

China's perception of the EU: Is the EU a friend, an enemy, or a "frenemy"?

A case study of China Daily's framing of the EU

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to study China's perception of the EU by analyzing China Daily's framing of the Union, which is a Chinese government-owned newspaper. In particular, the EU-China relationship holds great significance in international affairs. However, in recent years, the bilateral ties have experienced various setbacks due to conceptual differences between the actors. Thus, I argue that it is vital to understand how EU and China perceive each other to make the relationship move forward – does China perceive the EU as a friend, enemy, or “frenemy”? Using the *Policy Frames Codebook* by Boydston et al., (2014), this thesis has studied and compared China Daily's authors' framing of the EU during two different time periods of President Xi Jinping – his two first years (2013-2015) and his two last years (2020-2022) as president. Based on the 292 articles in China Daily, the study found that China perceives the EU as a friend – not an enemy, nor a “frenemy”. But there are political areas that are non-negotiable for China, such as human rights and Taiwan. However, the findings are significant because no matter the frictions between the actors, China still regards the EU as a friend.

Keywords: China, EU, Framing, Framing analysis, Perception, China Daily

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The EU-China relationship holds great significance in international affairs, and the two sides share a robust history together. Looking back, the EU-China relationship has been developing dynamically since the late 1990s, which has now been upgraded to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. This partnership mainly involves the economic dimension, however, other dimensions are also included such as social, economic, environmental sustainability, education, and innovation, etc. (Men, 2006, p. 788; Michalski & Pan, 2015, p. 10). Moreover, the EU-China bilateral ties have experienced some low points as well as some more rosy periods (Michalski & Pan, 2015, p. 6). For example, the period from 1995-2002 is known as the “rapid development period”, in which EU-China relations developed quickly both economically and politically. During 2003-2005, the EU-China ties then underwent an “imagined honeymoon period”, in which the partnership was extended to several new sectors, such as industrial policy and strategic issues (Michalski & Pan, 2015, p. 20). However, in 2005 the relations started to get frosty due to conceptual differences between the actors, controversies in connection with the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, and national leaders' meeting with the Dalai Lama in 2008-2009 (Song, 2012, p. 21ff.; Michalski & Pan, 2015, p. 22).

Currently at this writing moment, the EU-China relationship is at a crossroads. While the economic relationship remains paramount – some scholars even argue that the bilateral tie is the most significant one in the world due to the trade relationship – growing disputes on trade and human rights have created significant challenges in the EU-China relationship (Chen, 2012, p. 11). Most recently, the EU Commission’s President Ursula von Der Leyen stated that the EU needs to “de-risk” from China, rather than decoupling¹ (Reuters, 2023; Nikkei Asia, 2023). At the same time, China’s President Xi Jinping has emphasized that China opposes the strong bullying of the weak, and that China and the EU need to foster the right perception of each other (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, 2023). Thus, I argue that understanding the perception the two sides have of each other is crucial to break the deadlock in the bilateral ties, which has been the inspiration for this study.

¹ The EU’s statement of “de-risking” China means a tougher stance on China, i.e. pushing for a level playing field instead of decoupling from the world’s second-largest economy. It includes using the EU’s trade and domestic defense tools (Reuters, 2023).

Additionally, there is mainly academic literature regarding the West's and Europe's perception of China, which is why this thesis will study the Chinese perception of the EU instead.

1.2 Research question and the aim of the study

This thesis is interested in studying China's current perception of the EU, which will be achieved through studying China Daily's authors' framing of the Union. It is one of China's biggest Chinese government-owned English-language newspapers. Therefore, the authors in China Daily can be considered as extended state agents of the Chinese government. Moreover, previous academic literature has mainly focused on the US and the Western media's framing of China and other global events, which makes it more relevant to study the opposite direction, i.e. the Chinese media's framing of the EU. In order to understand the Chinese media's framing of the EU today, this study has selected two time periods to compare and analyse: the first period is Xi Jinping's first two years as president (2013-2015) and the second period is his last two years (2020-2022). These two periods have been chosen because I argue that they will provide the most contrasting (potential) framing shift, which will allow us to understand how the journalists in China Daily perceived the EU during the beginning of Xi's presidency, compared to how the authors currently perceive the EU at this writing moment. So how do the authors in China Daily frame the EU? How does the EU become reported by journalists? In positive terms? In negative terms? Identifying this will allow us to understand if China perceives the EU as a friend, an enemy, or a "frenemy", i.e. a mix of a friend and an enemy, which will be valuable for the current EU-China relationship going forward.

As a result, the research question in this study is the following:

- How has the Chinese media's framing of the EU changed under Xi Jinping's first two years as president, compared to his two last years of presidency?

To answer this research question, this study has chosen to study the authors' framing of the EU in China Daily as the case study. The two selected time periods are 2013-03-14 to 2015-03-14, the day Xi Jinping assumed office as president and two years forward, and 2020-12-31 to 2022-12-31. The study's main findings are that the journalists in China Daily have perceived, and are currently perceiving, the EU as a friend – not an enemy, or an "frenemy". Another finding is that during the first time period, the authors perceived the EU mainly as an

economic partner. However, this has now shifted during the later time period and the journalists now perceive the EU of political significance – a close partner in international affairs that shares the responsibility for world development and peace.

1.3 Academic contribution

This study contributes to existing and emerging literature about framing analysis – studying the Chinese media’s framing of the EU. In particular, previous literature in this field has mainly tended to focus on the US and Western media’s framing of global events. Thus, there is a shortage of literature studying the East Asian, in particular, the Chinese, media’s framing of world events at this writing moment, which this study hopes to fill.

2. Literature review

This chapter will present the existing literature on the framing of China in the US, the framing of China in Europe, and lastly, China's framing of the EU.

2.1 Framing China

News framing of international events has been a popular topic in academic research, but the literature tends to focus on the US and the Western media's coverage of global events. However, the studies that study the overall framing of China find that the country is generally framed negatively in Western news (e.g. Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Hauser, 2011; Huang & Leung, 2005; Lams, 2016) (Qi et al., 2022, p. 209f.; Golan & Lukito, 2015, p. 753). The research has also noted the influence of Orientalism², which is motivated to have given rise to the stigmatization and skepticism of the Chinese government in Western media. In the case of China, it is often negatively framed in terms of social exclusion and oppression (Qi et al., 2022, p. 209f.). Additionally, the negative framing of China can be demonstrated in the use of the historical construction of the Yellow Peril.³ For example, the literature has shown that by framing China as the “source” and the “spreaders” of SARS and Covid-19, Western media have facilitated the so-called “virus racialization”, which is similar to the Yellow Peril ideology (Qi et al., 2022, p. 210).

2.1.1 Framing China in the US

The majority of the existing literature about framing China is related to the US and most of the focus has been on the US-China relations. This could be motivated due to China's emergence in the early 21st century as the most important partner and rival to the US, ever since the fall of the Soviet Union. As a result, this has increased scholars' interest to study the US perception, discourse, and construction of China (Ooi & D'Arcangelis, 2017, p. 269; Golan & Lukito, 2015, p. 753f.; McCourt, 2021, p. 643). The previous research has mainly examined the framing of China in American newspapers (e.g. Ooi & D'Arcangelis 2017; Ha et al., 2021; Boykoff, 2022; Golan & Lukito, 2015; Saleem, 2021). Moreover, the overall

² The concept of Orientalism was put forward by the postcolonial studies that argued that the West's portrayal of the East is based on an approach of “superiority; through this lens, the West is modern, virtuous, and peaceful while the East is primitive, evil, and violent” – Said, E. (1978).

³ The Yellow Peril is a racial color metaphor that portrays the people of East- and Southeast Asia as an existential danger to the Western world – Odijje, M. (2018).

reporting of China in American news media shows a generally negative tone of the coverage and is usually in line with the US government's position towards the Chinese government (Golan & Lukito, 2015, p. 753).

A well-known paper about framing China is written by Guy J. Golan and Josephine Lukito (2015). Their paper studied the framing of China's emergence as a global power in two elite newspapers in the US, the New York Times and The Wallstreet Journal. The results showed that the New York Times framed China as a global power undermined by structural limitations, while the Wallstreet Journal framed China as a direct threat to US foreign policy interests (Golan & Lukito, 2015, p. 753). The conclusion was that both newspapers framed China as a rival and described China's global rise as a threat (Golan & Lukito, 2015, p. 765f.). Golan & Lukito (2015, p. 765) argued that their findings were especially important because the news frames may impact the American public opinion of China, and could reinforce harmful stereotypes or negative country image. For instance, by reinforcing frames such as "China anxiety" or a fear of China's rise to power.

Similarly, previous research also confirms an overall negative framing pattern of China by the US media (Peng, 2004; Stone & Xiao, 2007; Willnat & Luo, 2011). David M. McCourt's (2021) paper especially reaffirmed that the US framing of China's rise had shifted from viewing it as an economic opportunity to being "engaged" to the threat of a rival challenging "American power, influence, and interests" (Mccourt, 2021, p. 643). The rejection of the US engagement towards China could be illustrated by the American ex-president Donald Trump's China Policy. For example, in the economic policy, a trade war was launched in July 2018 with the motivation that the US was responding to long-term concerns about discriminatory Chinese trade practices, such as intellectual property theft (Mccourt, 2021, p. 647). The study concluded that the US sharp shift in framing China from engagement to strategic competition is a reflection of the dynamics of the US national security policy-making process rooted in Great Power competition (Mccourt, 2021, p. 664).

The US-China trade war has also been studied by other scholars, which is the biggest trade war in economic history (Ha et al., 2021; Ha et al., 2022). Two of the most recent papers of it are written by Ha et al., (2021) and Ha et al., (2022). In particular, the trade conflict has been viewed as a complex issue between the two rival states and the perceived growing threat of China to US supremacy and Western democracies (Ha et al., 2022, p. 931). The first article examined the news coverage of the US-China trade conflict by major news media outlets in

the US and China – concluding that the US news media employed more war journalism regarding the conflict than China (Ha et al., 2021, p. 131). In contrast, the Chinese media had a higher use of peace journalism with efforts of creating a vision for common ground and emphasizing the benefit of free trade. The retaliation to the tariffs was motivated by the Chinese government as a defense to the attack by the US government whose goal was to contain China’s economic growth and technological advancement (Ha et al., 2021, p. 148). The second article by Ha et al. (2022) examined the US public’s perception of China and the US during the US-China trade conflict (Ha et al., 2022, p. 930). However, this paper was interested in studying the relationship between selective and non-partisan media exposure in domestic news media. The study showed that a national survey among the US adult population found that the people perceived the media as escalating the conflict between China and the US, rather than promoting peace between the two states (ibid.). Consequently, it was more likely that the people viewed their own country positively (Ha et al., 2022, p. 947).

2.1.2 Framing China in Europe

Although the majority of the literature on framing China has been focused on the US-China relationship, there has also been research regarding Europe’s framing of China (e.g. Lams, 2016; Sparks, 2010; Smith, 2016; Xu & Cao, 2019; Qi et al., 2022). For instance, a study conducted by Lutgard Lams (2016) examined how the Belgian and Dutch elite press engaged with China by using content analysis, studying themes and tones with critical discourse analysis. The newspaper media consisted of Belgian outlets De Morgen, De Standaard, De Tijd, le Soir, and La Libre Belgique and the Dutch papers Dutch Dailies, de Volkskrant, and NRC Handelsblad (Lams, 2016, p. 138). The study showed that China is often not portrayed in peaceful terms in the Belgian press, especially in regards to the three T’s (Tibet, Taiwan, Turkestan), in which China is often depicted as the “villain” (Lams, 2016, p. 140). The study concluded that the findings, i.e. that China is overall assessed negatively despite its importance in international affairs, confirmed other similar research findings (Lams, 2016, p. 151). In addition, a similar paper by Colin Sparks (2010) examined China’s coverage in the UK national press, such as from the Sun, the Daily Express, and the Financial Times (Sparks, 2010, p. 347). The study found that there was a sharp difference between the foreign coverage of China available to the elite and that available to the mass population (Sparks, 2010, p. 364). For example, the “quality” press, such as the Financial Times, had much more coverage and higher quality coverage of China, and covered diverse topics and China was

less framed negatively. This could be motivated that their readers usually are people who travel to China often, meet Chinese people on a regular basis, and need to understand the Chinese in order to do business with them. In contrast, it was argued that the Daily Express has a poorer and less influential reader audience that is much less likely to visit China for any reason and consequently, this paper could portray China in the same way as it uses migrants and other bogeymen. For instance, to reinforce a more general picture of a dangerous and hostile world that threatens the lives of its readers (Sparks, 2010, p. 363f.).

