

News Source Ideology: The Impact of Media Ownership Status – Asian Marxist vs. Libertarian Media

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Submitted: 2026, Mar 10; **Accepted:** 2026, Apr 08; **Published:** 2026, Apr 13

Citation: Dengdalai, E., Sukhee, A. (2026). News Source Ideology: The Impact of Media Ownership Status – Asian Marxist vs. Libertarian Media. *J Huma Soci Sci*, 9(4), 01-11.

Abstract

Previous studies on news sources have largely focused on usage, cases, cultural approaches, and influence, often overlooking the relationship between “source” and “medium” within the classic mass communication triad of “source–medium–audience.” This gap has served as the rationale for our study, whose findings reveal several latent patterns. This research aims to examine how media ownership status shapes news source selection through a comparative analysis of Marxist and libertarian press models.

Mongolia and China, neighboring Asian countries, provide a distinctive context due to their sharply contrasting media systems and ideological orientations. This makes them particularly valuable comparative research subjects. In this study, we selected a daily newspaper representing Mongolia’s libertarian, relatively free press, and a Chinese daily newspaper functioning as a central Marxist–statealigned organ for comparative analysis.

The findings show that source selection in media from two different systemic environments is heavily influenced by media ownership status and ideological framework. In Mongolia’s libertarian press, there is a strong tendency to preserve source diversity and balance, whereas in China’s Marxist press, state and official voices dominate, and sources are noticeably more onesided and propagandistic in orientation.

Keywords: Media Ownership Status, Libertarian Media, Marxist Media, Government Information, News Source, Media Ideology

1. Introduction

The chaotic, unverified, and sourceless flow of digital information has increasingly weakened audiences’ trust in the press and heightened their skepticism toward media content. Although daily newspapers still position themselves as reliable vehicles that deliver news sourced from verifiable references, they often function as mouthpieces that promote onesided perspectives and ideological narratives. To identify what factors, shape this dynamic and to connect the issue explicitly to media ownership status, this study selects representative “daily newspapers” from libertarian and Marxist media systems for a comparative analysis of their

news sourcing practices.

News sources do more than merely provide information; they also determine how particular issues are framed and “angled” for the public. Moreover, whoever controls the right to speak in the media is widely perceived as holding the power to define and regulate what counts as “truth” in society.

Source use has become one of the central concepts in journalism and mass communication studies, evolving into a key research focus. In the 1970s, British cultural scholar Stuart Hall proposed

the idea that “sources are the primary definers of social reality,” arguing that media organizations do not independently generate truth but rather relay and interpret events through the sources they choose to rely on (Hall & Scraton, 1981, p. 340) [1]. Today, the study of news sources has expanded beyond journalism and mass communication into sociology, cultural studies, and related fields, with scholars increasingly examining how different source groups mediate relationships between the media, the public, and the shifting distribution of power in the public sphere (Cottle, 2007) [2].

Recent research on source usage patterns has shown how media organizations construct and sustain public perceptions of chronology, continuity, and causality, thereby shaping broader social attitudes (MonroyTrujillo, 2025) [3]. In addition, journalism and mass communication textbooks and monographs have addressed source management in detail, from theoretical perspectives on source recruitment and selection to practical questions about interviewing and news writing.

Within Chinese journalism research, scholars have examined source verification (Bagana, 2004), source typologies (Sui Shan, 2021, p. 86), source categories (Bureechin, 2002), source utilization patterns (Suhua, 2006), and sourcerelated reporting techniques (HuAiYu, 2022) [4-8]. However, most of these studies have remained on the practical, methodological level, emphasizing issues of language, social groups, and professional practice rather than engaging in broader structural or ideological analysis.

In Mongolia, research on newspaper sources remains relatively limited. In 2007, Dr. O. Oyunbilig defended her doctoral dissertation on “The Current State of News Sources in Mongolian Newspapers and the Problems They Face,” which used sociological methods to identify the main challenges journalists encounter when locating and using sources (Oyunbilig, 2007) [9]. Confidential sources have also been explored in a methodfocused case study (Bazar, 2007) [10]. Nevertheless, foundational, macrolevel research on news sources in the Mongolian context is still scarce.

Research Question: To what extent do daily newspapers still fulfill their role as “reliable, sourcebased” gatekeepers against the disorder of the digital information flow, and to what extent do they simply function as passive transmitters of official or governmentaligned news?

1. Methodology

1.1. Sampling and Procedures

This study selected dailynewspaper news items as the primary material. News stories serve as the core object for analyzing news sources in professional journalism, and the sourcing patterns of news items also form the basis for understanding how other types of journalistic texts select and treat sources.

The following publications were selected as study objects for sampling and content analysis:

Odryn Sonin and *Zuuny Medee* (Mongolia), two representative

daily newspapers;

Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily, China), the central daily organ of the Chinese Communist Party.

For each publication, halfyear issues (six months) from 2004, 2014, 2019, and 2024 were drawn as samples, covering four distinct time points.

Each news item was coded according to a standardized coding scheme. Articles were coded in sequence according to the following criteria:

Story format: “indepth feature” vs. “brief news”;

Presence of sources: “sourced” vs. “unsourced”;

News topic: general categories such as society, politics, economy, and culture/sports.

For conflictrelated stories, the perceived balance of sources was also recorded, with greater balance indicating a relatively more pluralistic source mix.

