who are led by the communist Party leaders and who follow that leadership without dissent and

government to implement reform initiatives and strengthen the state by making it more efficient, open, and responsive (Zhou 2000: 587). Tong (2011) notes that the general population also felt the need for investigative journalism, as they wanted more attention to social problems and the misconduct of the rich and powerful. Members of the public could not make their voices heard on their own, due to lacking access to social resources. Instead, they turned to journalists and the media to help them get recognition and justice (Tong 2011: 31). Media exposure can help them vent their frustrations and express concerns about pressing social issues (Zhou 2000: 586, 587). Further incentives to increase the practice of investigative journalism resulted from the social, economic, and political problems that emerged after 1992, including political corruption, fraud, environmental issues, the partial collapse of the social welfare system, and the rise of urban crime (Zhou 2000: 580). The new investigative role for the media was promoted by the central government as part of a wider attempt to "create a closer identity between the people and the party" (Gordon 1999: 52).

Another important factor in the changing role of journalists was the commercialization of media operations. The commercialization began in 1978 and gradually accelerated. All media are still owned by the state, but are also dependent on commercial financing and have to survive in an increasingly competitive media market (Zhou 2000: 581, 582). This is part of what is called the dual-track system: newspapers are under the direct control of propaganda departments, but they are still regarded as independent enterprises and have the responsibility to attract advertisers and readers (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 51). Despite their state ownership, the Chinese government encourages newspapers to enhance their market-driven capacity to grow bigger and stronger and to compete with international media (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 52). This dual-track system may seem contradictory, and on some aspects of reporting it is, but on others the dual-track system does not pose a difficulty. Fighting corruption, for example, is an important matter for the survival of the Communist Party, and the exposure of corrupt officials usually increases the popularity of the exposing newspaper. Exposing a corrupt official may thus be helpful for both the Party and the newspaper. Efforts by newspapers to expose government scandals are somewhat welcomed and even initiated by the government (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 48). However, views differ on whether journalists can choose for themselves which government scandals to expose or not to expose, or whether the government allows certain revealing stories and blocks others.

Newspapers have become more segmented and aimed at a specific target audience since the commercialization process started in 1978. Commercialized media can provide a

without their own ideas (Tong 2011: 195).

solution to the “dictator’s dilemma”³, as segmented media can provide more information about society. By providing information about citizens' views and increasing the credibility of the media in the eyes of citizens, the government can be perceived as more legitimate and propaganda instruments become more effective. However, most researchers believe that the ability to guide public opinion has always remained more important to leaders of authoritarian states⁴ than obtaining societal feedback (Stockmann 2013: 7, 8, 23).

2.2 Propaganda and the freedom of press in China

In this thesis I will use the definition of propaganda provided by the historian Peter Kenez: "propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior" (Kenez 1985: 4)⁵.

Although views differ on the degree of its implementation, propaganda⁶ has always been an essential element of the CCP’s hold on power since the civil war in 1949 (Brady 2007: 3).

Although investigative journalism has become more normal and practiced in the past three decades, most researchers, such as Brady (2008), Tong (2011), and Zhao (2008), assert that investigative journalists still have to obey rules and guidelines relating to matters of propaganda, and investigative journalists have to be very careful in choosing their targets. The selection and framing of news topics is not allowed to endanger social stability, the supreme goal of the party leadership, or to provoke the audience (Zhou 2000: 585). For government officials, there is a major difference between critique of major state policies on the one hand, and critique of the power-abuse by individuals and the violation of policies by local bureaucracies on the other hand (Zhou 2000: 589). Misbehaviors of local officials, local governmental work, and rich individuals are frequently criticized and reported, while the

³ In a democracy, nationwide elections can be used for leaning about the preferences of citizens (Malesky & Schuler 2011: 491). The dictator's dilemma refers to the problem of not knowing how much support an authoritarian leader has. The use of repression breeds fear among the general public, which makes citizens reluctant to voice their opinions (Stockmann 2013: 29).

⁴ Authoritarianism is a form of government characterized by one strong central power and limited political freedom. Marketization of media in authoritarian states contains elements of both liberalization and control (Stockmann 2013: 2).

⁵ Propagating an ideology can be used for propaganda purposes. “A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render the self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic, and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself.” (Eagleton 1991: 5, 6) (italics in the original). For more information on ideology, see: Eagleton (1991).

⁶ The term ‘propaganda’ (*xuanchuan* 宣传) is not perceived as negative in China as it is in other countries. Chinese citizens generally accept the idea that propaganda is a necessary form of citizen education. This does not mean, however, that citizens find propaganda convincing (Stockmann 2013: 202).

political system, central leadership, the ruling party and high-ranking officials are usually left untouched (Huang 2011: 444).

There are a number of rules and guidelines for journalists on how to find the line between topics that are allowed and those that are forbidden. This is not a fixed line, but "an ever changing, hard to grasp curve" (Zhao 2008: 25), an "invisible swinging boundary", which is subject to changes that may only be understood in a Chinese newspaper newsroom (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 49). These guidelines are transferred to journalists by means of a national exam held annually. Exam-topics include "supporting the basic theories, lines, and policies of the Chinese Communist Party". The licenses are renewable for a two-year term (Zhao 2008: 30). Other important guidelines to restrict the information flow include: do not publish bad news during holiday periods or sensitive dates; do not mention problems that cannot be easily solved; talk up the economy and do not promote the views of the enemy (Brady 2007: 95-101).

There are a number of institutions that regulate propaganda and media publications in China (Brady 2007: 93), but the most important organization in the propaganda system is the Central Propaganda Department. This is the administrative body of the CCP Central Propaganda and Thought Work Leading Group that is in charge of ideology-related work. It organizes and monitors the news media, broadcasting, television, culture, art, publishing etc., in order to ensure that they promote the current line, guiding principles, and policies of the government in a correct and timely fashion. Academic literature on the Propaganda Department does not give a consistent view on the intensity, effectiveness and strictness of the provided guidance, but according to Brady, if clear guidance is given, it must be closely obeyed, because this guidance is assigned a higher status than national law on propaganda-related matters (Brady 2007: 13, 15, 19). The Propaganda Department combines traditional means with advanced communication technologies to deliver its messages (Zhao 2008: 24).

"Freedom of the press", as the term is often used in the European and American context, is not present in China, although the concept is frequently discussed and seems to be growing within the Chinese context, or within "Chinese characteristics" (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 44), a characterization that is often used when a concept is unclear and not identical to its counterparts in other countries.