One of the most recent studies on Europe's framing of China is published by Qi et al., (2022), focusing on China's soft power push in Europe by studying the framing of the mask diplomacy during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Qi et al., (2022, p. 205) used a sample of 233 articles published by BBC, Euronews, Politico, French 24, and Der Spiegel, from March to September 2020. The study found that China's mask diplomacy was used to boost the Chinese government's legitimacy. The paper also observed that China's soft power effort was overshadowed by two other dominant frames found in the articles, the remedy frame and the threat frame. For example, European media tended to default to longstanding stereotypes of Yellow Peril and Orientalism – most news media outlets “othered” China as the source and the spreader of Covid-19, which undermined China's soft power efforts and their credibility (ibid.). The Orientalist-othering of China was based on two differences between authoritarian and democratic views on the pandemic policies. Furthermore, the Western media also framed China's mask diplomacy as unsuccessful propaganda that attempted to leverage gratitude for future benefits and continued to be critical of China's legitimacy as a responsible global leader. Moreover, China was framed as a rival that could potentially threaten the EU's internal integrity and security (Qi et al., 2022, p. 219f.).

However, among the existing studies at the moment, Jian Xu and Yongrong Cao's (2019) study in terms of approach and methodology is the closest to this study. Their qualitative study examined how mainstream European media covered China between 2000 and 2005 by analyzing 2273 news reports in The Times (UK), Le Figaro (France), and Der Spiegel (Germany) (Xu & Cao, 2019, p. 185). The framing theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for the study and they adopted a deductive approach for their coding, i.e. by pre-defining certain framing, in order to verify the occurrence of these frames in the news (Xu & Cao, 2019, p. 187). The study also measured the valence, i.e. how the media described China in different tones, such as positive, neutral, negative, or non-applicable tones (Xu &

Cao, 2019, p. 188). Their paper found that the majority of European media framed China in a negative tone, which was 44 percent (997) of total news articles. Positive tone articles accounted for only 7.2 percent (164) of the total, and neutral tone for 20.3 percent (462) of the total (Xu & Cao, 2019, p. 189). Their research confirmed that the political and ideological biases persist in the Western media's reporting of China and that there is little evidence that the media will overcome this bias in the near future (Xu & Cao, 2019, p. 194).

2.2 Framing the EU

2.2.1 Framing the EU in China

There is also some English-language research on China's perception of the EU (e.g. Men, 2006; Zha, 2015; Chen, 2012; Chang & Pieke, 2018; Wang, 2012). In particular, due to the rapid development of EU-China relations that has now been upgraded to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in less than a decade, an increasing number of scholars in China focus their research on the EU and the bilateral relationship (Men, 2006, p. 788).

One of the first papers to present the Chinese perceptions of the EU was written by Jing Men (2006) (Chang & Pieke, 2018, p. 318). The study examined how Chinese journals perceived the EU, its global role, and explored both the EU-US relationship and the EU-China relationship. The study used articles published in Chinese journals from 2000-2005 (Men, 2006, p. 792). The paper concluded that due to the rising importance of the EU and China in world politics and the improved relationship, the Chinese scholars demonstrated a stronger interest than before in their research of Europe and EU-China relations. For example, China regarded now the EU as a partner, a new "pole" in the global order, in its pursuit of a multipolar system (Men, 2006, p. 805). Regarding the EU-US relations, the Chinese scholars noted that the EU-US relations had undergone noticeable changes, such as the majority of the EU countries advocating a multipolar world, which inspired the EU to be equal to the US in international affairs. However, the US had been unwilling to see an assertive EU – preferring a US-led unipolar world (Men, 2006, p. 797f.). Despite the differences between the EU and the US, the two would continue to stay as close partners and all the Chinese scholars agreed that the transatlantic conflict would be able to withstand the problems (Men, 2006, p. 800).

Other previous literature has studied China's view of the EU from 2008 and onwards. For example, Chen Zhimin's (2012, p. 7) article argued that since 2008, the global financial crises and the European debt and Euro crises, there have been significant changes in regard to how

the EU's global role is perceived in China. The Chinese leaders, elites, and the general public have started to develop a more realistic view of the EU and scaled down some of their wishful thinking about the increasingly-growing influence of the EU. However, China's relationship with the EU is still at the top of China's foreign policy agenda (ibid.). Furthermore, a paper written by Vincent K. L. Chang and Frank N. Pieke (2018) shared the same findings as Chen's (2012). Their paper discussed the dramatic shifts in Chinese policy perspectives on the EU and the EU-China relationship from 2016. They argued that policymakers and Europe scholars in China had regarded the EU as an ideal for regional integration and as a promising new "pole" in international affairs for more than a decade. However, a recent survey in China showed that in the wake of Eurozone crises, the refugee crises, and Brexit, many Chinese perceived the EU as a troubled actor unfit to deal with challenges (Chang & Pieke, 2018, p. 317). Moreover, one of the main findings was that the official Chinese perceptions of the EU have changed dramatically, suggesting a complete reversal of the optimistic attitudes, as a result of the European debt crises, the refugee crises, terrorist attacks, Brexit, and rise of nationalist sentiments in Europe (ibid.). An additional finding was that despite the critical views from China, the EU has not lost its strategic relevance to Chinese policymakers, such as a counterweight to the US. China still views the EU as a long-term partner, and a prosperous and stable Europe is necessary for peace and development (Chang & Pieke, 2018, p. 322).

2.3 Conclusion

To summarize, the previous academic literature on framing China have had focus on the US-China relationship and how China is framed in American news. The results show that China is often portrayed negatively in American news. Similarly, China is also often depicted negatively in European news. There is also research studying China's perception of the EU. However, some of them are outdated (e.g. Men, 2006; Wang, 2012; Chen, 2012) or have a different methodology from this study. Therefore, this study aims to fill the academic gap by providing a framing analysis of Chinese media's framing of the EU, and comparing it to two different time periods of Xi Jinping's presidency, the first two years of Xi's presidency compared to his two last years (2013-2015 and 2020-2022).

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter will present the framing theory and how it is conducted, the consequences of the framing in communication, and its critiques.

3.1 Framing theory

Framing analysis is a constructivist approach to examining news discourse with the purpose of conceptualizing news articles into empirically operationalizable dimensions, such as thematic and rhetorical structures, in order to gather evidence of news media's framing of issues in news (Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1993, p. 1). Moreover, framing is a rapidly growing area of study in communication research, though it lacks a clear definition. The ambiguity of the concept is due to the lack of consistency in how to define it (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 1f.). Framing has been described as a concept (e.g. Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000), as an approach (e.g. Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1993; McLeod & Detenber, 1999), a theory (e.g. Scheufele, 1999), and also been described as a paradigm (e.g. Entman, 1993) (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 2). However, despite the ambiguity of defining framing, it has become one of the most popular areas of research for scholars in different disciplines, such as political science, sociology, psychology, behavioral economics, and especially in the communications field (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 1f.). Much of the existing framing research focuses on ways that politicians or stakeholders use journalists to communicate their preferred meanings of events and issues. Moreover, a growing number of articles on framing has been witnessed in academics (e.g. Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Reese, 2001; Scheufele, 1999; Wicks, 2005).

Studying news has been the most prominent method by which communication researchers strive to understand what framing is and how it works (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 1). Many events that the citizens encounter in the news have often been framed by political actors, in particular by government officials. These frames often have political purposes as they are intended to influence public perceptions (Lawrence, 2010, p. 265). In covering policy issues, the news media provide more than "just the facts" – they provide frames that tell the audience how to understand particular policy issues (Brewer & Gross, 2010, p. 159). Ultimately, quantitative studies on framing effects show that partisan frames in media

coverage can shape the audience members' opinions and attitudes about policy matters (Brewer & Gross, 2010, p. 161).

3.1.1 What is framing and how is it conducted?

Framing refers to the process in which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or event or reorient their thinking and perception about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). A frame in communication "organizes everyday reality" (Tuchman 1978, p. 193; Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106) by providing "meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani 1987, p. 143; Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106) and contributing to "particular definitions and interpretations of political issues" (Shah et al. 2002, p. 343; Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106). In order for the framing effect to occur, the theory argues that a given consideration needs to be stored in the memory of the public to be available for retrieval and use (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 110; Wang, 2012, p. 36). For example, political leaders often use historical memories to boost their legitimacy, promote their interests, encourage national spirit and unity, and mobilize mass support for a social conflict (Wang, 2012, p. 36).

For framing to occur, it is assumed that every news story has a theme that functions as the central organizing idea. A theme is "an idea that connects different semantic elements of a story (e.g., descriptions of an action or an actor, quotes of sources, and background information) into a coherent whole" (Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1993, p. 4f.). Furthermore, the signifying elements of a theme are that they consist of choices of codes constructed by certain rules and conventions. They also function as framing devices because they are recognizable and experienced, can be conceptualized, can be arranged or manipulated by actors such as newsmakers, and can be conveyed through communications. In short, they function as tools for newsmakers to use in constructing news discourse as well as psychological stimuli for audiences to process. The theme makes a frame communicable through the news media (Zhongdang & Kosicki, 1993, p. 5).

Additionally, there are no definite measurement standards in the framing process, however, the most dominant studies tend to take the following four steps (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106f.):

1. "An issue or event is identified. A frame in communication can be defined only in relation to a specific issue, event, or political actor.

2. If the goal is to understand how frames in communication affect the public opinion, then the researcher needs to isolate the particular attitude. Different frames may highlight these attitudes.
3. An initial set of frames for an issue is identified inductively to create a coding scheme.
4. Once the initial set of frames is identified, the next step is to select sources for the content analysis, such as mass media sources including major newspapers, magazines, websites, or television broadcasts. The selection of the source is dependent on the researcher's purpose for the study. The articles are identified via searches and typically serve as the unit of analysis. The coders will then analyse a sample, identify the presence or absence of one of the pre-defined frames in the article."

Before coding, it is necessary for the researcher to explain how any particular frame can be identified (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 108).

In addition, the framing can be constructed in both positive and negative terms. It can be used as a strategy to manipulate or deceive individuals, or it can be used neutrally for a learning process for individuals' common beliefs (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 120).

3.1.2 The consequences of frames in communication

Frames in communication have consequences as they affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audience. Therefore, the politicians frequently adopt communication frames used by other politicians, the media, or the citizens (e.g., Riker 1996; Edwards & Wood 1999). Existing research in this field has been interested in studying how frames in the communications of elites influence citizens' frames and attitudes. This process is typically called a "framing effect" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 109). These framing effects happen when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (occasionally large) changes in opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104).

3.1.3 Critique of the framing theory

Framing is the most suitable theory for this study, but it has experienced criticism, just like any other theory. One of the most common critiques is regarding the coding approach – the possible risk of losing the context of what is being said during the qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 583). Another critique is the risk of unclear instructions. Therefore, coders should be clear about how to interpret each dimension and the factors to take into account when coding the material (Bryman, 2016, p. 298).

