

# CCPS

An International Journal

Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal (CCPS) is an academic journal published by the Institute of China and Asia-Pacific Studies, National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan, focusing on the Chinese polity, economy, and society; and the interrelationship between sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors that influence political, economic, and social outcomes in contemporary Mainland China and Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, and their politico-economic and strategic relations with other regions and countries.

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# Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations

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*An International Journal***

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# Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: *An International Journal*

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## China's Global Footprint: Economic Alignments, Media Narratives, and Regional Perceptions

Over the past decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has become a central actor in reshaping the global order. Its ascent has not only restructured patterns of trade, finance, and production but also transformed the cognitive and communicative infrastructures through which global power is perceived and contested. The [Volume 11, Issue 2 \(December 2025\)](#) of the *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* (CCPS) examines PRC's evolving global engagement across economic, political, and communicative domains. The articles featured in this issue analyse how China's trade realignments, media diplomacy, and public perceptions interact to shape its international legitimacy. Specifically, this issue forwards the **Perceptual Geo-economics** concept in probing into how China's economic strategies, media narratives, and public sentiments co-produce influence in diverse regional contexts. The framework integrates insights from international political economy, communication studies, and comparative perception analysis and situates China's international behaviour within the intersection of structural transformation and meaning-making.

This CCPS issue features four articles: the first article by Valdiglesias, *"Rewiring Global Value Chains: Friendshoring, Nearshoring, and the Politics of Supply Chain Realignment in the United States-China Trade War,"* offers an econometric analysis of how the United States (US)–China trade conflict restructured trade flows across Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member economies from 2013 to 2022. Using a random-effects panel data model, Valdiglesias demonstrates that geographic proximity (nearshoring) and strategic political alignment (friendshoring) jointly influence export performance during periods of geopolitical tension. Countries like Mexico and Vietnam gained most from production relocations, while the US and China continued to anchor global value chains (GVCs) as central hubs. Theoretically, the study builds upon and extends classical trade models by introducing political trust and strategic risk as new determinants of trade. Valdiglesias concludes that in an era of uncertainty, friendshoring functions as a form of economic risk management, where trust and alliance supplant pure cost efficiency; second,

Duishekeeva et al.'s "*Mediating Power: Media Frames and the Representation of China–Central Asia Relations in Kyrgyzstan*" analysed how Kyrgyz media construct narratives around China's political and diplomatic activities. Drawing on data from *Vecherniy Bishkek* between January and June 2023, the authors find that China's image in Kyrgyzstan oscillates between optimism and caution. The newspaper's reporting largely emphasizes political cooperation, infrastructure projects, and regional stability, consistent with the Chinese narrative of "win–win" development. However, latent frames of dependency, inequality, and transparency concerns persist. The authors situate these patterns within a broader regional context—post-Soviet nation-building, limited media freedom, and the struggle to balance relations among great powers. The study, thus, demonstrates how media framing both reflects and shapes the political geography of Central Asia; third, the "*Soft Power from the Newsroom: Media Diplomacy and Cultural Narratives of China in Kyrgyzstan*" by Liu et al. extends Duishekeeva et al.'s work by incorporating a three-year longitudinal analysis (2020–2022) of Kyrgyz media coverage on China. Employing content analysis and comparative methods, the study identifies the growing prevalence of neutral or positive tones in reporting. Around 81.82 per cent of the sample suggests a deliberate attempt to maintain diplomatic balance. The study underscores that Kyrgyz media serve not only as information channels but also as agents of public diplomacy. By foregrounding China's contributions to infrastructure, health cooperation, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the press performs a *mediating* function between state interests and public sentiment. Nevertheless, Liu et al. acknowledge tensions between official optimism and public ambivalence, indicating that media narratives can both consolidate and complicate soft power; and lastly, Rifawan, Karalekas, and Hardiawan's "*Perceiving China Across Continents: Comparative Attitudes in Indonesia and Hungary toward China's Global Role*" introduces a comparative perceptual dimension. Using a survey data analysed through the *Rasch Model*, they examined how university students in Indonesia and Hungary perceive China's influence in development, democracy, and geopolitics. In this study they found out that Indonesians express economic appreciation but with political caution, viewing China as an indispensable trade partner yet distrusting its authoritarian governance model. However, Hungarian students display greater skepticism, aligning more closely with Western democracies and perceiving China as politically intrusive despite strong governmental cooperation. Here, the findings imply that China's image is contingent not on its economic presence

alone but on how local historical, cultural, and political contexts interpret that presence.

These papers reflect the multidimensional nature of China's rise. They argue that China's global presence today is not defined by domination or isolation but by "*mutual entanglement*"—an interdependence that is simultaneously economic, narrative, and perceptual. Hence, it can be argued further that Beijing's influence emerges not merely from its economic might but from the interplay of structural, discursive, and perceptual forces. These forces are integrated, specifically, as dimensions of *perceptual geo-economics*.

*Structural Dimension: Reordering Global Production.* Valdiglesias' analysis captures how trade tensions between the US and China have ushered in a fragmented yet interdependent production system. Economies like Vietnam, Mexico, and Malaysia exemplify adaptive insertion into new value chains. China's position, though challenged, remains pivotal. The decoupling process is therefore selective and partial. A recalibration rather than a retreat.

*Discursive Dimension: Media as Infrastructure of Influence.* Duishekeeva et al. and Liu et al. demonstrate that the media function as the connective tissue of China's soft power architecture. Through media collaboration and strategic communication, China seeks to normalise its presence and cultivate legitimacy. However, media narratives are never unidirectional; they are refracted through domestic political contexts, press freedoms, and audience expectations. This interplay generates a hybrid narrative space, where cooperation and skepticism coexist.

*Perceptual Dimension: Legitimacy and Trust.* Rifawan, Karalekas, and Hardiawan highlight perception as the currency of legitimacy. Even in states where China wields substantial economic leverage, such as Indonesia or Hungary, public attitudes may diverge sharply from elite policy. These findings remind us that global influence depends not only on transactional benefits but also on trust, empathy, and shared norms.

## 1. Theoretical Implications

The integration of these studies suggests an evolution in the concept of geo-economics. Traditional geo-economics<sup>12</sup> focuses on how the states use economic tools for strategic aims. The present evidence suggests perceptual power—defined as the capacity to shape how economic and political actions are

understood, justified, or resisted—as a parallel domain. Thus, it is proposed that geo-economic analysis needs to expand by also looking at how states construct and contest perceptions of economic power.

Collectively, the four papers observe that China's deployment of perceptual power operates through:

- *Economic Narratives*, framing trade and investment as mutually beneficial partnerships rather than domination;
- *Cultural Diplomacy*, promoting linguistic and educational exchanges that humanize China's global role; and
- *Media Collaboration*, crafting informational ecosystems that privilege developmental success over controversy.

However, perceptual power is inherently unstable. It is dependent on local interpretive communities. As seen in the Indonesian and Hungarian cases, the same Chinese initiatives can evoke divergent reactions depending on historical memory and political culture.

The emerging scholarship on China's international behaviour calls for an integrated analytical approach: that is by combining international political economy, media and communication studies, and comparative social psychology. Only through such synthesis can we capture the full complexity of China's global transformation.

## 2. Regional Contrasts and Global Convergences

While the economic logic of interdependence is universal, the meanings attached to China's rise vary, from pragmatic accommodation in Asia to normative scepticism in Europe and cautious opportunism in the Global South. These regional patterns illustrate how material interests and perceptual politics converge, producing differentiated strategies of engagement, resistance, and adaptation to China's expanding footprint.

*Asia: Pragmatic Acceptance and Strategic Hedging.* In both Indonesia and Central Asia, China's presence is met with pragmatic acceptance rather than ideological opposition. Economic cooperation is valued, yet concerns about dependency, transparency, and cultural sovereignty persist. Such ambivalence reflects a broader Asian pattern of strategic hedging, where states seek to benefit from Chinese investment while maintaining policy autonomy.

*Europe: Normative Scepticism and Political Duality.* Hungary represents the paradox of European engagement with China—elite alignment amid popular scepticism. While Orbán's government embraces Chinese investment as an alternative to Brussels' conditionalities, Hungarian citizens remain oriented toward Western democratic norms. This gap illustrates the limits of soft power when perception diverges from policy.

*The Global South: Opportunity and Asymmetry.* Valdiguiesias' analysis reveals how APEC and developing economies navigate a double bind—leveraging new trade opportunities while avoiding overdependence. China's BRI amplifies these dynamics by linking physical infrastructure with narratives of solidarity and “shared destiny.” Yet, the sustainability of such ties rests on institutional transparency and reciprocal trust.

The articles featured in this issue portray a global order defined by the politics of perception. In an economic perspective, China remains deeply embedded in global production. In a communications point of view, PRC is a dominant narrative-maker. In perceptual terms, however, China's legitimacy is contingent and context-dependent. This underscores a fundamental shift in global politics. Power now resides not only in control of resources or technologies but in the capacity to shape meaning. The interplay of trade realignment, media framing, and public perception forms the foundation of *perceptual geo-economics*, to understand the transformation of global power relations.

As the boundaries between economy, communication, and culture continue to blur, the sustainability of China's global influence will depend not merely on its capacity to build infrastructures and supply chains but on its ability to build trust and shared understanding across a deeply differentiated world.

**Reymund B. Flores, DPA\***  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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## Notes

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1. Geo-economics entered the lexicon in 1990 with an article by Edward Luttwak, which argued that following the Cold War, the importance of military power was giving way to geo-economic power.
2. The ultimate goal of geoeconomics is the “conquest or protection of desirable roles in the world economy” (Luttwak, 1993) with an important role of large companies used by the states as instruments for geo-economic purposes.

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- Luttwak, E.N. (1993). *Endangered American dream: How to stop the United States from becoming a third-world country and how to win the geo-economic struggle for industrial supremacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

## Rewiring Global Value Chains: Friendshoring, Nearshoring, and the Politics of Supply Chain Realignment in the United States-China Trade War

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### Abstract

Understanding how the United States (US)–China trade war affects Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies is crucial for policymakers and firms, as it informs strategies to enhance trade resilience and optimize participation in global value chains (GVCs). This study assesses the impact of the trade war on exports, emphasizing nearshoring and friendshoring as strategic responses. Economies are classified based on geographic proximity and perceived political or economic alignment with the two major powers. Using a random-effects panel data model covering all the 21 APEC members from 2013 to 2022, the study examines trade flow adjustments before and during the trade war, accounting for heteroscedasticity and structural variations across countries. Results indicate heterogeneous effects: economies geographically close to the US, such as Mexico and Canada, experienced significant gains through nearshoring, while countries strategically aligned with either China or the US, such as Vietnam and Taiwan, benefited from friendshoring. Findings highlight that both geographic proximity and strategic alignment enhance integration into GVCs, facilitating resilience and export growth amidst geopolitical disruptions. By linking geopolitical factors, supply chain strategies, and export performance, the study provides practical insights for policymakers and firms aiming to optimize trade outcomes under

increasing global uncertainty. The evidence suggests that proactive engagement in nearshoring and friendshoring can strengthen export capacities and promote sustainable participation in evolving GVCs.

