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Master's Thesis

Chinese Media Discourse on the Trade War with the United States

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Declaration of Authorship

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague   Dobromila Dvořáková

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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to provide an overview of Chinese domestic political discourse through an analysis of the Chinese domestic media narrative surrounding the recent trade war with the United States. Using a mixed method of quantitative analysis of keywords and qualitative analysis of headline emotivity from media articles published by three big Chinese domestic news outlets, we were able to explore the language and emotions of their narrative. The results of keyword analysis identified the prevalence of politically motivated discourse, which was dominant throughout majority of this conflict. Themes such as strong self-identification, Chinese victim self-portrayal and American aggression were very strongly mentioned in the discourse of this population. Meanwhile, the interest of Chinese media in global economy and multilateral trading system was very little, with only few mentions in comparison to the political aspects of the discourse. Additionally, publishing volumes over the course of the conflict showed that despite the Chinese media reporting escalatory developments of the trade conflict more, the qualitative headline emotivity analysis discovered a general preference for the usage of rather neutral language and appeasing rhetoric.

Abstrakt

Hlavním cílem této práce bylo poskytnout přehled čínského domácího politického diskurzu prostřednictvím analýzy narativu čínských domácích médií ohledně nedávné obchodní války se Spojenými státy. Prostřednictvím smíšené metody kvantitativní analýzy klíčových slov a kvalitativní analýzy emotivity titulků z mediálních článků publikovaných třemi velkými čínskými domácími médii jsme byli schopni prozkoumat jazyk a emoce jejich narativu. Výsledky analýzy klíčových slov identifikovaly převahu politicky motivovaného diskurzu, který byl dominantní během větší části tohoto konfliktu. V diskurzu této populace článků byla velmi silně zmiňována témata, jako silná sebeidentifikace, prezentace Číny jako oběti a americká agrese. Na druhou stanu, zájem čínských médií o globální ekonomiku a multilaterální obchodní systém byl velmi malý ve srovnání s politickými aspekty diskurzu. Jak ukázal objem článků publikovaných v průběhu konfliktu, přestože čínské sdělovací prostředky více informovaly o zhoršujícím se vývoji obchodního konfliktu, kvalitativní analýza emotivity titulků nicméně ukázala obecnou preferenci pro použití spíše neutrálního jazyka a uklidňující rétoriky.

Keywords

Chinese media discourse; keyword analysis; emotivity analysis; Chinese media

Klíčová slova

Čínský mediální diskurz; analýza klíčových slov, analýza emotivity, Čínská média

Název práce

Čínský mediální diskurz o obchodní válce se Spojenými státy

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Introduction

China has been gaining an increasing importance on the field of global politics over the last 20 years. The impressive undisputable economic, social and technological progress that the country has made now comes with a plethora of questions from the other international actors about its ambitions, capabilities and attitudes towards the current existing world order still championed by the United States' declining hegemony.[1]

The recent trade war between the increasingly isolationist United States and bolder than ever China is indeed a manifestation of increasingly conflicting aspirations and ideologies in the global arena.[2] The U.S. policies in the recent years have been represented by retreating from various cooperation attempts like the TPP[3] or the Paris Climate Accord[4] and aggressive trade policy against rivals as well as allies. The recent introduction of higher tariffs and various sanctions towards goods imported from the rest of the world, greatly influences China as the world's biggest exporter and the United States' biggest trading partner with 418.6 billion USD of shipments equaling to 16.8% of China's total exports in 2019.[5] It yet remains to be seen if this is only a temporary strategy of the current Trump's administration, or if we are truly watching the beginning of a larger conflict unfolding between these two superpowers with implications of a potential contestation of the global economic governance style as we know it.[6]

This situation is not a completely new or surprising phenomenon, as countless power transitions between countries occurred during the course of human history and have often led to wars or long-term instability of whole regions.[7] As most IR theorists and policymakers nowadays agree, China and the United States are on the verge of a hegemonic power

[1] Ikenberry, G. (2011). The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America. Foreign Affairs, 90(3), 56-68. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/23039408

[2] Woon, C. (2017). China's Contingencies: Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Exceptionalism and the Uses of History. *Geopolitics*, *23*(1), 67-95. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1302429

[3] Baker, P. (2017). Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's Signature Trade Deal (Published 2017). The New York Times. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/us/politics/tpp-trump-trade-nafta.html

[4] Press Statement. (2020). On the U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://www.state.gov/on-the-u-s-withdrawal-from-the-paris-agreement/

[5] Workman, D. (2020). China's Top Trading Partners. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from http://www.worldstopexports.com/chinas-top-import-partners/

[6] Tammen, R. (2006). Power Transition and China-US Conflicts. *The Chinese Journal Of International Politics*, *1*(1), 35-55. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from doi: 10.1093/cjip/pol003

[7] Goldstein, A. (2007). Power transitions, institutions, and China's rise in East Asia: Theoretical expectations and evidence. Journal of Strategic Studies, 30:4-5, 639-682. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from DOI: 10.1080/01402390701431709

transition.[8] According to the Neoliberal Institutionalists, this situation can still be resolved by peaceful means[9] but in the eyes of Neorealist scholars the risk to instigate conflict and destruction is too high to overlook. [10] As much as the current political research concentrates on this power transition and its implications, [11] few have actually asked if world dominance and the liabilities connected to it is actually what China currently aims for. As some have argued, so far China has been more than anything a shirker in the global governance area and therefore should have very little interest in taking over the system or changing it.[12]

Due to the strong interdependence of the global trade and economy fostered through the institutional linkages created mainly by the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and others, this ongoing conflict has serious implications not only for these two leading economies, but also for the rest of the world and global economy.[13] Henceforth, most of the research to date has been mainly concentrating on thorough analyses of political proclamations, bilateral relations,[14] economic and trade relations[15] and China's participation in multilateral organizations.[16] Since the Chinese domestic political situation is generally the strongest impetus for Chinese foreign policy, I think that researching the domestic Chinese press is a very important, yet neglected area of study that has a strong potential for providing the answers that analysts have not been able to find so far.[17]

[8] Zhu, Z. (2005). Power Transition and U.S.-China Relations: Is War Inevitable? Journal of International and Area Studies, 12(1), 1-24. Retrieved April 7, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/43107108

[9] Wang, L., Zheng, J. (2012). China's rise as a new paradigm in the world economy: preliminaries. Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies, 10(4). 301-312, DOI: 10.1080/14765284.2012.724979

[10] Mearsheimer, J. (2014). *American Grand Strategy and the Future of U.S. Landpower* (pp. 37-54, Rep.) (Da Silva J., Liebert H., & Wilson I., Eds.). Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11930.6

[11] Schweller, R. (2011). Emerging Powers in an Age of Disorder. Global Governance, 17(3), 285-297. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23033748

[12] After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline, Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu

[13] Ikenberry, G. (2011). The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America. Foreign Affairs, 90(3), 56-68. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/23039408

[14] Zhang, Y. (2018). The US–China Trade War: A Political and Economic Analysis. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs, 31*(1/2), 53-74. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/26608823

[15] Tan, D., & Chen, C. (2019). Modelling the economic impact of the Sino– US trade dispute: A global perspective. In SONG L., ZHOU Y., & HURST L. (Eds.), *The Chinese Economic Transformation: Views from Young Economists* (pp. 215-236). Australia: ANU Press. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvp7d4j8.18

[16] Athukorala, P. (2017). China's Evolving Role in Global Production Networks: Implications for Trump's Trade War. In Song L., Garnaut R., Fang C., & Johnston L. (Eds.), *China's New Sources of Economic Growth: Human Capital, Innovation and Technological Change* (pp. 363-388). Australia: ANU Press. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkk3v.23

[17] Blanchard, J. (2013). Introduction: China and the WTO into the Next Decade: Probing the Past and Present as a Path to Understand the Future. *Asian Journal of Social Science, 41*(3/4), 243-262. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23654843

In contrast to the mostly foreign policy oriented researches, I have decided to apply one of the increasingly popular quantitative research methods in the current social science field – the content analysis – to find out how these events of trade war are represented in the Chinese media, since the domestic and international politics are inseparably intertwined in the case of China.[18] The main question that I will attempt to answer throughout this research is: "Through which narratives is the trade war with the United States presented in Chinese media?". I am going to research the presentation of this conflict with the United States from the perspective of the Chinese domestic media and discover its underlying political narratives and its implications, instead of analyzing the texts of Chinese official foreign policy, as many other researchers have already been doing that in the past.[19]

By analyzing the publications of main news outlets in China I have a unique opportunity to identify patterns in language that are not accessible to most China-oriented researchers who lack the Chinese language proficiency and rely on translated documents or Chinese overseas media. Since coverage of any topic in China is generally subject to governmental censorship for the sake of domestic political needs,[20] analyzing the media discourse uncovers interesting facts about what the Chinese Communist Party wants to persuade the citizens about the current state of world economic governance, the United States or its own position in the trade dispute.[21] I will look at the Chinese domestic narrative through several potential discourse lenses based in the main current Realist and Liberal political theories, in order to establish if there is a prevailing type of narrative on the topic and which arguments it uses to support the Chinese legitimacy.

Given the relatively long time frame of almost two years during which this conflict has unfolded, I will also be able to determine how the narrative developed over time with regards to the fast changes of events. On one hand, the recency of this topic is an opportunity for providing a unique and new perspective, while at the same time it is also a disadvantage due

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[18] SCHIRM, S. (2013). Global politics are domestic politics: A societal approach to divergence in the G20. Review of International Studies, 39(3), 685-706. doi:10.1017/S0260210512000216

[19] Dixon, J. (2014). East China Sea or South China Sea, they are all China's Seas: Comparing nationalism among China's maritime irredentist claims. *Nationalities Papers, 42*(6), 1053-1071. doi:10.1080/00905992.2014.969693

[20] Xu, B., & Albert, E. (2014). Media censorship in China. *Council on Foreign Relations*, *25*, 243. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/177388/media%20censorship%20in%20china.pdf

[21] Lee, Y. (2020). 3 charts show China is far from meeting its 'phase one' trade commitment to the U.S. CNBC. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/13/chinas-progress-in-buying-us-goods-under-phase-one-trade-deal-in-charts.html

to the lack of new theoretical resources about the issue. Given these circumstances, I will analyze the whole dispute from the beginning in the first half of 2018 when the United States first introduced the new tariffs until the end in January 2020, when the final deal was signed. Even though a deal has been struck, this trade war is quite likely not yet completely warded off. Despite the initial Chinese promise to purchase $200bilion more in goods from the U.S. in the Phase one trade deal, the coronavirus global pandemic has again amplified the animosities between the two countries and damaged the already shaken global supply chains.[22]

This thesis is divided into four main sections. In the first part, I briefly summarize the most important relevant literature remarks on the topics of Chinese participation on global economic governance, main theoretical approaches that have researched Chinese rise, relationship with the United states and aspirations for the future. Here, I also develop my research question and hypotheses in more detail with the help of the two current main IR traditions, Realism and Liberalism. The following part describes in depth the chosen content analysis methodology based on researching the prevalence of narratives through keyword targeting in a corpus of texts comprised of media articles. It also explains the qualitative method used for exploring the emotivity of headlines in this population of articles. The third part will be dedicated to the results of the main corpus content analysis, showing the prevalent narrative and the discourse development over time, in order to formulate a clear answer to my research question and validate my hypotheses. The last part will summarize the results of the headline emotivity analysis and link all our previous findings with some critical contextual background such as publishing volumes to provide possible explanations about why the Chinese media narrative is being constructed in this way.

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[22] Colback, L. (2020). How to navigate the US-China trade war. Financial Times. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.ft.com/content/6124beb8-5724-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20

Part 1: Research question and literature

1.1. Hypotheses

The main overarching question that I will attempt to answer in this paper is: *Through which narratives is the trade war with United States presented in Chinese media?* My research is designed to safely and ethically answer this main research question as well as test for hypotheses without having any harmful potential to influence the Chinese media in question, individual writers which are not accounted for in this research or the general Chinese public opinion. The data in the form of news articles gathered for the purposes of this analysis were at the time of their download public and freely accessible to anyone. The data corpus for this research consists of articles published in Chinese domestic online media outlets within the whole period of China-U.S. trade war from the beginning of 2018 to early 2020. The research question will be answered by analyzing various data available from this corpus based on a mixed method approach consisting of a two main parts quantitative analysis of keywords and qualitative analysis of headline emotivity. The first quantitative part will provide us with information about the most prevalent narrative and its development over time, while the qualitative analysis of headline emotivity and the analysis of publishing volumes will identify the general reporting preferences of Chinese media and the emotional prevalence in reporting of the conflict, giving us contextual understanding of the whole discourse. Through the interpretation of results from these methods, I will test several hypotheses, that I have established based on my general expectations of the Chinese domestic media narrative.

Main hypotheses:

> *H1: The most prevalent narrative will be political.*

I expect the domestic media narrative to have a strong prevalence of political vocabulary, mainly concentrating on national and political aspects of their power and interest, due to the vast importance of domestic politics to Chinese leadership.[23] The narrative used in Chinese domestic media will generally be focusing most on the spread of political and ideological values that present China as a strong and confident but also a righteous entity for the domestic

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[23] Duckett, J., & Stepan, M. (2018). The Domestic Politics Behind China's International Engagement. *Political Insight*, *9*(1), 37–39. doi: 10.1177/2041905818764707

public. There will likely also be some cherry-picking of the important Liberal notions by the Chinese media in order to appear more as an open economy supporting multilateral trade and cooperation.[24] But I expect this narrative to appear in the Chinese domestic media in a minority as the domestic and international spheres are not completely separate from each other.[25]

> *H2: The longer the conflict continues, the more the narrative will shift from domestic politics to international economy topics.*

Over the course of the conflict, I expect the discourse to shift, starting around the domestic politics topics since U.S. tariffs directly impact domestic political situation in China in the immediate future right after their introduction. But as the conflict protracts during the following year, there will be likely a gradual shift towards stressing the problems caused to the global economic system[26] and a possible shift from China portraying itself as a victim of economic warfare to the defender of the multilateral trade system.

The core of the model to verify the two hypotheses above is based on the notions in two most academically approved contemporary IR theories of Realism and Liberalism. It works with two main narrative streams, Politics and Economy, which point towards what type of issues are the most prevalent in the Chinese media discourse. These two narratives will then be further divided by Domestic and International lenses, which point towards if the discourse is more domestic or international topics centric. The division of my four narratives as presented in a simple scheme hence consist of combinations of the two possible dimensions of conflict – Politics and Economy – which are the main indicators of the narrative and 2nd or 3rd image lenses, which outline the discursive inclination towards more domestic or international themes.[27]

[24] Lee, J. (2012). False Hopes for Chinese Economic "Integration." *Asia Pacific Bulletin, No. 160*. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/false-hopes-chinese-economic-integration

[25] De Mesquita, B. (2002). Domestic Politics and International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly, 46*(1), 1-9. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096116

[26] Chaudoin, S., Milner, H., & Pang, X. (2015). International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations. *International Organization, 69*(2), 275-309. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/24758116.

[27] Waltz, K. (2001). *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/walt12537

Politics	Economy
Domestic	International

Table 1: Model of narrative combinations

Politics narrative:

1. Domestic narrative concerns itself with domestic political situation. Tariffs are understood as a deliberate attack targeted against China and its citizens in order to harm and cripple the country as a representation of its citizens' rights and interests.[28] This discourse stresses the Chinese reluctance in a conflict, but also its ability to endure the trade war with resilience.[29]

2. International narrative sees the new American tariffs through the Neorealist lens as a U.S. attempt to restrain China from gaining its rightful power, prestige and prosperity in the international arena through harming the bilateral relations.[30] At the same time China stresses its victim position in the conflict as well.