However, for this study, I argue that the advantages of using the framing theory outweigh the potential limitations. For example, it is a transparent research method – the coding scheme can be clearly established so that replications and follow-up studies are feasible. Consequently, it can be considered an objective method of analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 302). Additionally, content analysis has the advantage that it does not require scholars to “undergo the same level of ethical scrutiny that is common for students selecting methods that require research participants.” (Bryman, 2016, p. 303), which will be beneficial when studying the frictions in the EU-China relationship due to the political sensitivity.

4. Methodology

This chapter will present this study's overall research design, framing analysis, how the frames were discovered, how the data collection was conducted, and the ethical considerations.

4.1 Research design

This study is a qualitative case study in order to study a single case intensively and provide a detailed analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). This thesis also has elements of a comparative research design, studying the Chinese perception of the EU during different periods in order to understand the case from a broader perspective (Bryman, 2016, p. 64f.). The first time period selected is China Daily's framing of the EU during President Xi's first two years as president (2013-2015), in comparison to his two last years (2020-2022). These two time periods were selected because they would provide the most contrasting (potential) shift in the framing of the EU. Furthermore, this study is designed as a content analysis, which is a flexible method to analyse different media content. Content analysis also holds several advantages. For instance, it is an objective and systematic method of collecting and analysing data (Bryman, 2016, p. 283f.). More importantly, this is also an ethical strength, considering the political sensitivity of the current frictions in the EU-China relationship. Therefore, it will lead to the researcher's personal biases intruding as little as possible in the process (Bryman, 2016, p. 284).

At last, I am aware of the limitations of using a case study, such as that generalization is difficult to achieve (Bryman, 2016, p. 62). However, I still hope that this study can provide additional perspective on the current EU-China relationship's complexity and contribute to existing and future research, which can hopefully influence the bilateral ties in a meaningful way.

4.2 Framing analysis

This study has used framing analysis to analyse the material and to answer the research question. In particular, many world conflicts today have their roots in the history, memory, and ideas of various factions. However, this has been quite understudied or underestimated in international relations due to other widely accepted systemic approaches, such as realism and liberal institutionalism (Wang, 2012, p. 28f.). Moreover, framing is important in conflict

management because it allows us to identify what frames are used and how they are constructed. In the long run, understanding framing can influence the direction and future of the conflict (Wang, 2012, p. 33), which is valuable for the current EU-China challenges.

This study has used the framing analysis based on Boydston's et. al., (2014) Policy Frames Codebook. In short, the pre-defined codes from this codebook have assigned the raw data to categories. Moreover, this codebook was chosen because of its advantage, i.e. its flexibility which enables scholars to apply these pre-existing categories in ways that suit their research (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 8). In comparison, there exist other frame schemes, however, they are either too issue-specific or issue-general (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; McCombs, 2002; Baumgartner et al., 2008). Therefore, the codebook provided by Boydston et. al., (2014) was selected for this study.

4.2.1 Frame discovery: the Policy Frames Codebook

The Policy Frames Codebook is a framing analysis method established by Amber E. Boydston et al., (2014). The codebook is used to code political discourse in various materials into different pre-existing fourteen categories, please see Appendix 1 (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 8). Boydston et al., (2014) invented this codebook with the reason that identifying what frames are used by the politicians, the media, and the public, and how these frames evolve, is a crucial task for advancing our understanding of politics. However, this is also a significant challenge due to the dynamic nature of language and the growing volume of data, in which the frames appear and develop over time (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 1f.). Another challenge is that the frame discovery is also complex and labor-intensive for scholars (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 2). Therefore, Boydston et al., (2014, p. 5) established the Policy Frames Codebook, which provides a general system for categorizing frames across policy issues. In other words, this study has a deductive approach to identifying frames in order to see the occurrence of these frames in the news articles (Bryman, 2016, p. 293f.; Xu & Cao, 2019, p. 187).

Shortly about the coding process according to the codebook, Boydston et al., (2014, p. 8) advocate first coding each piece of the data according to the primary frame category used, and then coding the presence of any additional sub-frames used. For example, a news story focused on the economic impacts of immigration, but with additional discussion about the challenges of the immigrants' quality of life and cultural assimilation would be coded with three frame dimensions – the economic, quality of life, and cultural identity – but the

economic dimension would be coded as the primary frame (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 8). It is also recommended by Boydston et al., (ibid.) to highlight the selection of text that gives us evidence of those frame cues. This study has followed the recommendations given by Boydston et al., (2014).

In addition to tracking the frames in the articles, this study will also track the tone of each article. For example, by differentiating between positive, negative, or neutral tones (Boydston et al., 2014, p. 9). Please see Appendix 2.

Using the same pattern as Boydston et al., (2014) for coding the tones in Appendix 2, this study replaced the example of the immigrants with the EU (in Appendix 2). The tones applied for the coded data are the following three:

- **Positive tone:** the EU is portrayed in a positive light or from a generally sympathetic point of view; EU employers, and/or advocates would be pleased to see the news articles.
- **Negative tone:** the EU is portrayed in a negative light or in a non-sympathetic manner, so that EU employers, and/or advocates would be disappointed or upset to see the news article.
- **Neutral tone:** the EU is portrayed using both positive and negative tones that balance each other out, or the news article does not appear to discuss the issue either positively or negatively.

The following table (Table 1) was used to code the frames and the tones of the data:

Article URL			
Article number			
Article title			
Date of publication			
Author(s)			
Keyword of the article			
Primary frame			
Primary frame indicators			

Sub-frame 1			
Sub-frame 1 indicators			
Sub-frame 2			
Sub-frame 2 indicators			
.....			
Sub-frame 8			
Sub-frame 8 indicators			
Tone			
Tone indicators			

Table 1. The headings used for the coding process

4.3 Data collection

This thesis' ambition is to study Chinese media's framing of the EU during two different time periods of President Xi Jinping. Therefore, the primary data selected for this study is news articles. Secondary data was also used, such as journal articles and documents in order to analyse the primary data and for the literature review.

Due to the four important criteria for assessing the quality of documents, which are as follows: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Bryman, 2016, p. 546), it was decided that the primary data would be collected from the Chinese government-owned newspaper, China Daily. China Daily is one of China's most influential English-language news platforms with more than 350 million readers and it is known for being quoted more often by overseas media, compared to other Chinese publications (China Daily, 2022a). Therefore, China Daily became the ideal platform to extract data from to analyse for this study.

In the search engine of China Daily, the time period of the articles was set from 2013-03-14 to 2015-03-14, the day Xi Jinping assumed office as president, and 2020-12-31 to 2022-12-31. The keywords in the following table were used to find the relevant articles. Moreover, these keywords were selected with the ambition of not narrowing the search to an extreme

extent, especially since the goal was to study China Daily’s authors’ framing of the EU – preferring an open search in the search engine.

Keywords and settings used to find relevant Chinese articles in China Daily	
Title	
All these words	EU
At least one of these words	China
None of these words	
Full text	
All these words	
At least one of these words	relations, relationship, ties
None of these words	
Results	
Total articles found (2013-2015)	599
Total articles found after duplication removal (2013-2015)	147
Total articles found (2020-2022)	357
Total articles found after duplication removal (2020-2022)	145

Table 2. Keywords and settings used to find relevant Chinese articles in China Daily

Initially, in the time period between 2013-2015, there were 599 found articles. However, after enabling the duplication removal, 147 articles were left. The same principle was applied to the time period 2020-2022, which resulted in 145 articles left from the first 357 articles. In the end, a total of 292 articles were coded for this study. However, during the coding process,

20 articles required a subscription in order to access them, which I did not have. This could pose as a limitation for the study since there was a risk of missing additional sub-frames for the data collection. On the other hand, it was enough data to code the main frame and the tone of the article based on the title and the first paragraph of the article. In a similar way, four videos were not accessible in the articles, which also might risk missing sub-frames for this study. However, I argue that the information provided in the links did offer enough to code the main frame, but insufficient to code the tone of the videos.

4.4 Ethical considerations

This study has been conducted in accordance with the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The positionality of the researcher is important to address, especially since area studies have been criticized for impartiality and containing traits of Orientalism (e.g. Walder, 2004; Said, 1978). Moreover, I am aware that research cannot be value-free, but efforts have been made to ensure that my own values in the research were muted as much as possible by demonstrating reflexivity (Bryman, 2016, p. 35; Sultana, 2007, p. 376). In my case as a researcher, I am born and raised in Sweden, and I am a proponent of values such as democracy, free speech, and human rights. I also have a professional background working for the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, promoting Swedish interests and values in foreign relations, which is still my career goal today. Similarly, one of my future ambitions is to work on the EU-China relationship, which is one of the main reasons for this study. Therefore, this study acknowledges that there are unavoidable subjective Western biases that are interfused throughout the thesis. However, I have been aware of these values and biases throughout the study.

The subjectivity of the study was also a concern when I was coding and interpreting the data in the articles in China Daily. However, this is when the Policy Frame Codebook by Boydston et al., (2014) had its advantage of being an objective and systematic method of collecting data (Bryman, 2016, p. 283f.), eliminating the potential risk of my own subjectivity interfering with the data collection. At last, this study is aware that it is trying to answer how the Chinese perception of the EU as an "outsider". Therefore, in order to collect the data ethically, the primary data was collected from China Daily, a Chinese government-owned newspaper, which can be regarded as an extended arm of the government. Simultaneously, I have been aware that it has still been necessary to be critical of this material, i.e. having its own agenda, just like any other material. For example, since it is an English-language

newspaper in China with an audience target of foreigners, it is likely that the articles would have a positive tone towards the EU.

5. Data collection and findings

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be presented and discussed. The chapter begins with the primary frames on the EU from China Daily during 2013-2015, which is followed by the sub-frames and the tones of the articles. The same principle will then be applied to the articles from the time period 2020-2022. At last, the comparison of the primary frames and the tones of the EU in both time periods will be presented. Moreover, due to the limitation in the amount of characters in this study, only the most recurring frames in the articles will be presented in this chapter.

5.1 Frames on the EU from China Daily, 2013-2015

5.1.1 Primary frames on the EU from China Daily

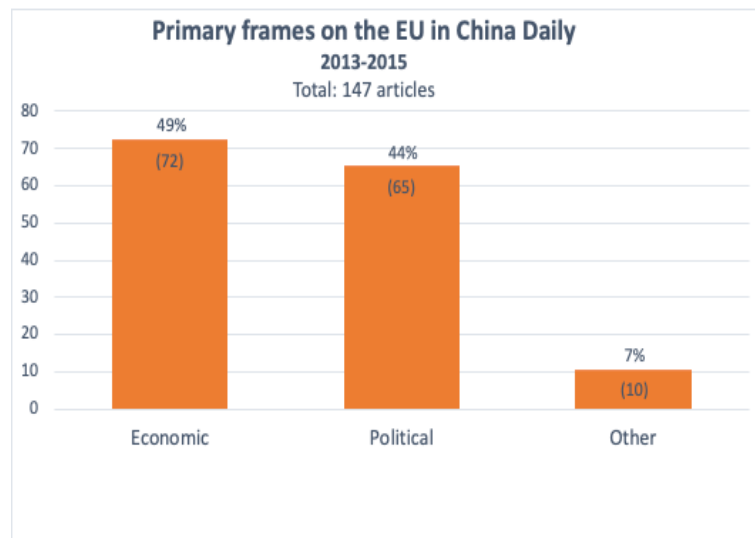


Table 3. Primary frames on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

Other	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	4
Other (not applicable, video has expired)	4
Law and order, crime and justice	1

Other (digital)	1
Total	10

Table 4. “Other” categories, 2013-2015

5.1.1.1 Economic frames

As the diagram illustrates, the economic frame was the most dominating among the articles, 72 out of 147 of the total articles had it as the primary frame (49 percent). In the economic frames present in the articles, the majority of the issue-specific topics were found: the dispute over the EU’s imposed duties on Chinese solar panels (23), and the deepening EU-China trade (12), which I now will present.