**Keywords:** *nearshoring, friendshoring, trade war, APEC, global value chains*

## 1. Introduction

For several decades, the rise of China has generated significant spillovers worldwide, particularly affecting neighboring Asian economies with strong links to it. In this context, Global Value Chains (GVCs) have created opportunities for comparative advantages, technological transfers, and industrial upgrading. For example, Southeast Asian economies have benefited both directly and indirectly from their relationship with China, leveraging its growing market demand and integration into international production networks. However, while China's rapid economic growth has been advantageous for some countries, recent export restrictions resulting from the trade war—especially those imposed by the United States—have disrupted GVCs, leading to substantial trade and gross domestic product (GDP) losses for several economies (Cerdeiro et al., 2023).

According to Caliendo et al. (2022), from 2000 until the onset of the trade war, there was a steady increase in Chinese imports into the US market, driven primarily by two factors. First, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 provided greater certainty regarding preferential tariffs for the US market. Second, ongoing improvements in the productivity of Chinese manufactured products, particularly electronics, played a significant role. Since the trade war began, escalating tariffs—halted temporarily in January 2020—have compounded pre-existing US challenges related to unemployment and rising inflation, with American consumers largely bearing the costs due to the inelastic demand for Chinese goods (Caliendo et al., 2022).

The primary cause of the trade war has been the growing trade deficit between China and the US, which has favored China. Since China's accession to the WTO, Chinese exports to the US increased eightfold between 2000 and 2013,

whereas US exports to China only doubled (Parsapour, 2024). The interdependence in global trade extends beyond these two powers, making the decoupling process highly complex and with far-reaching implications for the global economy. Political leaders in the US have sought to align other countries against China, with bipartisan consensus framing China as a strategic rival.

Moreover, the US has enacted sanctions targeting China's intellectual property practices. China's response, including tariffs on the American automotive sector, was directed at domestic economic and political objectives, while promoting nationalism and internal unity—a strategy recurrently employed by the Chinese Communist Party (Mallick, 2018; Zeng, 2019). The pass-through of tariffs has also affected US producer and consumer prices, reshaping the global market and increasing incentives for nearshoring and friendshoring (Fajgelbaum et al., 2021).

Despite increasing research on nearshoring and friendshoring, current studies largely focus on individual countries or specific sectors, overlooking the differentiated impacts within a regional block like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). In particular, prior analyses rarely examine how geographic proximity, political alignment, and GVC integration interact to shape trade and investment outcomes across member economies. This leaves a gap in understanding which APEC economies are best positioned to benefit from strategic relocation under trade war pressures and how policy interventions can enhance these gains.

Against this backdrop, several critical questions emerge regarding the differential benefits of nearshoring and friendshoring for APEC members. Specifically: How do APEC economies leverage geographic proximity or strategic alliances to enhance exports under trade war pressures? To what extent do perceptions of political or economic friendship with China or the US influence trade advantages? Which levels of integration into GVCs are necessary for economies to maximize these benefits? And how do these dynamics vary across regions and sectors within the APEC framework? Addressing these questions is essential to understand how APEC economies can capitalize on current geopolitical shifts while navigating complex international trade constraints.

Building on these research questions, this study aims to analyze how APEC economies can leverage geographic proximity and strategic alliances to maximize the benefits of nearshoring and friendshoring amid the ongoing trade war between China and the United States. Specifically, it seeks to examine the influence of political and economic alignment with major powers on trade advantages, assess the role of integration into GVCs in enhancing export performance, and identify the regional and sectoral variations in capturing these opportunities. By addressing these objectives, the research provides a structured framework to understand how APEC economies can strategically respond to trade disruptions, upgrade their export structures, and strengthen their participation in both regional and global value chains.

This research contributes by providing a comprehensive analysis of nearshoring and friendshoring across APEC economies, addressing the gap in current literature regarding how geographic proximity, political alignment, and GVC integration interact to determine trade and investment outcomes. While previous studies focus on individual countries, this study highlights the differentiated benefits that emerge within a regional economic block, offering a structured framework to understand which economies are best positioned to capitalize on trade war-induced opportunities. The findings also provide actionable insights for policymakers seeking to enhance competitiveness, attract foreign direct investments (FDIs), and strengthen export-oriented production under conditions of geopolitical uncertainty.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Classical international trade theories, such as the Comparative Advantage Theory and the Heckscher-Ohlin Model, have long provided foundational explanations for global trade patterns. According to the Comparative Advantage Theory, a country's exports are determined by its specialization in producing goods where it holds a relative efficiency edge. Similarly, the Heckscher-Ohlin Model posits that nations export goods that make intensive use of their abundant production factors, such as labor, land, or capital. These

frameworks have historically guided trade policy and firm-level production decisions.

However, in the contemporary geopolitical environment, these models are insufficient to explain the strategic relocation of production in response to trade wars, sanctions, or political alignments (Escalaith, 2022; Nedumpara, 2024). Nearshoring and friendshoring introduce political, strategic, and risk-based criteria that fundamentally reshape global production networks, challenging the predictive power of traditional trade theory.

Krugman's Geography Theory emphasizes that geographic concentration of production fosters efficiency gains and competitive advantages, yet this concentration is increasingly contingent on geopolitical stability and infrastructure quality. Companies are relocating to APEC economies such as Mexico, Vietnam, and Taiwan, drawn by robust industrial clusters and proximity to major markets (Krugman, 1991; Chan, 2024).

While Krugman provides a strong theoretical lens, it underestimates the role of political alignment and trust in determining production site selection under conditions of trade uncertainty. Similarly, Porter's Global Value Chains Theory highlights how production is increasingly distributed across regions to exploit local comparative advantages, including labor, raw materials, and technology. Yet, Porter's framework does not fully account for the strategic recalibration of GVCs induced by trade wars and sanctions (Zeng et al., 2022; Utar et al., 2023).

Nearshoring—relocating production closer to end markets—addresses logistical inefficiencies, reduces transportation costs, and enhances supply chain responsiveness. This approach has gained renewed importance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, global trade wars, and other external shocks (Posta, 2022; Ciuriak, 2023). Beyond operational efficiency, nearshoring can enhance regional economic integration, particularly in trade blocs like the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the European Union (EU). However, its benefits are highly context-dependent: successful nearshoring requires adequate infrastructure, skilled labor, regulatory stability, and governance capacity (Alfaro et al., 2023; Chor, 2024). Importantly, nearshoring does not automatically

guarantee economic resilience; economies with weak institutional frameworks or labor market rigidities may experience limited gains.

Friendshoring, a more recent concept introduced by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, adds a political dimension to nearshoring. Firms prioritize countries that are not only geographically proximate but also politically aligned or strategically trustworthy (Nedumpara, 2024; Basundoro et al., 2023). Friendshoring is increasingly adopted as a risk mitigation strategy, particularly in response to the US–China trade war, sanctions, and global geopolitical volatility. While friendshoring can reduce exposure to political and economic risks, it may introduce economic trade-offs: relocating to politically aligned but higher-cost regions can reduce cost-efficiency, particularly in sectors where traditional comparative advantages remain entrenched in China or other low-cost countries (Mykyta, 2025; Morales, 2025). Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the conceptual criteria differentiating nearshoring and friendshoring.

**Table 1.** Conceptual Criteria Differentiating Nearshoring and Friendshoring

Criterion	Nearshoring (example cases)	Friendshoring (example cases)
<b>Location</b>	Geographical proximity reduces transport costs and delivery times. <i>E.g., Mexico–US integration under USMCA.</i>	Strategic alignment overrides distance. <i>E.g., Malaysia–US semiconductor supply chains during trade war.</i>
<b>Cost</b>	Lower labor and logistics costs enhance competitiveness. <i>E.g., Vietnam attracting firms relocating from China.</i>	Reliability prioritized even at higher costs. <i>E.g., Canada–US energy trade and diversification away from China.</i>
<b>Political Risk</b>	Reduced exposure to geopolitical frictions by staying close to main markets. <i>E.g., Mexico leveraging USMCA.</i>	Shared institutions and alliances mitigate disruption risks. <i>E.g., Malaysia within ASEAN and U.S. partnerships.</i>

**Notes:** This table is based on the conceptual distinctions between nearshoring and friendshoring in recent trade and policy debates. Nearshoring emphasizes geographic and cost-based advantages, while friendshoring prioritizes political alignment and supply chain security, adapted from Posta (2022), Ciuriak (2023), Nedumpara (2024), and Basundoro et al. (2023).

### 3. Literature Review

The US–China trade war (2018–2020) exemplifies how geopolitical conflicts drive strategic relocation in GVCs. Policies such as tariffs and sanctions incentivized firms to explore alternative production sites outside China, including Mexico and Vietnam (Utar et al., 2023; Posta, 2022). Zeng et al. (2022) highlight that sunk costs are higher for firms deeply integrated with Chinese GVCs, demonstrating uneven impacts across sectors and regions. Mexico leveraged its manufacturing base and USMCA integration to capitalize on nearshoring opportunities, while Vietnam benefited from increased US imports as firms diversified supply chains (Alfaro et al., 2023; Chor, 2024). Similarly, China continued to invest in Vietnam and Taiwan, ensuring its indirect participation in US supply chains and highlighting the resilience of strategic FDI flows (Chan, 2024; Lovely, 2024).

While Poilly and Tripier (2025) demonstrate that tariff volatility shocks in the US reduced trade and heightened precautionary savings, thereby transmitting disruptions to partner countries, subsequent studies show that these shocks did not have homogeneous effects across economies. Alessandria et al. (2025) highlight that the initial overreaction of markets reflected unrealistic expectations of a short-lived conflict; once these expectations faded, trade diversification accelerated and nearshoring gained traction. Benguria and Saffie (2024) further reveal that the industrial supplies sector was most affected, but importantly, trade flows were reallocated toward East Asia, with Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam emerging as alternative hubs. Similarly, Freund et al. (2024) emphasize that countries like Mexico became primary beneficiaries of nearshoring due to their geographic proximity to the US.

