

Between Partnership and Risk: Localizing and Securitizing Narratives about China in Fijian News Media, 2022–2025

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Abstract: This article investigates how three Fijian English-language news outlets made sense of China-related issues during a period of intensified Pacific regional debate from 2022 to 2025. Drawing on a cleaned corpus of 178 articles from FBC News, The Fiji Times, and Fiji Sun, and a close qualitative reading of 75 theoretically rich texts, it argues that Fijian media do not simply reproduce external narratives. Instead, China-related coverage is shaped by issue-conditioned narrative mediation. Development, health, agriculture, climate, and infrastructure stories are commonly localized into partnership narratives when attached to concrete Fijian and Pacific needs. By contrast, policing, defence, military-base concerns, PIF/Chinese Taiwan disputes, influence-related reporting, and infrastructure accountability are more likely to be securitized or risk-framed. Across both processes, Pacific agency matters. Fijian and regional actors use sovereignty, consensus, balanced diplomacy, the Ocean of Peace, and regional priorities to filter external frames.

1. Introduction

In Fiji's English-language news sphere, China-related issues have increasingly appeared not only as matters of bilateral cooperation, but also as questions of Pacific regional order, development priorities, and sovereignty-sensitive governance. These issues have generated different interpretations in policy debate, academic analysis, and news coverage. Yet much commentary still treats the Pacific mainly as an arena in which larger powers project influence, missing how Pacific societies themselves interpret and translate external narratives.

Fiji offers a useful site for examining this process. It is a regional diplomatic hub, an influential Pacific Island state, and home to an active English-language media environment. Fiji sits at the intersection of China-related cooperation, traditional partners, and Pacific regionalism. Existing studies show that Pacific responses to China are mixed rather than uniform. Zhang (2022)[1] demonstrates that local perceptions of China in Pacific Island countries are shaped by issue-specific experiences and cannot be reduced to simple support or opposition. Mausio (2023)[2] similarly argues that Fiji's relations with China cannot be reduced to one-way influence, because Fiji has long exercised agency in choosing development partners and setting aid priorities.

The relevance of strategic narrative theory lies in its capacity to link diplomatic communication with the public meanings produced in news discourse. Miskimmon et al. (2013)[3] define strategic narratives as communicative tools through which actors organize expectations about international politics. In the Pacific, Wallis et al. (2023)[4] show that Chinese strategic narratives are not simply adopted by Pacific leaders, but are selectively interpreted and instrumentalized in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Samoa. Media framing theory is also central to this study. Entman (1993)[5] shows that framing involves problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Doidge and Kelly (2025)[6] further show that Pacific Island news media report China through competing development and geopolitical discourses while retaining local discursive mediation. Wallis et al. (2022)[7] demonstrate how Australian discourse has often framed China in the Pacific through threat and competition, helping to shape external risk-oriented narratives.

Despite these advances, an important gap remains. Existing research has focused mainly on external representations of China, elite diplomatic discourse, or broad multi-country media patterns. Less attention has been paid to how one Pacific media environment constructs China across different issue areas over time. This matters because China is not represented in a single stable way. In Fijian news texts, China may appear as a development partner, donor, infrastructure contractor, climate partner, public health supporter, agricultural technology provider, security actor, geopolitical competitor, or source of influence-related concern. The central question is not whether China is represented positively or negatively, but under what conditions China-related narratives become localized as partnership and under what conditions they become securitized as risk.

This article addresses that question through a theory-informed qualitative content analysis of Fijian news coverage from 2022 to 2025, drawing on 178 China-related articles from FBC News, The Fiji Times, and Fiji Sun, of which 75 were selected for close coding and event-based comparison. It argues that Fijian news media do not simply reproduce external narratives, but mediate China-related coverage through localization, selective securitization, and small-state agency.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The framework is built from four debates directly relevant to the empirical puzzle: China's role in Oceania, strategic narratives and media framing, the local translation and risk-framing of external engagement, and small-state agency. Together, they support the article's core concept of issue-conditioned narrative mediation.

Research on China in Oceania provides the regional background. Wesley-Smith and Porter (2010)[8] offer an early overview of China's expanding diplomatic, economic, and social relationships across Oceania. Firth (2024)[9] shows that Fiji's foreign relations from 2006 to 2023 were shaped by changing leadership, regional positioning, and efforts to diversify external partnerships. These studies prevent China-Fiji relations from being reduced to simple influence or dependency, but they focus mainly on diplomacy, aid, security agreements, and state-level relations. Less is known about how China is narrated within Fiji's everyday media environment.