2.3 The situation of newspapers within the Chinese media environment

The media in China are changing rapidly, together with the intense economic revolution from Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong-thought to authoritarian capitalism (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 1). More traditional forms of media, including newspapers, have been affected by the introduction of modern media, for example television and especially the rise of the internet in recent years. Like in many other countries in the world, the circulation and popularity of newspapers have declined, due to the competition the newspaper market faces, caused by newer forms of media (Scotton & Hachten 2010: 56). Printed newspapers and magazines are still popular, influential, well-read, and readily available, and to date it seems not likely that printed media will disappear as a result of competition posed by online media sources (Stockmann 2013: 1)

Not all media forms can exercise the same intensity of investigative reporting. Newspaper and journal editors tend to push the boundaries further than television or radio producers might (Brady 2008: 17). The most investigative, in-depth reports can be read in liberal newspapers, such as Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末) and the Economic Observer (*Jingji Guanzha Bao* 经济观察报). Television news is more closely controlled by the government, and gives a more politically correct view, with the exception of the television program *Focus Point* (*Jiaodian Fangtan* 焦点访谈), a popular 15-minute program discussing current events. This television program is known for taking a critical stance towards government policies. It gained most popularity during the SARS crisis in 2003, when it scrutinized the system for its failure to fight the disease (Zhang 2011: 173). Newspapers are perceived as representatives of society. Readers turn to newspapers and regard them as convincing, they identify more strongly with newspapers than with television news. The internet may emerge as an even more credible information source compared with traditional media, possibly because the internet is considered to be even more representative of public opinion, allowing netizens to voice their own opinions and views on current matters (Stockmann 2013: 227, 231).

2.4 This research in academic debates on Chinese journalism

As mentioned above, not all researchers on Chinese journalism share the same view on the range of freedom Chinese journalists have. Researchers can generally be divided into two groups. The first group thinks that journalists in China have the opportunity to write freely, that they can develop and express individual ideas and that there is much room for investigative journalism. According to this group, the media can act as a watchdog of the

government, keeping them in check and providing them with information on what is considered important by the Chinese people. They admit there are guidelines and restrictions for journalists, but there is enough freedom for good and independent reporting (for example Chen 2007, Polunbaum 2008, Tong 2012). The second group thinks that journalists in China have to answer to the call of the party and have to provide a perfect picture of the party and Chinese society. According to this group of researchers, negative news and critical reports on government policies are generally not tolerated. Some government scandals are allowed to be exposed, but only with explicit consent of the government. Usually, individual officials or other important public figures are detained and blamed in the case of negative news, to emphasize the adequate and resolute action of the government, and take the attention away from faults in the government system. According to this view, the media can be seen as the lapdog of the government, reporting on what the government wants and providing the image the government wants them to provide (for example He 2008, Liu 2010, Shen & Guo 2012, Young 2012).

Because academic literature does not provide a consistent view on the freedom of journalistic reporting in China, I want to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the reporting of newspaper journalists. I chose to examine the Tianjin harbor explosions, which happened August, 12 2015. The explosions were an important event in China and they were covered in international, national, and regional media. In international news, the reaction of the Chinese authorities was criticized because first-aid workers who arrived at the emergency spot did not wear protective clothing and were thus exposed to hazardous chemicals that were released into the air during the explosions (for example BBC News, The Guardian, CNN, and the New York Times). Residents of the harbor area and Tianjin city complained that the government did not provide enough information on how to protect oneself against the chemicals. With debates about responsibility, accurate government action, economic losses and environmental impact, this case showcases many interesting elements that make it suitable for my research on contemporary journalism in China.

3: Method: A critical discourse analysis on two Chinese newspapers

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology I used for this research. I will explain my sample selection, the difference between official and nonofficial newspapers, the research questions, and method of analysis.

3.1 Sample selection

In this research, I focus on newspaper journalism. As stated before, journalists can be freer in printed media than they can be in broadcast media (Brady 2008: 17, Stockmann 2013: 227, Tong 2012: 70). My case study thus explores how the supposedly more critical printed media deal with reporting on the harbor explosions, rather than focusing on how more compliant media sources do their reporting.

It is beyond the scope of this research to work with a fully representative sample, so that should not be the objective of selecting sources. A narrow but carefully selected sample of just two newspapers promises a better in-depth analysis of the chosen media.

Generally speaking, newspapers in China can be divided into three groups: official newspapers, semi-official newspapers and commercialized newspapers (Stockmann 2013: 21). Semi-official and commercialized newspapers are together referred to as nonofficial newspapers. They are more commercialized and enjoy greater autonomy than official newspapers (Ibid: 21). Examples of nonofficial newspapers are the Economic Observer (*Jingji GuanCha Bao* 经济观察报), Beijing News (*Xinjing Bao* 新京报), and Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末). Official newspapers function as a mouthpiece of the government. Readers will choose to read these newspapers to learn about the position of the government and the activities of important political figures. Official newspapers are perceived by local Chinese as less trustworthy, less realistic, and less worthy of reading (Stockmann 2013: 22, 165, 167). Examples of official newspapers are People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日报), China Youth Daily (*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* 中国青年报), and Beijing Daily (*Zhongguo Ribao* 北京日报).

Official newspapers are more influenced by the Party, in order to help guide public opinion and to generate support for new policies. Surprisingly, however, nonofficial newspapers are often more effective in forming public opinion and in changing people's opinions in favour of the official line demanded by the government, because these newspapers are perceived as being more credible. When readers turn to such a source they regard it as

more convincing, because they identify more strongly with it. When reading official newspapers, readers tend to be more resistant, and they will be more critical in evaluating its content (Stockmann 2013: 22, 231).

I chose to adopt no official newspapers in the sample of this research. There are relatively few people who read these newspapers, and even when people choose to do so, it is mostly for reasons other than obtaining trustworthy information on current news events. Moreover, nonofficial newspapers are more successful than official newspapers, in terms of guiding public opinion and generating support for new policies.

I chose to adopt the following two newspapers in the sample:

- The Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末)
- The Global Times (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报)

Southern Weekend is a commercialized newspaper that is perceived as presenting open-reporting. It is known for a commitment to overstep boundaries and use creativity in finding new ways to do so. It has a good reputation for investigative journalism. Although it is registered with the Southern Daily Group (*Nanfang Baoye* 南方报业集团) at the Guangdong provincial level, it is circulated nationwide (Stockmann 2013: 52, 71, 170).⁷

The Global Times is a semi-official newspaper, presenting news that is more closed but still rather open in comparison to official newspapers. It has gained a reputation for reporting from a nationalist angle and has a positive stance on Chinese foreign policy. It propagates the viewpoint of the government, but packages this in stories that are interesting to read, using foreign media sources, voicing different societal views, using a neutral language and investigative reporting. This newspaper is based in Beijing and is also circulated nationwide (Stockmann 2013: 71, 99, 126, 170).

Even though I am solely focusing on newspapers, it is impossible to analyse a representative sample of all newspapers in China. However, I do believe that this sample includes two important newspapers that a relatively large proportion of the Chinese people will be able to identify with. I will analyse all articles published about the Tianjin explosions starting from August 13, 2015, the day after the explosions, for a period of 10 days, until August 22, 2015.

⁷ The Southern Weekend gained global notoriety in early 2013, when some of the newspapers' journalists and interns staged a strike against censorship. According to many commentators, the incident could be seen as a sign of a growing sense of independence and assertiveness among journalists in China (Harcup 2014). This strike may have had an influence on their reporting on the harbor explosions, as it can be seen as an opportunity to strengthen its image as an investigative newspaper.