This pattern suggests that the reallocation of trade and investment was not limited to aggregate flows but reshaped the strategic positioning of specific economies. Vortherms et al. (2024) demonstrate that foreign firms exited tariff-targeted industries in the US and China, relocating to nearby markets, while Hopewell (2025) interprets such moves as part of a broader unilateral strategy by the US to reconfigure supply chains. Flores (2024) extends this argument by showing that Malaysia and Vietnam, leveraged their geopolitical positioning to attract investment and enhance regional cohesion, consolidating their role within

restructured GVCs. Capello et al. (2024) provide further nuance by stressing that relocation decisions toward Mexico or Southeast Asia depend on whether firms prioritize cost efficiency or quality upgrading, underscoring the heterogeneity of nearshoring drivers.

Crucially, Selwyn et al. (2025) argue that Vietnam, Mexico, and Malaysia exemplify the differentiated outcomes of nearshoring: their repositioning within global production networks was facilitated by the U.S.–China trade war, but the magnitude of benefits hinged on domestic reforms and institutional capacity. In this sense, these cases confirm Javorcik et al.'s (2024) view that friendshoring is not merely about geopolitical alignment but also about reducing exposure to vulnerabilities in global value chains. Blažek and Lypianin (2023) remind us that these strategies should ultimately be interpreted as adaptive responses to systemic geopolitical decoupling, rather than as purely economic choices.

On the other hand, studies by Baqae & Malmberg (2025) and Rodríguez-Clare et al. (2025) quantify welfare losses from trade wars, highlighting disproportionate effects on export-dependent economies. However, these analyses often treat the global economy as a static system, neglecting adaptive strategies by firms and governments. Auray et al. (2024) show that discretionary monetary policies can amplify trade war costs, yet fail to consider coordinated policy interventions across trade blocs. Henrika et al. (2025) and Kalu et al. (2025) emphasize rising input costs and inflation but under-theorize industrial upgrading, technological adaptation, and supply chain resilience mechanisms that some economies exploit to mitigate trade disruptions.

Within APEC, trade wars can act as both constraint and catalyst. Ji & Tong (2025) and Iglesia et al. (2025) illustrate Vietnam and Thailand's export redirection successes, yet their findings understate the fragility of these gains, which depend on governance quality, infrastructure readiness, and labor market conditions. Hong & Lee (2025) and Sierra et al. (2025) underscore that temporary export surges—like Brazil's tariff-induced gains—often dissipate due to structural weaknesses. This underscores that nearshoring and friendshoring outcomes are highly contingent on local institutional and infrastructural capacities.

Other studies highlight vulnerabilities introduced by fragmented GVCs. Maihold (2025), Charpin & Cousineau (2024), and Attinasi et al. (2024) emphasize protectionist backlash, policy reversals, and strategic ambiguity as risks that may undermine nearshoring and friendshoring. Mykyta (2025) and Morales (2025) note inflationary consequences and cost escalations associated with shorter supply chains, while Dachs et al. (2025) and Grover & Vézina (2025) show that geography and political alignment drive FDI inflows, yet benefits require strong domestic institutional frameworks. Asnafi & Choiri (2024) and Kumar et al. (2025) argue that APEC's geographic proximity and governance structures support nearshoring, but inter-APEC power asymmetries may constrain smaller economies from fully exploiting these opportunities.

Indeed, strategic industrial policies, including China's "Made in China 2025" initiative, dual circulation strategy, and the Belt and Road Initiative, demonstrate the interplay of domestic policy and international GVC dynamics. These initiatives foster self-reliance, infrastructure development, and new market creation, which interact with friendshoring and nearshoring trends to shape trade flows (Ciuriak, 2023; Basundoro et al., 2023). Importantly, these policies illustrate that GVC restructuring is not merely economic but embedded in broader political and strategic considerations, reinforcing the critical role of institutional quality, governance, and geopolitical alignment in determining which APEC economies benefit from emerging trade patterns.

Indeed, the literature demonstrates that nearshoring and friendshoring present significant, heterogeneous opportunities for APEC economies. However, gains are conditional on institutional quality, governance capacity, infrastructure, sectoral competitiveness, and geopolitical alignment. Existing studies often oversimplify trade war impacts, under-theorize firm-level adaptations, or neglect institutional heterogeneity. This research addresses these gaps by critically evaluating how APEC economies leverage proximity, alliances, and GVC integration to capitalize on nearshoring and friendshoring, situating the analysis within both economic and geopolitical frameworks.

This research hypothesizes that the US-China trade war affects APEC economies differently depending on their GVC integration and geopolitical

alignment. Economies close to either major power, such as Mexico and Vietnam, are expected to benefit from nearshoring, while APEC members perceived as allies of the US or China are likely to gain through friendshoring. The extent of these effects depends on each economy's integration into GVCs, infrastructure, and institutional capacity.

#### 4. Method

This study employs a comprehensive panel data framework, leveraging cross-sectional time-series data for all 21 APEC economies over the period 2013–2022. The ten-year span is strategically subdivided into two sub-periods to capture the differential impact of trade tensions: 2013–2017 represents a relatively stable period prior to the escalation of the US–China trade war, while 2018–2022 corresponds to the heightened trade conflict phase. A dummy variable (TW) is constructed, taking a value of '0' for the pre-conflict period and '1' for the trade war period, enabling a systematic evaluation of the causal impact of the trade war on APEC member exports, distinguishing baseline conditions from periods of geopolitical disruption.

Data are organized in a strongly balanced panel format using Stata 16, where the cross-sectional dimension is defined by the 'economy' variable and the temporal dimension by the 'year' variable. All categorical identifiers for economies were numerically encoded to facilitate estimation procedures. This panel structure allows control for both cross-sectional heterogeneity and temporal dynamics, ensuring that observed effects are not confounded by unobserved country-specific factors or time-varying shocks.

The analysis begins with a detailed descriptive exploration of export values to China and the US. Density plots are used to visualize distributional properties, detect outliers, and evaluate temporal shifts. Summary statistics—including mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and between- and within-group variations—are computed for all economies. Export values are further categorized into thresholds to identify economies demonstrating exceptional

nearshoring or friendshoring performance, providing initial evidence of structural shifts in global value chains.

To quantify the trade war's impact, random effects panel regressions serve as the primary tool, complemented by fixed effects specifications for robustness. The Hausman test is conducted to determine the most appropriate model; results confirm the suitability of random effects estimation. Robust standard errors are employed to correct for heteroskedasticity, ensuring consistent and efficient parameter estimates. The primary models are specified as follows:

**Exports to China:**

$$IM_{it}^{China} = \alpha_i + \beta TW_{it} + \gamma CV_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

**Exports to the US:**

$$IM_{it}^{US} = \alpha_i + \beta TW_{it} + \gamma CV_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

where  $IM_{it}^{China}$  and  $IM_{it}^{US}$  represent exports from economy  $i$  to China and the US in year  $t$ , respectively;  $TW_{it}$  is the trade war dummy;  $CV_{it}$  is a vector of control variables including GDP per capita and population;  $\alpha_i$  captures unobserved economy-specific effects; and  $\varepsilon_{it}$  is the idiosyncratic error term. The coefficient  $\beta$  measures the main impact of the trade war, particularly through nearshoring and friendshoring channels. To capture heterogeneity, four complementary models are estimated for each export destination:

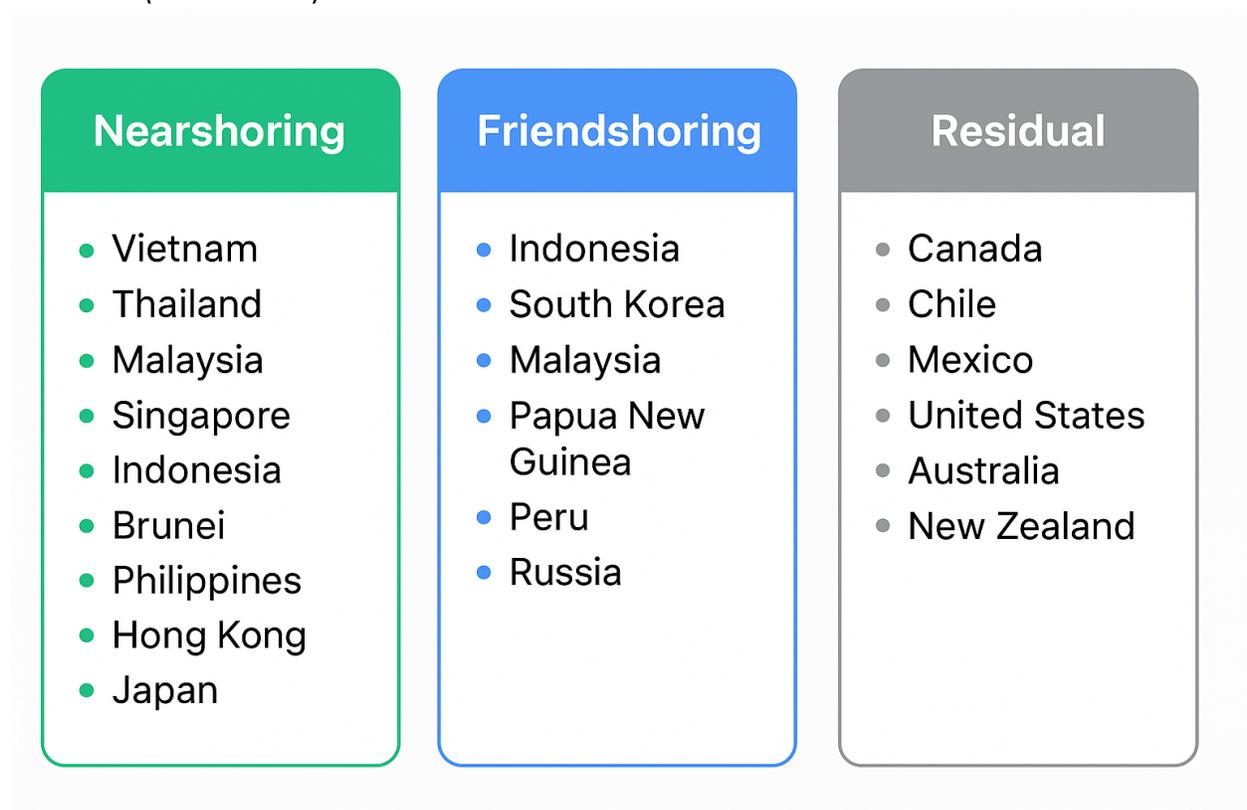
- *All Economies Model*: Includes all 20 exporting economies to the target market.
- *Nearshoring Model*: Economies geographically proximate to the target market. For China, this includes Southeast and East Asian economies and Russia; for the US, Canada and Mexico.
- *Friendshoring Model*: Economies aligned politically or strategically with the target power. For China, selected APEC economies include Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and Russia; for the US,

selected economies include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam.