Strategic narrative theory helps explain why media representation matters. Miskimmon et al. (2013)[3] conceptualize strategic narratives as communicative structures through which actors make international politics meaningful. In the Pacific, China, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, regional institutions, and island governments all participate in competing narrative projects. Wallis et al. (2023)[4] show that Pacific leaders do not simply absorb China's strategic narratives, but selectively interpret and use them for their own diplomatic purposes. This article extends that insight from elite diplomacy to news discourse by asking how Fijian media select, translate, or contest China-related narratives across issue domains.

Media framing theory provides the operational bridge between narrative and textual analysis. Entman (1993)[5] argues that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest remedies. Here, framing is used to identify how news texts organize China-related issues: whether China is positioned as a development partner, donor, infrastructure builder, security actor, geopolitical competitor, or risk source. This moves the analysis beyond topic classification. A road project, for example, may be framed as rural connectivity, economic opportunity, debt risk, or governance accountability depending on headlines, sources, quotations, and evaluative language.

Localization and securitization explain two contrasting pathways. Acharya (2004)[10] defines localization as the reconstruction of external ideas to fit local identities, beliefs, and institutional contexts. In this study, localization is not simple acceptance of an outside message, but the process through which China-related cooperation is reworded around Fijian and Pacific concerns such as rural access, health capacity, food security, climate resilience, education, livelihoods, and community development. A narrative becomes locally persuasive only when it is connected to recognized needs and norms. By contrast, securitization explains how cooperation can be reframed as risk. Buzan et al. (1998)[11] argue that security is socially constructed when issues are represented as urgent threats requiring special attention. In this article, securitization is treated as an analytical category, not as a claim that China is inherently threatening. It identifies when China-related issues are framed through sovereignty, policing, defence, institutional integrity, regional stability, military basing, or political influence.

Small-state agency completes the framework. Baldacchino (2009)[12] cautions against treating small states only as weak objects of larger powers, while Corbett and Connell (2015)[13] emphasize that small states can exercise agency through diplomacy, coalition-building, and strategic use of limited resources. In the Fijian media field, agency appears through sovereignty claims, balanced diplomacy, Pacific Way, Blue Pacific, Ocean of Peace, non-interference, and “friends to all, enemies to none” language. These are coded as narrative resources through which Fijian and Pacific actors accept, resist, redirect, or set boundaries around external narratives.

Combining these literatures, the article proposes issue-conditioned narrative mediation. The concept has three elements. First, external narratives enter Fiji’s media field through Chinese, Western, regional, and local actors. Second, Fijian news media process these narratives differently by issue domain: development, health, agriculture, climate, and infrastructure are more likely to be localized as partnership, while policing, defence, regional institutional disputes, military basing, and influence-related stories are more likely to be securitized as risk. Third, both pathways are filtered through small-state agency. This framework explains why China can appear in the same media system as partner, opportunity, security actor, and risk source without reducing coverage to a simple positive or negative stance.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Corpus Construction

The empirical basis is a purpose-built corpus of China-related news articles published by FBC News, The Fiji Times, and Fiji Sun between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2025. These outlets represent Fiji’s mainstream English-language media environment: public broadcasting, a long-established newspaper, and a commercial news outlet. Candidate articles were retrieved through combined searches using China-related terms and issue terms covering climate, infrastructure, aid, policing, security, Pacific regionalism, trade, agriculture, fisheries, debt, and influence. After removing low-relevance or unverifiable texts, 178 articles were retained as the formal sample, and 75 were selected for in-depth qualitative coding. Table 1 presents the sample profile.