Economic narratives:

3. Domestic narrative concentrates on the severity of domestic economic situation in reaction to the trade war. It stresses the impact on Chinese enterprises (like the National Champions) that are increasingly successful on the global market.[31] Main notions are therefore the country's economy and domestic businesses as well a Chinese economic development and prosperity.[32]

4. International narrative revolves around economic cooperation between the two states and potential benefits or drawbacks of cooperation or conflict. Argues that The United States is trying to destroy the rules of the global economic governance embedded in the World Trade Organization, to gain back their comparative advantage.[33] In this narrative, China is positioning itself as being the status quo power reluctant to fight, that aims to actually protect the multilateral trading system from U.S. attacks,

[28] Moravcsik, A. (1998). Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics: Erratum. *International Organization*, *52*(1), 229-229. doi: 10.1162/002081898550536

[29] Hu, S. (2006). Revisiting Chinese Pacifism. Asian Affairs, 32(4), 256-278. Retrieved November 8, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/30172885

[30] Mearsheimer, J. (2001). The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. New York: W.W. Norton. 29-54. doi: 10.1093/survival/44.3.150

[31] Hemphill, T., & White, G. (2013). China's National Champions: The Evolution of a National Industrial Policy-Or a New Era of Economic Protectionism?. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *55*(2), 193-212. doi: 10.1002/tie.21535

[32] Ruggie, J. (1992). Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution. *International Organization*, *46*(3), 561-598. doi: 10.1017/s0020818300027831

[33] De Mesquita, B. (2002). Domestic Politics and International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly, 46*(1), 1-9. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096116

believing that trade wars are harmful anomalies to the beneficial multilateral trade relations.[34] In this context, China aims for a dialogue and concessions on both sides in order to foster mutually beneficial relations.[35]

Apart from the core narrative prevalence analysis, I want to also concentrate on other aspects of the given Chinese media discourse to observe not just the content, but also the ways in which the media wrote about the events analyzed in the first part. This will be researched through a combination of qualitative headline emotivity analysis and publishing volumes analysis. As these analyses use different parts of the data derived from the corpus, they will be researched and interpreted in a separate, more qualitatively oriented part of this paper. For this part of the research, I have formulated two hypotheses related to reporting of escalatory developments below.

Contextual hypotheses:

H3: Escalatory development will be reported more than de-escalatory.

I expect there to be a preference to report more on the negative escalatory developments like new tariffs or negotiation failures, as Chinese media likely follow the universal idea that negative news attracts more attention than positive reconciliatory events like truces, cancellation of tariffs etc.[36]

H4: Escalatory development will be reported very negatively.

The reporting of escalatory developments is likely to be quite aggressive and can be expected to include mostly negative emotional connotations in order to present China as a strong actor.

Unlike in the case of the previous two narrative hypotheses which will be tested through a narrative model, the testing of H3 will be done in the second part of the analysis through research of volumes of publishing across events in order to map the development of publishing trends in reaction to various events. H4 will then be tested through a qualitative analysis of headline emotivity, where we concentrate on the ratio of negative, positive and

[34] Chaudoin, S., Milner, H., & Pang, X. (2014). International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations. *International Organization*, *69*(2), 275-309. doi: 10.1017/s0020818314000356

[35] Keohane, R., Macedo, S., & Moravcsik, A. (2009). Democracy-Enhancing Multilateralism. *International Organization, 63*(1), 1-31. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071882

[36] van der Meer, T., Kroon, A., Verhoeven, P., & Jonkman, J. (2018). Mediatization and the Disproportionate Attention to Negative News. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(6), 783-803. doi: 10.1080/1461670x.2018.1423632

neutral headlines and its development based on the type of event. The aim of this qualitative part is to further supplement the understanding of the general narrative of Chinese domestic media discourse with regard to the whole context of conflict with the United States. Through the use of this mixed analytical method, I will be able to identify the specifics of Chinese media narrative on the content level but also on the emotional level, which provides a more comprehensive idea about the domestic political thinking in the country.

1.2.   Background and Literature

The most recent trade conflict between China and the United States as of the time of the writing of this paper has been somewhat successfully put on hold after extensive bilateral trade consultations. This unstable peace is now facing other challenges from the raging worldwide Coronavirus pandemic, which has soon after reaching a deal again significantly dilapidated any potential warming up of bilateral relations between the countries, having been controversially dubbed as "the Chinese virus"[37] and "the Plague from China" by the current president of the United States Donald Trump.[38]

The agreement signed by representatives of both states in January 2020 has promised a ceasefire in imposing new tariffs and relief of some tariffs already in place as well as reciprocal purchases of goods welcomed by both countries.[39] On the American side which started the dispute, recently graduating attempts at keeping its spot as the hegemon in the international arena and domestic motivations like the Trump's 2020 re-election were likely some of the main impetuses for this war. Even though many of his voters were directly impacted by his protectionist policies Donald Trump hoped that his strong anti-China stance and

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[37] Viala-Gaudefroy, J., & Lindaman, D. (2020). Donald Trump's 'Chinese virus': the politics of naming. The Conversation. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796

[38] Hansen, S. (2020). How Coronavirus Could Derail The U.S.-China Trade Deal. Forbes. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhansen/2020/05/13/how-coronavirus-could-derail-the-us-china-trade-deal/?sh=561184105e08

[39] Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2020). *Economic and Trade Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the People's Republic of China*. Washington, DC. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china/phase-one-trade-agreement/text

subsequentially getting a better deal in trade relations would gain him a sure re-election success, still on the note of his "America first" slogan from the first term.[40]

After the turbulent development during the two years of imposing tariffs and signing deals only to impose more tariffs few days later, both U.S. and Chinese governments eventually had to make concessions, during the 2019/2020 bilateral trade consultations, marking this Pyrrhic victory for both countries in the Phase One Agreement.[41] Many argue that a greater conflict between these two superpowers is yet still ahead as China is becoming increasingly confident on the global politics field and strives to gain its due influence, connections and recognition[42] while the United States is becoming increasingly isolationist and aggressive not just towards China but even its former allies.[43]

The benefit of international economic cooperation for countries like China has been a subject of extensive theoretical and practical research of the modern Liberal political theory. In order to achieve a beneficial form of cooperation states participating in international organizations have to respect the main notions of sovereignty of each state and reciprocity in their relations. Reciprocity is especially important for stimulating and upkeeping the multilateral cooperation of sovereign states, since if an actor feels that they are profiting less than others, they might resort into isolationism or even conflict.[44] Many therefore conclude, that the current China-U.S. conflicting relationship is not only a manifestation of the increasing U.S. dissatisfaction with the Chinese rising influence in the World Trade Organization, but also the U.S. distrust in WTO's monitoring system and the general direction of the organization.[45]

The World Trade Organization's core responsibility has been ensuring the cooperation and reciprocity among countries for the benefit of all members. The proper functioning and reliability of its mechanisms are crucial for the credibility of the whole organization, as

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[40] Trump's China trade deal turns from re-election asset to albatross. (2020). Japan Times. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/04/business/economy-business/us-donald-trump-china-trade-deal-election/
[41] Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2020). *Economic and Trade Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the People's Republic of China*. Washington, DC. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china/phase-one-trade-agreement/text
[42] Flockhart, T., & Xing, L. (2010). (Rep.). Danish Institute for International Studies. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13116
[43] Dollar, D. (2020). The future of the U.S.-China trade war. Brookings. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/09/the-future-of-the-u-s-china-trade-war/
[44] *Keohane, R. (1986). Reciprocity in International Relations. International Organization, 40(1), 1-27.* Retrieved 26 December 2020, from *http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706740*
[45] Johnson, K. (2020). U.S. Effort to Depart WTO Gathers Momentum. Foreign Policy. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/27/world-trade-organization-united-states-departure-china/

unresolved disputes of perceived dominance of particular country or a block of countries could harm or even cripple the organization permanently.[46] The current WTO faces a large crisis coming from a clash of interests between the old powers which had been benefiting from the U.S.-made structure since its inception and the increasingly potent efforts of the developing countries, which had been marginalized in the past, but have found new strength through forming their own alliances as a counterweight to the dominant United States.[47]

Similarly to the very much needed yet unsuccessful reform of the United Nations Security Council[48] a reasonable solution to the problems surrounding the WTO's architecture has not been found so far, as powerful advanced economies like the United States naturally do not wish for the change of the status quo that benefits them[49] and accuse China and others from freeriding on the one hand but revisionism on the other.[50] A prelude of how vast this WTO crisis already is could be seen in the Doha round of negotiations, which showed how the power balance within the organization has shifted, creating an impasse in decision-making and ultimately ending in a disappointment of both sides[51] with the West not securing better access into the agriculture sector of developing countries and the developing countries led by China, India and Brazil not being able to push their objectives through either.[52]

Until quite recently, China acted like a ghost in many multilateral institutions, as keeping a low profile was a key foreign policy concept of then leader Deng Xiaoping.[53] China's first dispute settlement motion was after 6 years of membership in the WTO, which only showed how much China always preferred bilateral agreements to multilateral settlement tools which at the time were a foreign concept. Another aspect of the initial reluctance to participate was the fear of damaging its international reputation by a potential loss at court, as the Chinese

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[46] Lipson, C. (1984). International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs. World Politics, 37(1), 1-23. doi:10.2307/2010304

[47] Ikenberry, J. (2008). The Rise of China and the Future of the West. Foreign Affairs. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west

[48] Weiss, T. (2003). The illusion of UN Security Council reform. *The Washington Quarterly*, *26*(4), 147-161. doi: 10.1162/016366003322387163

[49] Barber, T. (2017). The United States and the Status Quo: Is Hegemonic Satisfaction Innate? *E-International Relations*. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/71678

[50] Johnston, A. (2003). Is China a Status Quo Power? *International Security, 27*(4), 5-56. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137603

[51] Tarasofsky, R., & Palmer, A. (2006). The WTO in Crisis: Lessons Learned from the Doha Negotiations on the Environment. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 82*(5), 899-915. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3874206

[52] Narlikar, A. (Ed.). (2010). Deadlocks in Multilateral Negotiations: Causes and Solutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511804809

[53] Clover, C. (2017). Xi Jinping signals departure from low-profile policy. Financial Times. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.ft.com/content/05cd86a6-b552-11e7-a398-73d59db9e399

understood such a loss as losing face. [54] These concerns had been gradually eliminated over time, as China nowadays is becoming more and more active in the WTO and thanks to the gained experience, confidence and rising influence inside the developing countries coalition it has become one of the most vocal critics of the United States.[55] The Chinese side understands the criticism of U.S. arrogance and hegemonic tendencies in multilateral institutions as rightful and does not want to be perceived as a revisionist power for it, stressing its own maintaining role in the WTO.

The economic benefits of free trade are actually crucial for China's domestic political stability, as it directly relates to government's survival. As the Chinese Communist Party does not have to fear re-elections due to the Chinese constitutional dispositions of a one-party rule, the government faces enormous domestic public pressure for its decisions, since the monopoly on power brings about also full accountability for success and failure alike. [56] The legitimacy of Chinese Communist Party's rule has long been based on the economic performance and continuous development of the country as opposed to elections or democracy-based legitimacy. A collapse of the free trade system or an economic conflict with one of its largest trading partners naturally poses a massive threat to the Chinese government's legitimacy, which the country seeks to avoid.[57]

China is therefore in a very complex situation, as it benefits greatly from reduction in trade barriers that the Liberal world order provides on one hand, but on the other hand the more China embeds itself in the Liberal order and opens its economy to foreign trade and businesses the more it also opens its borders to the undesirable side effect of democratization, which is in a direct conflict with the perseverance of the CCP's rule.[58] Furthermore, every wrong step of the government that potentially jeopardizes prosperity of the country could also punish the current leadership itself, as the political discourse even inside of the ruling party is far from homogenous. The internal political debate within the CCP oscillates between the traditional

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[54] Li, X. (2012). Understanding China's Behavioral Change in the WTO Dispute Settlement System. *Asian Survey*, *52*(6), 1111-1137. doi: 10.1525/as.2012.52.6.1111

[55] Hopewell, K. (2014). Different paths to power: The rise of Brazil, India and China at the World Trade Organization. *Review of International Political Economy*, *22*(2), 311-338. doi: 10.1080/09692290.2014.927387

[56] Zhu, Z. (2005). Power Transition and U.S.-China Relations: Is War Inevitable? Journal of International and Area Studies, 12(1), 1-24. Retrieved April 7, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/43107108

[57] Chu, Y. (2013). Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate over the Chinese Model. *China Review, 13*(1), 1-42. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23462227

[58] Lee, J. (2012). False Hopes for Chinese Economic "Integration." Asia Pacific Bulletin, No. 160. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/false-hopes-chinese-economic-integration

Confucian-based Conservative Pragmatism, heavy Nationalism reinforced through propaganda in government-dominated media, persisting Marxist notions that have been shaping the ideals of Chinese people for almost a hundred years now and the newly entering Liberalism, which has been steadily penetrating into Chinese political thought. [59]

Western Liberal theory especially threatens the Chinese government in very fundamental ways, as it provides a consistent potent rivaling ideology which offers economic prosperity, while also introducing concepts of freedom and openness. The Chinese political elite is increasingly warried by the potential problems stemming from incompatibility between the Western liberal democratic model and the Chinese harmonious society model.[60] This growing insecurity manifests in the increasingly strong crackdowns on all spheres of life in China through projects like the Social Credit System, which not only monitors personal data of Chinese citizens, but also data of domestic and foreign companies which then can be utilized for example for the purposes of retaliation in a trade war.[61]

Many questions about future development of China-U.S. relations and Chinese future position in the global order stemming from these premises remain unanswered. Researchers disagree vastly if the internal political dilemmas of both countries will or will not transcribe into the international arena in the form of actual Chinese attempts to change the U.S.-made and led global order even after the inevitable fall of U.S. hegemony. [62] Popular frameworks like Organski's Power Transition Theory have been increasingly used to interpret the possible development of relations between China and the United States, implying that the strong insecurity on the U.S. part could in the worst case provoke a conflict between the two powers.[63] On the other hand, not only China has to reach the U.S. in power, but there is also the crucial aspect of revisionism needed from the potential contender for world dominance. In order to be willing to contend for hegemony a revisionist must not only be dissatisfied with

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[59] Schweller, R. (2011). Emerging Powers in an Age of Disorder. Global Governance, 17(3), 285-297. Retrieved December 25, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23033748

[60] Morris, R. (2006). *China Review International, 13*(1), 221-237. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23732879

[61] Stevenson, A., & Mozur, P. (2019). China Scores Businesses, and Low Grades Could Be a Trade-War Weapon. The New York Times. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/business/china-social-credit-business.html

[62] Keohane, R. (1984). After hegemony: cooperation and discord in the world political economy. *International Affairs*, *61*(2), 290-291. doi: 10.2307/2617490