- *Residual Economies Model*: Economies neither classified as nearshoring nor friendshoring, serving as a control group.

To provide a clear and objective framework for the empirical analysis, Figure 1 and Figure 2 present the classification of APEC economies exporting to China and the US, respectively, according to their trade strategy: nearshoring, friendshoring, or residual.

**Figure 1.** Classification of APEC Economies Exporting to China by Trade Strategy (2013–2022)\*



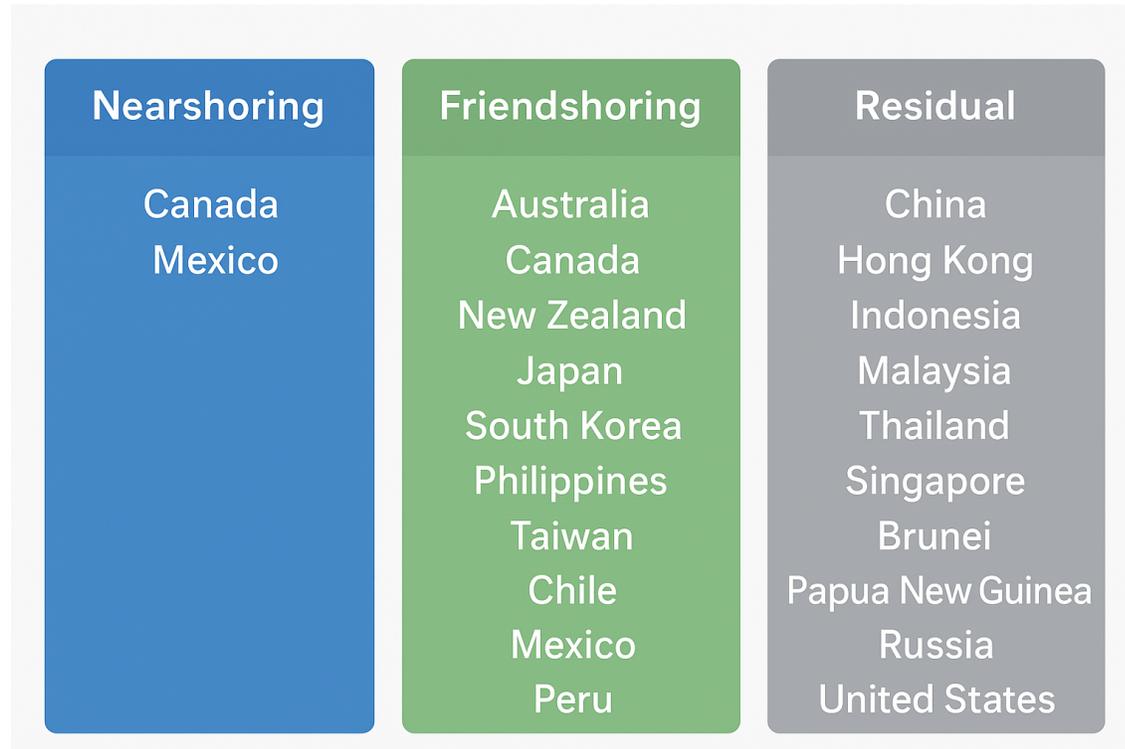
**\*Notes:** This figure categorizes APEC economies exporting to China into nearshoring, friendshoring, and residual groups. Nearshoring economies are geographically proximate to China, friendshoring economies maintain strong strategic or economic ties, and other economies serve as a control group.

*Nearshoring economies are defined based on geographic proximity to China, mainly in East and Southeast Asia, and Russia (Liu & Woo, 2021; ADB, 2020). Friendshoring economies were selected considering strategic alignment, political ties, and participation in Chinese-led initiatives like the Belt and Road (World Bank, 2021; UNCTAD, 2020). Residual economies include those neither geographically proximate nor strategically aligned. This classification provides a transparent framework to analyze trade patterns and the impact of the US–China trade war on APEC exports.*

To provide a clear and objective classification of APEC economies in relation to China, the economies are grouped into three categories: nearshoring, friendshoring, and other/residual economies. Nearshoring economies are defined based on geographic proximity to China, primarily including East and Southeast Asian countries and Russia. These countries—Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Russia—benefit from logistical and trade advantages due to their closeness to China, facilitating shorter supply chains and faster market access.

Friendshoring economies are those that maintain strong strategic, political, or economic relations with China. This group includes Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and Russia. For example, Peru has been integrated into China's Belt and Road Initiative through major infrastructure investments such as the Chancay Port. South Korea and Malaysia have maintained stable diplomatic and economic ties, while Russia and Papua New Guinea have developed closer strategic partnerships with China.

**Figure 2.** Classification of APEC Economies Exporting to the US by Trade Strategy (2013–2022)



**Notes:** Economies are categorized into nearshoring, friendshoring, and residual groups. Nearshoring includes countries geographically close to the US, while friendshoring comprises economies with strategic or political alignment with the US. This classification allows a clear and transparent analysis of export patterns during the US–China trade war. Nearshoring economies are geographically proximate to the US, i.e., Canada and Mexico (US Census Bureau, 2022; OECD, 2021).

Friendshoring economies are identified based on political alignment, democratic systems, free trade agreements with the US, and strategic partnerships (World Bank, 2021; UNCTAD, 2020). Residual economies include APEC members not classified as nearshoring or friendshoring. This classification supports robust analysis of trade patterns amid US–China trade tensions.

To provide a clear and objective framework for analyzing APEC exports amid the US–China trade tensions, economies were classified into nearshoring, friendshoring, and residual groups for each target market. For exports to China, nearshoring economies were defined based on geographic proximity, including Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines), East Asian economies (Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), and Russia (World Bank, 2021; UNCTAD, 2020).

Friendshoring economies were identified according to strategic alignment and investment relationships with China, resulting in Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and Russia being classified as friendshoring, while the remaining economies were assigned to the residual category. Similarly, for exports to the US, nearshoring economies include Canada and Mexico due to their geographic proximity (US Census Bureau, 2022; OECD, 2021). Friendshoring economies were selected based on long-standing political, economic, and strategic ties with the United States, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam.

Random versus fixed effects are compared to ensure model consistency. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are applied, multicollinearity diagnostics conducted, and sensitivity analyses performed by modifying the composition of nearshoring and friendshoring groups. These checks guarantee the reliability of coefficient estimates and support rigorous inference.

The methodological design integrates classical trade theories (comparative advantage, Heckscher-Ohlin) with contemporary concepts in global value chains. Nearshoring and friendshoring are operationalized as empirically testable phenomena, connecting macroeconomic trade data with policy-relevant implications. This approach allows us to examine not only correlations but also the mechanisms through which proximity and strategic alignment influence APEC exports amid the US–China trade war.

## 5. Results

The results are organized in two main sections, reflecting APEC exports to China and to the United States, clearly illustrating the differential impacts of the US-China trade war. For exports to China, nearshoring economies such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Indonesia, along with friendshoring economies like Peru and Russia, experienced significant gains, while less integrated or distant economies showed minimal changes. Descriptive statistics and histograms highlight the concentration of trade among high-performing economies, with the trade war variable confirmed as highly significant in panel regressions for nearshoring and friendshoring groups.

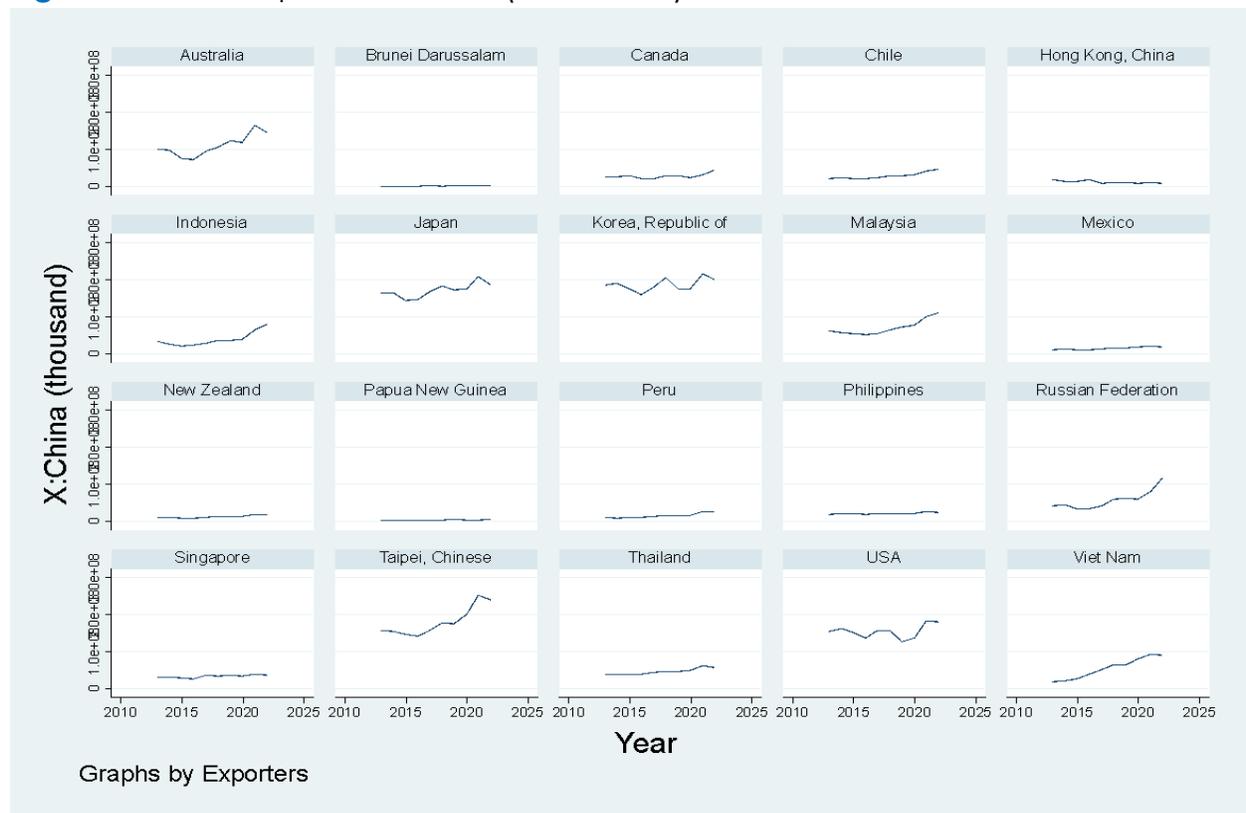
Similarly, exports to the US reveal robust growth for nearshoring partners, Canada and Mexico, and for friendshoring economies including Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, whereas other economies benefited little. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the trade war's effects are heterogeneous but systematic: proximity to major markets, strategic alignment, and integration into global value chains determine which economies capture trade gains. This two-part structure clarifies the selective nature of trade diversion and provides a coherent framework for understanding nearshoring and friendshoring dynamics in APEC.