The dispute over the EU’s imposed duties on Chinese solar panels

The dominating topic, among the primary economic frames, was regarding **the dispute over the EU’s imposed duties on Chinese solar panels**.⁴ In this topic, the context was that the authors first demonstrated irritation regarding the EU’s imposed duties on Chinese solar panels, which would harm the EU-China ties (Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Agencies, 2013-05-16, Tuo, Y. & Ding, Q., 2013-05-25). Moreover, it was argued that the Chinese understood how important a balanced tariff policy was for national development, however, the Europeans did not (Celani, 2013-06-21). It was also reported that China would have no choice but enforce counter-measures against the EU’s solar duties (Li, J., 2013-03-26; Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Agencies, 2013-06-05). However, consistent in the articles was the political will from China to solve this economic dispute (Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Xinhua, 2013-06-05; Xinhua, 2013-06-06). As the trade dispute was resolved in the end, it was noted that the irritation from the authors consequently disappeared. For example, it was expressed that China welcomed the deal that was beneficial to an open, cooperative, stable, and sustainable trade relationship between the EU and China (Xinhua 2013-07-27; Xinhua 2013-07-30; Xinhua 2013-08-05).

Deepening of current and future EU-China trade

Another frequent topic was about **deepening current and future EU-China trade**. In this frame, several authors emphasized the positive aspects of the enhanced EU-China economic

⁴ The EU-China conflict about solar panels was considered the biggest trade dispute between the two sides at that time (2013), in which the European solar panel makers accused China of benefitting from huge state subsidies, allowing the dumping of solar panels in Europe. Consequently, the EU planned to impose hefty tariffs on Chinese solar panels (Reuters, 2013).

relationship (Wei, H., 2013-08-02; Agencies, 2013-09-18; Tuo, Y., 2013-10-25; Zhou, W. & Wu, J., 2013-11-13; Tuo, Y., 2014-01-17). For example, this could be achieved through a potential EU-China free trade agreement (Xinhua, 2013-09-18; Xinhua, 2013-11-16; Li, J., 2013-11-20; Xinhua, 2013-11-23; Xinhua, 2014-04-02; Mu, C., 2014-09-17; Fu, J. & He, W., 2013-06-15; Agencies, 2013-09-18). In a similar way, there was a reporting of the need to further improve the bilateral trade relationship between the two states – for both parties and the world’s benefit (Xinhua, 2013-09-18; Xinhua, 2013-11-16; Li, J., 2014-02-10).

5.1.1.2 Political frames

Almost as equally dominating as the economic frame, the political frame accounted for 65 out of the total 147 articles (44 percent) as the primary frame. In this frame, the majority of the specified topics were found: the need for the EU and China to overlook differences (22), and upgrading the EU-China Strategic Partnership (13).

The need for the EU and China to overlook differences

A continuous topic in the political primary frames was the emphasis that **the EU and China need to overlook differences**. The context in which this topic appeared was often used to argue that EU-China relations could be healthier and that the two parties could address the differences properly (Banks, 2013-12-21; Ford, 2015-01-21; Xinhua, 2013-06-26; Fu, J., 2013-10-25). Therefore, it was called for the EU and China to address “issues of friction” that divided the two sides, such as economic differences or human rights divergencies (Banks, 2013-12-21; Fu, J., 2013-10-25; Fu, J., 2014-09-15; Ford, 2015-01-21; Banks, 2015-03-13). Moreover, it was noted in these articles that the authors emphasized that China’s emergence as a global economic power house was an “opportunity, not a threat” and that the EU should not shy away from China due to the differences (Banks, 2013-12-21). In particular, since the bilateral relationship celebrated its 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations, there was an emphasis that China and the EU could support each other in new ways since both sides were navigating in “uncharted waters” (Xinhua, 2014-09-26).

Upgrading the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

A repeated topic was also about **upgrading the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, which was often in line with China’s deep appreciation of its ties with Europe (Xinhua, 2013-05-28; Xinhua, 2013-11-11; China Daily, 2013-11-21; Yang, Y., 2014-09-27; China Daily, 2015-02-12). In addition, this topic was often brought up in parallel with the

tenth anniversary of the establishment of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Xinhua, 2014-03-30; Yang, Y., 2014-09-27; China Daily, 2015-02-12; China Daily, 2013-11-20). It was also highlighted that the EU was keen to broaden the strategic partnership with China beyond economic relations, education, migration, and mobility (Xinhua, 2014-03-30; Tuo, Y. & Pu, Z., 2014-03-31). At last, it was underlined by the authors that China was committed to deepening cooperation between China and the EU, despite the political and economic differences (Xinhua, 2014-11-16; Fu, J. & Liu, J., 2014-11-18; Islam, 2013-11-15).

5.1.2 Sub-frames on the EU from China Daily during 2013-2015

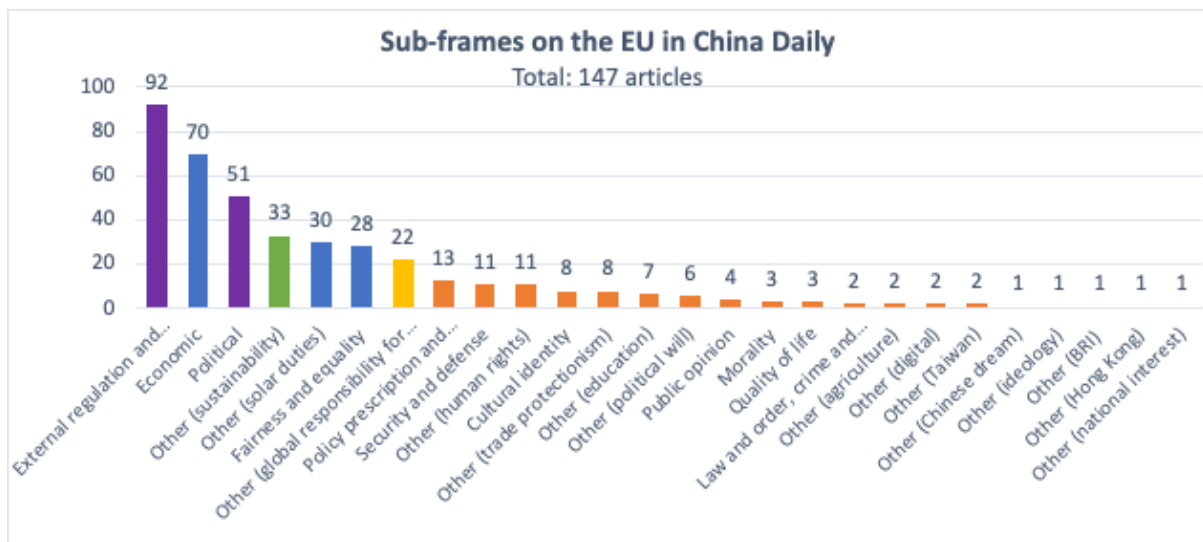


Table 5. Sub-frames on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015

In the following section, the sub-frames will first be presented according to the majority. Following this, their related sub-frames will then be introduced in order to make the context coherent for the reader. The sub-frames which are related to each other have been filled in with the identical color in the graph. In addition, the orange color is the default color for the time period 2013-2015's graphs' staples and these include the sub-frames that will not be discussed in this study, due to the limitation in the characters.

5.1.2.1 External regulation and reputation sub-frame

92 articles out of the 147 articles had the sub-frame of *external regulation and reputation*. Most of the articles related to this sub-frame had it in the context of the Chinese government often expressing their desired policy outcomes in the EU-China relationship. For example, the authors often argued that the world needs a united, prosperous, and strong Europe, but more importantly, that China had always viewed its ties with Europe from a strategic

perspective and supporting European integration, which called for enhanced cooperation between EU and China (Xinhua, 2013-05-26, Xinhua 2013-07-29, Xinhua, 2013-11-11; China Daily, 2013-11-21; Xinhua, 2014-10-09). Moreover, it was underlined that President Xi and the Chinese government hoped that China and the EU should address their disputes through dialogue in the spirit of mutual respect and mutual benefit (Xinhua, 2013-07-06; Tuo, Y., 2013-10-25; Xinhua, 2014-04-02; China Daily, 2013-10-31). However, the authors also reported that the frictions in the EU-China relationship, such as protectionism and duties, would severely impair the bilateral trade ties (Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Xinhua, 2013-05-26; Xinhua 2013-05-30).

At last, this sub-frame of *external regulation and reputation* were in most cases interconnected with the *political* sub-frame, which is the following sub-frame.

5.1.2.1.1 Political sub-frame

51 articles had the *political* sub-frame and they were in most cases interconnected with the other sub-frame of *external regulation and reputation*. Thus, no major repetition of the context is further needed. However, it was underlined that China considers good relations with Europe a top priority and that China is ready to work with the EU to bring the major markets closer to build stronger cooperation (Fu, J., 2013-11-18; Xinhua, 2014-04-02).

5.1.2.2 Economic sub-frame

70 articles had the *economic* sub-frame. The clear majority of the articles emphasized that China and the EU had become important trading partners and showed great potential for further trade cooperation, such as in bilateral investments. It was also emphasized that China views the EU as one of its most important trade partners (Fu, J. & Tuo, Y., 2013-10-31; Xinhua, 2014-04-02; Xinhua, 2014-09-24; Fu, J. & Liu, J., 2014-11-18).

Additionally, almost half of the sub-frames in this category were related to the *solar duties dispute* sub-frame and the *fairness and equality sub-frame*, which will now be mentioned in the following section.

5.1.2.2.1 Other sub-frame (*solar duties dispute*)

Due to the previous explanation of this frame in chapter 5.1.1.1 under primary “Economic frames”, this topic will not be repeated here. However, it can be observed that 30 articles had the sub-frame regarding the *solar duties dispute* between the EU and China.

5.1.2.2 Fairness and equality sub-frame

28 articles had the sub-frame of *fairness and equality*, which were closely related to the frames of the *EU-China solar duties conflict* and the *economic* sub-frame. The context in which this sub-frame was brought up was that the authors argued that the EU's solar duties on Chinese exports were unfair and unequal since they would severely hurt the interests of Chinese manufacturers. Therefore, it was argued that the Chinese government would have no choice but to take counter-measures to protect Chinese businesses. However, this would only create a lose-lose situation for China and the EU (Li, J., 2013-03-26; Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Xinhua, 2013-05-28). In this sub-frame, the Chinese government's will to try its best to resolve this dispute with the EU to avoid a trade war was consistent (Xinhua, 2013-05-28; Xinhua, 2013-05-30; Xinhua, 2013-06-05).

5.1.2.3 Other sub-frame (sustainability)

33 articles of the total had the sub-frame about *sustainability*, primarily about the EU-China sustainability cooperation and/or "climate diplomacy", in order to promote sustainable development (Liu, C. & Tuo, Y., 2015-01-09; Chao, P. & Li, Y., 2013-10-25; Xinhua, 2013-11-14; Banks, 2015-03-13; Fu, J. & He, W., 2013-06-15; Xinhua, 2013-11-23; Xinhua, 2014-04-02). It was also argued that since China was accelerating its urbanization and upgrading its economic structure, this called for closer cooperation with the EU since the two parties could exchange knowledge in experience and technology (Xinhua, 2014-04-02; China Daily, 2014-03-24).