Most of the reporting is done during this period, and it covers both the initial reporting right after the explosions, and the more in-depth reporting containing an analysis of what happened and who is to blame. A list of all articles analyzed can be found in the next chapter.

3.2 Research questions

In order to get a good insight in the discourse of the newspaper articles about the harbor explosions, it is necessary to take a close look at the reporting on the questions of 'responsibility' and the representation of government action, because both can be an embodiment of the relation of the journalists and the newspaper to the government. The first two sub-questions will be:

Sub-question 1: Who or what is blamed for the harbor explosions?

Sub-question 2: How is the role of the government portrayed in the reporting on the harbor explosions?

Another important element worth analysing is the consistency of reporting between the two newspapers. If the newspapers can report freely, it is likely that the two newspapers will provide a slightly different analysis of the event. If they have to report conform to the guidelines of the government, it is more likely they will provide the same analysis. The third sub-question is therefore:

Sub-question 3: Is the analysis of the event in the two newspapers consistent?

The main research question of this thesis combines all of the sub-questions, and is about the freedom of Chinese journalists.

Main research question: How do two different Chinese newspapers report on a crucial crisis in the People's Republic of China, and what does this reporting suggest about the degree of freedom that Chinese journalism enjoys today?

3.3 Critical discourse analysis

I will try to find the answers to the research questions stated above by using the method of critical discourse analysis. Many different definitions of discourse and critical discourse analysis can be found in academic literature (Philips & Hardy 2002: 2). Critical discourse analysis is an emerging method of discourse analysis, which combines the results of multi-disciplinary research of among others psychology, linguistics and media studies. It attaches importance to literary and non-literary discourses, but it takes news discourses as its main research object. In the field of critical discourse analysis, language is regarded as a form of ideology and linguistic activity is considered as a social practice. The goal of conducting a critical discourse analysis is to reveal the relationship between language, power and ideology (Wang & Liu 2015: 1, 3). Social reality is produced and made real through discourses that give them meaning. Discourses can be found in written texts, spoken words, symbols, pictures, artefacts, and so forth (Philips & Hardy 2002: 3, 4)⁸.

The discourses I will look at in this research consist of newspaper articles. In my analysis I will pay special attention to linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms, as these may contain a lot of information about the discourse that is used by the journalists and the newspapers. Elements that I specifically will be looking for include the use of passive and active phrasing, direct and indirect speech, and rhetorical and literary figures.⁹

The difference between passive and active phrasing is especially important in sections about the question of who is responsible for the explosions, and coverage of the careless action in the first hours after the blast. For example, the difference between the two sentences that might appear in a news article: 'the factory was not maintained well', or 'X did not maintain the factory well', shows an important feature of how the question of responsibility is addressed. Passive phrases are a common way to shrink responsibility and obscure relationships behind the text (Schneider 2013), it is used to delete agency and maintain unequal power relations (Billig 2008: 785, 786).

I will look for the use of quotes in the news articles, and will determine whether they are paraphrased or cited as direct speech. The use of quotation or reported speech is an important feature of news-related discourse. The use of quotation can contain information on

⁸ For more information on the history and practice of discourse analysis, see: Wodak & Krzyzanowski (2008).

⁹ An important mechanism of discourse that is missing from this list is the use of evidentialities. Evidentialities can be used in texts to make something look obvious and generally accepted, while this is actually not the case. Examples of sample phrases are: 'of course', 'as everyone knows', and 'obviously'. In analyzing the articles, I looked for the use of evidentialities, but could not find strong examples worthy of noting in this research.

whether the journalists want to portray a statement as a general value or truth, as opposed to a personal opinion (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton 2001: 424).

Rhetorical and literary figures include allegories, metaphors, idioms, proverbs and rhetorical questions. The use of these figures can frame the meaning of specific statements and lead to the construction of certain categories and relations (Schneider 2013) that in fact might not be natural categories and relations. This form of expressing power relations is indirect and often not consciously noted by the reader, but at the same time very powerful (Van Dijk 1993: 261).

All newspaper articles were downloaded as jpeg files from the newspapers' official websites. With the use of OCR (optical character recognition) software and extensive corrections (both by me and native Chinese speakers), the relevant articles were transcribed to workable data. The articles were analysed using NVivo 11 Starter, a qualitative data analysis software program.

4: Analysis

In this chapter I will present the sample that was used for this research as well as provide an analysis of the articles of the Southern Weekend and the Global Times. After I have provided an overview of the sample and a list of all articles used for this research, my analysis will cover the use of ‘experts’, foreign media, literary figures, analyze the different verbs as well as the difference between active and passive phrasing for different groups of actors involved in the Tianjin explosions, and explore the relation between the explosions and Tianjin and China.

4.1 Sample

A total of 27 newspaper articles were found in the Southern Weekend and the Global times in the time period from August 13, 2015 until August 22, 2015. The Global Times published 23 articles about the explosions in this period, whereas the Southern Weekend published only 4 articles. This difference can be explained by the fact that the Global Times is a daily paper (issued every day, except on Sundays) and the Southern Weekend is a weekly newspaper (issued every Thursday).

I have decided to closely analyze a total of eight articles. These will include all four articles published by Southern Weekend, and a selection of four important articles published by the Global Times. The selection of the articles of the Global Times was made based on representativeness and newness of information (some articles merely contain a summary of earlier told facts and the opinion or statements of particular people). The other 19 articles would also be interesting objects for critical discourse analysis, but due to limits of time and space it was not feasible to do a close analysis of all articles. The other 19 articles of the Global Times will be kept in the sample and used for reference for the outcomes found in the selected articles. The results discussed in this chapter are not contradicted by data in the complete sample. All 27 newspaper articles can be found below, listing the name(s) of the author(s), the Chinese title, the translated English title¹⁰, whether the article was accompanied by a photo, length of the original article, and publication date.

¹⁰ I made all the English translations. They were checked by two native Chinese speakers with a high command of English.

4.1.1 List of all articles published in the Southern Weekend¹¹

| | Publication date | Name(s) of author(s) | Original Chinese title | Translated English title | Length of article ¹² | Photo |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | August 13, 2015 | Xi Yihao | 天津滨海新区公司自查发现火灾隐患 | The company of the Tianjin explosions once found fire danger in a self-investigation | 905 | Yes, 1 |
| 2 | August 13, 2015 | <i>Compiled</i> ¹³ | 天津滨海新区11名消防员牺牲 | The explosion in the Tianjin Binhai area already sacrificed 11 firefighters | 1042 | Yes, 1 |
| 3 | August 20, 2015 | <i>Compiled</i> | 天津港“大爆炸”后如何拆除“黑仓库” | Tianjin port after the accident, how to remove the “devil mask”: “black warehouse” of the hazardous chemicals | 4075 | Yes, 2 |
| 4 | August 20, 2015 | Shi Zhe | 天津港是计划经济时代的遗留物 | [New opinion] The Tianjin port is another leftover of the planned economy | 1026 | No |

¹¹ The list of articles is placed in the text since I will refer to the articles throughout the ‘analysis’ section. This makes it easier to go back and forth and find the article in the list.