### 5.1. APEC Exports to China

Since the onset of the trade war, several APEC economies have shown a marked increase in exports to China, particularly Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan, and Vietnam (see Figure 3). These trends suggest emerging nearshoring or friendshoring opportunities linked to China's changing trade dynamics. Although geographically close to China, near economies like Thailand and the Philippines experienced minimal export gains, highlighting that proximity alone does not guarantee nearshoring benefits, which also depend on integration into GVCs and sectoral specialization.

In contrast, Vietnam shows substantial export growth, while Indonesia and Malaysia display moderate increases. Taiwan stands out with the highest export growth, followed by Russia. For economies more distant from China, Australia has experienced a consistent rise in exports that predates the trade war but intensified thereafter. Canada, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea show minimal changes, whereas the US, Chile, Mexico, and Peru display slight upward trends.

**Figure 3.** APEC exports to China (2013–2022)



**Notes:** Trends in APEC exports to China, showing marked increases in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan, and Vietnam, contrasted with more stable patterns in other economies.

Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

### 5.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Average exports to China among the 20 APEC economies were USD 60.7 billion, with a standard deviation of USD 63 billion, reflecting substantial heterogeneity in trade performance. Brunei recorded the minimum export value of USD 89,804 in 2013, indicative of its small economic size and limited integration into GVCs, while Taiwan reached the maximum export value of USD 250 billion in 2021, highlighting its strong manufacturing base and extensive trade networks.

The trade war variable is coded as 0 for the pre-trade war period (2013–2017) and 1 for the trade war years (2018–2022), capturing the temporal effect of this policy shock on exports. The average population of exporting economies is 75.5 million, with a wide dispersion across countries, from 411,702 in Brunei to 333 million in the United States, illustrating the role of “gravity” in trade patterns. Similarly, GDP per capita averages USD 26,179, ranging from USD 2,333 in Papua New Guinea to USD 82,808 in Singapore, reflecting the differences in economic capacity to engage in international trade and influencing the scale and direction of export flows.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of exports to China and related variable, 2013–2022\*

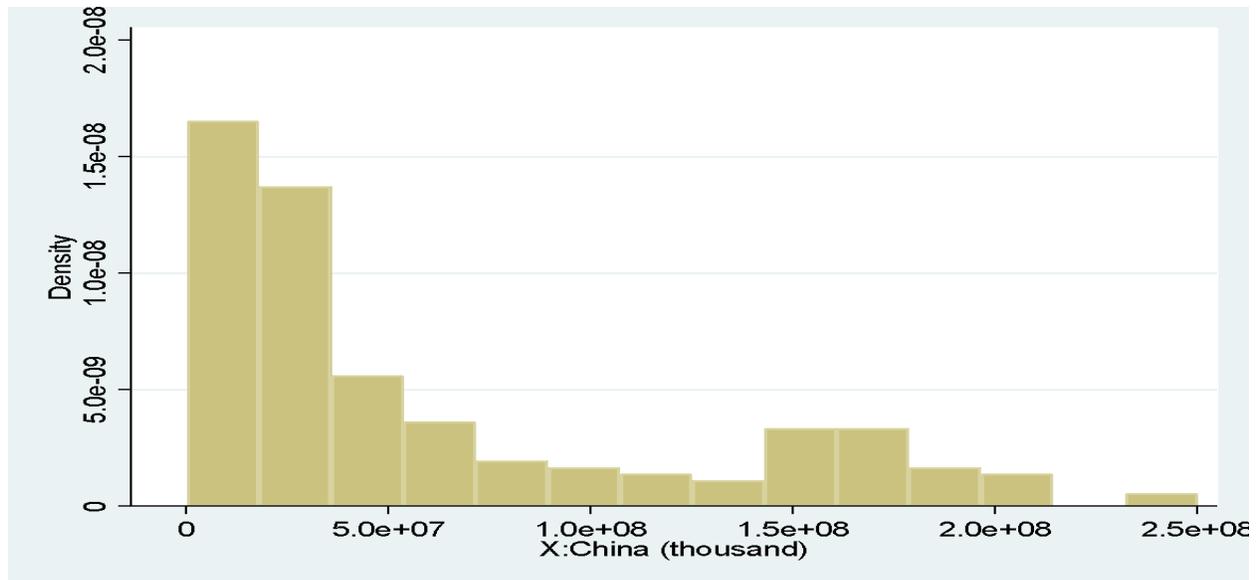
Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Observations
Exports to China	60.7e+06	63.1e+06	89 804	250e+06	200
between		62.4e+0.6	5.604	185e+06	20
within		16.1e+06	6.80275	132e+06	10
Trade war	0.5	0.5012547	0	1	200
between		0	0.5	0.5	20
within		0.5012547	0	1	10
Population	75.5e+06	86.6e+06	411702	333e+06	199
between		88.4e+06	431448.7	326e+06	20
within		2614377	63.5e+06	85.7e+06	9.95
GDP per capita	26 179	21 373	2 333	82 808	200
between		21 554	2 602	64 294	20
within		3 636	17 373	44 693	10

**\*Notes:** The data presented in table 2 is a summary of the results of the analyses of key variables (exports, trade war dummy, population, and GDP per capita), including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values across APEC economies.

Table reports mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and number of observations for the variables used in the empirical analysis. Between- and within-panel variation values are omitted for clarity but available upon request. Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Databas (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

The histogram of exports shows a positively skewed distribution, with most countries exporting less than USD 50 billion, indicating that a majority of APEC economies maintain relatively modest trade volumes with China. Mid-range exporters, between USD 50 and 100 billion, include Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand, reflecting the growing role of Southeast Asian economies in regional supply chains.

The largest exporters—Australia, Japan, Russia, the US, and Taiwan—dominate the higher export ranges, highlighting the concentration of trade among economies with advanced manufacturing capabilities, strong integration into GVCs, and strategic geographic or economic ties to China. In particular, the substantial export growth of Taiwan and other East Asian economies underscores the nearshoring effect, where geographically proximate countries have benefited disproportionately from shifts in trade patterns resulting from the US–China trade war (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Distribution of APEC exports to China

**Notes:** Most APEC economies export less than USD 50 billion, while a few large exporters—Australia, Japan, Russia, the U.S., and Taiwan—dominate higher trade levels.

Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

### 5.1.2 Trade War Effects

A random-effects panel regression was employed to evaluate the impact of the US–China trade war on APEC economies' exports, with robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity. The trade war variable is highly significant at the one per cent level across all models, confirming its substantial effect on trade flows. Notably, nearshoring economies—such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Indonesia—exhibit higher coefficients compared to friendshoring economies (Indonesia, Peru, Russia), indicating that geographic proximity to China and deeper integration into global value chains amplify the

benefits of trade disruptions. Economies classified as neither nearshoring nor friendshoring show no statistically significant impact, suggesting that the trade war's positive effects are concentrated among economies with strong trade linkages or strategic positioning (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Effect of the trade war on exports to China by economy type

Exports to China	All APEC economies	Nearshoring economies	Friendshoring economies	Others economies
War trade	1.4e+07*** (1.9+06)	1.9e+07*** (4.70e+06)	1.6e+07*** (524)	0.96e+07 (7.18e+05)
Population	0.287** (0.130)	423.5 (643.4)	225.3 (584.6)	1001*** (249)
GDP per capita	6.9e+02* (3.9+02)	0.155 (0.196)	0.277* (0.134)	0.240** (0.099)
Constant	1.8e+07 (1.3+07)	4.0e+07* (2.3e+07)	2.70e+07 (3.03e+07)	-9.1e+06 (1.4e+07)

**Notes:** The trade war significantly boosted exports from nearshoring and friendshoring economies, while the effect on other economies was weaker. The table reports regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance levels:  $p < 0.1$  (.),  $p < 0.05$  (.),  $p < 0.01$  (.). Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

Indeed, the regression results and observed export patterns demonstrate that the trade war's impact is heterogeneous: economies closely linked to global value chains or strategically positioned geographically experience the largest gains, while less integrated or distant economies see limited or no benefit. This emphasizes the importance of both proximity and GVC participation in determining trade war outcomes for APEC economies. While internal factors such as domestic reforms or FDI inflows may contribute, the observed export growth for Vietnam and Mexico during 2018–2022 is primarily associated with nearshoring and