[63] Tammen, R. (2006). Power Transition and China-US Conflicts. *The Chinese Journal Of International Politics*, *1*(1), 35-55. doi: 10.1093/cjip/pol003

the current global order but also must be willing to pay all the cost related to pioneering and upkeeping its new order.[64] To this regard, Liberal theory points out that China has never even claimed any hegemonic aspirations whatsoever and given the immense costs might be reluctant to become a world hegemon in the first place.[65] Especially so since China has been so far thriving by shirking the liberal global order and a change to the order might not provide the same benefits to the Chinese economy, hence it would be counterproductive to try to change the status quo if it benefits the country now.[66]

The Realist tradition is much more pessimistic about the future development as they do not believe the notions of peace-creating cooperation and are very concerned about China's growing military capabilities and rising international influence especially in Africa and South-East Asia that naturally transcribe into a threat to the unipolar global governance model led by the United States for the last several decades since the fall of the Soviet Union.[67] Realist concern with China's rising potential offensive capabilities is natural but the simultaneous disregard of its actual intentions and internal motives makes a conflict revolving around China appear almost inevitable, showing little reflection of Chinese domestic political thinking, which is a common problem for the whole Western political theory.[68]

These theories and frameworks have some valid arguments, but in general the contemporary political research in the West does not seem to completely grasp non-Western political thinking and therefore finds it hard to decipher China's behavior in the international arena.[69] On the other hand, even though political science is studied and researched in China,[70] local researchers are likely to remain unnoticed by the Western academia because of the strong

[64] Kugler, J., & Organski, A. (1981). The War Ledger. *American Political Science Review*, *75*(2), 566-567. doi: 10.2307/1961475
[65] Fusaro, L. (2017). Why China is Different: Hegemony, Revolutions and the Rise of Contender States. *Research In Political Economy*, 185-223. doi: 10.1108/s0161-723020170000032011
[66] Ikenberry, G. (2011). The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America. *Foreign Affairs, 90*(3), 56-68. Retrieved December 23, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039408
[67] Mastanduno, M. (1997). Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War. *International Security, 21*(4), 49-88. doi:10.2307/2539283
[68] Mearsheimer, J. (2014). American Grand Strategy and the Future of U.S. Landpower (pp. 37-54, Rep.) (Da Silva J., Liebert H., & Wilson I., Eds.). Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11930.6
[69] Bilgin, P. (2010). The 'Western-Centrism' of Security Studies: 'Blind Spot' or Constitutive Practice? *Security Dialogue, 41*(6), 615-622. Retrieved December 15, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/26301701
[70] 2018 Top Chinese Universities Ranking in Political Science by NSEAC. (2020). Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://ranking.cucas.cn/top_Political_universities_3.html

preference of English as a publishing language in renown international journals. [71] These researchers very likely have some of the answers that their Western counterparts cannot seem to find given their knowledge of both Chinese and Western perspectives, but apart from the language barrier they also face the problem of government control over Chinese academia which diminishes their academic credibility.[72]

This academic impasse will inevitably lead to many more upcoming misunderstandings and wrong predictions, as it is hard to say if the contemporary steep Chinese rise actually means that the country is prepared or even interested at all to challenge the United States for the hegemonic position if we only look at China's behavior through the West-centric lens. As some authors already pointed out, assuming that the prevalent Western political theory notions of Realism, Liberalism and others are universal around the world and therefore could be used to analyze political thinking everywhere is incorrect. [73] This continuing ignorance of specific context of each country and its domestic political thinking has arguably not been addressed enough in the International Relations and Politics academic communities.[74]

Since Chinese society developed on completely different principles than the Western democratic countries, it is likely that the explanations for its seemingly unpredictable international behavior lie in its domestic political preferences, which are possible to be directly observed through the Chinese domestic media narrative. [75] As the Chinese government directly or indirectly supervises all media outlets and now also social media platforms, it is not a surprise that the reporting in the country has always been subject to censorship and political propaganda that directly reflects the general domestic political thinking.[76]

[71] Curry, M., & Lillis, T. (2018). The Dangers of English as Lingua Franca of Journals. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/03/13/domination-english-language-journal-publishing-hurting-scholarship-many-countries

[72] Maxwell, D. (2019). Academic censorship in China is really a global issue. Study International. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.studyinternational.com/news/academic-censorship-china-global-issue/

[73] Lummis, C. (2002). Political theory: why it seems universal, but isn't really. *Futures*, *34*(1), 63-73. doi: 10.1016/s0016-3287(01)00035-0

[74] Hobson, J. (2007). Is critical theory always for the white West and for Western imperialism? Beyond Westphilian towards a post-racist critical IR. *Review of International Studies, 33*, 91-116. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/45128071

[75] Kádár, D., Liu, F., House, J., & Shi, W. (2020). Reporting ritual political advice in the Chinese state media: A study of the National People's Congress. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *35*, 100388. doi: 10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100388

[76] Shambaugh, D. (2007). China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy. *The China Journal,* (57), 25-58. doi:10.2307/20066240

Chinese journalism differs vastly in practices from the West and Chinese journalists are also equipped with a different set of basic normative values than their Western counterparts in general. The main aim of journalism in China is to serve the public through maintaining stability and harmony, rather than chase after sensational news.[77] Chinese media generally adhere to the Guidance of Public Opinion (舆论导向) principle which originated after the Tiananmen Square incident, in order to restrain and control what domestic media publish. The concept practically limits criticism of any political decisions of government and actively motivates reporters to vocally support CCP's agenda. Chinese journalists are not supposed to report in a way that would polarize the society on critical events or topics and should foster "harmonious" reporting.[78]

The situation is not any different nowadays, with sources reporting that Chinese media stakeholders were specifically instructed by the governmental censorship apparatus on what kind of language to use and which lines not to cross when reporting about the recent China-U.S. trade war. Curbing down the number of articles related to the topic in general, delaying and underreporting of unfavorable news like new sanctions or failures in negotiations and reporting strongly on the positive developments like negotiations and deals reached were allegedly also requested by officials.[79] Based on these premises, we can therefore assume, that by analyzing the Chinese domestic media discourse, we can observe, map and attempt to better understand the domestic political thinking of the Chinese government which is inevitably the main momentum force behind every foreign policy decision of the country.[80]

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[77] Hassid, J. (2011). Four Models of the Fourth Estate: A Typology of Contemporary Chinese Journalists. *The China Quarterly,* (208), 813-832. Retrieved December 26, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41447777

[78] Svensson, M., et al. (2015). Chinese Investigative Journalists' Dreams: Autonomy, agency and voice, edited by Marina Svensson, Elin Sæther, & Zhian Zhang. *Chinese Journal Of Communication*, 8(4), 468-470. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2015.1090160

[79] Li, S. (2018). How WeChat became the primary news source in China. Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/how-wechat-became-primary-news-source-china.php

[80] Duckett, J., & Stepan, M. (2018). The Domestic Politics Behind China's International Engagement. *Political Insight*, 9(1), 37–39. doi: 10.1177/2041905818764707

Part 2: Research Methodology

The analysis of how Chinese media presents the conflict with the United States is based on a corpus of texts published by Chinese domestic media outlets within the period of China-U.S. trade war from the beginning of 2018 to early 2020. I identified the most dominant type of narrative, that prevailed in the conflict as whole through a mixed-method analysis of keyword appearances in corpus. Following that, I explored how the most dominant narrative changed over the course of the whole dispute, which I divided into 10 separate time periods for this purpose. In the last part of the analysis a qualitative approach was used to map the emotivity of headlines in this population of articles, which provides a better understanding of Chinese media discourse in context.

2.1. Project Scope

For the analysis I chose only articles published by Chinese official media outlets. The reason for this choice is the publishing guidelines for all media in the PRC, as mentioned in the section about Chinese Press. Therefore, I have decided to not take public and alternative Chinese media into account in this analysis, because the difference in content is likely to be insignificant enough for such aspect of analysis to be redundant. Apart from the language barrier for non-Chinese speakers, the media sources I have chosen are very well accessible online even outside of the territory of PRC, so the analysis does not require physical presence in the country.

The first step of gathering the data necessary to conduct this analysis was to delimit the volume of articles based on three concrete criteria, the outlet, the search term, and the time frame. In more detail, I decided to searched in three different media outlets through the Chinese search engine Baidu. The publications I chose were the aforementioned 新华网 *Xinhua News Agency*[81], 环球网 *Global Times*[82] and 人民网 *People's Daily*[83]. In each publication, I used the same search term "中美贸易" "*China US trade*" in order to get as precise and

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[81] 新华网_让新闻离你更近. (2020). Retrieved 27 December 2020, from http://news.cn/
[82] 环球网_全球生活新门户_环球时报旗下网站. (2020). Retrieved 27 December 2020, from http://www.huanqiu.com
[83] 人民网. (2020). Retrieved 27 December 2020, from http://www.people.cn

relevant results as possible and minimize the appearance of nonapplicable articles in my results. The time span has been set to roughly correspond to the whole period of China-US trade war from 1.1.2018 to 31.1.2020. All of the articles retrieved using these criteria were catalogued into a MS Excel sheet. The relevant information that I saved from each article were the outlet, date of publishing, title and full text of the article content.

I excluded the content of the search that was of non-textual form such as videos or infographics from my corpus, since those did not have a full text and therefore could not be used in my analysis, in total there have been 44 such search appearances from all the sources combined. My final corpus of texts contains 199 articles published by Xinhua News Agency, 260 articles by the Global Times and People's Daily accounting for 274 articles. The oldest article in my population is from the 10th January 2018 and the newest was published on 19th of January 2020, which suggests that the chosen time frame of this analysis is fitting, given that there are approximately two weeks of time at the beginning and at the end of the given time period where no coverage of the topic has been found, suggesting the population of articles is comprehensive. The total amount of available data had greatly exceeded the planned scope of 300 - 500 articles, as the number of articles in my search population has reached 733 with the total corpus volume of 517 526 characters. In order to prevent any possible sampling difficulties, I have decided to include the whole population of articles into my corpus as it is needless to mention, that there is always a chance of human or technological error on any level of the data sampling, but I believe most of potential errors can be better mitigated through a complete population as well.[84]

One thing worth noting regarding the population of articles is that there has been an interestingly high number of duplicate articles or headlines (193 total) across the three platforms, consisting of articles either having the same or almost identical title or full text content or in many cases both of these. This suggests that not only Chinese outlets are copying each other's content, but also shows how much the publishing guidelines in China limit free press to an extent where even basic creative writing is curbed.[85] Nevertheless, since those articles were published by different outlets they will be considered as unique for the purposes

[84] Neuendorf, K. (2017). The Content Analysis Guidebook. doi: 10.4135/9781071802878

[85] Svensson, M., et al. (2015). Chinese Investigative Journalists' Dreams: Autonomy, agency and voice, edited by Marina Svensson, Elin Sæther, & Zhian Zhang. *Chinese Journal Of Communication*, *8*(4), 468-470. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2015.1090160

of the quantitative content analysis and I will briefly analyze these duplicates in a separate part of my analysis.

2.2. Keyword Analysis – A Mixed Approach

The following chapter describes all the steps needed to adjust the data in order to be able to further quantitatively and qualitatively analyze it and verify the hypotheses H1 and H2. As the articles were inputted in the corpus by their publishing dates and by each respective outlet separately, the first necessary adjustment was to sort all inputs by their time of publishing accordingly in the full corpus of 733 to create a chronological flow of all the articles in my population regardless of the outlet, with the exception for headline and publishing analyses which will be addressed later on. By using a mixed-method approach including quantitative computer assisted analysis as well as parts of qualitative analysis, both non-automated I hope to avoid the most common problems associated with automatic content analysis methods. [86]

2.2.1. Data Preparation

The input corpus file I used first needed to be transformed from its native .xls format into a .txt format in order for the corpus manager program to be able to read it. I have chosen a computer corpus linguistics software AntConc provided online by Lawrence Anthony for the generation of these quantitative results, which in the case of my analysis include the word list and any further cluster lists generated based on targeted words. This tool is mainly used by corpus linguistics researchers and language learners for targeting words and identifying patterns of speech. It is available online for free and offers a plethora of various functions like word list, concordance, collocates and n-gram lists generation for thorough text corpus analysis. [87]

The important adjustment before inputting the corpus in AntConc was a tokenization performed in a tokenizer program specifically designed for Chinese language Pan Gu. The tokenization is an essential process because unlike in English, Chinese sentences form one

[86] Grimmer, J., & Stewart, B. (2013). Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts. *Political Analysis*, *21*(3), 267-297. doi: 10.1093/pan/mps028
[87] Anthony, L. (2020). Laurence Anthony's AntConc. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/

long string of consecutive characters without spaces, so they lack any sort of native delimitation where a word starts and ends. Due to this phenomenon, researchers who do not speak Asian languages often refrain from analyzing Asian language corpuses and stick only to the English versions of documents, as most are probably unfamiliar with the existence of these tokenization tools, which can insert these delimitators into large amounts of unsegmented text based on its internal dictionary and solves this issue very easily.[88]

After going through all these necessary data adjustments, I was able to generate a word list of all the words that appeared in the corpus. With the generation of this list the automated part is done and I followed with a more qualitative approach to coding and sorting the given words.[89] I have chosen single words as basic units of my research supplemented further by a quick overview of N-grams ranging between 4 to 6 words[90], as those are the most common lengths of meaningful text units shorter than whole sentences in Chinese[91]. The disadvantage of basing a quantitative analysis on separate word units is their definite lack of context, as the sorting program tears them away from their surroundings. Nevertheless, I believe there is no other currently plausible and fast enough way to analyze such a large corpus, so the benefits of this approach definitely outweigh the downsides.[92]

2.2.2. Coding and Dictionary

In this section I will describe my method of coding and filtering of data for my quantitative analysis. The following diagram (Figure 1) simplifies the steps of the process that were taken as they follow from word list extraction to the finalization of keyword list and coding of each word into its categories. The raw word list generated by AntConc was exported into an .xls file in order to be able to code it. In the first step before the coding itself, I excluded all words on the list with less than 100 appearances frequency, as they bear little statistical significance for a quantitative analysis in such a large corpus. It is likely that some discourse related terms

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[88] Pan Gu Segment 盘 古 分 词 - 开 源 中 文 分 词 组 件 . (2020). Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://archive.codeplex.com/?p=pangusegment

[89] Young, L., & Soroka, S. (2012). Affective News: The Automated Coding of Sentiment in Political Texts. *Political Communication*, *29*(2), 205-231. doi: 10.1080/10584609.2012.671234

[90] Here words can be understood as units of meaning, hence 1 word can, but does not have to be equal to 1 character.