¹² Approximate length of original article in characters (including punctuation).

¹³ Articles 2 and 3 of the Southern Weekend are ‘compiled’ articles. They consist of information put together from other sources. No author or editor is listed for these articles.

4.1.2 List of all articles of the Global Times

| | Publication date | Name(s) of author(s) | Original Chinese title | Translated English title | Length of article | Photo |
|------------------------|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------|
| 1 ¹⁴ | August 14, 2015 | Ni Hongzhang | □□□□□□□□□□ | Huge explosions in Tianjin shocked the world | 2022 | Yes, 1 |
| 2 | August 14, 2015 | Ma Jun & Zhang Jie | □□□□□□□□□□ | Several military rescue teams rushed to Tianjin | 1753 | Yes, 2 |
| 3 | August 14, 2015 | Ma Jun & Zhang Jie | □□□□□□□□□□ | What shall we do if a storehouse of hazardous chemicals catches fire | 696 | No |
| 4 | August 14, 2015 | Ma Jun | 24 □ TNT □□□□□□□ □ | What implies a weight of 24 tons of TNT | 584 | No |
| 5 | August 14, 2015 | Ma Jun | □□□□□□□□□□ | Rules for the storage of hazardous chemicals | 525 | No |
| 6 | August 15, 2015 | Hu Qingyun, Wang Wei, Sun Hui, Qing Mu & Ma Jun | □□□□□□□□□□ | The rescue of the Tianjin explosions makes people worried | 2611 | Yes, 1 |
| 7 | August 17, 2015 | Zhang Tao, Sun Hui, Qing Mu, Liu Zhi & Chen Yi | □□□□□□□□□□ | Explosions make Chinese people reflect on safety in manufacturing | 1981 | Yes, 1 |
| 8 | August 17, 2015 | Liu Yang | □□□□□□□□□□“□□” | Why has the explosion formed a “big lake” | 552 | Yes, 1 |
| 9 | August 17, 2015 | Huang Peizhao, Qing Mu & Ni Hao | □□□□□□□□□□□□ | How big is the economic loss of the Tianjin explosions | 1901 | No |
| 10 | August 17, 2015 | <i>Editorial</i> ¹⁵ | □□□□□□□□□□□□□ □ | Why was the quality of the press conference in Tianjin a few days ago so poor | 1212 | No |

¹⁴ The four articles that were selected for detailed discourse analysis (articles 1, 7, 11, and 22) are shown in bold.

¹⁵ For this editorial no author is listed. Probably it is written by multiple journalists from the Global Times.

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|---|--------------------|---|------|--------|
| 11 | August 18, 2015 | Li Zhen, Zhang Jie, Sun Hui, Qing Mu, Chen Yi & Liu Zhi | □□□□□□□□□□ | China promises a thorough investigation of the Tianjin explosions | 2324 | No |
| 12 | August 18, 2015 | Huang Lei & Ma Jun | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □ | Vice mayor of Tianjin He Shushan accepts an exclusive interview by our paper | 2686 | Yes, 1 |
| 13 | August 18, 2015 | Ma Jun | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□ | Was high-tech equipment used in the rescue of Tianjin? | 3053 | Yes, 1 |
| 14 | August 18, 2015 | Guo Yuandan & Jiang Chuanjing | □□□□□□□□□□ | What does the explosion site look like now | 803 | No |
| 15 | August 19, 2015 | Zhang Tao, Sun Hui, Qing Mu, Chen Yi & Liu Yupeng | □□□□□□□□□□ | The investigation of the responsibility for the Tianjin explosions is speeding up | 2075 | Yes, 1 |
| 16 | August 19, 2015 | Zhang Jie & Liu Yang | □□□□□□□□□□□□ | The first rain after the explosions, what should we be aware of | 1315 | No |
| 17 | August 19, 2015 | Liu Ke | □□□□□□□□□□□□ | Management of hazardous chemicals cannot be sloppy | 1155 | No |
| 18 | August 19, 2015 | Liao Chenxia | □□□□□□□□□□□□ | I am from Tianjin, I have some things to say | 1218 | No |
| 19 | August 20, 2015 | Li Zhen, Yu Hong, Tao Duanfang, Ding Yuqing, Xing Xiaojing & Wei Jingqi | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□ | The port of Tianjin, from old pier to the world's fourth biggest port | 2874 | Yes, 1 |
| 20 | August 20, 2015 | Zhang Yichi, Hong Chuanjing, Guo Yuandan & Liu Yang | □□□□□□□□□□“□□” | What “poisonous gas” floats around the explosion site | 1901 | No |
| 21 | August 20, 2015 | Liu Xin, Zhang Jie, Sun Hui, Qing Mu & Tao | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □ | Tianjin mayor: my responsibility is unshrinkable | 2719 | Yes, 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--|------|--------|
| | | Duanfang | | | | |
| 22 | August 21, 2015 | Zhang Jie, Qing Mu & Yuan Ruolan | □□□□□□□□□□ | Tianjin responds to doubts about the environment | 1349 | No |
| 23 | August 21, 2015 | Liu Xin | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □ | Reporters of our newspaper explore the reasons of the dead fish in Tianjin | 863 | Yes, 1 |

4.2 The use of 'experts'

I will start the detailed analysis with the use of 'experts' in the articles of the Global Times. In three of the four selected articles about the Tianjin explosions in the Global Times, journalists explain things in the words of 'experts' (*zhuanjia* 专家). Most of the time it is not stated who the expert is, or what educational or professional background this person has to qualify as an 'expert'. In about 50% of the use of the word 'expert', the word 'but' (*danshi* 但是 or *keshi* 可是) is used in the same sentence or the sentence after the sentence containing the word 'expert', or there is a contradiction without the word 'but'.¹⁶ In this way, previous statements are contradicted, and this contradiction is assigned more authority by implying that the later statement is the correct one, since it was an expert who said it. A clear example of this use of the word 'expert' can be found in article GT 11¹⁷.

A few neighboring countries are very concerned about the environmental consequences of the Tianjin explosions. The Yonhap News Agency [a Korean newspaper] stated on the 17th that after the accident with the big explosions in the harbor of Tianjin happened, various kinds of rumors continuously spread. On the South Korean internet comments appeared and spread such as “harmful materials will be transferred to South Korea together with the wind and rain”, and “the dangerous influence of poison of the Tianjin explosions, do not get caught in the rain”. An expert on the matter refuted the rumors, stating that based on the meteorological conditions, this absolutely won't happen.¹⁸

In this example, the opinion of the 'expert on the matter' (*youguan zhuanjia* 有关专家) was used to contradict the comments that appeared and were spread on the South Korean internet. The articles does not give any information about the expert, other than that he/she is an *expert on the matter*. Also no information is provided about the people who posted these comments online. The contradiction in assigned authority by the newspaper results in a differentiation between the expert and the South Korean netizens, in which the comments posed on the South Korean internet are depicted as false, while based on the facts given, no such differentiation can be made (internet users might also be seen as 'experts on the matter', for example if they have a background in environmental studies or chemistry).¹⁹

The word 'expert' is significantly more frequently used in the Global Times than in the

¹⁶ This is calculated for the four articles selected for detailed discourse analysis. Presumably, the percentage will be about the same for all articles of the Global Times.