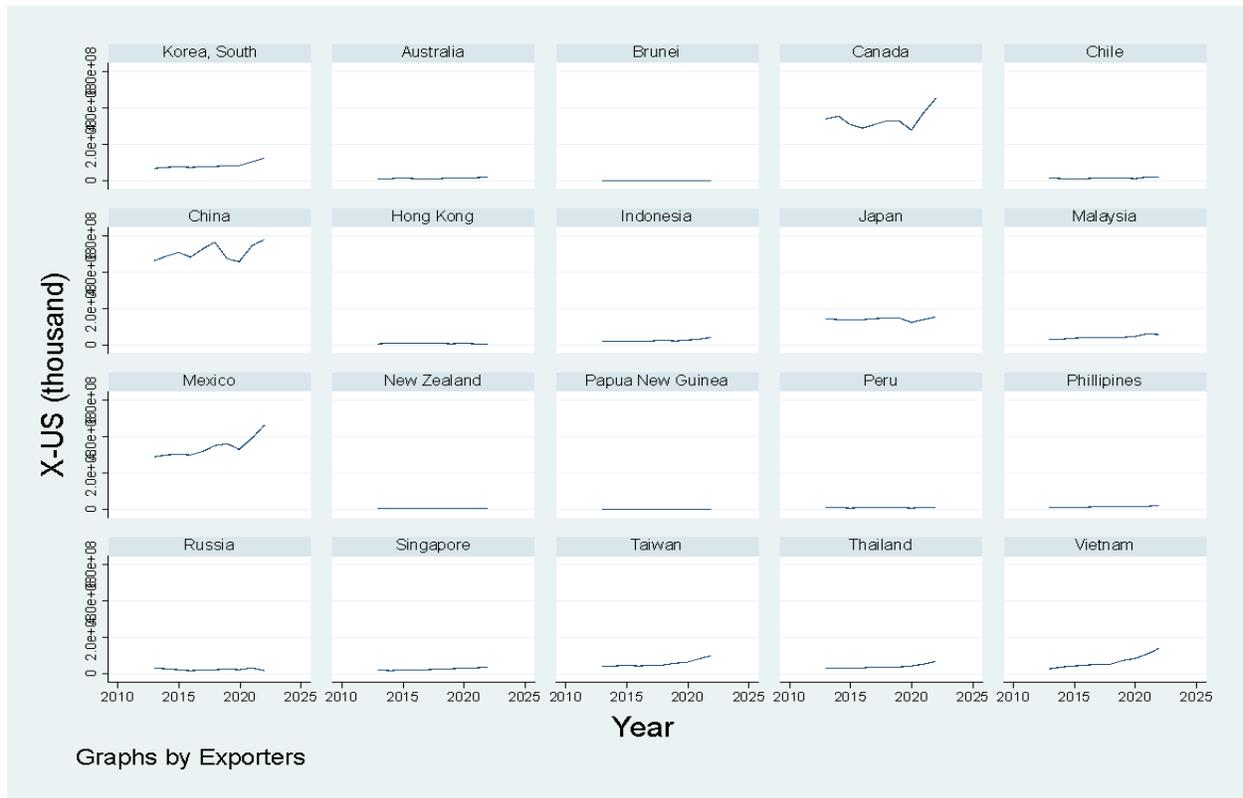
friendshoring dynamics, as reflected in panel regression coefficients.

## **5.2 APEC Exports to the United States**

Exports to the US illustrate the heterogeneous effects of the trade war. China remains the largest exporter, with a sharp decline in 2019–2020 followed by a strong rebound in 2021–2022. Nearshoring economies, particularly Mexico and Canada, show heightened volatility but substantial gains, reflecting their strategic proximity to the US. Friendshoring economies, including Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, display steady export growth, leveraging comparative advantages in high-tech sectors and integration into GVCs.

In contrast, less integrated or resource-based economies, such as Chile and Peru, show limited export growth, while Russia experiences declines due to geopolitical sanctions. Even politically aligned countries like Australia and New Zealand exhibit only modest export increases, and Canada shows strong but volatile gains, indicating that friendshoring benefits are influenced not just by political alignment but also by sectoral composition, pre-existing trade linkages, and capacity to absorb nearshoring or friendshoring inflows. These patterns demonstrate that geographic proximity, sectoral specialization, and integration into global value chains jointly determine which APEC economies capture trade war gains (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** APEC exports to the U.S. (2013–2022)



**Notes:** Exports from Mexico, Canada, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan rose notably during the trade war, while China's exports fell sharply in 2019–2020 but rebounded afterward.

Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

### 5.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Average exports from APEC economies to the US amount to USD 85.8 billion, with a standard deviation of USD 138 billion, indicating substantial variation across countries. This average is notably higher than exports to China, reflecting the US' position as the largest single export market for many economies in the region.

Among the sample, Brunei recorded the lowest export value at USD 13.9 million, underscoring its limited integration into global value chains, while China dominates with exports totaling USD 576 billion, highlighting its vital role in trade flows.

The average population of exporting economies stands at 129 million, with GDP per capita averaging USD 23,551, suggesting that both large and economically developed countries contribute disproportionately to US-bound trade. These figures provide an important context for understanding which economies are poised to benefit from nearshoring or friendshoring dynamics, given their market size, economic capacity, and existing trade linkages (Tsee able 4).

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of exports to the US and related variables, 2013–2022

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Observations
Exports to the US	85.8e+06	138e+06	13 991	576e+06	200
between		140e+0.6	45 476	506e+06	20
within		20.8e+06	30.2e+06	208e+06	10
Trade war	0.5	0.5012547	0	1	200
between		0	0.5	0.5	20
within		0.5012547	0	1	10
Population	129e+06	299e+06	411 702	1 412e+06	199
between		305e+06	431 448.7	1 390e+06	20
within		4459878	97.9e+06	147e+06	9.95
GDP per capita	23 551	19 920	2 333	82 808	200
between		20 099	2 602	64 294	20
within		3 331	14 903	42 065	10

**Notes:** Table 4 presents the summary of the results on the analyses of the key variables (exports, trade war dummy, population, and GDP per capita), including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values across APEC economies.

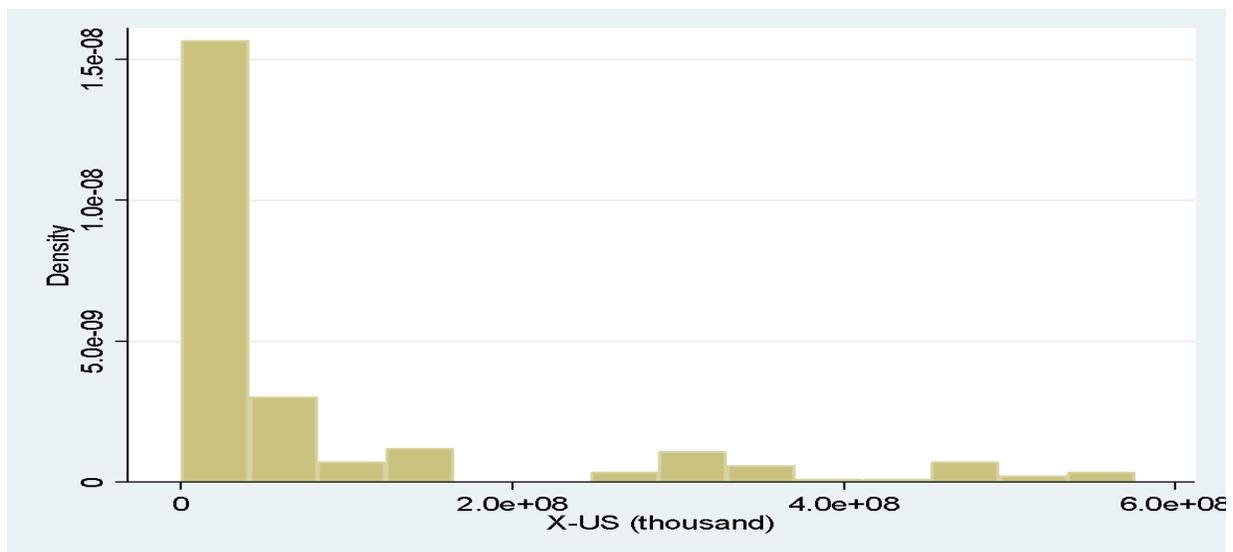
The report also includes the mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and number of observations for the variables used in the empirical analysis. Between- and within-panel variation values are omitted for clarity but available upon request. Data are definitive and

prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024): <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

The histograms of exports to the US reveal a positively skewed distribution, with the majority of APEC economies clustered in the lower range of zero to USD 200 billion. China, Canada, and Mexico emerge as the largest exporters, reflecting their established trade capacities and deep integration into GVCs. Smaller economies, including Brunei, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand, remain in the lower end of the distribution, indicating limited export volumes.

Vietnam’s export performance is particularly remarkable, increasing from USD 25.9 billion in 2013 to USD 135.9 billion in 2022, highlighting its rapid integration into US-bound trade networks and its role as a key friendshoring partner. Other notable increases are observed for Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, further illustrating the concentration of export growth among strategically aligned and economically capable economies within the APEC region (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Distribution of APEC exports to the US



**Notes:** Exports are highly concentrated, with China, Canada, and Mexico dominating, while Vietnam shows the fastest growth as a key friendshoring partner.

Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024): <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

### 5.2.2 Trade War Effects

The regression analysis presented in Table 5 robustly demonstrates the differential effects of the US-China trade war across APEC economies. Model 1, which examines all 20 APEC economies, reveals that the trade war variable is statistically significant at the five per cent level, confirming a general positive impact on exports to the US since 2018. Population also emerges as a significant factor, suggesting that larger economies are better positioned to leverage labor and scale advantages within GVCs. While GDP per capita is not significant in this aggregated model, the overall results underscore that economies integrated into GVCs have been the primary beneficiaries of the trade disruption.

**Table 5.** Effect of the trade war on exports to the US by economy type

Exports to China	All APEC economies	Nearshoring economies	Friendshoring economies	Others economies
War trade	1.1e+07** (460)	4.3e+07*** (4e+06)	0.9e+07** (4.1e+06)	0.4e+07 (2.6e+06)
Population	0.386*** (0.030)	3.788*** (1.4e+06)	2.64* (1.55)	0.371*** (0.015)
GDP per capita	1162.4 (923.3)	8657*** (3181)	2780 (1992)	563** (261)
Constant	319e+04 (1.8e+07)	-2.3e+08 (2.1e+08)	-1.38e+08 (8.78e+07)	-2.31e+07 (1.67e+07)

**Notes:** Nearshoring economies experienced the strongest trade gains, while effects on other groups were modest or insignificant.

The report presents the regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance levels:  $p < 0.1$  (\*),  $p < 0.05$  (\*\*),  $p < 0.01$  (\*\*\*). Data are definitive and prepared with ITC calculations based on US Census Bureau statistics since January 2015, obtained from UN Comtrade Database (2024) <<https://comtradeplus.un.org>>.

Focusing on nearshoring economies in Model 2 (Canada and Mexico), the trade war variable achieves significance at the one per cent level, reflecting strong export growth to the US. These results highlight that geographic proximity amplifies the benefits of supply chain realignments, with both population and GDP per capita contributing positively to export performance. Despite the small sample size, this model clearly indicates that nearshoring economies have captured substantial trade opportunities created by tariff-driven disruptions, validating the hypothesis that proximity and integration into GVCs enhance trade resilience. While domestic reforms or FDI inflows may also play a role, the observed export growth for Mexico during 2018–2022 is primarily associated with nearshoring dynamics, as confirmed by panel regression coefficients.