Table 1. Descriptive profile of the 178-article formal sample (N = 178)

Variable	Distribution (N; %)
Year	2022: 20 (11.2%); 2023: 44 (24.7%); 2024: 46 (25.8%); 2025: 68 (38.2%)
Media outlet	FBC News: 67 (37.6%); The Fiji Times: 63 (35.4%); Fiji Sun: 48 (27.0%)
Article genre	News report: 143 (80.3%); Wire repost: 13 (7.3%); Opinion: 11 (6.2%); Analysis/feature: 8 (4.5%); Other: 3 (1.7%)
Source provenance	Local original: 81 (45.5%); Embassy (Chinese): 28 (15.7%); Local/govt-sourced: 18 (10.1%); Govt (Fijian): 16 (9.0%); Wire repost: 15 (8.4%); Other: 20 (11.2%)
Primary topic	Diplomacy: 38 (21.3%); Development aid: 32 (18.0%); Security/policing: 28 (15.7%); Trade: 22 (12.4%); Geopolitics: 20 (11.2%); Infrastructure: 16 (9.0%); Climate: 8 (4.5%); Media/culture: 8 (4.5%); Other: 6 (3.4%)
Primary frame	Development cooperation: 70 (39.3%); Security risk: 25 (14.0%); Regional agency: 24 (13.5%); Economic opportunity: 19 (10.7%); Geopolitical competition: 15 (8.4%); Infrastructure connectivity: 11 (6.2%); Climate resilience: 10 (5.6%); Neutral: 4 (2.2%)
Primary China role	Development partner: 39 (21.9%); Security actor: 25 (14.0%); Donor: 21 (11.8%); Diplomatic: 20 (11.2%); Geopolitical competitor: 19 (10.7%); Investor: 19 (10.7%); Other: 35 (19.7%)
Tone toward China	Positive: 108 (60.7%); Mixed: 39 (21.9%); Neutral: 19 (10.7%); Negative: 12 (6.7%)
Localisation	Present: 146 (82.0%); Absent: 30 (16.9%); Unclear: 2 (1.1%)
Securitisation	Not present: 102 (57.3%); Present: 68 (38.2%); Unclear: 8 (4.5%)
Semantic shift	No shift: 122 (68.5%); Shift detected: 53 (29.8%); Unclear: 3 (1.7%)

3.2. Corpus Construction

The study employs a theory-informed qualitative content analysis approach, following Schreier's (2012)[14] emphasis on systematic and theory-guided category development. The unit of analysis is the individual news article. All 178 articles were coded for the descriptive variables reported in Table 1. The 75-article deep-coding sample was further coded using an 11-layer scheme integrating the theoretical framework with inductively refined categories. Table 2 summarises the coding dimensions.

Table 2. Coding dimensions, operational definitions, and coding basis

Dimension	Operational definition	Coding basis
Issue domain (L1)	Empirical issue area; 10 inductively consolidated categories	Headline + lead paragraph content
Strategic narrative (L2)	Legitimacy story through which China-related action is made meaningful; 95+ sub-codes	Close reading of narrative claims, causal logic, normative content
Media frame (L3)	Dominant interpretive frame organising the article; 8 categories	Entman (1993)[5]; headline, lead, source selection, closing paragraph
China role (L4)	Primary role assigned to China in the narrative; 12 categories	Direct characterisations, quoted sources, implicit positioning
Localisation (L5)	Whether/how Chinese Narratives adapt to Fijian/Pacific concerns; 70+ types	Presence: yes/partial; type inductively developed

Dimension	Operational definition	Coding basis
Securitisation (L6)	Whether China issues are framed as security/risk/threat; 30+ types	Buzan et al. (1998)[11]; threat language, risk characterisation, urgency framing
Semantic shift (L7)	Movement of issue between meaning fields; 30+ types	Comparing article frame with issue's expected default frame
Tone toward China (L8)	Overall evaluative direction of the article	Lexical choice, source selection, balance of characterisations
Small-state agency (L9)	Degree to which Fiji/PICs exercise choice and define priorities	Baldacchino (2009)[12]; sovereignty claims, priority-setting, boundary-drawing
Evidence and memo (L10)	Verbatim English evidence sentences + analytical memo	1–3 key sentences per article; 150–250 word analytical memo

Each article was read beyond the keyword level: the headline, lead, quoted actors, source structure, evaluative wording, and concluding emphasis were compared before assigning issue, frame, role, tone, localization, and securitization codes. For articles involving allegations of crime, espionage, or influence networks, coding records the media's risk framing rather than treating allegations as verified facts. Coding was performed by a single coder with iterative consistency checks: a subset of articles was re-coded after a two-week interval, and discrepancies were resolved through annotation.