¹⁷ In the text I will refer to the articles with the abbreviation GB (for the Global Times) and SW (for the Southern Weekend) followed by a number corresponding to the number on the list in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

¹⁸ Original text: 韩国媒体17日报道称，天津港爆炸事故引发各种谣言不断蔓延，韩国互联网上出现了各种评论，如“有害物质会随着风和雨一起转移到韩国”，以及“天津港爆炸的毒害影响，不会被雨水困住”。有关专家对此进行了反驳，表示根据气象条件，这绝对不可能发生。

¹⁹ Note: The word 'but' (*danshi* 但是 or *keshi* 可是) is not used in this example, but there is a clear contradiction between the comments of the South Korean netizens and the opinion of the 'expert'.

Southern Weekend. The word 'expert' appears only once in the four articles of the Southern Weekend (article SW 3), in the sentence 'several experts state [...]' (*duwei zhuanjia biaoshi* 多位专家表态). In this case there is no contradiction, but neither is any information given about who these experts are and why they can be called experts.²⁰

4.3 The use of foreign media

In all four news articles in the Global Times adopted in the sample of this research cite news publications of foreign media. The citations are used to state facts about the explosions or to state the opinion of foreign media about the behavior of certain political figures in China.

An article published on the front page of the Global Times on August 17, 2015 (article GT 8) is a good example to show the extensive scale of which foreign media are quoted in the Global Times. The article counts 13 paragraphs (excluding the title and the subtitle), of which 11 start with a citation of foreign media. Cited media include the English 'The Independent' (*Yingguo 'Dulibao'* 英国《独立报》), Hongkong media (*Xianggang meiti* 香港媒体), a German television news channel (*Deguo Xinwen Dianshitai* 德国新闻电视台), French radio 'Radio France Internationale' (*Faguo Guoji Guangbo Diantai* 法国国际广播电台), the Korean newspaper 'Everyday Economics' (*Hanguo 'Meiri Jingji'* 韩国《每日经济》), the English 'Sky News' (*Yingguo 'Tiankong Weish'* 英国《天空新闻》), Hongkong radio (*Xianggang diantai* 香港电台), German 'Worldnews Web' (*Deguo Quanqiu Xinwenwang* 德国全球新闻网), the Japanese 'The Diplomat' (*Riben Waijiao Xuezhe* 日本外交学者), and the American 'International Business Times' (*Meiguo 'Guoji Jingji Shibao'* 美国《国际经济时报》).

The whole article is structured around the use of foreign media. Besides the fact that almost all paragraphs begin with a citation of foreign media, the title of the article comes from an item broadcasted at the German television news channel mentioned before. The title of the article is: 'Explosions make Chinese people reflect on safety in manufacturing'²¹. The last sentence of the first paragraph of this article is: 'A German television news channel says that the explosions leads China to rethink'²². In this sentence, the object of the verb *to rethink* is not mentioned, but it is clear that it is about the safety of manufacturing, as the paragraph is about this topic.

²⁰ In Chinese journalism it is more common to not give detailed information on a source, compared to journalism in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and the United States. This is usually done to protect the source (Polumbaum 2008: 90). However, in the example of article GT 11, the information given by the source (the 'expert') does not seem to be sensitive, so there should be no need to protect the source.

²¹ Original text: 爆炸使中国人反思制造业安全

²² Original text: 德国电视台说爆炸使中国重新思考制造业安全

I think citing foreign media is used in order to make certain statements more credible, while there is actually no need to cite a news article of foreign media. One paragraph in the same article shows clearly that citing is not necessary for the correctness of writing or to let readers know where the information came from article GT 12 published on August 18, 2015:

The English Sky News reported on the 16th that the Chinese prime minister Li Keqiang arrived at the Tianjin rescue center on Sunday afternoon. The image displayed by Chinese media shows that this second highest ranked official of the Chinese Communist Party appeared at a place not far from the explosion center. He was wearing a normal white shirt, and he did not wear a face mask at all. Collapsed containers are visible nearby, and also some black smoke. The Chinese government repeatedly soothes the public by stating that although there is some more pollution than usual, it is still healthy to breath the air of Tianjin.²³

There are two comments I would like to make about the above paragraph. Firstly, it is striking that English media is quoted to state that the Chinese prime minister visited the Tianjin rescue center. It seems illogical that a Chinese newspaper needs an English source for this information, especially a semi-official newspaper such as the Global Times. During public outings of important Chinese politicians, numerous journalists of Chinese newspapers are present to report on everything these politicians do or say (or what they are wearing, as can be seen from the example). From the text it is not clear whether the information given throughout the paragraph comes from the English source, until the Chinese media are mentioned, or until the first full stop. In the original text, the first full stop only comes after the comment about the face mask. Because no quotation marks were used in citing the English media, it is unclear what is said by the English media and what information comes straight from the Global Times.

²³ Original text: 2015年8月16日，中国总理李克强在天津爆炸事故救援中心视察。新华社报道，李克强在视察过程中，并未佩戴口罩。现场可见倒塌的集装箱和浓烟。中国政府多次安抚公众，称虽然污染比平时严重，但呼吸天津的空气仍然是健康的。²³

Secondly, no information is given about the air quality in Tianjin after the explosions, not in this paragraph and not in the rest of the article. There is also no information on what the standards for air quality are, with respect to the air being ‘still healthy to breathe’. It is striking that it is explicitly noted that the Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang did not wear a face mask when he visited the explosion site. In stating this, the adverb *bing* (不) is used. This adverb is used to emphasize negations, so adding *bing* (不) to a negative statement, emphasizes that something is not. In other words, Li Keqiang did *not* wear a face mask *at all*. This information is used to make the statement about the air still being healthy to breathe more credible, while there is no proof provided for this statement.