When coding story topics, each article was assigned exactly one main category (C1–C4):

C1 – Society (e.g., crime, accidents, health, education, labor, quality of life);

C2 – Politics (e.g., parliamentary sessions, government activities, highlevel visits, laws, resolutions, state policy, party activities);

C3 – Economy (e.g., business, taxation, prices, markets, development, investment);

C4 – Culture/Sports (e.g., arts, cultural events, athletes’ achievements, cultural festivals).

Examples: “Investigation into reasons for rising meat prices” → coded as C3; “On the new law passed by the Parliament...” → coded as C2.

To ensure that the contentanalytic results validly reflect the phenomenon under investigation, the following validation procedures were applied:

First, content validity was established by ensuring that the coding categories and operational definitions (e.g., sourced vs. unsourced news, topicbased classifications) directly corresponded to the key theoretical concepts of the study. By covering all major dimensions of source use and topic framing, the coding scheme satisfied contentvalidity criteria.

Second, measurement validity was strengthened by defining operational indicators for concepts such as “indepth news,” “brief news,” “sourced news,” and “unsourced news” in clear, observable terms within the coding manual. This enabled reliable, replicable measurement of theoretically relevant variables on the empirical data. As a result, the study’s internal logic and comparative design are assumed to be relatively free from systematic bias.

The reliability indicators and validation techniques employed in this study help ensure that the contentanalytic results are scientifically grounded, replicable, and credible. Thus, the research findings are

not merely interpretive but methodologically warranted.

1.2. Key Concepts

Media ownership status refers to the economic and institutional framework of media ownership and control, including who owns and directs each media outlet.

To address the research questions, the study clarifies the status and systemic differences between libertarian and Marxist press models.

Media Ownership Status in Mongolia

Mongolia transitioned to a democratic system in 1990 and adopted a framework of “free press” principles. In 1998, the Law on Freedom of the Press was enacted, formally prohibiting the state from owning print media and requiring that all media outlets

operate according to freepress norms (Batbaatar J. et al., 2026) [11].

The two Mongolian dailies included in this study—*Odryn Sonin* and *Zuuny Medee*—are classified as libertarian-oriented, relatively freepress newspapers. However, major newspapers still enter into information and advertising contracts with the government and state institutions, which constitutes an important financial resource for them.

Journalists and editors in these outlets strive to work independently, gathering information and perspectives from diverse sources across government, civil society, and the public. As a result, they have the institutional capacity to produce and disseminate news based on verifiable primary sources.

Category	Description
1. Privately owned media (companies, individuals, NGOs, political parties)	Newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and online outlets owned by private companies, individuals, NGOs, and political parties.
2. Public radio and television (MNB, local public broadcasters)	Publicservice broadcasters such as the Mongolian National Broadcaster (MNB) and regional publicservice broadcasters, including some privately funded TV channels (e.g., Tenger TV).
3. Nonprofit/public media (communitybased outlets)	Nonprofit media established mainly for religious, family, automotive, or local community audiences, often supported by UNESCO and other international organizations.

Table 1: Structure of media ownership status in Mongolia

Media Ownership Status in China

In the People’s Republic of China, media outlets are directly controlled by the state and the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chinese media operate under strict party oversight and censorship (Freedom House, January 14, 2023), and the primary coordinating body is the CCP Central Propaganda Department (Buckley, March 21, 2018) [12,13]. Major institutions such as *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), Xinhua News Agency, and the China Media Group are all under CCP control (Williams, 2023) [14].

China is a Marxist-oriented media system where political power and ideological control are highly centralized. While both state and “private” media exist, the state exerts strong topdown control over the entire media environment. The result is a highly stratified, hierarchical media system whose structure affects not only daytoday operations but also the selection and framing of news sources.

Within the Chinese print sector, the “topdown” administrative and political hierarchy remains strong, yet the system has successfully adopted a “convergence journalism” (or unified editorial) model in the digital era, integrating print, broadcast, and online platforms under centralized party control.

Level	Representative outlet	Main news sources	Core function
Central level	People’s Daily, Xinhua News Agency	Central Party organs, State Council, ministries	Nationalpolicy guidance and “leading” (ideological) role
Regional (provincial) level	Beijing Daily, Southern Daily	Local governments, inhouse reporters	Intermediary “bridge” between central and local authorities
City (municipal) level	Hangzhou Daily, Evening News	Citizenlife reporting, publicinterest news	Localservice role and coverage of municipal affairs
Specialized (sectoral) level	China Education Daily	Professional institutions, experts, analysts	Indepth sectorspecific, specialist information

Table 2: Status of Chinese Media

2. Results

The content analysis of the news sample was summarized for each newspaper separately and then aggregated into combined quantitative indicators, which are presented in tables and graphs. Overall, the analysis covered 22,930 news items. When broken down by publication, the sample sizes are:

- *Odryn Sonin* (Mongolia): 7,826 articles (1,861 + 2,053 + 2,184 + 1,728);

- *Zuuny Medee* (Mongolia): 8,040 articles (1,864 + 1,996 + 2,208 + 1,972);
- *Renmin Ribao* (China): 7,064 articles (1,371 + 1,781 + 1,853 + 2,059).

Using the abovementioned coding scheme, the results on sourced news across the three newspapers were integrated and comparatively analyzed (see Figure 1 below).