3.3. Analytical Strategy

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, descriptive statistics from the 178-article sample map the overall architecture of China coverage (Table 1), providing the basis for Finding 1. Second, event-based comparative analysis draws on the 75-article deep-coding sample, organised into 26 event clusters. Five core chains are examined in detail: the policing cooperation controversy (26 articles), the military base and Ocean of Peace debate (10), Wang Yi's 2022 visit (11), the Solomon Islands security pact's regional reverberations (7), and the BRI and infrastructure accountability chain (17). These provide process-tracing evidence for Findings 2 and 3. Third, the coded data are synthesised to identify the tripartite mechanism of localization, securitization, and small-state narrative arbitration.

4. Findings

The framework is built from four debates that are directly relevant to the empirical puzzle: China's role in Oceania, the framing of strategic narratives, the local translation and risk-framing of external engagement, and the agency of small states. Together, they support the article's core concept of issue-conditioned narrative mediation.

4.1. Localised Partnership Narratives

The dominant mode of China-related news construction in Fijian media is partnership-oriented and locally anchored. Across the 178-article sample, the development cooperation frame accounted for 70 articles (39.3%), exceeding the security risk frame (25 articles, 14.0%) and the geopolitical competition frame (15 articles, 8.4%). The coverage most frequently constructed China as a development partner (39 articles, 21.9%), followed by donor/aid provider (21, 11.8%) and investor/builder (19, 10.7%). The overall tone was predominantly positive: 108 articles (60.7%)

conveyed a favourable stance toward China, compared with 39 mixed (21.9%) and 12 negative (6.7%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Dominant media frames and China roles in the 178-article sample

Primary frame	N	%	Primary China role	N	%
Development cooperation	70	39.3	Development partner	39	21.9
Security risk	25	14.0	Security actor	25	14.0
Regional agency	24	13.5	Donor/aid provider	21	11.8
Economic opportunity	19	10.7	Symbolic diplomatic actor	20	11.2
Geopolitical competition	15	8.4	Geopolitical competitor	19	10.7
Infrastructure connectivity	11	6.2	Investor/builder	19	10.7
Climate resilience	10	5.6	Other	35	19.7
Neutral information	4	2.2			

The key pattern is the translation of cooperation into tangible local benefits. Localisation appeared in 146 of 178 articles (82.0%) and in 68 of 75 deep-coded articles (90.7%). Infrastructure investment was commonly framed through rural connectivity, school and hospital access, and market links. Agricultural technology transfer, especially the Juncao programme and rice cultivation projects, was narrated through food security, farmer livelihoods, and poverty reduction. Medical assistance, including Chinese hospital-ship visits and cataract-surgery programmes, was framed as public health capacity building and humanitarian goodwill. Climate cooperation was translated into climate resilience, green energy, and clean transportation. Across these domains, partnership narratives became persuasive when they were anchored in concrete, locally legible needs.

Table 4 shows outlet-level variation: FBC News spread coverage across development, regional agency, infrastructure, climate, and geopolitical frames; Fiji Sun concentrated on development cooperation and economic opportunity; and The Fiji Times carried more security risk and regional agency frames. These differences justify comparing outlets rather than treating Fijian media as a single voice.

Table 4. Media outlet by primary frame cross-tabulation (N = 178)

Media outlet	Dev. Coop.	Security Risk	Regional Agency	Econ. Opp.	Geopol. Comp.	Infra. Conn.	Climate Res.	Neutral	Total
FBC News	26	6	8	6	7	7	7	0	67
Fiji Sun	24	7	2	8	3	4	0	0	48
The Fiji Times	20	12	14	5	5	0	3	4	63
Total	70	25	24	19	15	11	10	4	178

4.2. Securitised and Risk-Framed Narratives

While partnership and localisation dominate the overall corpus, 68 of 178 articles (38.2%) frame China-related issues through security, risk, or threat lenses. This securitisation is not a generalised judgement on China itself, but an issue-specific media framing of particular domains. It clusters in policing and security cooperation, military basing and defence ties, regional institutional contestation, especially PIF/Chinese Taiwan, and influence-related allegations involving espionage, media influence, or elite networks.

The policing cooperation controversy provides the clearest illustration. Across 26 articles, the China–Fiji policing agreement shows a semantic shift from technical cooperation to sovereignty

review, legal procedure, and restricted resumption. Table 5 shows that most articles contain no semantic shift, but when shifts occur, the dominant form is cooperation to security. This confirms that risk framing is not evenly distributed across the corpus; it is activated by specific issue conditions.