The four articles of the Southern Weekend, in contrast, do not mention foreign media. This difference is not completely surprising since the Global Times is known for using foreign media to tell stories, and Southern Weekend is not. What is surprising is that some of the articles of the Global Times are completely structured around foreign media, even if foreign media do not seem to have anything to do with the matter. Another short example is given below (article GB 12):

Reuters News Agency stated that during the latest press conference organized by the Tianjin municipal government on the 17th, it was announced that the death rate has already risen to 114 persons, 698 persons are injured and hospitalized, and the number of missing persons has declined to 70 persons.²⁴

This example shows again that foreign media is used to give information that is easily directly accessible for Chinese newspapers. Journalists of the Global Times were most probably also present at the press conference organized by the Tianjin municipal government, and if not they could have cited other Chinese media who had journalists present. It seems as if the statement becomes a little more true if a foreign source is cited. Another possible explanation is that foreign media are used to show how important China is internationally, by indicating that premier foreign media such as the Reuters News Agency is interested in attending a municipal Chinese press conference. Thus, the citing of foreign media is probably not only used to legitimate statements made in the article, but also to legitimate the Chinese political situation, and show how important it is in the international political setting.²⁵

²⁴ Original text: 新华社天津17日电 天津市政府17日召开新闻发布会，通报爆炸事故伤亡情况。截至17日12时，遇难人数已上升至114人，698人受伤并住院治疗，失踪人数已降至70人。

²⁵ Paul Chilton writes in his book ‘Analysing Political Discourse – Theory and Practice’ (2004) about the use of foreigners in political discourse. According to Chilton, the main purpose is to legitimize statements. For more information see Chilton’s book.

4.4 The use of literary figures

The Southern Weekend used more literary figures than the Global Times. It is not always clear whether the journalists of the Southern Weekend thought them up themselves, or whether they are citing other people. In an article published on August 20, 2016 (article SW 3), the warehouse where the explosions took place is described as a “black warehouse” (*hei cangku* 黑仓库). In the third paragraph of the article, the following is said about the warehouse:

'The devil' is right at the side. Dangerous chemicals with the possibility to inflame, explode, corrode, become radioactive and pollute, for example gasoline, ethanol, lacquer and calcium carbide, sodium cyanide, are inextricably linked to our lives. Every day they are transported from the Eastern coastal areas to the whole country. Due to the deficiency of warehouses for hazardous materials, there are people within the industry who think that there are 'black warehouses' for hazardous chemicals. ²⁶

‘Black warehouses’ in this context means illegal warehouses. These ‘people within the industry’ state that because there are not enough warehouses for hazardous chemicals, there are illegal warehouses to fulfil the need (since everyone needs these chemicals every day). The Ruihai company where the explosions took place is said to be one of these ‘black warehouses’, as not all chemicals that were stored there were officially registered.

In the same article some other literary figures are used to describe what happened. The incident is for example described as a ‘devil mask’ of the port of Tianjin, and the extent of the explosions was described as ‘extremely big’ (*tebie zhongda* 特别重大). Throughout all articles, especially in the Southern Weekend, many idioms, four-character Chinese set phrases, are used. The Global Times used far less idioms in their reports, although some can be found. An example is the description of the hospitals of Tianjin right after the explosions, the paper uses the idiom *renmanweihuan* 人山人海 to describe a crowd of people, which literally means ‘there are so many people that it becomes a disaster’ (in article GB 2).

4.5 Different verbs for different actors, passive and active

As the first two sub-questions stated in the second chapter are about the responsibility and the role of the government in the Tianjin explosions, I paid special attention to the verbs used to describe the actions of different actors involved in the Tianjin explosions, in particular the government officials and institutions, and people working at or related to the Ruihai company where the explosions took place.

²⁶ Original text: “黑”仓库里存放着大量的危险化学品，一旦发生火灾，后果不堪设想。这些危险化学品，有的易燃易爆，有的有毒有害，有的具有腐蚀性，有的具有放射性，有的具有挥发性，有的具有刺激性，有的具有窒息性，有的具有麻醉性，有的具有致癌性，有的具有致畸性，有的具有致突变性，有的具有致敏性，有的具有致纤维化性，有的具有致肺纤维化性，有的具有致肝硬化性，有的具有致肾衰竭性，有的具有致脑出血性，有的具有致脑梗塞性，有的具有致心肌梗塞性，有的具有致猝死性，有的具有致休克性，有的具有致昏迷性，有的具有致死亡性。这些危险化学品，给我们的生活带来了巨大的安全隐患，也给我们的生命财产带来了巨大的威胁。我们必须高度重视这些危险化学品的安全管理，采取有效措施，防止事故的发生，保障人民群众的生命财产安全。”

Verbs that are used to describe action of officials or government related people include: to demand (*yaoqiu* 要求), to say (*shuo* 说 or *cheng* 成), to insist on (*jianchi* 坚持), to emphasize (*qiangdiao* 强调), to indicate (*biaoshi* 标示), to dispatch/send (*paichu* 派出), to point out (*zhichu* 指出), to show/indicate (*xianshi* 显示), to aid and comfort (*anfu* 安抚), to examine closely (*shenshi* 审视), to execute (*zhixing* 执行), to promise to undertake (*chengnuo* 承诺), to investigate (*jiancha* 检查) and to discover (*faxian* 发现)²⁷. These verbs were all used in active phrasing, and they are all active verbs in themselves, suggesting that the government takes accurate action and is determined to find the responsible person or organization. On the August 18, 2015 (article GB 12), the Global Times writes the following about government action with regard to the Tianjin explosions:

The paper ‘People’s Daily’ [the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party] reacted to some doubts, indicating that the central government’s attitude towards the accident that created numerous deaths and material losses is clear and firm. It is beyond doubt that they will investigate strictly and punish with severity.²⁸

Verbs that are used to describe action of people working at or related to the Ruihai company include: to say (*shuo* 说 or *cheng* 成), to give the impression (*gei yinxiang* 给印象), to exist (*cunzai* 存在), and to become (*chengwei* 成为).²⁹ These verbs are all more passive (except the verb to say, which is also used to describe government action), which shows that the company is portrayed as less active and decisive than the government. The following passage from an article published on August 18 (article GT 12) serves as an example of this indecisive portrayal of the Ruihai company:

The Ruihai company gives people the impression of being a company with “a profound background”, “many privileges”, and “an unregulated nature”. More and more company information is being publicly revealed. The irresponsible behavior and the possible abuse of power of the company behind the accident of the explosions are now coming to the surface.³⁰

²⁷ These examples were found in articles of both the Global Times and the Southern Weekend, although more come from articles in the Global Times, as this newspaper reported more on government action.

²⁸ Original text: 人民日报对天津爆炸事故的反应，表明中央政府对此次造成多人死亡和重大财产损失的事故，态度明确、立场坚定。毫无疑问，他们将严格调查并予以严厉惩罚。²⁸

²⁹ These examples were found in both articles of the Global Times and the Southern Weekend, although more come from articles in the Southern Weekend, as this newspaper reported more on the Ruihai company.

³⁰ Original text: 瑞海公司给人的印象是“背景深厚”、“特权众多”、“不受监管”。越来越多的公司信息正在被公开。瑞海公司不负责任的行径和可能的权力滥用，在爆炸事故的背后正在浮出水面。³⁰

In this example the Ruihai company is portrayed as a passive actor. The company does not seem to have any influence on what impression it gives to the people, and what information is being publicly revealed or is coming to the surface. This is opposite from the image that the reports give of the government and government related actors.