[91] Yang, S., Zhu, H., Apostoli, A., & Cao, P. (2020). N-gram Statistics in English and Chinese: Similarities and Differences. International Conference on Semantic Computing. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/research.google.com/cs//pubs/archive/33035.pdf

[92] Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis : an introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. ISBN 0-7619-1544-3

were less frequent than 100 appearances and were hence filtered out of my research population, but it is safe to say such words hardly made a difference on the statistic as the first 865 words with over 100 appearances make up 69% of the corpus, while the other 19895 words with under 100 appearances only make 31%.
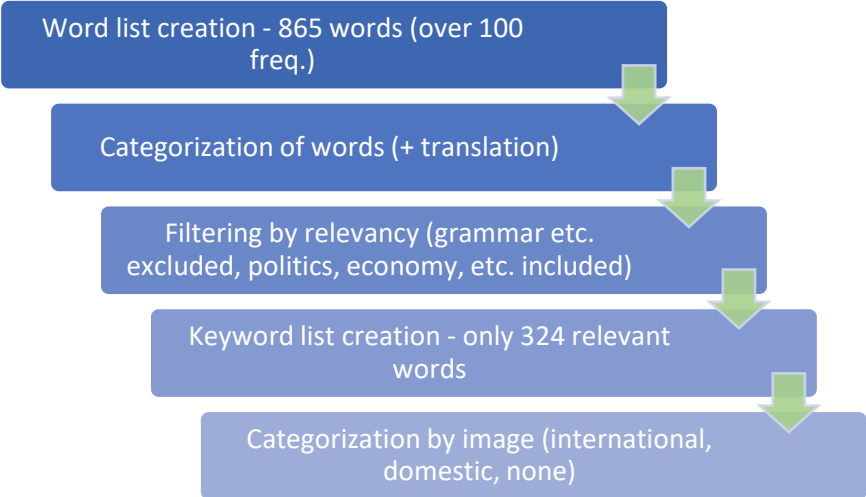

Figure 1: Simplified diagram of coding process

After this filtering the wordlist is now accounting only for the 865 words qualified by their statistical relevancy, upon which I started the process of manual coding of words based on their meanings in order to create my own working dictionary through assigning each word into a primary semantic category relevant to my narratives – Politics and Economy. The reason why I first identified Politics and Economy aspects and only after started looking for Domestic and International was that the latter two aspects are somewhat secondary attributes of words which do not stand alone. There was not a single case of a word which would have been identified as only Domestic or International without belonging to any of the semantic-based groups like Politics or Economy. I have established four primary categories of words, namely three semantic based groups of Economy, Politics and two other groups of words Grammar and Generic. Since I had no interest in words from other than the Economy and Politics groups the other groupings are very broad and overarching as a detailed categorization of irrelevant words was redundant for the analysis.

Economy: includes words clearly related to the hypernym of Economy like trade, business, economic relations, tariffs, goods and other clearly economy-related terms.

Politics: words falling under the Politics hypernym including concepts (power, conflict, interest etc.), entities such as heads of state, representatives, governments and actors' names, institutions, citizens and more. Words relating to geographical entities like names of countries or continents were excluded given their vague meanings into a subcategory of geography. The exception from this rule was made for capital cities, as those are frequently used as substitutes for the seat of government which is a political entity (Beijing imposed tariffs = Chinese government imposed tariffs).

Grammar: includes grammatical words and particles irrelevant to any kind of discourse, mostly prepositions, conjunctions, particles, numbers, various modal verbs, location and possession verbs, measure words and measure units etc.

Generic: words with irrelevant meanings for politics or economy, or words that were impossible to meaningfully sort into either main category including adverbs and adjectives without any political or economic straightforward implications

In this part the words were assigned also an approximate working translation, which is based on my best knowledge of the vocabulary and context, since Chinese characters often have multiple meanings and the appearance of those meanings that fit the context of this research are more probable than others. The manual translation is not without any flaws, as translating based on context could be potentially flawed by a personal bias or a faulty generalization of a potential meaning in the same way as the categorization itself, but this translation here mostly serves as a tool for potential control of coding by other researchers who might lack Chinese language capabilities. Words from generic, geography and grammar groups were then considered irrelevant for further purposes of this research and hence disqualified from the keyword list analysis.

After filtering out these irrelevant terms, we were left with a keyword list of 324 words which now could also be assigned their secondary category, 2nd and 3rd image (or Domestic and International). These values were assigned based on whether a given word is referring to either domestic or international phenomena and domestically or internationally related adjectives, adverbs etc. During this part of coding, it became apparent that most words' secondary category could not actually be reasonably determined without a heavily biased or arbitrary decision as most of the words did not have any clear exclusive affiliation and could

often be used in both domestic and international contexts and some in none at all. Unlike in the case of economy and politics, which are hypernyms and it is mostly straightforward to sort words based on their meanings, it is practically impossible to infer domestic and international aspects of a word without any context in the same manner, making them contextual aspects. The domestic-international division hence might not be plausible on this level of analysis, likely due to the size of the analyzed unit being just one word, which is simply too small to determine this aspect. It is likely that it could be better identified in a larger unit of text. Given these procedural difficulties, I have decided against assigning arbitrary values and rather placed such words into a neutral category. As a reaction to this situation that could not have been foreseen during the initial definition of the research project, I have decided to use the images categorization only as a supplementing tool for a better understanding of the main division between economic and political terms.

In comparison to the original proposal, I have decided to make a change regarding the keyword list creation. It has been previously decided to first create an expected keyword list and then consecutively look for those given words in the corpus. A keyword list pre-creation would require a significant amount of potentially biased input from my side which I ultimately deemed unnecessary and decided to abandon this idea. As for the quantitative analysis, it is not a problem to include even large volumes of text, I have decided to abandon this idea of creating an arbitrary keyword list without real relation to data, henceforth, I created a very broad keyword list inductively based on the actual generated word list from the corpus. Similarly, I have also decided against any sampling of words within the keyword list for the purposes of analysis whatsoever, as an initial check on a sample of 15 and 30 most frequent keywords showed that the size of the sample sometimes had a significant impact on the results, while other times it did not make a difference. This is problematic, as there is no way to establish which metric is the "correct one" under such circumstances. This is why I decided to stick to my previously established benchmark of 100 appearances, which makes the most sense to me in the context of the whole corpus.

After this final part of coding, the results of analysis could be generated and interpreted. For the statistical purposes in the results interpretation part of the paper only terms from politics and economy primary categories were included, as they are the only ones directly relevant for my model. To illustrate how my final coded dictionary looks like, there is a list of top 15 most

frequent words from the word list including their categorization in Table 2 and a full list of coded words including differences between 1st and 2nd coding is available in the supplement.

Count	Word	English	Type	Image
31184	的	of	grammar	N/A
8668	美国	United States	geography	N/A
7669	中国	China	geography	N/A
6642	在	in	grammar	N/A
5814	和	with	grammar	N/A
5321	中美	China-US	politics	3
4934	是	Yes/is	grammar	N/A
4631	对	against/ compared to	grammar	N/A
4541	了	//	grammar	N/A
3948	贸易	trade	economy	-
2417	中	center	grammar	N/A
2214	将	will	grammar	N/A
2179	这	This	grammar	N/A
2156	关税	tariff	economy	-
2015	与	versus/and	grammar	N/A
1997	也	and/also	grammar	N/A
1969	经贸	Economy / trade	economy	-
1962	双方	both sides	politics	3
1956	贸易战	trade war	economy	3
1937	为	for	grammar	N/A

Table 2: Sample of manually coded words

The list of keywords is ordered by their respective frequencies[93] which point out the most used words in a corpus at the top and when split into the time periods can also show differences in frequencies of important words between the periods.[94] This is especially useful, because according to general understanding, the quantitative method summarizes the most statistically important findings in a text which represent the biggest concerns of the writer and therefore the most frequent expressions in a corpus just on their own are already able to show some generalized results.[95] I analyzed the numbers of appearances of these coded keywords to identify the prevalence of narratives quantitatively in the whole keyword list and also in subsets of top 15 and top 30 most frequent keywords in each period, in order to verify how

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[93] Neuendorf, K. (2017). The Content Analysis Guidebook. doi: 10.4135/9781071802878

[94] Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. ISBN 0-7619-1544-3

[95] Weber, R. (1990). Basic Content Analysis. Sage Publications, London. doi: 10.4135/9781412983488

big the difference in narrative prevalence between subset sizes and the whole keyword list would be and hence how representative the results of this analysis are in general.

2.2.3. Problems of this approach

As it is clear from the methodology description the main drawback of the reliance on manual coding is the potential influence of personal biases and preconditions on the research, which creates a problem in the reliability, as various researchers could conclude different findings on the same sample. The decision to choose manual coding was caused mainly by external factors such as the lack of easily accessible sentiment dictionaries like the Afinn Sentiment Lexicon for English[96] as well as other sources related to the textual analysis of Chinese language for political purposes which could have substituted the manual coding part. The automatic coding method though, faces other problems in the field of validity, as it takes words from a sentence one by one and those then lack the context necessary for their interpretation.[97]

In order to mitigate this reliability concern on my part as best as possible in given circumstances, I performed an intra-coder reliability test, 5 months after the initial coding on all the manual levels of coded input, to see how much my results would differ. Since there are no other coders cooperating with me on this thesis, it is the only way to verify my results.[98] After this test, I have found out that this adjustment changed the keyword list size from 342 words to 314 words with 7% out of 866 words coded differently than the original on the first level of categorization. On the second level (images) the difference was 5%, only words in politics and economy section were processed in this step. A note on the word list population has to be made, given the richness of possible variations of combinations of Chinese characters, there have been a significant number of similar or practically synonymous words especially related to the trade, economy, WTO and others. I did not group them together under any umbrella terms, as they still technically are unique expressions. Chinese words on

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[96] Nielsen, F. (2009) AFINN Sentiment Lexicon. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from
http://corpustext.com/reference/sentiment_afinn.html
[97] Drost, E. (2011). Validity and Reliability in Social Science Research. Education Research and Perspectives. 38. 105-124. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261473819_Validity_and_Reliability_in_Social_Science_Research
[98] Strauss, A. (1987). Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists. Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/cbo9780511557842

their own do not express any gender, case, tense or plurality, so issues with words differing by such criteria do not occur in this case.[99]

2.3. Headline Emotivity – A Qualitative Approach

As the quantitative keyword analysis provides us with general answers to the research questions about the most frequent discourse and its development over time, the headline emotivity analysis will broaden the scope of these findings and verify the two additional hypotheses about the context. This part of the analysis concentrates on which emotions had been expressed in all of the headlines throughout the conflict based on both time and a media outlet. The results of this part broaden the scope of this research from "what were the media writing about the trade war" to "which emotions did the media express while writing about the trade war". I have chosen this approach as a substitute for the originally planned qualitative analysis of a random sample of articles, as a different outlook on the same event provides more supporting value than analysis of a random sample of articles torn away from their context.[100]

2.3.1. Coding categories

For the emotionality analysis, I set up a three basic category model of emotionality as positive, negative and neutral - not having any explicit emotional charge. I gathered all the 733 headlines and upon manually reading each one decided which category they belong to, based on the criteria I have summarized in the headline samples below. The description of my categorization includes examples of several articles that were sorted in each section to illustrate how these types of headlines looked in general to support the reliability of my method. The full list of headlines and their categorization is available as a part of the supplement section including rough translations to English for non-speakers of Chinese.

Positive: articles in this category are generally using clearly identifiable positively charged words or expressions such as win-win cooperation, protect, save, preserve, high ground when

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[99] Ross, C., & Ma, J. (2014). *Modern Mandarin Chinese Grammar A Practical Guide.* Routledge. ISBN 9780415827140
[100] Wiltfang, G., & Berg, B. (1990). Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. *Teaching Sociology*, *18*(4), 563. doi: 10.2307/1317652

talking about China, United States or a particular event. Further, this category elapses also titles including expressions which could be considered negative, but given the context they generally carry a positive meaning. Such either appraise an event or convey some form of encouragement for the Chinese side even if the other content of the headline is negative. Here fall the headlines expressing how China is doing well in the dispute or how the dispute is having no impact. Positive headlines also include appraisals of behavior like trade talks initiation or progressing, reaching compromises and agreements on issues, restoration of the China-US trade relations etc.

#342 商务部：中美贸易摩擦对中企影响有限风险可控 – Ministry *of Commerce: The impact of Sino-US trade friction on Chinese enterprises is limited and risks are manageable*

#572 商务部透露中美贸易磋商细节 对未来两国达成协议充满信心 – Ministry *of Commerce reveals details about China-U.S. trade negotiations. We are full of confidence in the two countries reaching an agreement in future*

#729 社评：刘鹤访美是缓解中美贸易紧张的机会 – Social commentary: Liu He's visit to the United States is an opportunity to ease Sino-US trade tensions

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Negative: articles fitting in this group generally tend to use straightforwardly negative expressions like fear, destroy, damage, attack, condemn, disrupt, provoke etc. related to either the United States, the trade war or some of the specific events. Contextual negative headlines express criticism of US provocations or the war in general such as war is harmful, war has an impact on, Trump provoked war, unilaterally provoked etc.

#117 白皮书：中美经贸磋商严重受挫，责任完全在美国政府 - *White paper: China-U.S. economic and trade consultations suffer a severe setback, the responsibility lies entirely with the U.S. government*

#519《关于中美经贸磋商的中方立场》白皮书：贸易战未给美带来所谓的再次伟大 - *White Paper 'Regarding China's Position on China-US Economic and Trade Consultations': Trade War did not make America so called great again*

#517 商务部：美方从中美贸易中获益巨大，"吃亏" 论完全站不住脚 - *Ministry of Commerce: The United States has benefited greatly from Sino-US trade, the 'disadvantage' discourse is completely groundless*

Neutral: this category contains mostly informative articles, which tend to be generally calmer in their expressions. These generally mention an event or some development of situation without giving any attitudes or clear emotion. Common types of such headlines would include expressions like trade balance is, representatives signed a deal, a summit happened without

including any further explanations or expressions of whether these occurrences are supposed to be negative or positive. There has been an extensive research on the general neutrality of media language, which I will also mention in the findings section.[101]

#324 中美在京举行经贸问题副部级磋商 – China *and the United States hold deputy ministerial consultations on economic and trade issues in Beijing*

#118 关于中美经贸磋商的中方立场 – China's *position regarding the China-US economic and trade consultations*

#12 国新办就中美贸易有关情况举行吹风会 – State Development Office holds a briefing on the situation concerning China-US trade

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2.3.1 Barriers to automatic coding

It is important to note, that a current normal practice of most academic researches of similar topics is a quantitative type of analysis performed automatically by computer programs which are able to identify which kinds of words appear in a text based on their extensive internal dictionaries. Nevertheless, in my case I have decided not to apply such method on my population of headlines as it faces a major disadvantage to the manual qualitative analysis which is tearing each word away from its context.[102] The Chinese language poses a great barrier for such an approach, as words and meanings are constructed very differently than in the Indo-European languages, which are mostly studied in this way and for which the method itself was created.