5.1.2.4 Other sub-frame (global responsibility for development and/or for peace)

22 articles consisted of the sub-frame of the importance of the EU-China relationship due to their *global responsibility for development and/or for peace*. Several authors emphasized that the world experienced profound and complex changes, such as the global financial crises, imbalance in global development and international conflicts, which called for deepened EU-China ties. It was argued that since the EU and China are important actors in the multipolar world, they share a responsibility together for peace, prosperity, and sustainable development that will benefit all (Xinhua, 2013-11-23; Xinhua, 2014-03-30; Xinhua, 2014-04-02; Xinhua, 2014-03-27; Xinhua, 2014-04-02). In other words, deepening the EU-China relationship would contribute to peace and prosperity of the world (Xinhua, 2014-04-02).

5.1.3 The tones of the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015

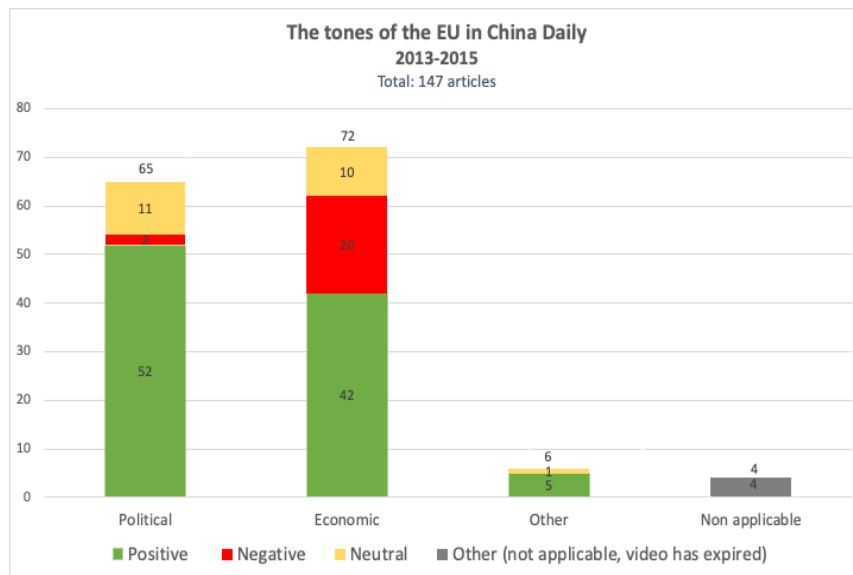


Table 6. The tones of the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

Other	Tone	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	Positive	3
Law and order, crime and justice	Positive	1
Other (digital/5G)	Positive	1
Other (sustainability)	Neutral	1
Total		6

Table 7. “Other” categories and tones, 2013-2015

5.2 Frames on the EU from China Daily, 2020-2022

5.2.1 Primary frames on the EU from China Daily

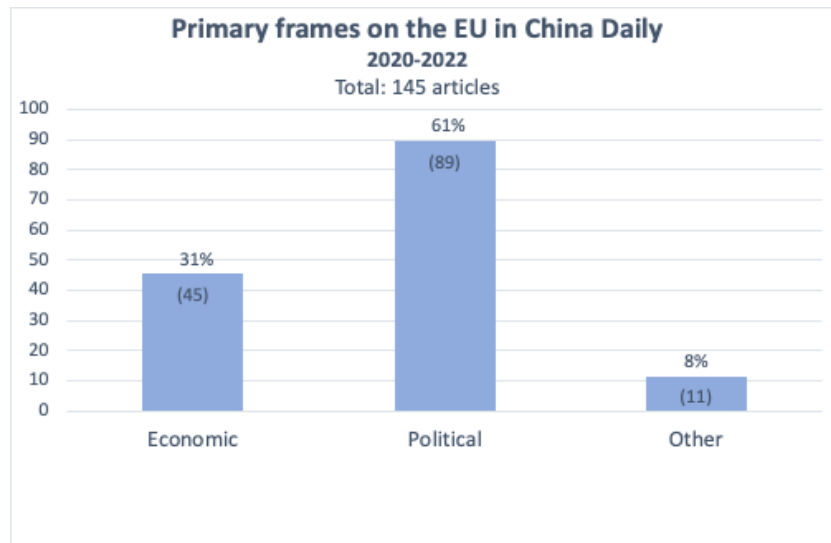


Table 8. Primary frames on the EU in China Daily, 2020-2022

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

Other	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	6
Other (human rights)	3
Other (Taiwan)	2
Total	11

Table 9. “Other” categories, 2020-2022

5.2.1.1 Political frames

As the diagram shows, the political frame was the most dominating primary frame in all the articles, 89 out of 145 of the total articles (61 percent). In the existing primary political frame, the following majority of the topics were regarding: the call for strengthening the EU-China relationship (for global stability) (45), the bad influence of the US (6), the EU’s strategic autonomy (4), and Taiwan (3), which will now be presented.

Call for strengthening the EU-China relationship (for global stability)

In a majority of the articles, the authors wrote that the global disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crises, and the Ukraine crises **called for pragmatic and strengthened cooperation between the two sides** in order to bring stability to the world (Chen, W., 2022-04-01; Chen, W., 2022-12-26; Xinhua, 2021-10-15). Some authors wrote that this was of additional importance after the EU called China “a negotiation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival”, which China opposed (Chen, W., 2021-07-09). Instead, it was emphasized that the EU and China are two major independent forces, and comprehensive strategic partners (Xinhua, 2021-10-15). Moreover, strengthening the bilateral relationship would be a positive sign of great significance to the turbulent and complex world amid profound changes (ECNS, 2022).

In addition, the articles often referred to several Chinese elite politicians, such as Premier Li Keqiang, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and President Xi Jinping, who called for greater cooperation between China and the EU (Xu, W., 2022-04-01; Mo, J., 2021-06-02). For example, these individuals repeatedly said that it is necessary for China and the EU to jointly promote the healthy and stable development of the bilateral relationship, which is in the interest of both sides (Xinhua, 2021-10-15). Furthermore, several authors acknowledged that although China and the EU have differences, such as in political systems and stances on issues regarding human rights and the rule of law, however, this is nothing new and could be overcome (Chen, W., 2021-07-09; Xu, W., 2022-01-27). Ultimately, the authors argued that the face of the harsh reality of today’s world, called even more for the EU and China to set aside their differences and meet each other halfway. Specifically, the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in Europe was another urgent call for stronger EU-China cooperation in order to achieve global stability (Wang, H., 2022-03-31; Chen, W., 2022-10-21; Chen, Y., 2022-04-01).

The bad influence of the US on EU-China relations

Another recurring frame in the articles from 2020-2022 was the topic of the **bad influence of the US on EU-China relations**. One article wrote how the Biden administration, compared to the Trump administration that tried to bully other countries to support its goal to stop China’s rise, now tried to use other arguments to achieve this goal, such as relating to American self-righteousness and self-interest. Moreover, it was argued that the US is trying to pour “Cold War wine” into a new bottle during US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s

visit to Brussels (China Daily, 2021-03-25). Another article argued that the US wants to drive a wedge between Europe and China, in a similar way to how the Americans had driven a wedge between Europe and Russia. Moreover, under the influence of the US, this had resulted in growing anti-China sentiment within the bloc. It was stated that Washington, having tried to contain China and failed, was now trying to get the US allies to join in its dirty work. However, it was argued that the EU will only harm itself if it abandons its win-win cooperation with China, if the EU decides to support the US (Wang, M., 2021-07-06; China Daily, 2021-05-06; China Daily, 2021-05-31). Moreover, the authors declared that China is not a threat to American security, however, America is worried because China's rise is considered a threat to US global hegemony. On the other hand, it was emphasized that China's development is an opportunity for the EU and vice versa, whether or not the US supports it (Wang, M., 2021-07-06; Global Times, 2022-01-19; China Daily, 2021-04-08; HK Edition, 2022-05-23).

Although the US was portrayed negatively by the authors in China Daily, this was not applied to the EU. Instead, the EU was portrayed as a rational actor, compared to the US. It was emphasized that the EU had refused to ally with the US against China due to the EU's awareness that it will not serve any parties' interests. For example, it was argued that "No matter how anxious the US has become about China's rise, the EU has remained sober-minded" (China Daily, 2021-03-29). It was also reported that President Xi, in a phone call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said that by strengthening EU-Germany cooperation, China and the EU could achieve significant and meaningful things (China Daily, 2021-04-08).

The EU's strategic autonomy

Another primary frame often used in the articles, related to politics, was about the **EU's strategic autonomy**⁵, and China's support of this newly introduced concept. For instance, it was reported that President Xi Jinping re-confirmed China's commitment to supporting the strategic autonomy of the EU in a video meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. China argued that the bilateral relationship should not be controlled by any third party (Xu, W., 2022-05-10; HK Edition, 2022-09-08). In particular, China urged the EU to make correct judgements and truly achieve strategic autonomy, which will result in new opportunities in

⁵ The EU's "strategic autonomy" is a policy objective of the EU Commission under President von der Leyen, with the goal of being autonomous from other countries in strategically important policy areas, i.e. defense, security, and economy (EPRS, 2022).

the bilateral relationship (Mo, J., 2021-04-09; Xu, W., 2022-05-10; China Daily Global, 2021-04-09).

Taiwan

The primary frame of **Taiwan** was mentioned in a few articles. The context in which Taiwan was brought up by the articles was that China urged the EU to stop making trouble with Taiwan-related issues since the European Parliament urged the EU to pursue closer ties with the island (Mo, J., 2021-09-03). The articles repeated China's argument of the one-China principle, that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and that the European Parliament's move violated China's domestic affairs, and severely violated international laws and basic norms in governing international relations (Mo, J., 2021-09-03; Xinhua, 2021-10-21). It was clearly stated in the articles that there is only one China in the world and that Taiwan is part of China (Xinhua, 2021-10-22).

5.2.1.2 Economic frames

As the diagram illustrates, the economic frame was the second most dominating primary frame, with a total of 45 articles out of 145 (31 percent). In the primary economic frames, the topics were the following: the EU's top trading partner, China, and the resilience of the EU-China trade (24), and the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) (12), which will now be presented.

EU's top trading partner, China, and the resilience of the EU-China trade

The clear majority of the articles had the main topic that **China is now the EU's top trading partner since 2020**, surpassing the US, whilst the EU is the second-largest trading partner for China (Zhang, Y., 2021-02-18; Xinhua, 2021-02-26; Xinhua, 2021-02-18; Zhu, W., 2022-01-18; Zhong, N. & Liu, Z., 2021-02-27; Stasinopoulos, 2021-01-25; Zhang, Y., 2021-05-27; China Daily, 2021-05-31; Xinhua, 2021-07-07; Chen, W., 2022-12-26; China Daily, 2022-01-19; China Daily, 2022-03-31). Moreover, the authors highlighted that despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the recession, the EU-China trade has prevailed. In fact, the bilateral economic cooperation had improved instead (Wang, L., 2020-12-31; Zhang, Y., 2021-02-18; Zhu, W., 2022-01-18). In other words, despite a pandemic, lockdowns, and a downward global economy, the EU-China trade relationship had proven a *strong resilience* and potential (Xinhua, 2021-02-18; Xinhua, 2021-02-26). The positive examples of the improved trade relationship were repeatedly illustrated by the authors. For example, reporting that in the first

quarter, the EU-China trade in mechanical and electrical products accounted for approximately 41 percent of the total EU-China trade (Liu, Z., 2022-04-29). Another instance that was used was surveys that revealed that more companies are making higher profits in China than the global average and their plan to expand their business further (Zhu, R., 2022-08-23). It was also emphasized by the authors that several experts believed that this positive trend would continue to increase, even in the post-pandemic era and despite the political frictions between the two states (Wang, M., 2021-06-03; Ouyang, S. & Zhou, L. & Zhong, N., 2022-07-21).