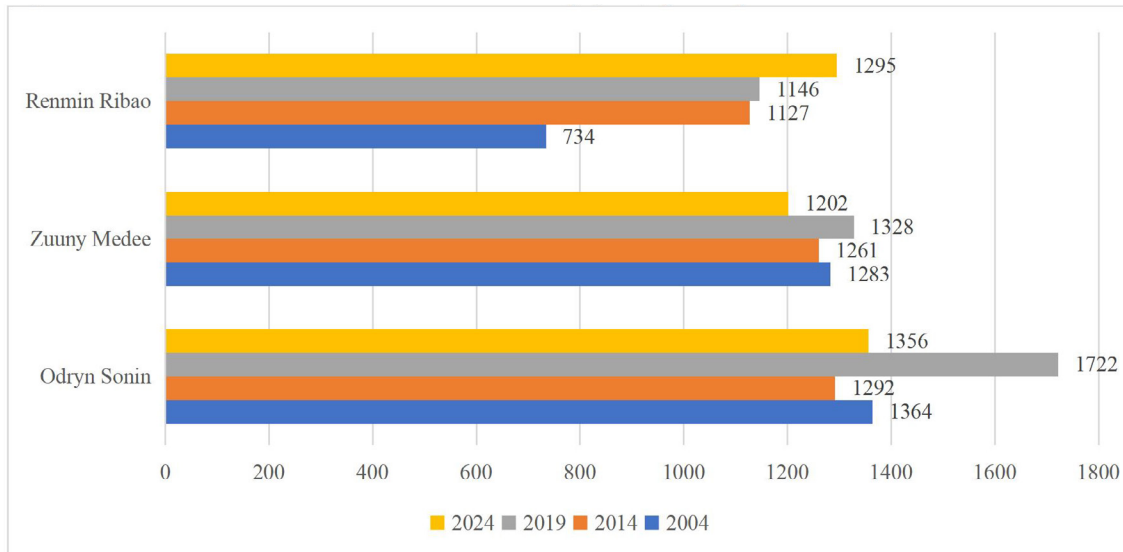


Figure 1: Indicator of sourced news in the three newspapers, by halfyear issues across 2004–2024

When the newspapers are ranked by their overall sourcing performance (summed across all four years), the results are:

- *Odryn Sonin*: 5,674 sourced articles (1,364 + 1,292 + 1,722 + 1,356);
- *Zuuny Medee*: 5,164 sourced articles (1,283 + 1,261 + 1,328 + 1,292);

- *Renmin Ribao*: 4,002 sourced articles (734 + 1,127 + 1,146 + 1,295).

Compared to the total number of articles in each newspaper, the ratio of sourced news paints the pattern shown in Figure 2.

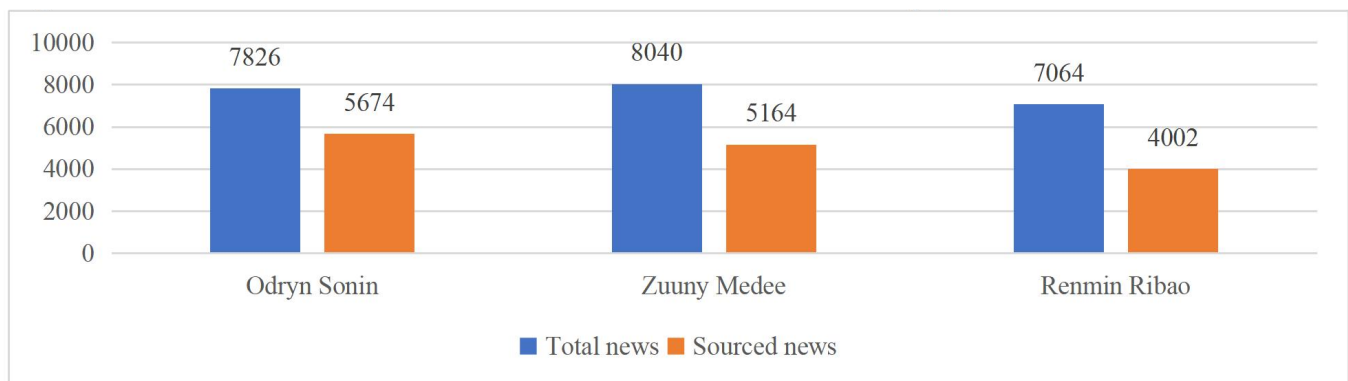


Figure 2: Sourced news versus total news volume across the three newspapers

Although these are quantitative indicators, they clearly reveal substantial differences in sourcing behavior among the selected newspapers.

Odryn Sonin and *Zuuny Medee* display the highest proportion of sourced news when their four-year totals are compared. Across the selected years, *Odryn Sonin* shows a steady upward trend in the

use of sourced news (see Figure 3), whereas *Zuuny Medee* remains relatively stable (see Figure 5). This pattern reflects a responsible, professionally oriented journalism style that seeks to ground reporting in verifiable references.

By contrast, *Renmin Ribao* had the lowest number of sourced news items in 2004 (734) but has gradually increased that figure over time, approaching the sourcing levels of the other two newspapers by 2024. This suggests an improvement in

professional sourcing practices. However, the dominance of statealigned and partyoriented sources in politicalthemed news (see Table 3) indicates that the newspaper still functions largely as a propagandistic organ, channeling a single ideological stream and shaping public opinion in line with official narratives.