This precise problem is why I have decided to read through every single headline manually and assign it an emotional value, rather than run it through a program. This approach is also not without flaws, as the criteria I use for sorting are and will always be influenced by my subjective understanding of reality, so other scholars might interpret them differently.[103] Apart from that, in a manual analysis there is also an increased possibility of random error, such as assigning a wrong value by accident due to the large amount of data processed and so

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[101] de Wilde, P. (2019). Media logic and grand theories of European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(8), 1193-1212. doi: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1622590

[102] Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. ISBN 0-7619-1544-3

[103] Hammersley, M., & Gomm, R. (1997). Bias in Social Research. *Sociological Research Online*, *2*(1), 7-19. doi: 10.5153/sro.55

on. Nevertheless, I still believe that it is the best choice to perform such analysis manually in order to properly understand what authors meant by some of the headlines, as another problem with Chinese language is the preference of various idioms and allegories that are impossible to decipher by a program without the human analytical input and they are known to be difficult to properly translate and understand even for researchers.[104]

Another reason why qualitative manual approach that prioritizes context is better for this task is the problem of multiple meanings of a single character, which I will illustrate on a simple example of one of the most commonly appearing words in the corpus: The character 美 *měi* poses two main meanings that are vastly different from each other based on the surrounding context. The basic meaning of 美 is *beautiful* or *nice*, which would most definitely be sorted as a positive term in an automated analysis. The problem arises from the fact that 美 is also used in the name of the country United States - 美国 *měiguó*. This would not be a problem if 美国 only ever appeared in the 2-character composite form together, which unfortunately given the Chinese grammatical specifics is not the case. In a possessive form of an adjective referring to something "American" the latter part of the composite is commonly dropped and only the first part 美 is used as a prefix of another word, for example 美商品 *měi shāngpǐn U.S. goods* and 美出口 *měi chūkǒu U.S. export*. In an automated keyword analysis, this prefix gets sorted out as separate word, since it is technically not a part of the noun it refers to, which would most definitely result in it being interpreted as "beautiful" instead of "American". This would necessarily end in a disproportionate number of appearances of positive words and in the case of such a crucial word for this topic this mistake could completely distort any validity of the statistic.[105]

[104] Wang, L., Yu, S., Wang, Z., Qu, W., & Wang, H. (2015). Emotional Classification of Chinese Idioms Based on Chinese Idiom Knowledge Base. *Lecture Notes In Computer Science*, 197-203. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-27194-1_20

[105] Rauh, C. (2018). Validating a sentiment dictionary for German political language—a workbench note. *Journal Of Information Technology & Politics*, *15*(4), 319-343. doi: 10.1080/19331681.2018.1485608

Part 3: Narratives representation

In the following sections, I will present the answer to my research question about the most prevalent discourse types. I will also explore the discourse development over time to test the validity of both of my initial hypotheses H1 and H2. Following that, we will explore the main features of both Politics and Economy discourses in order to describe their specifics.

3.1.   The most prevalent discourse

As already mentioned, the discursive value of keywords is less pronounced than in the case of sentences, as single words are the smallest units and carry less meaning in general, nevertheless we can see a very clear strong prevalence of political vocabulary in the corpus, which is visualized on Figure 2. In general terms, the ratio of prevalence based on frequency of keywords from both categories in the corpus was 65% of politics terms to 35% of economic terms. Since the corpus contains the entire population of Chinese media discourse on the topic during the delimited time scope, the only measurable error is the human coding error which has been established at 5 percent. **Therefore, we can reasonably assume that the original assumption of politically centered discourse in H1 has been proved to be correct**. Whether this was the case for the whole duration of the conflict, or there were any discrepancies over time will be explored in the following section.
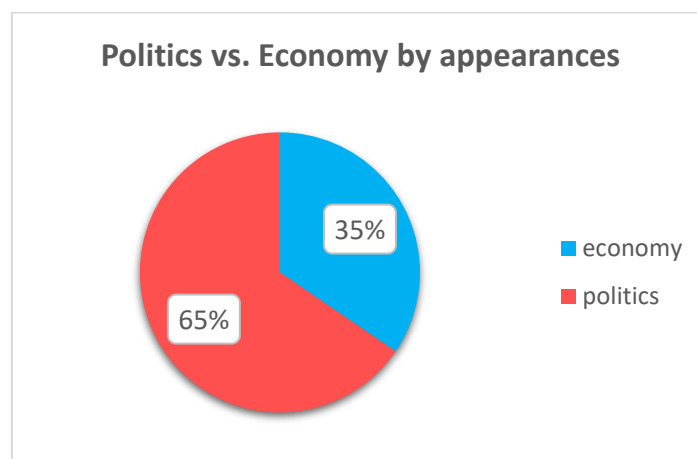

Figure 2: Proportion of politics vs. economy keywords by sum of appearances

As for the count of keywords on the list, an even bigger disparity shows 70% of all unique keywords on the list being politically relevant while only 30% had economic affiliation. In the process of setting my methodology I considered an idea to only research a small subset of

keywords rather than the whole list. I had doubts about this metric's representativeness, but in order to present the best possible interpretation of discourse I still performed a test of Politics vs. Economy discourse distribution on two subsets of keywords from the whole corpus, to see if the results would differ from my preferred metric of including all relevant words above 100 appearances. Within the Subset 1 consisting of Top 15 most frequent keywords, the ratio of Politics and Economy discourse was 16956:14711(or 8:7 keywords) respectively, meaning the Politics discourse closely prevailed. Meanwhile, in the Subset 2 consisting of Top 30 most frequent keywords the Politics discourse took the lead by a large margin with the ratio being 27463:20480 (or 18:12 keywords) for Politics vs. Economy keywords. As we can see from these results, when it comes to the highest-ranking words, both discourses are quite balanced, still leaning towards Politics though; but the more words we add to the subset, the bigger the disparity between Politics and Economy becomes. This effectively shows, that no matter what metric is used, Politics discourse always prevailed.

From looking at the keyword list, we can clearly see that Chinese media vastly preferred speaking of 战略 *military strategy* and 利益 *interest*, rather than 经贸合作 *Economic Cooperation* and 互利 *mutual benefit*. Not only more political terms made it into the over 100 appearances keyword list but also, they were more frequently used in general, which shows just how strongly the Chinese domestic discourse is politically inclined, putting the most stress on political values as opposed to the general notion of China being the world's best merchant as it is often perceived in the West.[106] This politics-heavy rhetoric is quite descriptive of the new trend in Chinese discourse, the "Wolf warrior" diplomacy theme, concentrating much more on political power, conflict and influence over trade and economic relations. The main aim of this new openly aggressive rhetoric is to attack any critical voices from abroad, while pleasing the domestic nationalist tendencies, portraying China as a strong and assertive player on the world politics field.[107] With the rise of Xi Jinping the trend of moving away from economic diplomacy and keeping a low profile as set by the former national leader Deng Xiaoping and practiced during the previous several decades has begun. As Xi has consolidated much of the domestic power unprecedented from the era of Mao Zedong, he also shaped the

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[106] Leggeri, A. (2020). What Happens to the CCP If China's Economic Growth Falters?. The Diplomat. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/what-happens-to-the-ccp-if-chinas-economic-growth-falters/
[107] Ma, A. (2020). China's new, hardline 'wolf warrior' diplomacy is supposed to cement its dominance — but it's also uniting its rivals abroad and dividing people at home. Business Insider. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.businessinsider.com/china-wolf-warrior-diplomacy-backfires-uniting-rivals-dividing-at-home-2020-6

domestic as well as foreign Chinese discourse tremendously, making it more assertive, threatening and aggressive.[108]

When it comes to the images representation as on Figure 3 below, the division between the 2nd (Domestic) and the 3rd (International) was less clear than in the case of Economy and Politics as a 65% majority of words did not have any clear affiliation, while the words where Domestic and International images were identified represented only a small number of words in the corpus with 14% of Domestic and 21% of International narratives keywords. **Given the procedural difficulties of assigning Domestic and International values to words the prevalence of either aspect of discourse cannot be reasonably estimated so the results of this level of analysis should be considered tentative.**
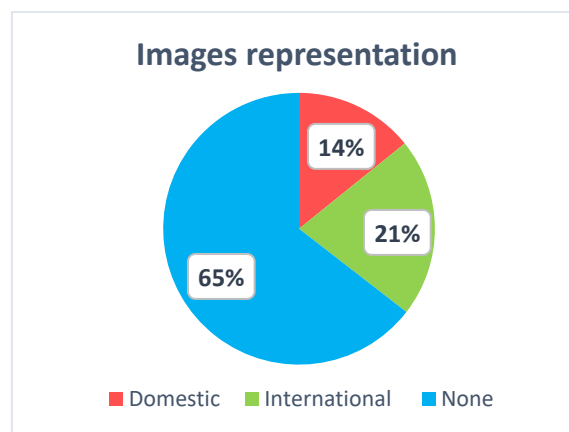
Images representation

14%

21%

65%

■ Domestic ■ International ■ None

Figure 3: 2nd and 3rd image representation among keywords

When we combine all these findings together, as visualized on Figure 4, we can see that by the two strongest values on their own, politics and international, also became the strongest category when combined the International Politics. On the other hand, economy centric discourses were practically obscured as the International Economy group has a mere half of the words compared to the first two groups and the Domestic Economy group was close to nonexistent. This shows that even though China might present itself primarily as a "businessman" in the international arena, its actual underlying motivations are based on domestic and also international political goals.[109]

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[108] Zhou, C., & Mantesso, S. (2019). 'No room for mercy in this system': Xi Jinping's rise from cave dweller to post-modern chairman. ABC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-06/the-astonishing-rise-of-chinese-president-xi-jinping/10794486

[109] Hass, R., & Chhabra, T. (2019). Global China: Domestic politics and foreign policy. Brookings. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/global-china-domestic-politics-and-foreign-policy/
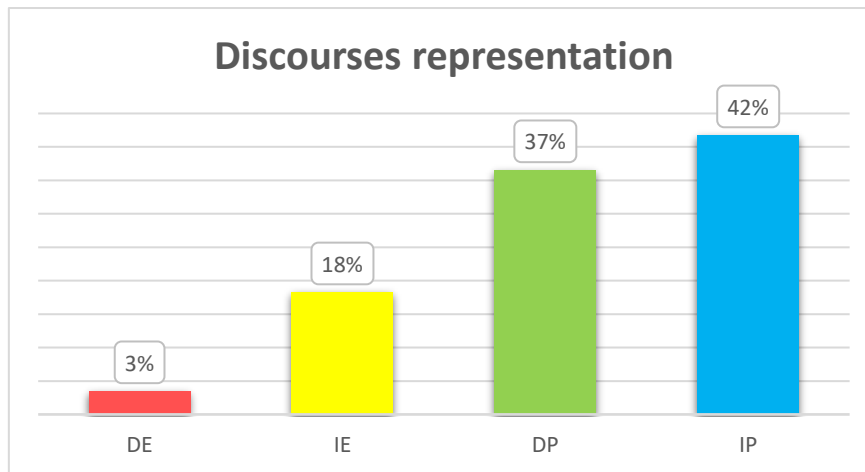
Figure 4: Combination of all discourse dimensions

As most words could potentially be used in a domestic or international context though, the vast majority stayed excluded of this categorization in the neutral category. As I already mentioned in methodology, this posed a problem for any further evaluation of this level of discourse, and the results presented here should therefore be considered more orientational as their validity is potentially questionable. I will further be using mentions of Domestic and International mainly for further explaining different aspects of the main two narratives.

3.1.1. Politics Discourse

The dominance of the Politics discourse was quite overwhelming on all fronts. Let us now explore some of its main traits. While the Chinese domestic discourse is somewhat expected to cater mostly to the needs of domestic audience, revolving around domestic issues and impact that arose from the trade war inside the country, the fact that the domestic media actually prefer to use the International Politics lens more even when addressing the domestic audience is interesting. The in-depth analysis revealed that the International Political discourse was heavily appeasing from the Chinese point of view, especially used in relation to 双方 *both sides*. Its rise in appearances also directly collocates with major de-escalatory events like negotiations, truces and was the most common during the final settlement stage. Most notable expressions used 双方 in shorter phrases such as 双方都能接受 *both sides can accept* or 双方最好的选择 *the best choice for both sides*. 谈判 *negotiations,* 合作 *cooperation* and 相互尊重 *mutual respect* were some of the most prominent notions. 合作共赢 *win-win cooperation* was the most frequent expression related to cooperation. Making a point about

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protecting the China's rightful development is also not appearing by chance, as the Chinese economic development is the top priority for the survival of the government.[110]

声明说，经过中美两国经贸团队的共同努力，双方在平等和相互尊重原则的基础上，已就中美第一阶段经贸协议文本达成一致。 *The statement says that through the joint efforts of the economic and trade teams **both China and the United States**, on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual respect, the **two sides have reached an agreement** on the text of the first phase of the China-U.S. economic and trade agreement.*

钟山表示，合作是中美两国唯一正确的选择。 *Zhong Shan expressed that **cooperation** is the only **correct choice for both** China and the United States.*

共同推进以协调、合作、稳定为基调的中美关系。 *Jointly advance the China-US relations based on coordination, cooperation, and stability keynotes.*

中方谈判的大门一直敞开，但谈判必须以相互尊重、相互平等和言而有信、言行一致为前提，不能以牺牲中国的发展权为代价。 *The door to China's negotiations has always been open, but negotiations must be based on mutual respect, mutual equality, trustworthiness, and consistency in words and deeds, and not at the expense of **China's right to development**.*

A general trend from the Domestic aspect of Politics discourse seems to be revolving mainly around the self-identification and defense of interests of the Chinese people. Here a special attention should be paid to 我们 *We* which ranked 9th out of all the relevant keywords. In this particular context the self-reference word substitutes for the Chinese government, but also the Chinese people, which can be seen as expression of strength like often mentioned phrase 我们有信心有能力 *we have confidence in our ability*. Through the use of 我们 *We* it is possible to blur the distinction between the two and foster the sentiment of unity in readers. By frequently using self-referring words, like 我们 *We and* 我国 *motherland* which are quite emotional, Chinese media are trying to foster the self-identification of the readership with the

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[110] Chu, Y. (2013). Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate over the Chinese Model. *China Review, 13*(1), 1-42. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23462227

country and its government representatives in order to stabilize fragile domestic peace and gain widespread support for the government's actions.[111]

Chinese victim self-portrayal was also a very frequent theme where Chinese media articulate the unlawfulness of U.S. provocations and attacks, Chinese reluctance to fight, while presenting retaliative tariff measures as mere necessities for defending national interests. Interestingly the claim of not wanting to fight is mostly used in phrases which could be interpreted as threatening. This shows the dilemma of the government trying to "save face" and not appear weak in front of citizens, while on the other hand trying to send out appeasing signals outward to avoid potential domestic political elite backlash in case of further worsening of relations.[112]

美国挑起对华经贸摩擦损害两国和全球利益。 *The **anti-Chinese** economic and trade frictions **provoked by the U.S.** harm the interests of **both countries and the whole world**.*

对于贸易战，中国不愿打、不怕打、必要时不得不打 *Regarding the trade war, **China does not want to fight, but is not afraid to fight** and if needed has no choice but to fight.*

中方不想跟任何人打贸易战，但如果有人非逼迫我们打，我们一不会怕，二不会躲。 *Chinese side **does not want to fight** a trade war with anyone, but if someone forces us to fight, **we will not fear** and we will not hide.*

中国坚定维护国家尊严和核心利益 *China firmly safeguards **national dignity and core interests***

国家核心利益和人民根本利益 *the **core national interests** and the fundamental interests of the people*

措施坚决捍卫国家和人民 *measures to resolutely **defend the country and people***

3.1.2 Economy Discourse

In the smaller, Economic part of the discourse main themes were quite rich, revolving around mostly International topics of trade war, friction and negotiations, while a small part was also

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[111] Bramley, N. (2001). *Pronouns of politics: the use of pronouns in the construction of 'self' and 'other' in political interviews.* (Ph.D). Australian National University. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/46225/5/01front.pdf

[112] Ezrati, M. (2019). China's Xi to Trump: Help us save face. New York Post. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://nypost.com/2019/08/14/chinas-xi-to-trump-help-us-save-face/

dedicated to Domestic issues like Chinese economic development. As opposed to the general expectations, the global economy, free trade and multilateral trading systems were not very often seen in the Chinese media texts, as already mentioned. On the other hand, 美国贸易代表 *U.S. trade representative*, was one of the most used words in the International Economy discourse, as the United States' representative Robert Lighthizer a known Beijing skeptic made some strong anti-Chinese statements about the country's unfair trade practices and insufficient economic opening to the world. The trade representative was one of the most noticeable figures of the conflict as he communicated many of U.S. government's new tariffs and policies towards China and became the main propagator of trade war apart from president Trump himself.[113]

