

## **Framing the Antagonists: Cultrual Thickness and Semiotic Shifts of the Northern Myanmar Online Scam**

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### **Abstract**

The article extends framing research by integrating the concepts of thick and thin culture with binary codes to propose Myanmar's dual-core cultural continuum, grounded in Amyotha Yae (the Myanmar nationalistic complex) and democracy. Through three cases—Shwe Kokko (March 2019 to August 2022), No More Bets (August-September 2023), and the 1027 Operation (October 2023-January 2024)—the analysis traces how Burmese media framed the antagonists in the “Northern Myanmar online scam,” shifting from Chinese harming Burmese to Chinese harming Chinese, and ultimately to Junta harming Chinese. Treating the media as social actors, the study conceptualizes framing as social performance, in which symbolic codes are selectively activated. Findings show that these framing processes were never centrally about online scam itself, but about evolving perceptions of China, Myanmar, China–Myanmar relations, and the country's political trajectory. Frame shifts corresponded to relational changes in events but, more crucially, to the specific cultural elements mobilized within Burma's multilayered symbolic structure. The study demonstrates the analytical value of culture thickness in revealing the diverse possibilities of semiotic shifts that shape framing dynamics in multicultural contexts.