The China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)

A frequent frame in the primary economic one was the reporting of the topic of the **China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)**.⁶ The context in which the CAI was reported was that after a long time of negotiations, seven years, and 35 rounds of negotiations, the EU and China had finally reached a balanced and mutually beneficial CAI. The authors also wrote that the CAI illustrated China's willingness and determination to promote a broader and deeper opening up to the outside world (Han, B., 2021-01-11; An, B. & Chen, W., 2020-12-31). Furthermore, the positive aspects of CAI were often highlighted. For instance, better market access commitments, fair competition rules, sustainable development, and enhanced dispute settlement (Han, B., 2021-01-11; An, B. & Chen, W., 2020-12-31; China Daily, 2020-12-31). It was also emphasized that the treaty would bring more investment opportunities for companies from both sides and create a better trading environment for the parties involved (Xinhua, 2020-12-31; An, B. & Chen, W., 2020-12-31; China Daily, 2020-12-31; Yi, X., 2021-02-22).

⁶ The EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) was a trade agreement between the two sides struck in 2020, and its key areas included market access, a level playing field, sustainable development, and special provisions. However, in May 2021, the European Parliament voted to freeze its ratification due to China's treatment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang province – resulting in the CAI being put to ice (CSIS, 2023; The Guardian, 2021).

5.2.2 Sub-frames on the EU from China Daily during 2020-2022

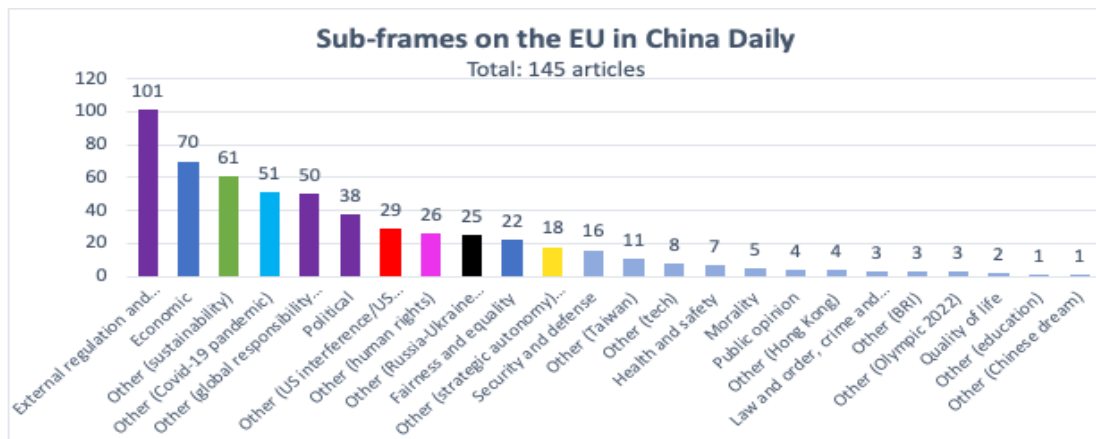


Table 10. The sub-frames on the EU in China Daily, 2020-2022

Just like previously, in this following section, the sub-frames will first be presented according to the majority. Following this, their related sub-frames will then be introduced, which have been filled in with the identical color in the graph. The light blue color is the default color for the time period 2020-2022 graphs' staples and these include the sub-frames that will not be discussed in this study, due to limitations in the characters.

5.2.2.1 External regulation and reputation sub-frame

101 articles had the sub-frame of *external regulation and reputation*. There were two recurring topics in the one-half of the articles. The first topic was about China's call to strengthen the EU-China relationship, both politically and economically. It was highlighted that the EU and China should improve mutual understanding, that the two sides should demonstrate the spirit of friendship and cooperation to achieve the next phase of their bilateral relationship (Wang, L., 2020-12-31; Xinhua, 2020-12-31; Han, B., 2021-01-11; Zhang, Y., 2021-02-18; Zhao, J., 2022-03-30; Cao, D., 2022-03-31). The second recurring subject was President Xi's and the Chinese government's will to promote the EU-China relations. For instance, it was often reported that Xi said that China attaches great importance to its relations with the EU and that the two sides should focus on their bilateral relationship from a strategic perspective (An, B. & Chen, W., 2020-12-31; Mo, J., 2021-04-08; Xinhua, 2022-04-04; Xinhua, 2022-05-10; Zhong, N., 2021-02-26; China Daily, 2022-04-02).

Additionally, the other half of the 101 articles had the sub-frame of *global responsibility for development and/or for peace* and was also related to the *political* sub-frame, which I will present in the following sub-frame.

5.2.2.1.1 Other sub-frame (global responsibility for development and/or for peace)

50 articles contained the sub-frame of the EU's and China's *global responsibility for development and/or for peace*. The authors emphasized that despite the two sides' differences, such as in the Ukraine crisis and some other issues, the two parties are still two major forces for global stability, and the EU and China shoulder common responsibilities in promoting world prosperity and stability. More importantly, these two sides have demonstrated that they could overcome the divergencies and prove that they still can focus on the greater good and their shared responsibility to the current volatile world (Wang, L., 2020-12-31; Xinhua; 2021-04-07; China Daily Global, 2021-04-08; Liu, Z., 2021-09-24; Zhang, Y., 2021-12-15; Xinhua, 2022-03-31). It was also highlighted that the EU, such as the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, showed a strong political will to enhance dialogue and cooperation between China and the EU since it would also benefit the world (China Daily, 2021-04-02; Xinhua; 2021-04-07; Mo, J., 2021-04-08). Similarly, it was repeatedly reported that President Xi stressed that China and the EU should act as two major forces in upholding world peace, which China is willing to do (Mo, J., 2021-04-09; Mo, J., 2022-01-14; Xinhua, 2022-04-04; Xinhua, 2022-05-10; China Daily, 2022-03-31).

5.2.2.1.2 Political sub-frame

38 articles had the political sub-frame and most of them were connected with the *external regulation and reputation* and the sub-frame of China's and the EU's *global responsibility for development and/or for peace*. In short, this sub-frame underlined that China and the EU are partners, not rivals, and that cooperation is far greater than competition. In other words, China is the EU's strategic partner, and not a systemic rival (China Daily, 2021-04-28; Zhong, N.; 2021-02-26). But it was also highlighted by the authors that the EU needs to better understand Chinese society, economy, and policies (Tian, D., 2021-04-24).

5.2.2.2 Economic sub-frame

70 articles contained the *economic* sub-frame. It was emphasized that the economic and trade cooperation is an important part of the EU-China relationship, and that the Chinese enterprises in Europe are the major driving forces of the cooperation (Rong, X. & Li, X. & Liu, Y., 2021-04-09). Another context in which the economic sub-frame was brought up was that there is huge potential in the EU-China trade cooperation, such as in the digital economy, green economy, additional promotion of trade and investment liberalization, fair competition, and better protect intellectual property rights (Zhang, Y., 2021-04-29; Peng, G., 2022-07-27;

Xinhua, 2021-07-07). The last context was in relation to the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), which I will present next in the upcoming sub-frame of *fairness and equality*.

5.2.2.1.1 Fairness and equality sub-frame

22 articles were related to the *fairness- and equality* sub-frame, which was interconnected with the *economic* sub-frame. In particular, there were two contexts when this sub-frame appeared, which were the following: CAI and the fair market, and the EU's unfair market conditions towards China during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first context, the authors reported that China and the EU had concluded the CAI, which would secure open and fair markets for both sides (Zhong, N. & Zhu, W., 2021-02-09; Chen, W., 2021-02-22; China Daily, 2021-05-10; China Daily, 2020-12-31; Chen, W., 2021-05-22; Xinhua, 2021-02-18). In the second context, it was underlined that the EU's trade protectionism during the Covid-19 pandemic had faced increasing discrimination regarding the law enforcement level in the EU, which had a negative impact on their operations in the EU (Zhu, W., 2022-01-18).

5.2.2.3 Other sub-frame (sustainability)

61 articles involved the sub-frame of *sustainability*. In the articles, it was noted that the topic of sustainability had become a recurring subject in the EU-China relationship. For example, according to a recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at their highest level in history, which would likely lead to the world experiencing more extreme climate impacts in the future. As a result, the authors underlined that the China-Europe climate could help address these global climate- and environmental challenges to foster new highlights in the bilateral cooperation (Liu, Y., 2022-12-03; Thus, the authors called for greater Sino-EU collaboration of fighting climate change (Yi, X., 2021-02-22; Ouyang, S., 2021-07-09; Ouyang, S. & Zhou, L., 2022-07-20; Xinhua, 2022-05-26; Jiao, S., 2022-01-06; Xu, W., 2022-05-10). Additionally, President Xi's and the Chinese government's will to bolster coordination in global challenges ranging from climate change to food security were also often highlighted in the articles (Xu, W., 2022-04-01; China Daily, 2022-11-16; Xu, W., 2022-05-10).

5.2.2.4 Other sub-frame (Covid-19 pandemic)

51 articles had the new sub-frame of the *Covid-19 pandemic*. Most of the articles underscored that the pandemic crises had not only caused considerable human suffering, but also disrupted

global trade and globalization, which called for stronger EU-China cooperation (Stasinopoulos, 2021-01-25; Xu, W., 2022-04-01; Liu, Z., 2022-04-29). The authors also reported that the EU had expressed willingness and readiness to continue to strengthen cooperation with China in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic (Xinhua, 2021-09-29). A positive aspect that also was highlighted was the robust trade ties between the two sides, which had risen above the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and reached new heights. For example, according to the statistics, China had maintained its position as the EU's top trading partner for the second year in a row, with two-way trade volume in goods increasing by 27.5 percent and setting a record of 744 billion euros in 2021 (Wang, H., 2022-03-31; Chen, W., 2021-07-09). More importantly, the authors argued that the EU and China must pull together to address the Covid-19 pandemic challenges, and keep their ties on the right course, in order to prevent the world from being divided into two camps (China Daily, 2021-10-17; Xinhua, 2021-07-07; Xu, W., 2022-05-10).

Additionally, another angle that the articles framed the Covid-19 pandemic was that China had largely succeeded in containing the pandemic in a relatively short time, thanks to its strict prevention and control measures. Moreover, China had taken the responsibility to help other countries to contain the pandemic by providing them with medical supplies, including vaccines (Hrubec, 2021-06-17).

5.2.2.5 Other sub-frame (US bad interference)

Due to the previous explanation of this frame in chapter 5.2.1.1 under primary "Political frames", it will not be repeated here. However, it can be noted that the new sub-frame of the *US bad interference* appeared in 29 articles.

5.2.2.6 Other sub-frame (human rights)

26 articles contained the sub-frame of *human rights*. The majority of the authors underlined that the EU sanctions imposed due to the alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region were a complete interference in China's internal affairs. As a result, China imposed its own sanctions on the EU, since it had no choice in order to defend its sovereignty and core interests. It was argued that these malpractices were evidence of foreign interference and imperialism (China Daily, 2021-05-22; Xinhua, 2021-05-28; Wong, B., 2021-10-20; Chen, Y. 2022-01-26). It was also argued that these so-called human rights

issues had been fabricated with funding from the US (China Daily, 2021-05-31; China Daily, 2021-11-18).

5.2.2.7 Other sub-frame (Russia-Ukraine conflict)

25 articles had the new sub-frame of the *Russia-Ukraine conflict*. The authors wrote that no matter how the Ukraine crisis transforms the global political landscape, maintaining the amicable relationship between China and the EU will be in the interest of both sides (China Daily Global, 2022-04-01). It was expressed that during the upcoming leaders' meeting, it served as a good opportunity for both parties to deepen their mutual understanding and trust not only on the Ukraine issue, but also their general bilateral relationship. In particular, it was underlined that since the beginning of the conflict, China had been maintaining an objective and impartial position. However, China now stood ready to maintain communication and coordination with the European side in order to play a constructive role to restore peace in Europe (China Daily, 2022-04-02; Wang, H., 2022-03-31). Finally, it was emphasized that China had been asserting that sovereignty to be respected, and that the solution lies in peaceful dialogue and diplomacy (Chen, W., 2022-04-01).