When it comes to the more aggressive words like 贸易战 *Trade war*, most of its appearances were generally in collocation with the United States in a sentence. Most frequent expression including trade war 中美贸易战 *China-U.S. trade war*, which had quite unequal distribution among outlets, as the Global Times used the expression twice as frequently as the other two outlets, likely due to its format being slightly closer to what would in the West be a tabloid. 挑起贸易战 *Provoke a trade war and* 发动贸易战 *Start a trade war* both were exclusively used in connection with the United States as well. Opposite usage of the word can be seen in the expression 贸易战没有赢家 *Trade war has no winner*, which again shows China's appeasement efforts.[114] The preference of softer language which is generally shows in the preference of 摩擦 friction to 贸易战 trade war in many clusters. The expression 中美贸易摩擦 *China-U.S. trade friction* and 中美经贸摩擦 *China-U.S. economic friction* were almost ten times more numerous than their aforementioned more aggressive counterpart 中美贸易战 *China-U.S. trade war*. showing the Chinese media reluctance to resort to portraying the conflict as very grave in order to not instigate domestic panic over the economic implications of a trade war. Third most numerous following term 中美经贸磋商 *China-U.S. Economic and Trade Consultations* is actually quite contrasting as these trade consultations clearly played a

[113] Thrush, G. (2019). As China Talks Begin, Trump's Trade Negotiator Tries to Keep President From Wavering. The New York Times. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/01/us/politics/robert-lighthizer-president-trump.html
[114] Lose-Lose for Everyone: Trade Wars Have no Winners. (2020). BDI e.V. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://english.bdi.eu/article/news/lose-lose-for-everyone-trade-wars-have-no-winners/

landmark role in the conflict, omitting the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement mechanism for the sake of strictly bilateral negotiation.[115]

中国的发展 *China's development* was one of the main topics, which shows the enormous importance that the CCP gives to the domestic population's perception of continuous prosperity of the country. 遏制中国发展 *Contain China's development* was a strong expression not only due to its past American Containment policy heritage but also because any hindrances to the perceived rightful growth are potential threats for the Chinese government, since a drop down in growth could easily turn into giant public unrests.[116] Similar expressions like 中国经济增长 *Chinese economic growth* and 中国经济发展 *Chinese economic development* were also very frequent in the Domestic Economy discourse, as they all represent core national interests for the CCP, given the fact that the party bases its legitimacy of rule on the economic performance rather than a democratic election as in the West.[117]

Important terms falling under the category of International and Economy like 全球经济 Global Economy and 全球化 Globalization ranked 73rd and 78th respectively 自由贸易 *free trade* ranked extremely low on the list on the 158th spot, showing that despite preferring cooperation and criticizing war, free trade and global cooperation is not the most important topic for Chinese media. The many appearances of 全球 *Global,* which were expected to present a strong multilateral Chinese inclination towards global free trade, Globalization or global governance were instead overwhelmingly used only in mentions of 全球价值链 *Global value chain*, 全球产业链 *Global industry chain* and 全球市场 *Global markets*, showing little interest in some main neoliberal notions.[118]

[115] Davis, B. (2020). U.S.-China Deal Could Upend the Way Nations Settle Disputes. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-china-deal-could-upend-the-way-nations-settle-disputes-11579211598

[116] Leggeri, A. (2020). What Happens to the CCP If China's Economic Growth Falters?. The Diplomat. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/what-happens-to-the-ccp-if-chinas-economic-growth-falters/

[117] Chu, Y. (2013). Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate over the Chinese Model. *China Review, 13*(1), 1-42. Retrieved December 7, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23462227

[118] Eagleton-Pierce, M. (2016). Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts. Abingdon: Routledge. ISBN: 0415837545.

3.2.   Discourse development over time

To consolidate how the results of the analysis of discourse development over time relate to the assumptions stated in H2, we will now observe how the discourse developed during the 10 predefined time periods. As we can see clearly on the Figure 5 below, the prevalence of Politics discourse in corpus was overwhelming in every single period throughout the conflict without exceptions. In general terms, Politics discourse always accounted for at least 60% of the text, making it universally prevalent and hence showing the vast importance of political themes to the Chinese media. We can see a pattern of higher values of Economics discourse in Tariff 1, Negotiation 1 and Tariff 2. This rise of Economic discourse here was not coincidental, which became apparent when I performed a test of discourse distribution, again on two subsets of Top 15 and Top 30 most frequent words from each period.

The discourse distribution in Subset 1 consisting of Top 15 most frequent keywords showed a prevalence of Political discourse in most events, but with a disparity compared to the corpus findings. Economy discourse prevailed in the three events Tariff 1, Negotiation 1 and Tariff 2. Even though, the average ratio over the whole course of events was still dominated strongly by Politics with 19144:16443 (or 9:6 keywords). The same test on Subset 2 with Top 30 keywords again showed prevalence of Politics discourse in most periods with an average ratio of Politics vs. Economy 30115:21397 (or 19:11 keywords). In this subset only Negotiation 1 and Tariff 2 periods had a higher number of Economy that Politics discourse.
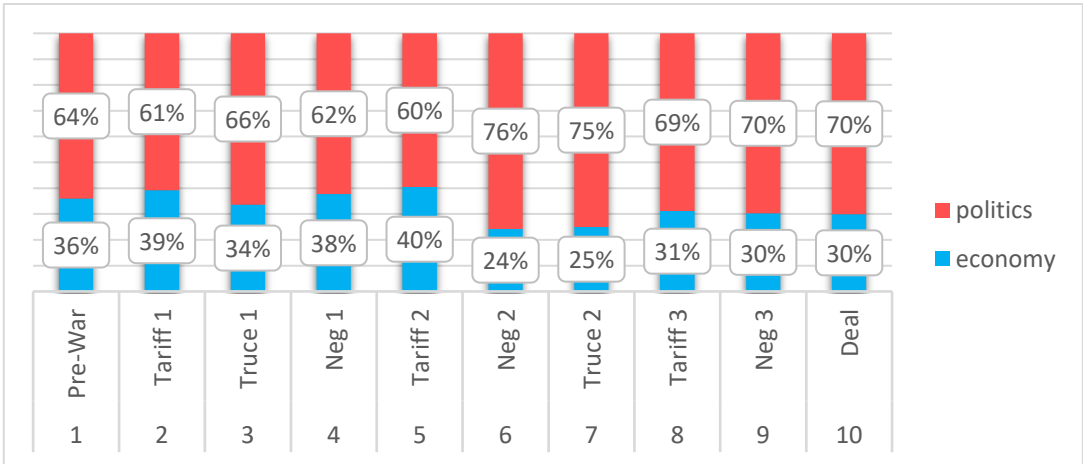

Figure 5: Politics vs. Economy discourse development over time

This finding tells us the same thing as the previous result in the whole corpus; since there were almost twice as many Politics keywords than Economy keywords even though several Economy keywords ranked very high in some periods, the more words were added to the subset, the less prevalent Economy discourse would be eventually. Nevertheless, given this disparity of findings between subsets, I have decided to account for this fact in my tentative evaluation, in which I consider the Economic discourse as prevalent in these select periods, despite the quantitative dominance of Politics.

There is a clear problem of comparing the results of this analysis to the originally estimated shift from Domestic Politics narrative towards International Economy narrative, as we cannot rely on the data of prevalence between domestic and International aspects. **Since the Domestic and International aspects could not be clearly determined and supported by empirical data, the assumptions as formulated in H2 cannot be directly proved by this analysis.** The following estimated development of narrative over time should therefore be considered as tentative, as it relies mainly on the image representation in the smallest subset of top 15 keywords, where it was possible to infer the narrative through visualization of keywords.

According to the tentative results of this analysis, we can somewhat argue that rather than the expected linear development from Domestic Politics towards International economy the most likely course of the narrative development was from International Politics towards International Economy and then returning back to International Politics. The Pre-War period was dominated by the International Politics narrative, then during the first part of the conflict narrative moved more towards International Economy, even though it still showed strong Politics basis. Lastly, in the latter stages of the dispute during 2019, discourse returned back to the prevalence of International Politics domain even though the main difference between the first and the second IP discourse lies more in their themes, with the former concentrating on the aspects of conflict, whereas the latter stressed bilateral relations and cooperation. The reason for the disparity between expectations and final result of analysis can partially lay in the fact that distinguishing strictly between Domestic and International aspects proved to be very difficult as most vocabulary somewhat naturally fell into the International dimension.

For an explanation of why the discourse shifted towards International Economy during the first part of the conflict in 2018, we have to consider the contextual understanding of the

conflict. The announcement of new tariff measures was followed by a large uncertainty about what will be the short-term or long-term impacts on the economic situation.[119] It is therefore not very surprising to see that all of the periods around the first tariff exchange had the highest ratio of economic keywords. Another common feature of this group was a lack of terms related to bilateral relationships and cooperation. Another similarity was the hostile rhetoric in these periods, and strong self-identification, marking the lowest point of relations between the two countries and the peak of hostility.

On the other hand, Negotiation 2 and Truce 2 periods had the least amount of Economic discourse of all mostly dominated by Politics, which again is not a surprise as major de-escalatory negotiations took place in these periods and a deal was struck eventually. The lack of Economic discourse here is counterweighted by large amount of Politics vocabulary related to bilateral relations and cooperation.

To visualize the broad scope of findings in this part on some key vocabulary, the general development of discourse as it followed started as International Politics oriented in Pre-War period with main keywords like 中美贸易战 China-U.S. trade war, 对华 *against China,* 打 *Fight,* 特朗普 *Trump*, but also 双方 *Two sides* and 两国 *Two countries*. Then during the first half of the conflict in 2018, the discourse moved closer to the International Economy narrative with many of the top keywords relating to 贸易 *Trade,* 关税 *Tariffs*, 产品 *Goods,* 市场 *Market,* 经济 *Economy*, 企业 *Business and* 出口 *Export* while still showing strong International Politics inclinations through often using the conflict vocabulary like 贸易战 *Trade war* and 摩擦 *Friction* as well as strong self-identification Domestic words like 我们 *We* or 我国 *Motherland*.

In the later stages of the conflict starting from Negotiation 2 period, discourse moved back to the International Politics domain with some important Economic aspects. Most of the top politics keywords until the end of the conflict were related to bilateral relations like 双方 *Two sides* and 两国 *Two countries* or 中美 *China-U.S.*; and cooperation efforts like 磋商 *Consultations*, 合作 C*ooperation*, 协议 *Treaty*. Important International Economy terms like 经济 Economy, 发展 Development and 经贸 Economy and Trade. The last period, Deal was again characterized by almost exclusively International Politics narrative and vocabulary related to

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[119] Markets edgy on US-China trade war fears. (2018). BBC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/business-43510802

cooperation and bilateral relations, which is quite natural, given that the final deal gave both countries a new hope of peaceful cooperation on the global market.[120] This was the only period where a different word that Trade and China-U.S. was the 1st most frequent – here it was 协议 *Treaty.* It also had the least number of Domestic Politics keywords of all the periods.

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[120] Blair, D. (2020). Progress in phase-one trade deal talks signals hope. China Daily. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/07/WS5f559814a310675eafc57ea0.html

Part 4: Publishing and Emotivity

Now that we have a general overview of which discourse was the most prominent and how the prevalence of discourses changed over time, we can follow up with the findings related to the validation of the contextual notions postulated in H3 and H4. These results broaden the scope of analysis by putting the previous discourse prevalence findings into the context of publishing and emotivity. In this part, I will first present a set of findings, that provide explanations of how much the Chinese media talked about the China-U.S. trade war in general and which events were reported more than others in order to verify the notions of H3. After that, we will see the results of the qualitative headline analysis part of this research, which concentrated on analyzing the headline emotivity in all the articles and its development throughout the whole conflict, which will verify the last hypothesis H4.

4.1.   The trade war publishing

Let us first look at the general publishing trend in correlation with the development of this trade conflict and major events as represented on Figure 6. On this graph the three colorful lines of orange, blue and grey represent the development of volumes of publishing among the three chosen media outlets, Global Times, People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency respectively. Major de-escalatory events were marked in green bubbles while the general situation was divided into two main blocks, tariff exchanges and negotiations, which are marked in red and yellow colors respectively. All the three outlets follow a very similar publishing line apart from few small deviations. The year 2018 experienced very turbulent developments of reporting with one major surge in publishing due to rapid escalation of the situation between Q1 and Q2 with multiple exchanges of Chinese and American tariffs. This was followed by a fast decline mostly after the announcement of the short-lived temporary truce between the two countries.[121] The reporting then became more stable during Q3 and Q4 despite further negative political developments. The year 2018 accounts for 54% of the total 733 articles published, with 33 articles a month on average, with a reporting high in April with 114 articles and the lowest number of articles in November with only 3 articles published.

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[121] Bradsher, K. (2019). A China-U.S. Trade Truce Could Enshrine a Global Economic Shift. The New York Times. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/29/business/us-china-trump-trade-truce.html
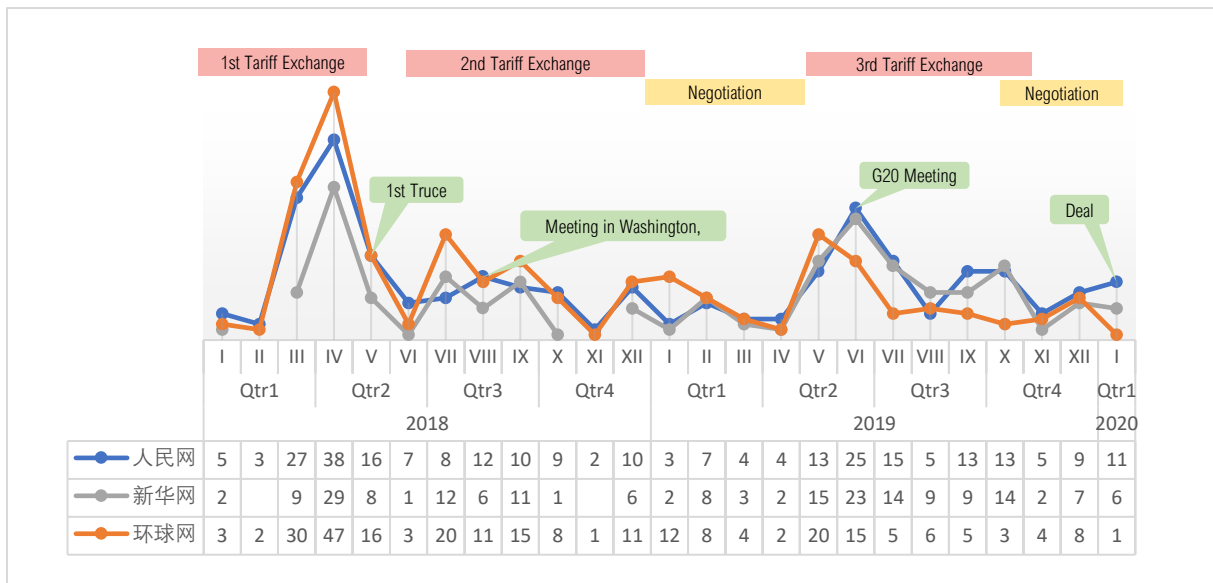
Figure 6: Publishing trends on the timeline

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	I
人民网	5	3	27	38	16	7	8	12	10	9	2	10	3	7	4	4	13	25	15	5	13	13	5	9	11
新华网	2		9	29	8	1	12	6	11	1		6	2	8	3	2	15	23	14	9	9	14	2	7	6
环球网	3	2	30	47	16	3	20	11	15	8	1	11	12	8	4	2	20	15	5	6	5	3	4	8	1

Year 2019 was slightly less skewed when it comes to reporting trends, but likely only due to less published articles in general. The trend line follows a similar pattern with one major surge in publishing, due to a mixture of escalatory and de-escalatory events like Trump's executive order against Huawei[122] and newly imposed Chinese tariffs on $60 billion worth of goods but also the G20 Extensive Talks agreement occurring within a short time span in the second half of Q2.[123] The second publishing surge never reached the heights of the first one and the following decline was also much less dramatic than the previous year even though more tariffs followed after the second temporary truce and another a rise in publishing would have been logical, but due to the protracting nature of the conflict reporting it likely lost its appeal. The year 2019 accounted for 43% of the articles with the high of reporting in June with 63 articles and the low in April with 8. The average number of 26 articles a month shows the decline in reporting quite clearly. Year 2020 only accounts for an insignificant number of articles, as the conflict ended in mid-January with the Phase One agreement.[124]

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[122] Kang, C., & Sanger, D. (2019). Huawei Is a Target as Trump Moves to Ban Foreign Telecom Gear. The New York Times. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/business/huawei-ban-trump.html

[123] G20 summit: Trump and Xi agree to restart US-China trade talks. (2019). BBC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48810070

[124] Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2020). *Economic and Trade Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the People's Republic of China*. Washington, DC. Retrieved 25 December 2020, from https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china/phase-one-trade-agreement/text

4.1.1. Publishing volume

In order to verify the idea of a strong prevalence of escalatory events publishing as postulated in H3, let us look at some basic publishing numbers as summarized in Table 3 below. There is a visible pattern of escalatory events being clearly reported more with 440 articles published, while de-escalatory events despite being more numerous amassed only 293 articles in total. Because of the uneven reporting distribution in time, I had to split the 25 months that were part of this research into smaller clusters that were separated based on the type of development. This resulted in clusters having varying sizes lengths since the quarters division was unfitting as some events spanned across several quarters while others accounted only for a several weeks. A time-based division of reporting volumes would not have solved this issue with uneven number of articles published, since there have been instances in the corpus where reporting was very sparse despite events occurring in that time.