On the basis of the quantitative indicators, the study further analyzed trends in the use of sourced news in the three newspapers.

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

Table 1: Trend in sourced news (change 2019–2024)

The table reveals two main tendencies. First, a downward trend in the number of sourced news items is evident between 2019 and 2024 for *Odryn Sonin* and *Zuuny Medee*. In particular, *Odryn Sonin* shows the steepest decline (-21.25%), which is directly related to the overall reduction in the volume of news published by the newspaper. Second, *Renmin Ribao* records a positive shift, increasing its count of sourced news by 13.00% over the same period, indicating a gradual professionalization of sourcing practices within the Chinese context.

Despite the recent decline, *Zuuny Medee* maintained the most stable proportion of sourced news, with only a modest drop

in the number of sourced items. This stability suggests that the editorial policy of that newspaper continues to prioritize news quality and sourcebased reporting even as the media environment changes.

Case: *Odryn Sonin* (Mongolia)

Odryn Sonin is published six days a week, typically in 16 or 24page formats. Across the selected halfyear samples (July–December of 2004, 2014, 2019, and 2024), the newspaper published a total of 6,895 indepth news items and 931 brief news items, amounting to 7,826 news articles. In recent years, however, the overall volume of news has sharply decreased.

Topic	2024 (July–Dec)			2019 (July–Dec)			2014 (July–Dec)			2004 (July–Dec)			Total
	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	
Society	725	37	762	886	61	947	783	68	851	559	132	691	3251
Politics	437	82	519	617	121	738	724	92	816	623	78	701	2774
Economy	197	31	228	182	24	206	166	13	179	127	25	152	765
Culture/ arts/ sports	183	36	219	251	42	293	159	48	207	276	41	317	1036
Total	1542	186	1728	1936	248	2184	1832	221	2053	1585	276	1861	7826

Table 2: *Odryn Sonin*: Topicwise and formatwise indicators (2004–2024)

A closer look at these figures reveals several key patterns.

Ranking topics by cumulative volume (2004–2024), societyrelated stories (3,251) emerge as the most prominent, followed by politics (2,774). The volume of societythemed news is highest in 2019 (947 items) and declines by 2024 (762 items), yet it remains the single largest topic category. This pattern reflects a responsible, citizenshiporiented journalism that prioritizes publicinterest issues and civilsociety voices, consistent with libertarian press norms.

Politics remains a core topic, but the number of political news items has sharply declined from 816 in 2014 to 519 in 2024, largely explaining the overall drop in the newspaper’s total news volume. This trend may be linked to the newspaper’s commercial and institutional relationships with the government, advertising contracts, and the broader politicalmedia environment.

Culture, arts, and sports coverage (1,036 items) is smaller than either society or politics but indicates that *Odryn Sonin* still functions as a source of entertainment and light news, appealing

to a broader audience. Meanwhile, economic news (765 items) has gradually increased over time, reaching its highest point in 2024 (228 items). This suggests that the newspaper has progressively strengthened its focus on economically relevant information.

The ratio between indepth and brief news is also significant. *Odryn Sonin* predominantly publishes news in indepth format (85–89%

of total items), while the share of brief news has declined from 14.83% in 2004 to around 10–11% in the last decade (2014–2024). This indicates a consistent editorial policy of prioritizing detailed, sourcebased reporting over short, superficial updates, distinguishing the newspaper from more lightweight news outlets.

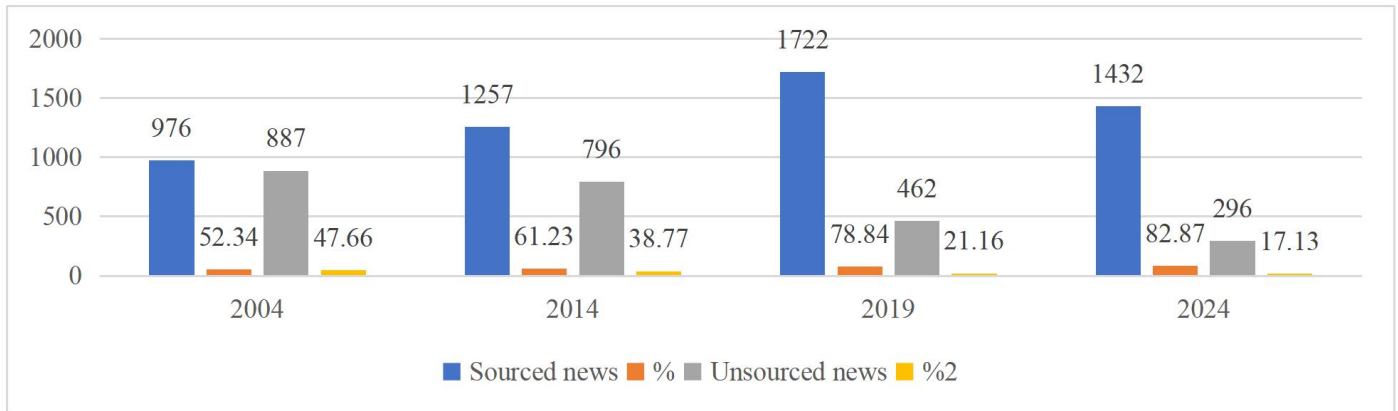


Figure 3: Proportion of sourced news in *Odryn Sonin*, 2004–2024

The share of sourced news in *Odryn Sonin* exhibits a remarkable upward trend over the past 20 years. The proportion of sourced news rose from 52.34% in 2004 to 61.23% in 2014, then jumped to 78.84% in 2019, and reached its peak at 82.87% in 2024. By contrast, the share of unsourced news fell from 47.66% to 17.13%.