Table 5. Semantic shift types in the 178-article sample

Semantic shift type	N
No shift	122
Cooperation to security	33
Investment to influence	11
Maritime to geopolitics	10
Climate to aid	3
Development to debt	1
Unclear	3

The military-basing debate demonstrates a related but different mechanism: de-securitisation. When concerns were raised about possible Chinese military bases in Fiji, Fijian media amplified Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka’s repeated statements that Fiji would not host foreign military bases. Reports on Chinese naval hospital-ship visits were also narrated mainly through humanitarian medical assistance rather than military presence. Infrastructure accountability formed another pathway. When the China-aided Navua hospital was reported to have construction defects, coverage shifted from connectivity to governance, standards, and accountability. Table 6 summarises how the five core event chains moved between partnership, risk, and regional agency frames.

Table 6. Five core event chains and narrative evolution

Event chain	N	Dominant narrative evolution
China–Fiji policing cooperation	26	Development partnership → sovereignty review → legal/restricted resumption
Military base and Ocean of Peace	10	External concern → Fijian denial → Ocean of Peace articulation → Chinese alignment
Wang Yi’s 2022 Fiji visit	11	Consistent development partnership; cross-outlet variation in source emphasis
Solomon Islands security pact	7	Regional securitisation background; exclusively via The Fiji Times
BRI and infrastructure accountability	17	Connectivity and development → governance risk and transparency demands

4.3. Pacific Agency and Narrative Arbitration

The third major finding concerns Pacific small-state agency. In the 75-article deep-coding sample, small-state agency was assessed as high in 42 articles (56.0%), medium-high in 16 (21.3%), medium in 15 (20.0%), and low-medium in only 2 (2.7%) (Table 7). This shows that Fijian and Pacific actors are not represented merely as recipients of external narratives. They appear as actors who set priorities, draw boundaries, and define acceptable forms of engagement.

Pacific agency appears through several recurring discursive strategies. The most prominent is the Ocean of Peace concept, articulated by Prime Minister Rabuka and covered across the three outlets. This concept reframes the Pacific not as an arena of great-power competition but as a zone of peace defined by Pacific priorities. The language of “friends to all and enemies to none” presents multi-

alignment as strategic autonomy rather than passive hedging. China’s reported endorsement of the Ocean of Peace was framed as alignment with a Pacific-authored regional narrative, not simply as external agenda-setting.

Table 7. Small-state agency levels in the 75-article deep-coding sample

Agency level	N	%
High	42	56.0
Medium-high	16	21.3
Medium	15	20.0
Low-medium	2	2.7

This agency also operates in practical policy domains. When China provides agricultural technology, Fijian media often frame it as Fiji choosing tools that serve food security and rural livelihoods. When China offers media training or public diplomacy engagement, reports also include assertions of editorial independence. Small-state narrative arbitration therefore captures how Fijian media do not eliminate external narratives, but subject them to local criteria: sovereignty, development needs, regional solidarity, non-interference, and balanced diplomacy.

5. Discussion

The findings shift the analysis of China-related narratives in Fiji from external projection to local mediation. Much scholarship and policy commentary on China in the Pacific asks whether China is expanding influence, whether traditional partners are losing ground, or whether the Pacific is becoming a site of strategic competition. This article does not reject those debates, but shows that they are incomplete unless the meaning-making practices of Pacific media are taken seriously. Doidge and Kelly (2025)[6] show that Pacific media coverage of China sits between development and geopolitical discourses. This study extends that argument by showing how mediation varies inside one national media environment, across issue domains, and across event clusters.

The first contribution concerns the relationship between partnership and risk. The Fijian corpus confirms that risk frames are present, especially in policing cooperation, defence, military-base debates, PIF/Chinese Taiwan disputes, infrastructure accountability, and influence-related reporting. Fraenkel and Smith (2022)[15] show that the Solomon Islands-China security agreement became a major moment in regional security debate, and that wider context helps explain why security-sensitive China stories circulated strongly in Fijian media. Yet the Fijian data also show that securitization is not totalizing. Development, health, agriculture, climate, and infrastructure stories are often localized through practical needs such as rural connectivity, food security, public health capacity, and climate resilience. This means China is not represented through one stable media logic. Rather, particular issue conditions determine whether cooperation is framed as partnership, opportunity, institutional concern, or risk.