Event Type	Number of articles	Number of days	Articles per day
Escalatory	440	438	1,00
De-escalatory	293	384	0,76

Table 3: Escalatory vs. de-escalatory events comparison

Nevertheless, to mitigate this issue I calculated the number of articles per day for both types of events and found that even after accounting for the difference in overall time, de-escalatory events were still reported 24 percent less than escalatory events. **Considering both the total size of the population of articles and the wide margin between the two event types, we can reasonably prove that the escalatory events were reported more than de-escalatory events proving the assumption of H3 correct.**

On Figure 7 below we can observe a detailed view of the volumes of publishing in all event clusters with escalatory events marked in red color, while de-escalatory events are in blue. The most reported event clusters over all were the first, second and third tariff exchanges which are all escalatory events. The most reported de-escalatory events like the second and third negotiation periods got considerably less coverage compared to the previous category. The remaining clusters, mainly other de-escalatory events only made 20% of the total population.
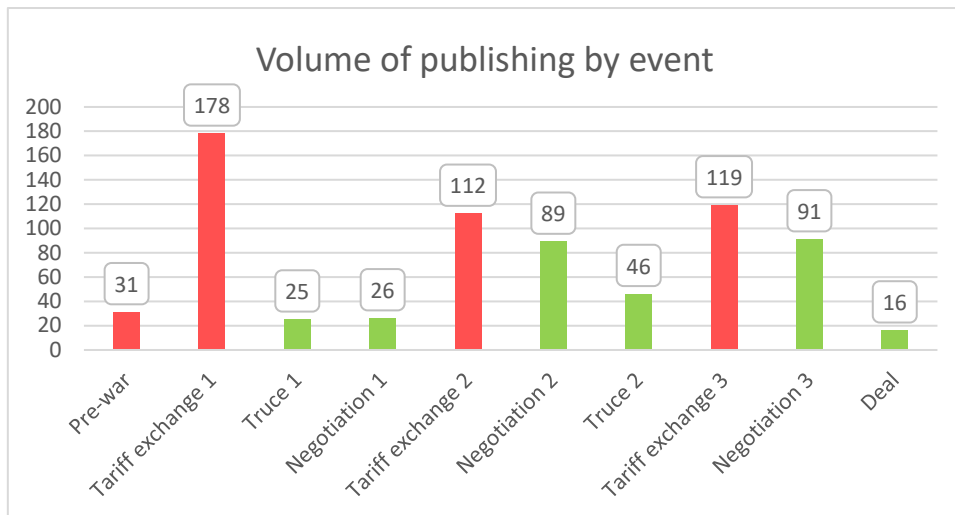
Figure 7: Publishing volume of escalatory vs. de-escalatory events

The first tariff exchange block covers the period between March and May of 2018 (with some pre-war escalations in the first quarter), which was the first time China and the United States exchanged some direct threats of mutual tariffs. On the 22nd of March the Trump administration started publicly discussing the imposition of tariffs on $50–60 billion worth of Chinese imported goods as a "response to the unfair trade practices of China over the years".[125] It comes as no surprise, that the United States under the "America First" policy would impose some protectionist policies on the Chinese imports, as the United States have now sobered up from their previous expectations of Chinese market opening to the rest of the world thanks to the WTO membership.[126]

Soon after, on the 1st of April China retaliated by threatening its own tariffs on 128 specific products imported from America, mainly technical products such as aluminum, airplanes or cars and agricultural products like pork or soybeans.[127] The reporting around the time of these two events rose dramatically with 34 articles each in the period of 5 days from the event occurring. Followed by more threats of retaliation from the American and Chinese reporting during the month progressed quite steady as the trade war became a hot topic. On the 6th of April, China filed a World Trade Organization request for trade consultations with the United

[125] Biesheuvel, T. (2018). As China Fires Back in Trade War, Here Are the Winners And Losers. Bloomberg. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-04/as-china-fires-back-in-trade-war-here-are-the-winners-and-losers

[126] Schweller, R., & Pu, X. (2011). After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline. *International Security, 36*(1), 41-72. Retrieved December 27, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41289688

[127] Rosenfeld, E. (2018). China announces it's imposing new tariffs on 128 US products. CNBC. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/01/china-announces-new-tariffs-on-us-meat-and-fruit-amid-trade-war-fears.html#close

States[128] which resulted on the 20th of May by the Chinese side agreeing to significantly increase its purchases of U.S. import goods and the American side therefore agreed to "put the trade war on hold".[129] Following the negotiations reporting slowly went down until mid-May. The first truce was reported quite strongly with 25 articles dedicated to the China-U.S. trade relations within the 5-day range.

The peace did not last very long as on the 29th of May Trump decided to prepare a new wave of 25% tariffs on $50 billion of Chinese technological goods. China angered by the provocation threatened more tariffs on $50 billion of U.S. goods of their own on July 6 and also warned of the discontinuation of trade talks if the U.S. tariffs became reality,[130] which marked the end of the first short-lived trade war truce and the beginning of second, much longer tariff exchange which lasted until the end of November of 2018. During this time the reporting rose again in the first half of July, when the promised U.S. tariffs worth of $34 billion finally hit the Chinese economy and the initial list for new 10% tariffs on $200 billion worth of goods were released by the US,[131] to which China retaliated by threatening its own tariffs on $60 billion worth of American goods.[132] But the volume of reporting never reached the previous scale with the peak of 40 articles in July, out of which 85% were found directly within 5 days of the aforementioned events and then a sharp decline in publishing followed until the promised 10% tariff on $200 Billion worth of Chinese imports coming into effect in late September, which garnered 25 articles within the same range. Events strongly covered included Trump's executive order 13873 against Huawei's purchases of U.S. IT technology components[133] and new Chinese tariffs on $60 billion worth of U.S. imports coming into effect in June.[134] The third tariff exchange was briefly interrupted on 29th of June by Presidents Trump and Xi agreeing on yet another "temporary truce" in the war after extensive talks during the G20 meeting in

[128] DS543: United States - Tariff Measures on Certain Goods from China. (2020). WTO Dispute Settlement. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds543_e.htm
[129] Wearden, G. (2018). US and China put trade war 'on hold'. The Guardian. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/20/us-and-china-put-trade-war-on-hold
[130] China warns US sanctions will void trade talks. (2018). BBC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44346461
[131] Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2018). USTR Finalizes Tariffs on $200 Billion of Chinese Imports in Response to China's Unfair Trade Practices. Retrieved from https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2018/september/ustr-finalizes-tariffs-200
[132] Wei, H. (2018). China Vows Retaliatory Tariffs on $60 Billion in U.S. Goods. Caixin Global. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.caixinglobal.com/2018-08-03/china-vows-retaliatory-tariffs-on-60-billion-in-us-goods-101311586.html
[133] Shepardson, D., & Freifeld, K. (2020). Trump extends U.S. telecom supply chain order aimed at Huawei, ZTE. Reuters. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china-trump-idUSKBN22P2KG
[134] Pramuk, K. (2019). China is raising tariffs on $60 billion of US goods starting June 1. CNBC. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.cnbc.com/2019/05/13/china-is-raising-tariffs-on-60-billion-of-us-goods-starting-june-1.html

Osaka,[135] which gained some positive attention from Chinese media with 14 articles. The further hostilities continuing until October 2019 were reported weakly, as China imposed some new tariffs and the U.S. accused Beijing of manipulating the value of RMB[136] among others. The announcement of the September deputy-level meetings further developing into ministerial-level talks by both sides,[137] did not get as much attention as it probably should have with only 9 articles within range.

It is apparent that for some reason, several de-escalatory events went largely underreported by all the outlets. For example, the meeting of U.S. Treasury Secretary with the Chinese Commerce Vice-minister in Washington, D.C. on the 22nd of August went completely unnoticed by the Chinese media with only 2 articles published within 5 days after the event.[138] Similarly, the announcement of the postponement of planned tariff increases by the representatives of the two countries at the end of 2018[139] only gained a modest number of 14 articles and was followed by another period of reporting silence, as only 59 articles in total were published during the first 4 months of 2019. Some sources suggested that Chinese media representatives were instructed to curb down the number of published articles related to the topic of trade war. This content control likely caused the complete omission of some events like the president Trump's November visit to China, which was virtually nonexistent in Chinese media.[140]

4.2. Duplicate articles

Another specific aspect of the publishing in Chinese media was an unusually high number of duplicates across the three news sites that had been discovered during the data preparation. This is not a completely unique phenomenon, as news outlets in other countries have been

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[135] G20 summit: Trump and Xi agree to restart US-China trade talks. (2019). BBC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48810070

[136] Franck, T. (2019). US declares China a currency manipulator, says it's using yuan to gain 'unfair advantage' in trade. CNBC. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/05/us-treasury-designates-china-as-a-currency-manipulator.htmll

[137] Stevenson, A. (2019). U.S. and China Agree to Resume Trade Talks, Sending Markets Higher. The New York Times. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/business/us-china-trade-talks.html

[138] Lawder, D., & Martina, M. (2018). China, U.S. to hold lower-level trade talks in late August. Reuters. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://br.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china/china-u-s-to-hold-lower-level-trade-talks-in-late-august-idUSKBN1L1058

[139] US-China trade war: Deal agreed to suspend new trade tariffs. (2018). BBC News. Retrieved 27 December 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46413196

[140] Li, S. (2018). How WeChat became the primary news source in China. Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved 26 December 2020, from https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/how-wechat-became-primary-news-source-china.php

proven to borrow content from each other as well.[141] The worrying part of this finding is the scope of it which goes far beyond the standard realm of "inspiration" when it comes to the re-publishing of articles previously posted by Xinhua News Agency. In many cases, the headline or the content of the borrowed article had not been adjusted whatsoever and were republished in their original form. This somewhat goes against the general methods of journalism to provide catchy and unique headlines in order to garner as much attention as possible especially if the topic had been covered by others already.[142] I have identified 193 such duplicate or partially duplicate articles via the headline comparison.[143] A brief overview of these articles would suggest that Xinhua News Agency serves in many cases as a primary source of news for other news outlets, which is not particularly extraordinary or unexpected given its official news agency status.

We could also argue, that the copying likely results in the increased length of the articles on other sites, as other outlets make some slight changes to the core articles at least some of the time. As shown on the Figure 8, Xinhua News Agency was the smallest publisher with total number of 199 articles and shortest average article length. In fact, Xinhua's total number of characters is at 66% of that of the People's Daily. The People's Daily on the other hand was the biggest publisher with 274 articles and highest average article length, followed very closely by The Global Times with 260 articles. These findings would also support the idea, that Xinhua serves as a primary source for other outlets. The details on time stamps of these articles though do not support this claim.

Out of the 193 duplicates, Xinhua News Agency was the most original author with 54 articles, while it also reposted 27 articles of other outlets, majority from the Global Times and also sometimes reposted its own articles under different publishing columns. The biggest borrower of content was the People's Daily with 65 articles copied from others and only 13 of its own originally posted articles. The smallest number of articles was reposted by the Global Times, only 11 duplicates mostly taken from Xinhua have been identified, while it also published 23 of its own pieces which then were reposted by others.