In Model 3, encompassing friendshoring economies (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam), the trade war effect remains significant at the five per cent level. Exports from these countries to the U.S. have increased steadily, reflecting the strategic advantage of politically and economically aligned partners in a context of global trade tensions. Conversely, Model 4, which includes economies neither nearshoring nor friendshoring (e.g., Brunei, Papua New Guinea, China, Russia), shows no significant trade war effect, reinforcing the conclusion that gains from the US–China trade conflict are concentrated among economies with strong GVC linkages or strategic alignment. Collectively, these results provide compelling evidence that the trade war's impact is both selective and economically meaningful, offering valuable insights for policymakers and international trade strategists.

## 6. Discussions

The findings of this research diverge from those of Cerdeiro et al. (2023), who analyzed both direct and indirect benefits of China's economic rise, particularly for Asian economies integrated into GVCs, and highlighted the constraints imposed by US tariffs starting in 2018. Similarly, our study examines Asian economies such as Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, and Indonesia, which have

benefited from access to both the US and Chinese markets. Our results indicate that the most integrated economies, such as Taiwan and Vietnam, are the greatest beneficiaries.

There are notable parallels with Freund et al. (2023), who observed that tariffs on Chinese technological products led to increased US exports from economies with comparative advantages in these sectors, including Taiwan and South Korea, and emphasized the advantages for countries with large populations. However, unlike Freund et al., who argue that low-GDP-per-capita countries experience export gains due to lower labor costs, our findings reveal a positive correlation between higher GDP per capita and increased exports, consistent with the gravity model of international trade.

Wai-chung Yeung et al. (2023) discuss how the rise of fables production has shifted international trade patterns. Our analysis, however, highlights more pronounced export growth from economies such as Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Vietnam to China, and from South Korea, Canada, Mexico, and Vietnam to the US, emphasizing the role of Chinese infrastructure investments, particularly in Mexico, rather than solely fables production. Concerning China's "Made in China 2025" plan, our results show significant increases in exports to China from Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Australia, and New Zealand.

Alfaro et al. (2023) report that Mexico's exports grew while China's exports to the U.S. declined as a result of the trade war. Our research confirms this trend only at the onset of the conflict; more recently, China's exports to the U.S. have rebounded. While both studies recognize Vietnam's strong export performance, our results also highlight substantial gains for Taiwan, which has increased exports to both major markets.

The introduction of China's "dual circulation" doctrine, aimed at self-sufficiency (China, 2023), appears contradicted by the rise in imports from Southeast Asia, East Asia, Oceania, Latin America, and Russia, as well as the continued growth of Chinese exports to the US. Our findings suggest that infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, such as the Chancay Port in Peru, will further enhance exports from participating economies.

Utar et al. (2023) propose a substitution relationship between Mexican and Chinese exports to the US. The current study corroborates on this idea at the start of the trade war, observing reductions in Chinese exports alongside increases from Mexico. However, unlike Utar et al., it did not find evidence of strengthened trade between Mexico and China.

Posta (2022) focuses on a smaller subset of Southeast Asian economies as cost-effective alternatives for relocating manufacturing from China. By contrast, our study examines 21 economies across multiple regions, confirming broader trends in nearshoring and friendshoring, with smaller economies increasing exports to major markets. Escaith (2022) emphasizes that FDI and export benefits are uneven due to weak global institutions, a pattern reflected in our findings, where Vietnam, Mexico, Taiwan, Indonesia, and South Korea gained the most, while Brunei, Chile, Papua New Guinea, and Peru gained less due to limited GVC integration.

Chor (2024) identifies Mexico and Vietnam as primary beneficiaries of nearshoring and friendshoring using detailed HS4-digit data and satellite imagery. While the findings in this study corroborates that Vietnam and Mexico benefits more from nearshoring and friendshoring, it was found out that Vietnam's gains are broader, encompassing both US and Chinese markets, whereas Mexico's expansion is largely toward the US. Coutino (2024) discusses triangular trade between China, Mexico, and the US, noting indirect trade flows. The results similarly indicate periods of simultaneous increases in exports from China and Mexico to the US, highlighting the complex dynamics of rerouted trade. Iyoha et al. (2004) identify Vietnam as a transit point for Chinese exports to the US, observing a positive correlation between US tariffs on China and re-exported products. Although the study did not quantify rerouted products, it observed similar increases in Vietnamese exports, reflecting broader economic benefits.

The findings, moreover, support Chan (2024), showing that Taiwan and Vietnam's integration with China in GVCs has driven export growth, with Taiwan replacing some Chinese products in the US market. Consistent with Basundoro et al. (2023), firm relocation from China to Southeast and South Asia, aided by low transport costs and incentives, underlies Indonesia and Vietnam's increased

exports to both markets. Furthermore, Gopinath et al. (2024) noted a fragmentation of globalization into US- and China-centered blocs, it was observed that APEC economies maintain strong trade flows with both, with countries like Australia and New Zealand increasing exports to China, reflecting economic pragmatism over political alignment.

While Vietnam and Mexico experienced notable export growth during 2018–2022, our analysis indicates that this was primarily linked to nearshoring and friendshoring dynamics. Nevertheless, due to data limitations—lack of disaggregated sectoral trade, FDI, or domestic reform indicators—the role of internal factors, or gains, concentrated in manufacturing, agriculture, or resource-based products cannot be fully determined or assessed. Future studies incorporating detailed sectoral and investment data could clarify both the drivers of export growth and the distribution of benefits across industries.

Future research should address the current limitations by incorporating disaggregated sectoral trade data, as well as information on domestic reforms and foreign direct investment. Such analyses would allow a more precise assessment of how different industries and internal policies influence export performance, and would clarify the relative roles of nearshoring, friendshoring, and domestic factors in shaping trade outcomes across APEC economies.

## 7. Conclusions

The main focus of this research is the ongoing shifts in international trade as a result of the trade war between the US and China. These shifts have benefitted certain APEC economies closely linked to these two major powers, particularly Vietnam, Mexico, Taiwan, and Indonesia, which have shown substantial growth in exports and FDI. Nearshoring and friendshoring trends are evident, with economies integrated into GVCs and strategically positioned geographically gaining the most. Exports to China increased notably for Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, and Australia, while exports to the US were strongest among nearshoring partners such as Canada and Mexico. In contrast, economies with

limited integration into GVCs, including Brunei, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and Chile, experienced smaller gains, largely due to reliance on raw materials.

These findings underscore the need for differentiated policies tailored to each type of economy. Developing APEC economies, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico, should expand manufacturing capacities in sectors where they hold comparative advantages, including electronics, machinery, and processed foods. Investments in ports, logistics corridors, and industrial zones can facilitate trade flows with both China and the US, while targeted tax incentives can attract FDI and strengthen export-oriented production.

Small or neutral economies, such as Brunei, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand, would benefit from creating specialized industrial zones focused on niche exports, offering regulatory simplifications to attract FDI, and promoting regional partnerships that allow partial integration into GVCs despite smaller domestic markets.

Resource-exporting economies, including Peru and Chile, should focus on value addition in primary sectors by establishing manufacturing and logistics hubs, encouraging investment in processing industries, and pursuing trade agreements that facilitate the export of higher-value goods. Such strategies would reduce dependence on raw material exports and enhance competitiveness in global markets.

Finally, the analysis confirms that friendshoring is durable and stable: regression results show that Vietnam and other allied economies consistently increase exports to strategic partners even during the US–China trade war, indicating that these patterns are driven by long-term strategic and political factors rather than temporary shocks.

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## Notes

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## Mediating Power: Media Frames and the Representation of China–Central Asia Relations in Kyrgyzstan

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### Abstract

The study aims to address Sino-Central Asian political and diplomatic cooperation through the prism of quantitative analysis of information presented in the newspaper Evening Bishkek (Вечерний Бишкек). The main methods used were statistical, which was employed to address various indicators of media consumption in the region, and framing analysis, which formulated the specifics of information presentation in Kyrgyz media resources. The study determined that after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent republics, the situation on the continent began to change and transform rapidly. New mechanisms and

vectors of interaction, communications and scenarios for strengthening interstate contacts began to emerge. However, many aspects have remained unchanged, such as the cooperation between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Central Asian countries. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan continued to strengthen cooperation in their newly independent status, expanding the areas of mutually beneficial relations. At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the mass media began to play a key role in shaping the information agenda. The newspaper Evening Bishkek, which is one of the most popular news sources for Kyrgyz residents, has a diverse approach to covering the specifics of China's cooperation with the countries of the region. The results of the analysis of the information on the issue under study for the first six months of 2023 show that this publication presents news in a very diverse way, with most of it devoted to political, diplomatic and military aspects of cooperation. The study results can be used as a practical basis for developing strategies and roadmaps for shaping foreign policy.

**Keywords:** *International Cooperation, Multilateral Projects, Information Agenda, News Reports, Interaction Strategies*

## 1. Introduction

Political cooperation and diplomatic contacts are the fundamental principles of developing harmonious interstate relations, and this factor became especially relevant at the end of the twentieth century, during the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the creation of new republics on its territory. In the first decades of the 21st century, the mass media was central in shaping the necessary conditions for the processes of state formation and strengthening international relations, not only transforming the agenda but also influencing public opinion. The study of international cooperation and the reflection of its results in media resources is a key and highly relevant issue for discussion at all levels of national and international governance. The way the most popular media outlets present the situation in the political and diplomatic arena determines not only the future of these relations but also the development of states in general.

Addressing the dynamics of the development of interstate contacts at all levels in the vast majority of countries, as well as the presence of many difficulties, obstacles and hidden threats that occur in connection with the formation of transparent and trusting relations between countries, the issues of correct information policy regarding the results of international events are highly important in the third millennium. The responsibility for the news agenda lies entirely with the media, which, with the support of responsible government officials and by carefully monitoring and analysing the situation, must adequately and professionally convey the essence and meaning of foreign policy events. This issue is especially relevant for Central Asia, a region that is at the intersection of the strategic interests of many of the world's leading countries, and the activities of media resources there should be honest, free and open to criticism. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully consider the specifics of the news broadcasting of a local information source to analyse its activities and principles of content creation in the field of political and diplomatic relations.