Apart from a clear differentiation between the verbs used by different actors, the articles also show a difference in active and passive phrasing for different actors. In contrast to the government and government officials, the company is often not the main subject of the sentence. It mostly appears as an object to the actions of other subjects or appears when other people (such as government officials or people from other companies) have something to say about the company. A good example is the following quote from an article published on August 13, 2015 in the Southern Weekend (article SW 1):

The reporters of the Southern Weekend obtained an inside report of June 2013 of the safety committee of the Ruihai company. According to the content of this report, the routine safety inspections of the Ruihai company had to be done once a month and before holidays. Besides this, the safety officer has to check-up every day.³¹

This passage shows that the Ruihai company is used as an object to the reporters of the Southern Weekend. Although the difference between the use of the company as an object or a subject is not something many people will notice when casually reading the article without critically analyzing it, it still results in the formation of an image of the Ruihai company as more passive and without much agency and influence.

An example of a passage where government action is portrayed as very active and with much agency is the following, published on August 14, 2015 in the Global Times (article GT 1). The Chinese president Xi Jinping and the Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang serve here as the main, active subjects:

Chinese president Xi Jinping puts out the demand to “save the wounded persons with full strength”, he also demands that “the responsible persons for the accident must be seriously investigated and dealt with”. The Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang points out that attention must be paid to scientifically carrying out the rescue operation, in order to prevent new accidents. He also points out that “the public must be openly informed without delay”.³²

³¹ Original text: 2013年6月6日，南方周末记者获得瑞海公司安全委员会的一份内部报告。根据报告内容，瑞海公司的常规安全检查每月进行一次，并在节假日前进行。此外，安全员每天都要检查。³¹

³² Original text: 中国国务院总理李克强在会见中外记者时指出，救援工作要科学施救，防止发生新的事故。他还指出，要“及时公开透明地发布信息”。³²

The verbs that are used to describe the actions of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are all used in an active way. Besides, as highlighted earlier in this section, the verbs are highly active, leaving no doubt about the decisive attitude of the government. They are not just suggesting or asking for an investigation, they are demanding it (*yaoqiu* 要求).

4.6 China versus Tianjin

My analysis shows that the word ‘China’ (*Zhongguo* 中国) appears 81 times (weighted percentage: 1.34) in all the articles combined, and that the word ‘Tianjin’ (*Tianjin* 天津) appears 88 times (weighted percentage: 1.23) in all the articles. These numbers show that although the accident happened in Tianjin, the explosions are seen to be connected to the whole of China, and as a consequence, the national government has the obligation to respond to it and take appropriate action.

These similar word frequencies of the words ‘China’ and ‘Tianjin’ can be observed in articles of both the Southern Weekend and the Global Times, but the proportion and the weighted percentages are not the same for both words. In the four articles of the Southern Weekend the word ‘China’ (*Zhongguo* 中国) appears 14 times (weighted percentage: 0.44), and the word ‘Tianjin’ (*Tianjin* 天津) appears 21 times (weighted percentage: 0.67). In the four selected articles of the Global Times the word ‘China’ (*Zhongguo* 中国) appears 67 times (weighted percentage: 1.96), and the same is true for the word ‘Tianjin’ (*Tianjin* 天津), which also appears 67 times (weighted percentage: 1.96). This shows that the Southern Weekend relates the accident slightly more to Tianjin and slightly less to China, whereas the Global Times seems to relate the accident equally to Tianjin and China. This difference between the two newspapers becomes clear in their emphasis in reporting. The Global Times reports more on the behaviour and the stance of the national government than the Southern Weekend, and the Global Times brings up the locations more often than the Southern Weekend.

5: Discussion of the sub-questions and research question

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of the previous chapter by answering the sub-questions and the main research question.

5.1 Sub-question 1: Who or what is blamed for the harbor explosions?

The two newspapers address this question differently. This question is easily answered for the Southern Weekend. This newspaper clearly assigns the responsibility of the explosions to the Ruihai company. According to information in ‘inside reports’ (*neibu huibao* 内部汇报) there were a lot of safety issues within the company. The next passage is quoted by the Southern Weekend of these ‘inside reports’ (article SW 1):

Construction workers used illegal electricity during the construction process. The plug connections and the power outlets were not operated according to national rules nor according to the rules of the Ruihai company for electricity use. They were repeatedly reminded but it was still not corrected. The place where the construction workers were stationed was of bad hygiene, in a mess, and not up to standard, there were hidden safety dangers. After repeated reminders, it was not taken care of and cleaned (it was only partly taken care of). The security department decided to issue a notice to rectify and improve the safety issues. The construction leader Zhu signed and confirmed. The construction leaders Zhu and Li, and construction workers smoked cigarettes at the construction site. This is a violation of the rules of the company.³³

The Global Times is less straightforward with an answer to the question of who is to be blamed for the accident. In the articles published during the ten days after the explosions there is no clear-cut judgement on who or what is to be held responsible for the accident, but it is clear that there is someone who is responsible and that this person (or persons) will be found through investigations led by the government, and that the government is not responsible. It is emphasized that the Chinese president Xi Jinping and the national government ‘demand’ further investigations to find the responsible person(s). There is some speculation about the possible causes and results of the explosions, but they are characterized by words such as ‘might’ (*keneng* 可能) and concluded by the statement that further investigations are needed to reveal the truth.

³³ Original text: 施工过程中，工人使用非法电力。插头连接和电源插座未按国家标准或瑞海公司规定操作。工人多次提醒仍未改正。工人驻扎的地方卫生条件差，乱糟糟的，不达标，存在安全隐患。多次提醒后，未得到重视和清理（只进行了部分清理）。安全部门决定下发整改通知，要求整改并改善安全问题。施工负责人朱某签字确认。施工负责人朱某和李某，以及施工工人吸烟。这是违反公司规定的。³³

5.2 Sub-question 2: How is the role of the government portrayed in the reporting on the harbor explosions?

As stated in the previous chapter, the Global Times reports more on the government and government officials than the Southern Weekend. The Southern Weekend doesn't take a clear position when it comes to government action. The government is barely mentioned in its articles, but when it is mentioned, it is not in a negative way. It is mentioned in discussing the rules and regulations that exist for working with hazardous chemicals. The following is said about the existence and the implementation of these rules (article SW 3):

Headed by 'regulations on the safety administration of dangerous chemicals', China has regulations for the production, management, storage, and handling of hazardous chemicals. However, the problem is not that "the Chinese regulations are not strict enough, but that it is hard to implement them, and that they do not have a strong workability".³⁴

This example shows that the Southern Weekend does not blame the government for the explosions, since there are good regulation on how to work with hazardous chemicals.