This steady increase shows that the newspaper has progressively strengthened its commitment to accuracy, verification, and journalistic accountability. The adoption of a clear editorial norm—requiring journalists to cite sources in their reporting—has produced measurable gains in quality. Even though the absolute number of news items decreased in 2024 (1,728), the remaining stories were of considerably higher quality, with over 82% based

on identifiable sources. This signals a shift from quantitydriven to qualitydriven editorial strategy.

Case: *Renmin Ribao* (China)

Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily) is a flagship daily newspaper and a central organ of the Chinese Communist Party, widely regarded as the most authoritative and widely circulated national newspaper in China. The newspaper is often described as embodying the “official discourse” of Chinese society (Huang, 2007) [15].

Across the halfyear samples (July–December 2004, 2014, 2019, 2024), the newspaper published a total of 7,064 articles, of which 6,402 were indepth news items and 662 were brief news items.

Topic	2024 (July–Dec)			2019 (July–Dec)			2014 (July–Dec)			2004 (July–Dec)			Total
	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	
Society	612	34	646	553	27	580	518	39	557	424	12	436	2219
Politics	588	86	674	626	63	689	549	112	661	482	29	511	2535
Economy	252	73	325	186	29	215	246	18	264	117	32	149	953
Culture/ arts/ sports	384	30	414	327	42	369	278	21	299	260	15	275	1357
Total	1836	223	2059	1692	161	1853	1591	190	1781	1283	88	1371	7064

Table 3: *Renmin Ribao*: Topicwise and formatwise indicators (2004–2024)

Between 2004 and 2024, the total number of sourced news items published by Renmin Ribao increased steadily from 1,371 items to 2,059, reflecting both the expansion of the newspaper's coverage and higher publication frequency. The number of brief news items also rose noticeably, from 88 in 2004 to 223 in 2024, indicating a growing emphasis on speed and immediacy in the dissemination of information.

However, this rise in brief news may also exert downward pressure on source quality, as hurried reporting can reduce the time and resources available for verification. Hence, the growth in shortformat items should be interpreted with caution in terms of its impact on the newspaper's overall sourcebased reporting standards.

Politicsthemed news remains the largest topic category across all years, with a total of 2,535 items, substantially outnumbering the other topics. The highest volume is recorded in 2019 (689 items); although it slightly declines to 674 items in 2024, politics still occupies the leading position. This pattern reflects the dominant

role of the ruling party and state propaganda in the newspaper's content and illustrates how political sources shape public discourse in a communist media system.

Social news ranks second overall (2,219 items), and is the most sharply growing topic, rising from 436 items in 2004 to 646 items in 2024 (a net gain of 210). This indicates that Renmin Ribao increasingly emphasizes social issues and everyday life topics, likely in response to rising public interest and the government's own "social stability" narrative.

Economic coverage fluctuates between 2004 and 2019 but reaches its highest volume in 2024 (325 items), suggesting a heightened focus on economic development and marketrelated news. The relatively low level in 2019 (215 items) stands out as an anomaly that warrants further contextual analysis.

Now, examining the sourcing patterns within each topic across time, the following distribution emerges for Renmin Ribao (see Figure 4).

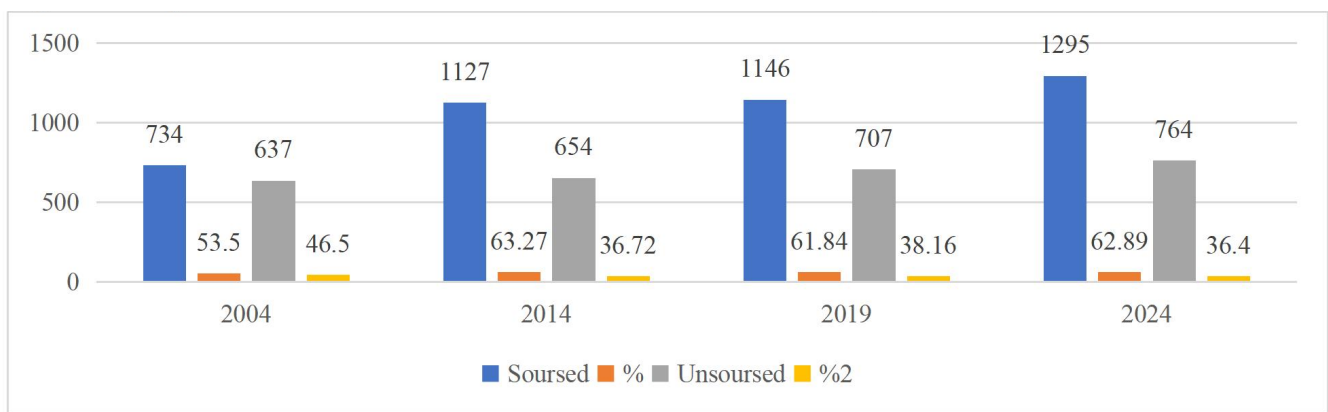


Figure 4: Proportion of sourced vs. unsourced news in Renmin Ribao, 2004–2024

The overall trend (2004–2024) shows that the number of sourced news items steadily increases from 734 in 2004 to 1,295 in 2024, an approximate twothirds growth. This corresponds to a broader expansion in the newspaper's coverage and the rising speed and volume of information dissemination. At the same time, unsourced news also rises, from 637 in 2004 to 764 in 2024, but at a slower rate. In particular, between 2019 and 2024, sourced news increases from 1,146 to 1,295, while unsourced news rises from 707 to 764, indicating a modest net improvement in sourcing practices.