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[141] Riffe, D., Kim, S., & Sobel, M. (2018). News Borrowing Revisited: A 50-Year Perspective. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *95*(4), 909-929. doi: 10.1177/1077699018754909
[142] Bell, A. (1991). *The language of news media*. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN: 0631164340
[143] Here we assume that one of the outlets was the original author of an article, which as further analysis shows also might not to be the only good available assumption.
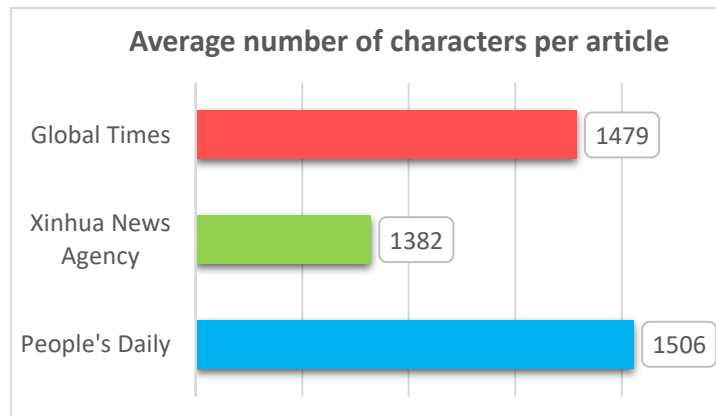
Figure 8: Average article length by publisher

The theory of Xinhua being the source of most articles cannot account for one major problem related to many duplicates posted just several minutes apart. Often times the difference between two publications is too short to reasonably assume that an outlet was able to view, copy and publish another platform's article. I have identified 30 such cases where the time difference between two duplicates was shorter than 30 minutes, with the shortest time span being less than 1 minute between two different outlets publishing a duplicate. Given such short time window, it is very unlikely that one outlet copied from another, which might suggest that both outlets were handed the same content potentially by a governmental bureau or the censorship department and then published it as it was, including the suggested headline or with very minor adjustments.[144]

This possible explanation of the duplicate phenomenon, though holds vastly different implications not just for these three outlets but possibly for the censorship of Chinese media in general. Even though the existence of Chinese media publishing guidelines suggests that censorship in China is done meticulously and on many levels of state hierarchy, be it state wide, provincial or regional.[145] This finding shows to what large extent can this guideline influence the content of media. This phenomenon might be worthwhile exploring in a separate detailed research if it has not been done yet, as my findings only show a very small overview. A research of Chinese readership habits and customs might also be interesting,

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[144] Liebman, B. (2005). Watchdog or Demagogue? The Media in the Chinese Legal System. *Columbia Law Review, 105*(1), 1-157. Retrieved December 27, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4099306

[145] Brady, A. (2008). *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. ISBN: 978-0-7425-4057-6

given that the Chinese media seemingly disregard the aforementioned basic journalistic themes like originality, brevity and catchiness of articles.[146]

One of the most important media principles is the Guidance of public opinion concept (舆论 导向) which originated after the Tiananmen square massacre, which practically limits all criticism of any political decisions and actively motivates journalists to support CCP's agenda. Chinese journalists are also not supposed to report in a way that would polarize the popular opinion on critical events and topics and should foster "harmony" in reporting. The only sort of exception from this rule are investigative reports on the corruption of officials, which are vastly popular in China.[147] From a western perspective we could therefore somewhat assume that Chinese outlets either do not expect their readership to follow multiple channels simultaneously to notice these similarities between articles or the choice of what can be published is likely so limited, that the editors rather do not attempt originality out of fear, as their competitors are also faced with identical constraints. It is also important to note, that Chinese journalists in general are equipped with a different set of normative values than their Western counterparts. The aim of journalism as understood in China is to serve the public through maintaining stability and harmony, rather than chase after sensational news which likely also further fosters frequent support of the government in media and lack of criticism.[148]

These findings prove to be useful given the initial idea of this research to only pick a few major news outlets and consider them as a homogenous unit instead of comparing various media with each other on the opinion basis, as these findings show that any differences in opinions are practically nonexistent. Given the censorship mechanism and publishing guidelines' dominance over the media, they are effectively limited from expressing ideas too far from the official line. Therefore, based on these findings it is safe to assume that it would not have been more enlightening to compare and contrast various news outlets within China, unlike in the case of content analyses of various Western media.

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[146] Blake, A. (2013). Political Journalism Represented by Headline News: Canadian Public and Commercial Media Compared. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique, 46*(2), 455-478. Retrieved December 27, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43298263

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4.3. Headline emotivity

This part of the analysis will explain what was the main emotion expressed by the Chinese media in the headlines of the article population, how did emotivity develop over time and if there were any discrepancies between publishers. The analysis looks to establish a relationship between escalatory events and negativity of reporting. In order to verify the main premise of H4, we will analyze the headline emotivity in the whole corpus divided into 10 time periods, to visualize how escalatory and de-escalatory events got reported.

These findings will be useful for the general contextual interpretation of the Chinese discourse, since news reports generally follow a standardized format of reporting about any kind of disturbance (headline -> lead paragraph -> following paragraphs -> wrap-up) the headlines are an important source of very condensed information about the given topic.[149] Out of the 733 article headlines in this population, a majority of 308 articles fell into the neutral category, 258 headlines belong to positive reporting and only 167 headlines were expressing negative emotions. This might be a surprise in the Western context, as general trends show that negative reporting gets more attention, so commercial media tend to leverage this fact.[150] It is in fact quite the opposite in the Chinese context, as the Chinese press state-run and commercial alike is subject to strict censorship. Expressions outside of the allowed scope can result in government repercussions for the writer or the outlet and even big media generally make sure to express as little opinion as possible when it comes to sensitive topics, which also explains the reason why the second biggest number of articles is positive. Chinese media headlines in general also do not seem to follow the general metrics of catchiness and simplicity of headline creation, often being long, uninformative and non-sensational.[151] This type of reporting is in fact preferred even by the journalists themselves, as the normative values of Chinese journalism stress to be objective and neutral and refrain from using any emotional language.[152]

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[150] van der Meer, T., Kroon, A., Verhoeven, P., & Jonkman, J. (2018). Mediatization and the Disproportionate Attention to Negative News. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(6), 783-803. doi: 10.1080/1461670x.2018.1423632

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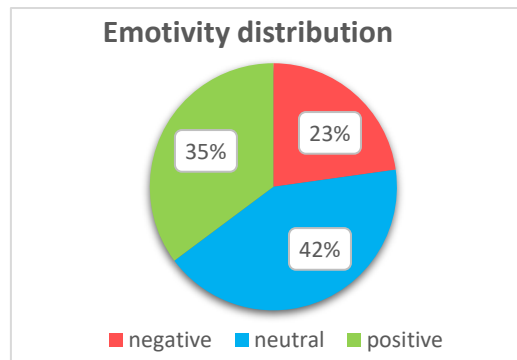
Figure 9: Emotivity throughout the corpus

Unlike in the West, Chinese press does not publish much negative news and tends to avoid controversial headlines including strong negative emotions and generally prefers milder headline language due to the generally accepted guidelines like the Guidance of Public Opinion.[153] The CCP considers curbing down the amount of negative or sensational news an essential method of stabilizing the society, as often times even negative public sentiments stemming from external factors resulted in domestic unrests which turned against the government.[154]

4.3.1. Emotivity development in time

Let us now consolidate the findings that explain how escalatory and de-escalatory developments were reported in reality to test the idea that escalatory events were reported overwhelmingly negatively formulated in H4. Based on the results so far, it seems quite certain that the Chinese media does not prefer negative reporting in general, which is also supported by the comparison of the reporting of escalatory and de-escalatory events. In escalatory events, Chinese media generally preferred neutral language to outright negative connotations, while during de-escalatory development positive reporting was actually the most frequent. **This effectively disproves the initial premise of H4 that negative reporting of escalatory events would be heavily prevalent.**

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[153] Svensson, M., et al. (2015). Chinese Investigative Journalists' Dreams: Autonomy, agency and voice, edited by Marina Svensson, Elin Sæther, & Zhian Zhang. *Chinese Journal Of Communication*, *8*(4), 468-470. doi: 10.1080/17544750.2015.1090160

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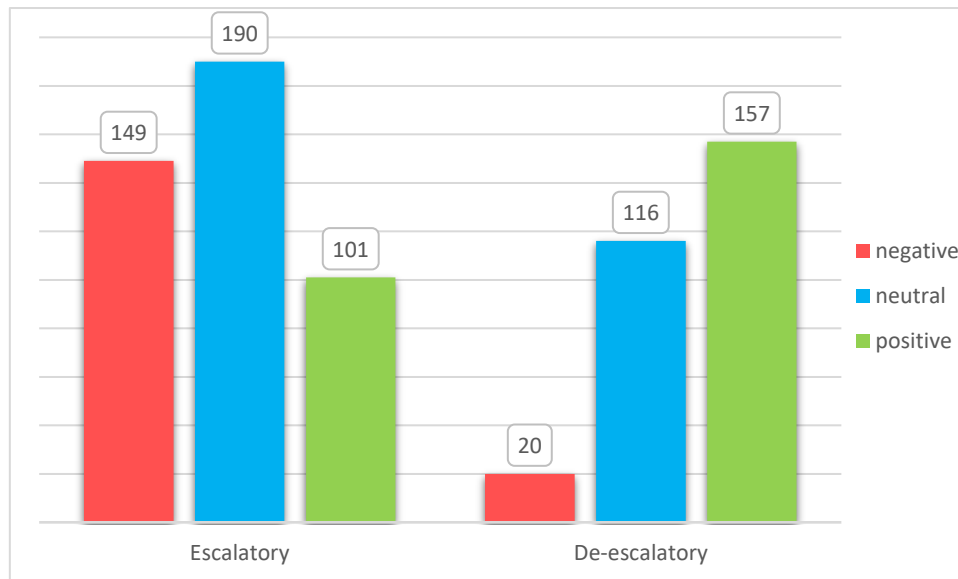
Figure 10: Emotivity by development type

When it comes to the development of emotionality in reporting over time, there is a clear pattern of initial negativity of reporting which gradually decreased over time with the only exception of a rise in negativity during the Tariff 3 period. This is counterweighted by an increase of positive article headlines over the conflict and especially in the last two quarters of the conflict. The neutral language values were generally prevailing in most of the events with a few exceptions of de-escalatory events where positive reporting took the lead.

The Figure 11 shows that most negatively reported periods were the Pre-war and Tariff 1 in the beginning of 2018, where bilateral relations have started tensing up. The Pre-War period was the only one with a large majority of negative headlines accounting for 55% of the articles, while the neutral and positive reports accounted for 23% each. Tariff exchange 1 which had the second highest ration of negative headlines was actually also the most balanced of all events when it came to the emotivity of reporting with 38% of negative, 39% of neutral and 24% of positive mentions. It is interesting, that even though the Tariff 1 event included the very first hostilities and tariff exchanges, the media language was actually quite moderate. Even though the reporting during this period was not purely negative as it could have been expected, the article volume was massive and the most negative articles by far were still published during this period.
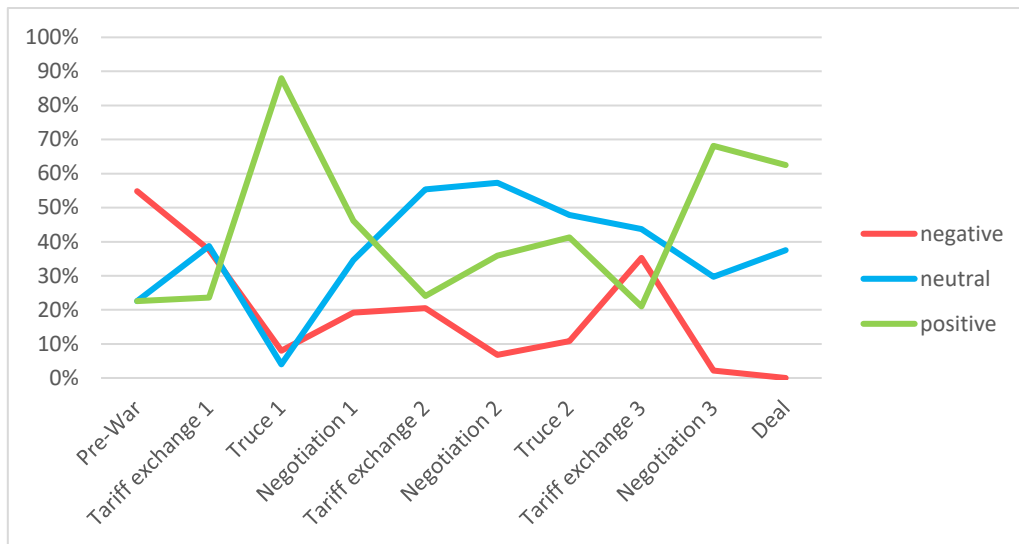
55

Figure 11: Headline emotivity over time

On the other hand, the most positively viewed event was during the short Truce 1 interlude in May 2018, which despite its short-liveness got an astounding ratio of 88% of positive headline coverage, while negative mentions dropped drastically to 8% and neutral 4%. As the first de-escalatory event in the whole conflict, it was likely followed by great enthusiasm over the result, at least until the new round of tariffs was announced very shortly after. This event was so important in the Chinese media that even a year after, in May 2019 several misinforming articles were published mentioning a trade war ceasefire despite there being no deal at the time and were shortly rebutted by authorities as fake news. The most neutrally reported event of all was the Negotiation 2 between December 2018 and May 2019 with 57% of neutral headlines, Chinese press was much less enthusiastic about the negotiation this time round, given the past experience of a failed negotiation and the aforementioned short truce in 2018.

The prevalence of neutral factual language was a general source of struggle throughout this research as the assumption that various media generally target different audience groups and lean towards different political discursive lenses which is reflected by their language choices can also hardly apply here as analyzing differences between outlets showed to be rather meaningless. In the case of Chinese press, there is neither possibility of vastly differing ideologies among media outlets, nor is there much maneuvering space for significant changes towards more aggressive or more appeasing tone as Chinese media all serve the purpose of intermediary between the state and the public. Furthermore, the generally neutral discourse is actually preferred among Chinese journalists, as the main aim of a journalist is to be

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objective and neutral and refrain from using any emotional language.[155] The general neutrality can be also understood through knowledge of Chinese publishing guidelines such as 舆论导向 *Guidance of public opinion*, which are officially formulated and binding for all media under the threat of state repercussion. Unlike in the case of sensation seeking media culture in the West, reporting that magnifies any sort of controversy around a problematic issue in a way that could potentially polarize the society is highly undesirable in China, which also further explains the specifics of the Chinese media discourse.[156]

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[155] Tong, J. (2009). Press self-censorship in China: A case study in the transformation of discourse. *Discourse & Society, 20*(5), 593-612. Retrieved December 27, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/42889285

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Summary

China's undisputable rise in power creates many unanswered questions about its future behavior on the global field. So far, the methods that have been used for analyzing Chinese ambitions and motivations have not been very successful at finding answers and uncertainty remains. Since the domestic political situation in China is always the most important motivator for Chinese foreign policy, I believe that this precise premise poses an opportunity for the Western scholarship to finally be able to better analyze and understand Chinese political thinking.

The main aim of this thesis was to provide an insight into the Chinese political discourse related to the China-U.S. trade war that was aimed at the domestic audience, rather than overseas spectators. Since the Chinese media is closely controlled by the state apparatus, they are faced with very tight restrictions when it comes to the content they are allowed to publish. Because of this tight control, more of the government's ideas and preferences penetrate the media discourse and hence are directly observable. Through analyzing the Chinese domestic media narrative, we are therefore able to see a reflection of the thoughts of the Chinese government itself. The Chinese media discourse surrounding the recent trade war with the United States had many specifics, some of which were anticipated in the original research hypotheses and others that brought new ideas not in accordance with the postulated notions.

The findings based on media articles published by three big Chinese domestic news outlets show a large prevalence of politically motivated discourse throughout the whole corpus as well as over the course of the whole conflict from early 2018 until the beginning of 2020. The main themes that had been anticipated in the initial research project such as strength rhetoric, Chinese victim self-portrayal and American aggression indeed proved to be strongly present in the discourse of this population. Meanwhile the expected interest of Chinese media in global economy and multilateral trading system was very little, with only few mentions in comparison to the political aspects of the discourse. Despite clearly blaming the United States for the conflict and its impacts worldwide, China in fact did not present itself as the defender of multilateral trading system on many occasions and concentrated more on the purely economic aspects of the conflict.

As the overview of publishing volumes over the course of the conflict showed, that Chinese media did in fact dedicate more coverage to the escalatory developments of the trade conflict as expected. The manner in which they referred to these events differed from expectations as discovered in the qualitative headline emotivity analysis. Negative coverage somewhat prevailed only in the very beginning of the conflict, while there was a general preference for the usage of rather neutral factual language and appeasing rhetoric in the vast majority of other instances.

Even though this approach for studying Chinese political thinking through Chinese domestic media discourse is not without flaws, I believe it could be potentially utilized in future research of various other topics regarding China, not just the trade war. There are many ways in which other data analysts could improve and broaden this method in order to serve more purposes and extract even more information from the data.

I also think that some of the findings that were not in the direct interest of this research would be worthwhile exploring further in a separate research. I especially believe so in the case of the duplicate articles phenomenon, where there is a strong research potential to actually illustrate how the content in Chinese media is created and how efficiently the censorship mechanism works.

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