The Global Times takes a clearer position about the role and the behavior of the government. The Global Times is very positive about the government, and the government is portrayed as a very effective and decisive institution. The government and national politics are involved in the aftermath of the incident, as becomes clear from the word frequency, explained in the previous chapter (identical word frequency for Tianjin and China in the four selected articles of the Global Times). The government fulfills an important part in the articles of the Global Times. The following paragraph shows that the government is portrayed positively in the articles of the Global Times (article GT 12):

"Beijing promises to undertake a thorough investigation," reports the German television news channel on the 17th, on the day after the arrival of the Chinese prime minister Li Keqiang at the rescue center of the accident of the explosions of Tianjin on August 12. He emphasizes that this accident caused a lot of injuries and deaths and that the lessons were extremely painful. The State Council immediately established an investigation group, which has to thoroughly investigate the reason and rigorously investigate the responsible person according to the law, strictly hold him accountable, and severely investigate and handle the crime. With respect to neglecting one's duty, not doing one's job, and

³⁴ Original text: 中国有《危险化学品安全管理条例》，对危险化学品的生产、管理、储存、运输、使用、处置都有严格的规定。但是，问题不在于“中国的法规不够严格，而在于难以实施，而且它们并不具有很强的可操作性”。³⁴

engaging in illegal activities, this will all be investigated thoroughly, handled with firm determination, and absolutely not tolerated.³⁵

5.3 Sub-question 3: Is the analysis of the event in the two newspapers consistent?

The Southern Weekend and the Global Times do not really contradict each other in their analysis or in the facts they provide about the number of casualties and information on the company, but they clearly place different emphases in their analysis and reporting. As shown in the previous chapter, the Global Times makes more use of the authority of experts and the credibility of foreign media, whereas the Southern Weekend uses more literary figures.

The analysis of the articles of both newspapers shows that the Global Times as semi-official newspaper, reports more positively on how Chinese officials behave. As I have shown in the previous chapter in section 4.5 about the verbs used to describe the actions of government officials, government officials are portrayed as being decisive and determined. The Global Times takes a quite neutral stance when it comes to the possible negative effects of the explosions. Reportedly, the economy will suffer from the event, but as China has a strong economy and can handle setbacks, the consequences will be unnoticeable in a few years' time (article GT 10). In another article about dead fish that washed ashore in Tianjin a few days after the explosions (article GT 23), the newspaper again denies the need for big environmental concerns because of the explosions. The fish are supposedly extremely sensitive to small changes in the chemical composition of the water, which sometimes causes a sudden death for many of them. The residents living in the area reportedly have seen this happen before and are not at all worried.

The Southern Weekend is a more liberal newspaper, which is also clear from the analysis for this research. It doesn't include the government and government action as much in its reporting as the Global Times, and is not so positive when it mentions the government. The connection between Tianjin and the explosions is perceived to be stronger than the connection between China and the explosions (as is clear from the word frequency, see paragraph 4.6).

I perceived the reporting in the Southern Weekend to be fiercer than the reporting in the Global Times: in discussing the mistakes made by the company and their negligence of warnings about safety issues, the reporters of the Southern Weekend were judging and unrelenting, whereas the Global Times expressed the need for further investigations. The Southern Weekend comes across as a newspaper directed at more highly educated people, with more

³⁵ Original text: “中国石化天津分公司17日通报，天津滨海新区爆炸事故“8.12”发生后，中国石化高度重视，第一时间启动应急预案，全力组织抢险救援，目前事故原因正在进一步调查中。”

literary figures and a vocabulary that is more difficult to understand than the Global Times.

5.4 Main research question: How do two different Chinese newspapers report on a crucial crisis in the People's Republic of China, and what does this reporting suggest about the degree of freedom that Chinese journalism enjoys today?

The Global Times and the Southern Weekend had a different angle in their reporting on the harbor explosions in Tianjin. The Global Times made use of the opinion and judgement of 'experts', cited foreign media, stressed the need for further investigations and held an affirmative stance on the government by portraying it as an active, resolute, and fair actor in the crisis. The Southern Weekend used many literary figures, blamed the Ruihai company for the explosions and refrained from making statements about the role of the government.

My analysis shows that the reporting on the harbor explosions in Tianjin is not identical for the two newspapers. This implies that it is not true that journalists in China can only report according to the guidelines of the party. If it were true, the reporting in the Global Times and the Southern Weekend would be more identical than they actually are. At the same time, it is not likely that Chinese journalists can report completely according to their own insights. The only negative reporting on government officials that can be found in all of the 27 articles, is some critique on the press conference organized by the Tianjin local government (article GT 11). I think that if completely free and unrestrained reporting were possible and encouraged, there would have been at least a bit more negative reporting on the central government, government action, or government rules and regulations somewhere in the articles, as this was to be expected based on the negative reporting on the behaviour of the government during the aftermath of the explosions in foreign media sources (for example the British *The Telegraph* and the American *International Business Times*, among many others).

Neither the Global Times nor the Southern Weekend strikes me as a clear-cut watchdog or lapdog of the government. Critical discourse analysis of the two newspapers suggests that a nuanced understanding of Chinese media is the correct one, in which Chinese journalists are neither completely free to report according to their own insights nor are they only allowed to report according to the rules and guidelines of the party.

6: Conclusion

The present study shows what discourse mechanisms are used by two different Chinese newspapers in reports on the Tianjin explosions. The Global Times used the opinion of ‘experts’ to validate statements, it cited foreign media to gain more credibility and to stress the significance of the Chinese political system in the international political setting. Stressing the decisiveness of the government and the justness of their actions was an important focus of almost all articles published by the Global Times. The Southern Weekend used more literary figures and was clearly blaming the Ruihai company for the explosions, whereas the Global Times stressed the need for further investigations. A close analysis of the verbs used for different actors showed a difference in the perception and representation of the government and the Ruihai company. The strong verbs for government-related institutions and persons portray these institutions and persons as stronger and more decisive, as does the difference between the active and passive phrasing, by which the Ruihai company and people related to the company are represented as more passive and incapable. The similar word frequency of ‘Tianjin’ and ‘China’ shows that the explosions are seen as a national affair that needs national attention.

Although (i) the sample of this research was relatively small, (ii) later reporting on the findings of the investigation of the government was not included in the sample, and (iii) only one form of news media (newspapers) was looked at in this research, the outcomes of the research show that a more nuanced understanding of Chinese journalism will be able to describe the present Chinese journalistic field more accurately. The image of Chinese journalists as lapdogs of the government who can only report according to the rules and guidelines of the government is proven to be false, as there exist major differences between the reporting of the Global Times and the Southern Weekend. They both provide a different answer to the crucial question who is responsible for the explosions (the Southern Weekend points to the Ruihai company as the culprit, while the Global Times stresses the importance of further investigations before such an accusation could be made).

As the Chinese media landscape and the involvement of the government in newspaper reporting is continually changing along with other changes in the economy and society, it is important that researchers continue to critically examine Chinese journalism and the freedom of the press in China. The aim of the present study is to make a contribution to the general understanding and evaluation of Chinese journalism. Although the scope of the study was relatively small, and a study with a larger sample and more case studies would be needed to consolidate and expand the findings of this research, this study has given an important insight

into Chinese journalism which was almost invisible in academic literature on Chinese journalism until now, namely that a more nuanced understanding of Chinese journalism is most accurate, in which Chinese journalists can be seen as neither a watchdog nor a lapdog of the government.

7: List of references

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