The proportion of sourced news shows a clear upward trend:

- 2004: 53.5%
- 2014: 63.27%
- 2019: 61.84% (slightly down but still high)
- 2024: 62.89% (the highest level recorded).

This indicates that Renmin Ribao has progressively strengthened its journalistic rigor and sourcebased reporting, even within a tightly controlled partystate media system. By 2024, roughly

twothirds of all published news items are sourced.

Conversely, the share of unsourced news declines from 46.5% in 2004 to 36.4% in 2024, signaling an improvement in verification standards and greater attention to sourcing norms. However, within politicalthemed news, the share and density of official sources remain high, reinforcing the paper's role as a propagandistic organ channeling the party line.

Case: Zuuny Medee (Mongolia)

Zuuny Medee is published five times a week, in A2 format, with 8–16 pages and 62–65 issues per year. The paper emphasizes highimpact, socially relevant reporting and targets a broad audience with a mix of political, economic, cultural, and social content (MönkhJargal, 2025, pp. 28–29) [16].

The halfyear samples (July–December 2004, 2014, 2019, 2024) yield the following topic and format distribution:

Topic	2024 (July–Dec)			2019 (July–Dec)			2014 (July–Dec)			2004 (July–Dec)			Total
	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	Indepth	Brief	Total	
Society	577	349	926	883	368	1251	645	151	796	676	139	815	3788
Politics	354	167	521	406	146	552	653	136	789	535	102	637	2499
Economy	164	19	183	157	38	195	99	27	126	121	41	162	666
Culture/ arts/ sports	319	23	342	173	37	210	242	43	285	214	36	250	1087
Total	1414	558	1972	1619	589	2208	1639	357	1996	1546	318	1864	8040

Table 4: Zuuny Medee: Topicwise and formatwise indicators (2004–2024)

Aggregated across the period, *Zuuny Medee* shows a strong focus on social issues, which constitute the largest topic category (3,788 items). However, social coverage declines sharply after 2019, while culture and sports coverage increase. Political news volume also decreases noticeably, indicating a shift in the newspaper’s editorial direction away from hardnews politics

toward more entertainment-oriented and lifestyle-oriented content.

This thematic shift correlates directly with the overall decline in news volume after 2019, as the paper publishes fewer high-impact political and social stories and replaces them with lighter, culture and sports-focused items.

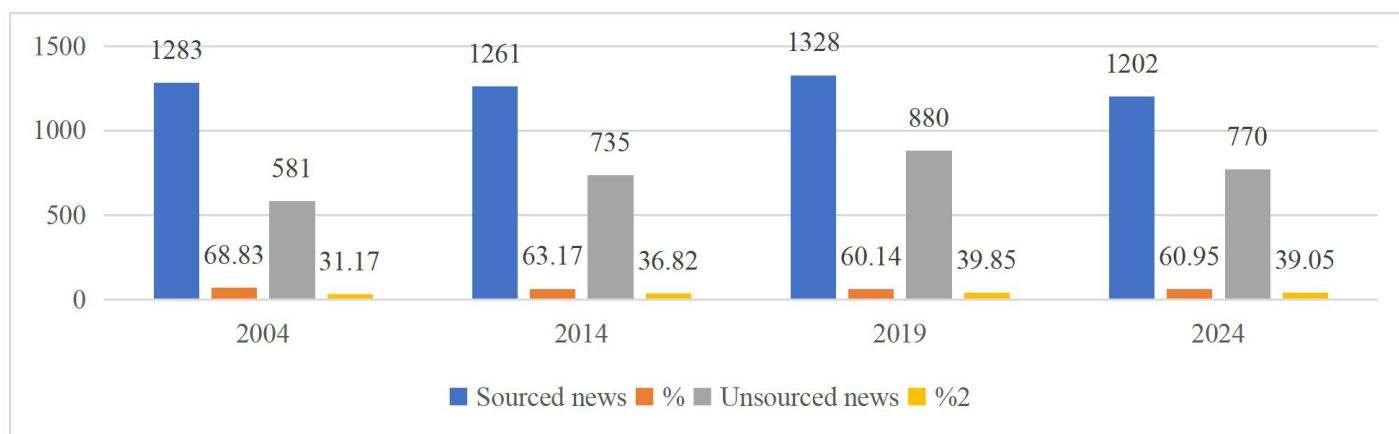


Figure 5: Proportion of sourced vs. unsourced news in *Zuuny Medee*, 2004–2024

The number of sourced news items in *Zuuny Medee* rises modestly from 1,283 in 2004 to 1,328 in 2019, reflecting a stable commitment to source-based reporting. However, by 2024 the count drops to 1,202, the lowest level among the four years. This decline coincides with an increase in brief news items, which are less likely to carry explicit source attribution. Even so, the share of unsourced news slightly declines compared to 2019, suggesting a small improvement in sourced disclosure practices within that year.