The second contribution is theoretical. The article advances the concept of issue-conditioned narrative mediation by linking strategic narrative theory, framing, localization, securitization, and small-state agency. Acharya’s (2004)[10] account of localization helps explain how external narratives are reconstructed through local priorities. Entman’s (1993)[5] framing theory explains how news texts organize roles, problems, causes, and evaluations. Buzan et al.’s (1998)[11] securitization theory explains why some issues move from cooperation to risk. The Fijian case shows that these mechanisms can coexist within the same media field. Simple sentiment analysis would therefore miss the main pattern: the key question is not whether reporting is positive or negative, but when particular frames become credible and why. In methodological terms, this also shows the value of combining corpus-level mapping with event-based close reading. The same

outlet may localize Chinese medical assistance as humanitarian cooperation while risk-framing policing or institutional disputes. This variation is not inconsistency; it is the empirical signature of issue-conditioned mediation.

The third contribution concerns Pacific agency. Fry (2019)[16] argues that Pacific regionalism is a politically significant arena for negotiating development, security, climate change, and external engagement. Wallis et al. (2024)[17] similarly show that the Blue Pacific narrative can be used by materially weaker Pacific states to shape external partners. Pan et al. (2019)[18] further argue that debates on Chinese aid in the South Pacific should include the concerns and voices of smaller actors rather than treating power shifts as a two-way contest between larger powers. The Fijian media corpus supports this view. Sovereignty, consensus, balanced diplomacy, Ocean of Peace, and “friends to all and enemies to none” language function as narrative resources. They allow Fijian and Pacific actors to accept, redirect, limit, or contest external claims. Small-state agency is therefore not only diplomatic; it is also discursive and mediated through journalism.

The Fiji case also cautions against reading small-state media coverage of major powers only as evidence of influence, alignment, or sentiment. Local news outlets make external engagement intelligible by linking it to development needs, while using more cautious frames for issues involving policing, defence, regional institutions, or political influence. Thus, the meaning of a rising power’s engagement is shaped not only by diplomatic intentions or rival interpretations, but also by local media institutions, source structures, issue salience, and regional norms. For China-Pacific research, China-related narratives should therefore be examined as locally mediated and issue-specific rather than as either accepted partnership discourse or imported threat discourse. Two limitations remain: the study focuses on English-language media and excludes Fijian-language, Hindi-language, social media, broadcast transcripts, and audience reception data; it also analyses media framing rather than independently verifying all political claims in sensitive reports. Future research could compare Fiji with other Pacific Island countries and test whether issue-conditioned narrative mediation operates similarly across multilingual media systems.

6. Conclusion

By tracing 178 articles and closely coding 75 priority texts, this article has shown how Fiji’s English-language media made China-related issues meaningful across cooperation, risk, and regional agency frames. China is represented neither as a uniformly benign partner nor as a consistent risk; rather, China-related coverage is shaped by issue-conditioned narrative mediation. Development, health, agriculture, climate, and infrastructure stories are commonly localized when connected to concrete Fijian and Pacific needs, whereas policing cooperation, defence, military-base concerns, PIF/Chinese Taiwan disputes, influence-related reporting, and infrastructure accountability are more likely to generate securitized or risk-framed narratives.

The broader significance lies in showing that local media do more than report external power engagement. They translate and filter it according to local priorities, institutional concerns, and regional norms. Partnership narratives become credible when linked to practical needs such as rural access, health capacity, food security, livelihoods, and climate resilience. Risk narratives become more salient when China-related issues touch sovereignty, policing, defence, regional institutions, or political influence. Across both processes, Pacific agency remains central, as Fijian and regional actors use sovereignty, consensus, balanced diplomacy, Ocean of Peace, and regional priorities to shape public understandings of external engagement. The article contributes to Pacific media studies, international communication, and international relations by providing a systematic account of China-related news coverage in Fiji, operationalizing an 11-layer coding scheme, and developing issue-conditioned narrative mediation as a concept for explaining how small-state media process

external power narratives. Internationally, the study suggests that small-state media should be understood as active sites of interpretation rather than passive channels of great-power discourse. Future research could extend this framework to other Pacific Island countries and incorporate multilingual media, broadcast texts, social media, and audience reception data.

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