5.2.2.8 Other sub-frame (EU's strategic autonomy)

Due to the previous explanation of this frame in chapter 5.2.1.1 under primary "Political frames", it will not be repeated here. However, it can be noted that the new sub-frame of the *EU's strategic autonomy* appeared in 18 articles.

5.2.3 The tones of the EU in China Daily, 2020-2022

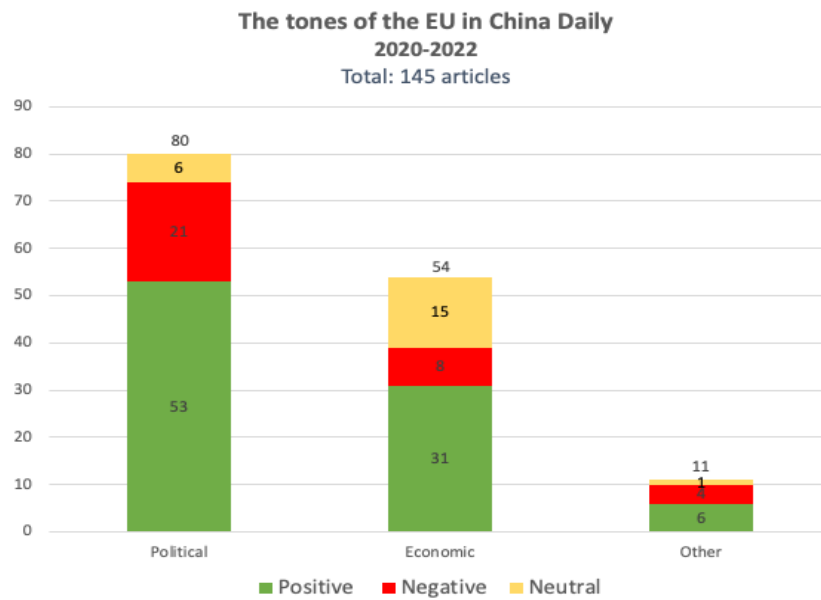


Table 11. The tones of the EU in China Daily, 2020-2022

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

Other	Tone	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	Positive	6
Other (human rights)	Negative	3
Other (Taiwan)	Negative	1
Other (Taiwan)	Neutral	1
Total		11

Table 12. “Other” categories and tones, 2020-2022

5.3 Total primary frames and tones on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015 and 2020-2020

5.3.1 Comparison of the total primary frames on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015 and 2020-2020

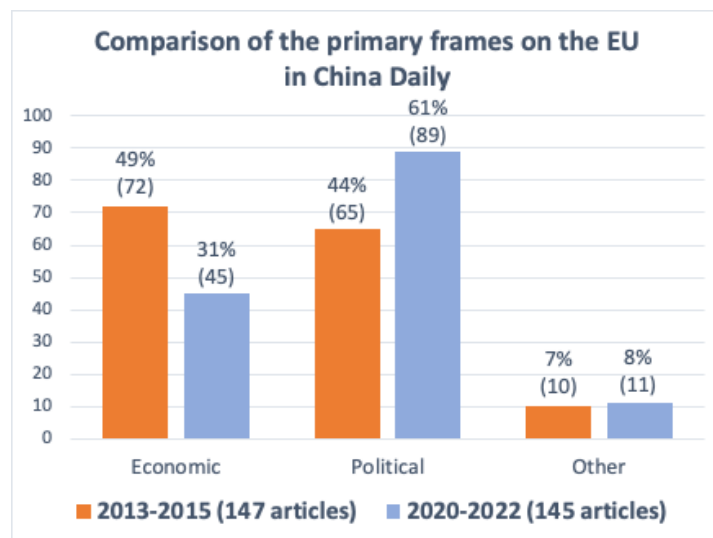


Table 13. Comparison of the primary frames on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

2013-2015		2020-2022	
Other	Occurrence	Other	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	4	Other (sustainability)	6
Other (not applicable, video has expired)	4	Other (human rights)	3
Law and order, crime and justice	1	Other (Taiwan)	2
Other (digital)	1		
Total	10	Total	11

Table 14. “Other” categories, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022

5.3.2 Comparison of the total tones on the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022

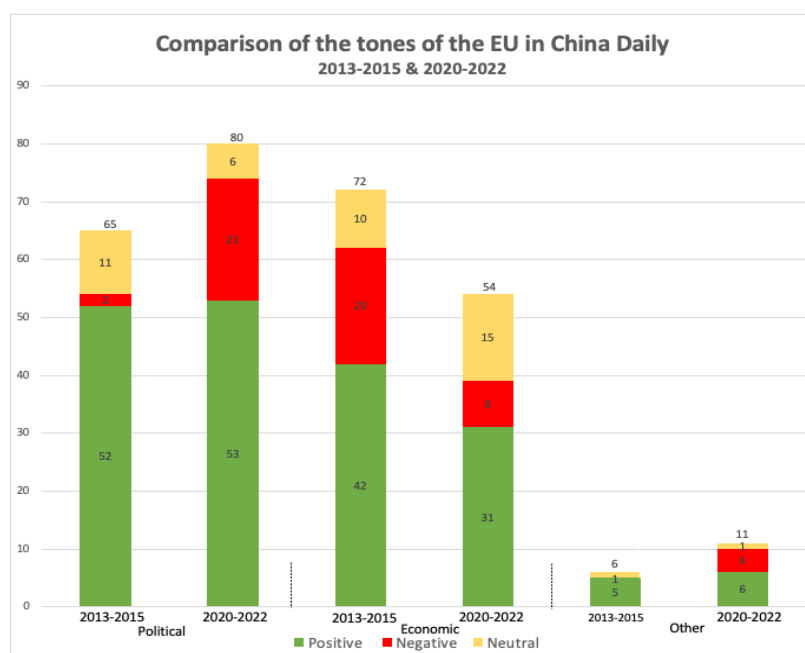


Table 15. Comparison of the tones of the EU in China Daily, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022

The following data in “Other” was according to the following table:

2013-2015		
Other	Tone	Occurrence
Other (sustainability)	Positive	3
Law and order, crime and justice	Positive	1
Other (digital/5G)	Positive	1
Other (sustainability)	Neutral	1
Total		6
2020-2022		
Other	Tone	Occurrence

Other (sustainability)	Positive	6
Other (human rights)	Negative	3
Other (Taiwan)	Negative	1
Other (Taiwan)	Neutral	1
Total		11

Table 16. “Other” categories and tones, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022

6. Analysis and discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study in more detail. It will also compare the frames of the news articles during the two different time periods, 2013-2015 and 2020-2022. Moreover, the study is aware that the data collection of the different time periods is limited to the various topics of that/this time's circumstances. However, it is argued that the various topics from the different time periods can still convey how China perceived, and currently perceives, the EU through studying China Daily's framing of the Union.

The study finds that the authors' framing of the EU during President Xi Jinping's first time period 2013-2015 and his second time period 2020-2022 does differ in China Daily. During his first two years as president, the EU was mainly perceived by the authors in terms of economic cooperation, with the majority of the main frames confirming this, 72 out of 147 articles (49 percent). Following this, the political primary frame remained the second most dominating, 65 out of 147 (44 percent). However, during Xi's later time period, i.e. his two last years as president 2020-2022, the study finds that this primary economic framing now has shifted to the political dimension – the political frame now being the dominating primary frame, 89 out of 145 articles (61 percent). In the opposite way, the economic primary frame has now become the second most dominating, 45 out of 145 (31 percent).

The study will now discuss and compare the authors' framing of the EU in the economic frame between Xi's two time periods, followed by the political frame and its related sub-frames. Due to the limitation of time and characters in this thesis, only these two selected frames will be discussed because they show the most contrasting framing shift of the EU during Xi's first and second period as president.

6.1 Economic frame

During Xi's first time period 2013-2015, it was observed that the economic cooperation with the EU was frequently reported in a positive light by the authors. For example, it was often described with verbs or adjectives that the EU-China talks would “pave the way” for a trade deal between two of the world's biggest markets, that the sides were “ready“, “willing“ and “only waited” to get started (Agencies, 2013-09-18; Tuo, Y., 2013-10-25), or that the authors called for “healthy” trade environment between China and the EU. The authors in China Daily also “appreciated” the efforts the EU had done in order to make the trade talks “go forward” (Tuo, Y., 2013-10-25). In the exact opposite way, an aggressive and negative tone

from the articles could be identified regarding EU's trade policies when these would damage or undermine China's interests of deepening the trade cooperation with the EU – the EU's solar duties on China during Xi's first time period is a clear example of this. In the case of these imposed solar duties, it could be noted that the authors frequently used verbs such as “damage”, “severely impair”, “seriously harm” and “hinder” when reporting the consequences it would have on the bilateral trade ties (Xinhua, 2013-05-16; Agencies, 2013-05-16). It was also argued that “provoking trade friction with China was like ‘dropping a boulder on one's own foot’” (Agencies, 2013-05-16). Therefore, what can be drawn from these findings during Xi's first period as president 2013-2015 is that the authors regarded the EU mainly as an important economic partner during the first time period. In other words, the EU collaboration with China was concentrated to the economic significance. However, although the economic importance the authors associated with the EU, they were not afraid to express their criticism regarding unwanted actions from the EU and the consequences these would entail. In contrast, a common theme in these negatively-toned articles was still China's consistent will to resolve the conflict, such as the need to use consultations and dialogue to resolve disputes in order to create a healthy trade relationship (Tuo & Ding, 2013-05-25; Tuo, Y., 2013-10-25). For these reasons, it can be concluded that during Xi's first time period as president 2013-2015, the economic relations functioned as the engine and the mediator for the political ties between China and the EU. For example, this could be witnessed from the authors' emphasis on the relative importance of the economic main frame with the EU, combined with the approach to underline common interests and to seek dialogue on conflicting issues.

However, during Xi Jinping's later time period as president during 2020-2022, this study observes that the main economic framing during Xi's first two years as president now has shifted to the political frame as the main frame. In comparison to Xi's first time period of 2013-2015 as president, the political frame is now the engine and mediator for the bilateral ties between China and the EU, which influences both the economic and political frame. In addition, the study finds that the economic collaboration now is in the background of the authors' framing of the EU instead. However, even though the economic cooperation now is in the background of the framing, it is still a significant factor in how the authors perceive the EU. For instance, the economic sub-frame in the later time period 2020-2022 is still reported almost the same amount as in the first period, i.e. in 70 articles, which illustrates the economic importance the authors put to the bilateral relationship with the EU. Moreover, the

economic framing of the EU by the authors in this later time period is similar to the first period's verbs and adjectives such as China and the EU have “bigger room for win-win cooperation” in economy and trade, and that cooperation is the “right way forward” for the bilateral ties (Peng, G., 2022-07-27; Xinhua, 2021-07-07).

6.2 Political frame

In Xi's first time period 2013-2015 as president, the study finds that the authors' argument of China consistently being willing to resolve the conflicts, just like in the economic frame, also could be observed in the political primary frame, which is the second biggest primary frame of 2013-2015. The majority of the political articles argued for closer EU-China ties. It was noted that despite frictions in the relationship, the authors frequently used verbs and adjectives such as EU and China “needing to compromise”, “not shy away” from divergencies, China and the EU “needing to build trust and create fresh cooperation”, and emphasizing that the EU must see China with “fresh” eyes (Banks, 2013-12-21; Fu, J., 2013-10-25; Glyn, 2015-01-21; Banks, 2015-03-13). In the later time period 2020-2022, it was also noted that the authors used similar verbs and adjectives, such as Premier Li Keqiang “underlined” the need for China and EU to “uphold” dialogue, cooperation, and “properly” handle differences and “strive” towards “healthy and steady growth” of bilateral ties, to describe the relationship (Xu, W., 2022-01-27; Xu, W., 2022-04-01; Mo, J., 2021-06-02).