Although 60–68% of news items remain sourced, the proportion of unsourced news (31–40%) has grown over time. This indicates that the newspaper faces ongoing challenges in maintaining consistent source verification standards, especially as it relies more on short, fast-format news.

Balance and Ideological Currents in Sourcing

Using multiple sources can signal balanced coverage, but this metric can be misleading if the plurality of sources masks an underlying one-sided bias. In many Mongolian news stories, even

when multiple sources are cited, the majority represent a single perspective or interest group. Thus, the mere presence of several sources does not guarantee balanced framing.

In Marxist-oriented media, the concept of balance is largely absent in conflict-themed stories, because the paper’s priority is to convey the official party line rather than present opposing viewpoints. Instead, balance often appears in high-level political visits, meetings, and formal ceremonies, where both domestic and foreign participants are mentioned as sources.

In Mongolian “conflict” stories, the situation is similar. In *Odryn Sonin*, only 19 out of 101 items with two or more sources achieved true balance, while 28 stories that required counterperspective sources relied on only one side, and 14 items with a single source failed to represent the opposing side.

This pattern highlights that source balance is strongly linked to the libertarian media status and the independence of the press. In

contrast, in China, news is largely channeled through CCP-controlled institutions and tightly supervised state sources, even in economic and social coverage. Although recent years show an increase in sourced reporting (e.g., rising source counts in *Renmin Ribao* and Inner Mongolia's *Renmin Ribao* edition), party and state institutions remain the dominant source type, and their content is clearly framed in a propagandistic, ideology-laden manner.

In this context, journalists effectively act as “transmitters” of official discourse, using party-aligned sources to shape public opinion rather than critically questioning the claims being reported.

3. Discussion

One key finding that reinforces the answer to the second research question is that Marxist-oriented media rely on state-aligned sources to “verify” news content, and in this sense adopt a propagandistic and manipulative quality. This issue is therefore raised explicitly in the discussion.

Our interpretation of the data gains support from several distinctive features of the Marxist media system in China.

Structured media system and source stratification. Over a long period of development, the Chinese newspaper sector has formed a relatively hierarchical, tiered system divided into: Central-level newspapers; Regional-level newspapers (central-provincial / autonomous-region organs); City-level newspapers; Specialized (niche-sector) newspapers.

Each tier corresponds to a different audience reach, political status, and social role, and each has its own preferred source channels and source-selection logic.

Central-level newspapers such as *Renmin Ribao* stand at the top of the newspaper hierarchy, conveying the voice of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and shaping national public opinion. They are directly supervised by the CCP Central Propaganda Department and the State Council, and are expected to promote party policies and guide the ideological line of the public. Their reporting emphasizes national policy debates, key current events, and international affairs, and their primary sources are central government bodies, CCP institutions, Xinhua News Agency, and in-house investigative reporting. These newspapers portray politics and power at the highest level and function as the main ideological “guides” of the Chinese media system.

Regional-level newspapers form the backbone of the system and include the official party organs of provincial and autonomous-region party committees. They cover local politics and socioeconomic affairs, acting as intermediaries between the central government and local authorities. Their sources are largely local party committees, local governments, local news agencies, and the Xinhua regional branches, as well as reprinted central-level news. In recent years, media groups such as the Southern Media Group and Shanghai Media Group have expanded their newspaper and new-media portfolios, integrating print, online, terminals, and

microblogs into a “converged-media” model under central-party control.

City-level newspapers and specialized newspapers cater to more specific audiences. City newspapers link municipal governments with citizens and often run “citizen hotlines” and public-interest columns. Their sources include local party organs, government announcements, street-level reporters, and reprinted central news. Specialized newspapers (e.g., *China Business Daily*, *21st Century Business Herald*) recruit highly professional sources such as sectoral regulators, research institutes, and financial experts, and focus on market dynamics and investment analysis rather than broad political narratives.

Across all tiers, the source selection system is tightly aligned with the party-state hierarchy, and the dominance of official, institutional sources is evident in both political and nonpolitical news.

Sourcing and ideology in *Renmin Ribao*: *Renmin Ribao* exemplifies the central-level newspaper in the Chinese system. As the official organ of the CCP Central Committee, it occupies a privileged position in the media landscape. Its news coverage is marked by a strong political and ideological orientation, and the headlines on the front page usually reflect the party's current work agenda and ideological line.

The paper's primary sources include: Transcripts and official releases from central party and state meetings; Statements and reports from central government bodies; Investigative reporting by its own journalists; Xinhua News Agency dispatches and selected overseas media items.

In international reporting, *Renmin Ribao* increasingly emphasizes a “China's perspective” and seeks to present its own interpretation of global events, relying on its own foreign correspondents, joint productions with other Chinese media, and commentary from domestic scholars and analysts. This shift reflects a desire to reduce overreliance on Western news agencies and to present China as an independent actor in world affairs.