6.2.1 EU's strategic autonomy

The study finds that in Xi's later time period 2020-2022 as president, despite the increased frictions in the bilateral relationship, there is a surprisingly dominating positive tone of the EU-China relationship in the majority of the articles, 90 out of 145 articles. In addition, one of the main findings discovered is the authors' current political desire and support of the EU's strategic autonomy, compared to previous time periods and what previous research have found. For instance, the EU-China relationship had previously been influenced by its relationship with the US. However, there has now been a shift in the authors' framing of the EU, which is now conveyed through the Chinese government's will and goal that the EU is treated as an independent actor and that the relationship is no longer dependent on third parties, i.e. the US. For example, when reviewing the political collaboration in Xi Jinping's later period, it can be found that adjectives and verbs such as China's “commitment to support EU's strategic autonomy”, nor that it is “hijacked”, “subjugated to”, or “controlled”

by any third party (Xu, W., 2022-05-10; China Daily Global, 2021-04-09). It was also argued that “The EU can only uphold its beliefs and values, and serve its own interests, by exercising its autonomy.” (China Daily Global, 2021-04-09). Moreover, this confirms the study’s previous findings, i.e. that the political frame is now the engine and mediator of the political ties between China and the EU. Compared to the first time period 2013-2015, the economic ties are now just a tool to put the two regions onto a new track. From a bigger perspective, the authors’ support of EU’s autonomy as an independent actor on the global scene can be viewed as their attempt to convince both the Chinese audience and EU readers to see both EU and China with new eyes – the bilateral ties now being a separate and independent entity in international affairs.

Additionally, another main finding in the study is that the authors are actively taking a more aggressive stance against the US in the later time period, in which the US is consistently framed negatively in relation to the EU. In these articles, the US was often described with verbs such as “China bashing” growing in the country and that the EU is being “hoodwinked” by the US, which has “fabricated” lies about China, such as the alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang in order to contain China (Wang, M., 2021-07-06; China Daily, 2021-05-06). It therefore shows that China has grown in confidence, which can be witnessed through the authors’ articles in China Daily, compared to the first time period, and becoming a more active actor in international affairs that challenges the US global hegemony.

6.2.2 China and the EU’s global responsibility for development and/or for peace

In addition, the authors’ desire of the EU becoming an independent actor can also be illustrated by its political will that the EU-China relationship should take responsibility for development and/or for world peace, which has doubled in occurrence in China Daily’s framing during the two different time periods – this sub-frame increasing from occurring in 22 to 50 articles. In this frame of global responsibility for development and/or peace, it is found that verbs and adjectives such as “cooperation being crucial” for China and the EU due to the time of global uncertainty, unilateralism, and economic nationalism, and that the sides should “grasp this historic opportunity” to “bolster” bilateral cooperation towards a more “open, stable and balanced future”. When describing the bilateral relationship, the authors wrote that the “future is bright” (Liu, X., 2021-09-24; Wang, L., 2020-12-31; Xinhua; 2021-04-07). Moreover, Xi had “urged” and “hoped” that the EU would cooperate with China to

bring more certainty and stability to the world (Xinhua; 2021-04-07; China Daily, 2021-04-08). Similarly, this common theme and similar verbs and adjectives can once again be confirmed and applied to other world conflicts, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine crisis, or the climate crisis (Liu, Y., 2022-12-03; Stasinopoulos, 2021-01-25; Xu, W., 2022-04-01; Liu, Z., 2022-04-29; Xinhua, 2021-07-07). In particular, Xi had “stressed” the EU to “deepen” the pragmatic cooperation (China Daily, 2021-10-17). These global crises have all called for stronger EU-China cooperation. Therefore, looking at the EU-China collaboration in the later time period, it can be found that the adjectives and the verbs become more constructive and positive in China Daily’s reporting. In other words, it could be argued that the authors now put an even greater significance to the EU-China relationship compared to Xi’s first time period, even perceiving it and signaling it as crucial in ways that might have a profound impact on the international order and stability. The articles and the frames demonstrate China’s active work to strengthen its ties with the EU, which is now also China’s biggest trading partner. At the same time, the authors are framing the EU in a way that is trying to weaken the alliance between the EU and China’s enemy, the US.

6.2.3 Human rights and Taiwan

However, it can also be noted that there are some areas in which the authors in China Daily clearly perceive the EU negatively, such as human rights and Taiwan. These two political issues have already existed in the time period 2013-2015, but they have increased in occurrence in China Daily during 2020-2022 – signaling a firmer non-tolerant stance from the authors. In these two cases, the authors often used verbs and adjectives such as “firm opposition” and “strong discontent” to statements regarding Taiwan and Xinjiang-related issues that are China’s internal affairs (Xinhua, 2021-05-28; China Daily, 2021-05-22). Ultimately, it was argued that “China had no choice but to defend its sovereignty and core interests. After all, sanction is a game that two can play. /.../” and that China will never compromise on its “core interests” no matter the circumstances (China Daily, 2021-05-22). This conveys a message that no matter how important the authors perceive the relationship with the EU, they still have firm non-negotiable areas that will not be compromised. In this context, it could be argued that the authors’ insistence on sovereignty regarding Taiwan and human rights is an extension of the assertion of the EU’s autonomy and independence (from the US), as the study previously found.

6.3 Conclusion

Based on the 292 articles' framing of the EU in China Daily, the conclusion is that China primarily perceives the EU as a friend, regardless of the current frictions in the bilateral relationship. The study finds that the overwhelming amount of articles in both the first and later time period have a positive framing of the EU. In Xi's first two years as president during 2013-2015, 99 out of 147 articles have a positive tone. During this time period, the authors also regarded the EU as mainly an economic partner. Similarly, during Xi's two last years as president 2020-2022, 90 out of 145 articles are positively loaded, which clearly demonstrates that the authors perceive the significance of the relationship with the EU (as a friend) outweighing the frictions (as either a "frenemy" or enemy). Another important finding in the study is that the authors, and thereby China, now perceive the EU in terms of political meaning – a partner in international affairs that together shares the responsibility for world development and peace.

7. Conclusion and future research

The aim of this study was to study China's perception of the EU, especially since the EU-China relationship holds great significance in international affairs, but has experienced various frictions in recent years. Thus, the research question of this thesis was to study how the Chinese media's framing of the EU has changed under Xi Jinping's first two years as president (2013-2015), compared to his two last years (2020-2022). Using framing analysis as the theoretical framework and based on the 292 articles in China Daily, this study finds that during Xi's first time period as president, the EU-China relationship was mainly perceived in terms of economic collaboration, which was also the main engine for development of the bilateral ties. However, this economic framing has now shifted to mainly political framing during Xi's later time period. In other words, the political frame is now the main catalyst in the bilateral ties between the EU and China. For example, economic factors have now even become politicized, but the economic cooperation still remains an important factor in the bilateral ties. In the political frame, the study's main findings are that there is a strong push by the authors for the EU's strategic autonomy and the need for the EU and China to work together due to the global responsibility for development and/or for peace, even though there are political issues that are non-negotiable, such as human rights and Taiwan. However, in the end, this study concludes that China perceives the EU as a friend – not an enemy, nor a “frenemy”.

Still, it is important to note that the data in this study is collected from China Daily, a Chinese government-owned English-language newspaper. It can therefore be concluded that its aimed audience is primarily foreigners, which may influence the authors' framing of the EU. For example, having a more positive framing of the EU, compared to a Chinese-language Chinese government-owned newspaper. Despite this, I argue that this study's findings still do convey a message of how China perceives the EU because the authors in China Daily function as a state agent to the Chinese government. Both the primary economic and political frames demonstrate the significance China views its relationship with the EU to be – as a friend. Based on this thesis' findings, I hope that this study can provide some value in breaking the current deadlock between the EU and China and contribute to the bilateral relationship moving forward.

For future research, it would be interesting to study China's framing of the EU in Chinese-language newspaper articles. This would provide a direct framing of the EU

in Chinese-language media to the native people in China. In contrast, it would also be interesting to study the current European perception of China. For instance, by studying the framing of China in newly-published European newspaper articles that would provide an up-to-date perception of China.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: The Policy Frames Codebook by Amber E. Boydstun et al., (2014)

- 1. Economic frames:** The costs, benefits, or monetary/financial implications of the issue (to an individual, family, community, or to the economy as a whole).
- 2. Capacity and resources frames:** The lack of or availability of physical, geographical, spatial, human, and financial resources, or the capacity of existing systems and resources to implement or carry out policy goals.
- 3. Morality frames:** Any perspective—or policy objective or action (including proposed action) that is compelled by religious doctrine or interpretation, duty, honor, righteousness or any other sense of ethics or social responsibility.
- 4. Fairness and equality frames:** Equality or inequality with which laws, punishment, rewards, and resources are applied or distributed among individuals or groups. Also the balance between the rights or interests of one individual or group compared to another individual or group.
- 5. Constitutionality and jurisprudence frames:** The constraints imposed on or freedoms granted to individuals, government, and corporations via the Constitution, Bill of Rights and other amendments, or judicial interpretation. This deals specifically with the authority of government to regulate, and the authority of individuals/corporations to act independently of government.
- 6. Policy prescription and evaluation:** Particular policies proposed for addressing an identified problem, and figuring out if certain policies will work, or if existing policies are effective.
- 7. Law and order, crime and justice frames:** Specific policies in practice and their enforcement, incentives, and implications. Includes stories about enforcement and interpretation of laws by individuals and law enforcement, breaking laws, loopholes, fines, sentencing and punishment. Increases or reductions in crime.
- 8. Security and defense frames:** Security, threats to security, and protection of one's person, family, in-group, nation, etc. Generally an action or a call to action that can be taken to protect the welfare of a person, group, nation sometimes from a not yet manifested threat.
- 9. Health and safety frames:** Healthcare access and effectiveness, illness, disease, sanitation, obesity, mental health effects, prevention of or perpetuation of gun violence, infrastructure and building safety.

10. Quality of life frames: The effects of a policy on individuals' wealth, mobility, access to resources, happiness, social structures, ease of day-to-day routines, quality of community life, etc.

11. Cultural identity frames: The social norms, trends, values and customs constituting culture(s), as they relate to a specific policy issue.

12. Public opinion frames: References to general social attitudes, polling and demographic information, as well as implied or actual consequences of diverging from or "getting ahead of" public opinion or polls.

13. Political frames: Any political considerations surrounding an issue. Issue actions or efforts or stances that are political, such as partisan filibusters, lobbyist involvement, bipartisan efforts, deal-making and vote trading, appealing to one's base, mentions of political maneuvering. Explicit statements that a policy issue is good or bad for a particular political party.

14. External regulation and reputation frames: The United States' external relations with another nation; the external relations of one state with another; or relations between groups. This includes trade agreements and outcomes, comparisons of policy outcomes or desired policy outcomes.

15. Other frames: Any frames that do not fit into the above categories.

Appendix 2: Coding for the Tone by Amber E. Boydston et al., (2014)

Positive tone: Immigration and immigrants' rights are portrayed in a positive light or from a generally sympathetic point of view, so that immigrant advocates and supporters of less restrictive immigration laws would be pleased to see the news article.

Negative tone: Immigration and immigrants' rights are portrayed in a negative light or in a non-sympathetic manner, so that immigrant advocates and supporters of less restrictive immigration laws would be disappointed or upset to see the news article.

Neutral tone: Immigration and immigrants' rights are portrayed using both positive and negative tones that balance each other out, or the news article does not appear to discuss the issue either positively or negatively.