The paper's comment sections—such as the *Renmin Shibao* *Renminping* editorials, *Guangming Forum* in *Guangming Daily*, and *Economic Commentary* in the *Economic Daily*—function as ideological filters and public-opinion-guidance tools. Their sources are often in-house editorial staff or invited establishment experts, and the content closely aligns with the party's line and policy priorities.

Regional and city-level newspapers: Provincial and regional newspapers operate under the “top-down” logic of the party-state, starting from the highest-level government directives and then moving downward to report on the realities of everyday life. Their reporting structures are often organized as “central office – local bureau – field reporters”, which allows them to cover both national policy implementation and local developments.

At the city and district level, newspapers give rising attention to public interest news and soft news, such as neighborhood changes and individual life stories. These stories may seem less “hard news” in content, but they serve as concrete records of grassroots change and contribute to local social memory.

At the same time, the dependence on central sources (especially Xinhua and higher level party organs) remains strong, which limits the proportion of independent, nonofficial sources in their reporting.

The impact of digitalization: The rise of digital platforms and social media (WeChat, Weibo, etc.) has introduced new dynamics into the source system. User generated content and online communities increasingly become sources of breaking news, and many newspapers now integrate these platforms into their online/offline converged models.

However, even in this convergent environment, the dominance of official sources persists. The stratified, party controlled source hierarchy continues to shape both traditional and new media journalism in China.

In contrast, the libertarian press in Mongolia—represented by *Odryn Sonin* and *Zuuny Medee*—faces its own challenges (e.g., declining political coverage and high rates of unattributed news), but its source patterns reflect greater plurality and more overt attention to source balance, even if full balance is not always achieved.

Thus, the discussion confirms that media ownership status and ideological framework strongly shape the role and character of news sources, and that Marxist oriented media tend to use official sources as instruments of ideological control, whereas libertarian media strive toward, but imperfectly realize, a more pluralistic source environment.

4. Conclusion

The total number of news items published by daily newspapers in Mongolia is showing a relative downward trend, indicating that the traditional newspaper space is being compressed, especially by fast breaking digital news. At the same time, different editorial strategies for in depth versus brief news—where *Odryn Sonin* prioritizes in depth reporting while *Zuuny Medee* relies more on brief news—have led to significantly different source usage patterns.

In general, *Odryn Sonin* has undergone a sharp qualitative improvement in sourcing, with a steadily rising share of sourced news over time. However, the paper has reduced its overall volume of news and largely stepped back from the fast news function, which may limit its timeliness and public reach. By contrast, *Zuuny Medee* has maintained a relatively stable sourcing level, but the increasing proportion of brief, often unsourced political news has exerted negative pressure on quality. About 73% of its brief news items focus on politics, and the overall share of unsourced news

(31–40%) suggests that formal source attribution and verification still need strengthening.

Renmin Ribao, over the same period, shows a clear trend toward more sourced reporting: the number of news items with identifiable sources has steadily increased, reflecting higher editorial standards and greater attention to journalistic accountability. However, the overall volume of news has also grown, which has helped preserve the average level of unsourced reporting over time. This means that, while the paper is moving closer to the norm of source based journalism, the room for unverified or lightly sourced material remains substantial.

5. Policy Oriented Implications

Based on these findings, the study argues that each newspaper must address the following source related priorities:

For *Odryn Sonin*: Go beyond being a passive transmitter of government and party oriented news and instead counterbalance official narratives with independent, interest neutral sources.

Strengthen investigative reporting anchored in social context and citizens lived experience, and use field based sources to produce more socially and economically relevant news.

For *Zuuny Medee*: Reduce the overall share of brief news, especially in the political domain, and allocate more space to in depth, well sourced, and balanced reporting.

Emphasize thorough sourcing and referencing so that the paper’s orientation shifts from fast updating toward quality driven, accountable journalism.

For *Renmin Ribao*: Strengthen journalists’ rights to independent reporting and ensure that information coming from party and state institutions is verified through multiple official and field based channels.

Encourage editors to seek out alternative perspectives, even within the constraints of a tightly controlled media system, so that the paper’s coverage remains more balanced and responsible despite its ideological orientation.

Ultimately, the status of media ownership and political control strongly shapes how sources are used. In Mongolia’s libertarian media environment, the principle of source balance is closely linked to the independence and ethical responsibility of the press. In contrast, in China’s highly censored context, the heavy reliance on state controlled institutions and political actors as primary sources serves an ideological, propagandistic function that steers public opinion rather than offering genuinely pluralistic debate.

Thus, the study confirms that media ownership status is a key determinant of source plurality, balance, and overall journalistic orientation, not only in Mongolia and China but also in broader comparative media system terms.

6. Implications and Recommendations

The findings suggest that libertarian media in Mongolia should treat source diversity and balance as core editorial standards, particularly in politics and social issues. Editors are recommended to limit unsourced brief political news, require explicit source attribution, and develop internal source-verification checklists.

In the Chinese context, the study recommends that media scholars and watchdogs track how party-aligned sources frame non-political news, and how media convergence alters the hierarchy of sources. Regulators and self-regulatory bodies in both countries should consider public-interest reporting standards that prioritize independent, evidence-based sourcing over speed-oriented, unverified content.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors Contributions

Erdenedalai and Amartuvshin Sukhee were responsible for study design and revising. Erdenedalai was responsible for ensuring an accurate data collection and interpretation. Amartuvshin Sukhee drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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