The initial half of 2023 was characterized by a multifaceted global economic landscape, with trade and investment activity witnessing moderate development. According to the WTO, world merchandise trade volume declined by 1.2 per cent in 2023, although commercial services trade increased by 9 per cent (World Trade Organization, 2024). Geopolitical concerns, particularly the conflict in Ukraine, and increasing global protectionism have affected this sluggish growth. Notwithstanding the global recession, commerce between China and Central Asian nations has shown significant expansion. During the initial half of 2023, China's exports to Central Asia totalled roughly \$26.4 billion, while imports approached almost USD13.5 billion (Burke, 2023). This increase signifies a fortifying economic partnership between China and Central Asia. The initial half of 2023 offers a distinctive and pertinent timeframe for investigation concerning commerce and investment between China and Central Asia. The divergent trends – global trade stagnation and regional growth – provide significant insights into how particular geopolitical and economic links may affect trade patterns, even in the face of overarching economic difficulties.

According to Paramonov (2023), the globalisation context for the development of cooperation between Central Asian countries and major international players, primarily the People's Republic of China (PRC), lies in the formation of a well-functioning and strictly controlled infrastructure of political, economic and military interaction on the continent. Chinese strategy of expanding influence in the West includes, in addition to direct influence on European states, an indirect “offensive” through Central Asian countries, and according to Tabynbayev et al. (2023), Kyrgyzstan is one of the key players among these countries. China's public diplomacy, which is characterised by “soft” influence with a strong cultural dimension, according to Burcu and Boni (2022), indicates Beijing's intentions to be present in all spheres of another state's life, and this is especially true for the national information policy concerning China. At the same time, there was no in-depth analysis of China's foreign policy in Central Asia in comparison with similar activities of other states, such as Russia and the United States.

Framing analysis as a method of identifying specific features and peculiarities of material presentation in textual data sets is most often applied in the study of news reports, which, according to the findings of Obi et al. (2021), is quite effective and practical, especially when considering a relatively short period. To create an ideologically “correct” information message, many countries utilise the power of the media by establishing good and mutually beneficial relationships with them and according to Qi (2023), in the third millennium, social media and mobile applications have become a tool for shaping public sentiment. However, the works of these experts did not address the situation of the local population's disagreement with some aspects of Chinese expansion.

The analysis of cooperation between Central Asian states in the sphere of interstate and interagency cooperation is best done by studying news reports in the most widely circulated information resources, among which local sources play a major role in the formation of a particular image of the partner country, which Dadakhonov (2024) called a key advantage over foreign media. The media landscape of Kyrgyzstan is a dynamic and flexible system that strives to adapt to global challenges and follow global trends. According to Toralieva and

Dragomir (2019), traditional print media are the most prominent in the field of information and news agenda in the context of cooperation of the state as an individual unit and within the region, whilst according to Alymbaeva and Alimakhunov (2021) those are digital resources and materials, whereas according to Duishonbaeva et al. (2021) use mobile and online applications. However, the aspect of combining these tools in political and diplomatic information activities was not addressed.

The study aims to examine the specifics of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries by analysing the specifics of the presentation of information on this issue in the media, namely of the newspaper Evening Bishkek.

The objectives of the study were to form a general idea of the quality of cooperation between China and Central Asian states; summarise global positive trends and negative aspects of China-Kyrgyzstan cooperation; analyse the specifics and create a holistic picture of the quality and tone of content in the Kyrgyz media on China's cooperation with the countries of the region, in particular, on the example of the electronic publication Evening Bishkek.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

During this study, quantitative data was presented through the analysis of many specific features of the topic under consideration, as well as by selecting data according to specified criteria, which ultimately formed the sample of the research paper. To determine the reasons for the emergence of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, the main trends and dynamics of cooperation between these states were considered—both within the framework of bilateral interaction and based on various projects (Chinese megaprojects are back in fashion in the poorest countries of Central Asia (Ricklton, 2024), China and Central Asia paint a new picture of the future of international relations: global Times editorial (China, Central Asia..., 2024) based on the Central Asia platform. During preparation for this study, the purpose, the subject of the work, the main stages of its development, the factors influencing the dynamics of processes

within its boundaries, as well as the initial data for evaluation were determined, the period was set, and a specific sample was formed as preliminary material.

Based on the quantitative indicators obtained, the intensity and frequency of use of certain keywords in different periods, as well as in the overall period under study, were analysed. Practical recommendations were formulated and presented – both for news content developers and responsible government agencies – accounting for the developments in the sector and increasing the intensity of joint activities between the media and the state. As the main scientific approach of this work, a specific mechanism of framework evaluation of text arrays was used to identify the most striking features and descriptions. In the context of the framework analysis of text arrays, there are 7 stages of framing analysis of news information presented in the media (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Stages of the framing analysis of news items presented in the media

Stage	Basic principle	Correspondence in the study
1	Select a specific source of information (electronic publication, print media resource, social media channel, or group)	The electronic resource selected is the newspaper Evening Bishkek
2	Determine the time frame – the specific period that will be considered in the research paper	The timeframe of the study has been determined – January-June 2023
3	Sample – a certain part, volume, or number of units that make up the general object of research	The sample is textual materials only
4	Outline the unit of research – the keyword/phrase or keywords/phrases to be searched	The research units are outlined: “China”, “People’s Republic of China”, “PRC”, “Kyrgyzstan”, “Kazakhstan”, “Uzbekistan”, “Tajikistan”, “Turkmenistan”, “Central Asia” and their derivatives
5	Define the criteria for the analysis – for example, positive, negative, or neutral effect, qualitative and quantitative changes, total amount, percentage, etc.	The criteria for analysis are outlined: number of mentions of keywords (in headlines and context – if not mentioned in the headlines), area/direction of the news item, and description of the news (positive, negative, neutral).
6	Conduct a semantic analysis of the test arrays – examine the headings, subheadings, and main text for linguistic errors, incorrect word combinations, etc. (qualitative analysis)	Not performed, as the purpose of the study is quantitative analysis
7	Summarise news data – identify the scope of the data set in terms of novelty, relevance to the consumer (qualitative analysis).	Not performed, as the purpose of the study is quantitative analysis.

The following materials were also selected, analysed and used: legal acts (Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 106 “On Television and Radio Broadcasting” (2008), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 247 “On the Public Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic” (2011), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 33 “On the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic” (2022)). The official documents of international organisations and institutions (Central Asia Media..., 2018); statistical arrays (Population growth (annual percentage)–Europe and Central Asia, World Bank (2023), World Press Freedom Index (2024)), China reports robust trade growth with Central Asian states (2024) were reviewed. In addition, information and reference data were analysed (Muratbekova, 2023; Ricklton, 2024). The study examines the period from January to June 2023, which might not adequately represent long-term trends or frame changes that could happen because of big political events, diplomatic progress, or changing foreign policy goals.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 International relations and information resources in the 21st century**

The collapse of the USSR and the subsequent transformation processes on the continent had a serious impact on all states without exception. However, the most intense impact was felt by the young independent republics, namely the countries of Central Asia, where interstate relations were among the strongest among all the members of the Union. Since the Central Asian financial, socio-economic, and general well-being were very high and confident during their existence within the USSR, to minimise the risks of large losses, the leaders of these countries began to look for ways to maintain balance in the international arena, establishing new ties and strengthening existing ones (Haerpfer and Kizilova, 2020; Nicolai, 2023). The latter includes the region's long-standing cooperation with China, which is characterised by a variety of directions, uneven intensity, and dynamic changes depending on the state.

An unprecedented increase in the popularity of the media at the beginning of the third millennium was observed in the context of obtaining new data, news, and reports on certain events in the country, region and the world (Nicolai, 2023). New information and communication tools (the Internet, social media, mobile applications, etc.) allow people to find the content they need instantly and consume it without any intermediaries. For this reason, as well as the growing influence of the media on the formation of the news agenda in a particular state, such phenomena as infringement of journalists' rights, excessive censorship, or, conversely, propaganda (in favour of the ruling party) have become widespread. Freedom of speech and thought, as well as minimal obstacles to the activities of reporters, are signs of a democratic society, which, along with other factors (economic growth, political systems, etc.), create conditions for the civilisational development of each state (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Top countries in terms of press freedom (according to the Press Freedom Index) for 2013, 2018, 2020, 2023, and 2024

Country	Place in the ranking				
	2024 (total score*)	2023	2020	2018	2013
Norway	1 (91.89)	1 (95.18)	1 (92.16)	1 (92.37)	3 (93.48)
Denmark	2 (89.6)	3 (89.48)	3 (91.87)	9 (86.01)	6 (92.92)
Sweden	3 (88.32)	4 (88.15)	4 (90.75)	2 (91.69)	10 (90.77)
Netherlands	4 (87.73)	6 (87)	5 (90.04)	3 (89.99)	2 (93.52)
Finland	5 (86.56)	5 (87.94)	2 (92.07)	4 (89.74)	1 (93.62)
Estonia	6 (86.44)	8 (85.31)	14 (87.39)	12 (85.92)	11 (90.74)
Portugal	7 (85.9)	9 (84.6)	10 (88.17)	14 (85.83)	28 (83.25)
Ireland	8 (85.59)	2 (89.91)	13 (87.4)	16 (85.41)	15 (89.94)
Switzerland	9 (84.01)	12 (84.4)	8 (89.38)	5 (88.73)	14 (90.06)
Germany	10 (83.84)	21 (81.91)	11 (87.84)	15 (85.61)	17 (89.76)
Kyrgyzstan	120 (49.11)	122 (49.91)	82 (69.81)	98 (69)	106 (67.8)
Kazakhstan	142 (41.11)	134 (45.87)	157 (45.89)	158 (45.59)	160 (44.92)
Uzbekistan	148 (37.27)	137 (45.73)	156 (46.93)	165 (39.16)	164 (39.61)
Tajikistan	155 (33.31)	153 (39.06)	161 (44.66)	149 (49.94)	123 (64.29)
China	172 (23.36)	179 (22.97)	177 (21.52)	176 (21.71)	173 (26.93)
Turkmenistan	175 (22.01)	176 (25.82)	179 (14.56)	178 (15.8)	177 (20.86)

**Note:** \*The overall score is calculated on the basis of such indicators as pluralism of opinions in the media, media independence, level of society development, legislative framework, transparency of state mechanisms, information infrastructure, crime rate, etc.

**Source:** World Press Freedom Index (2024).

Before starting to study the specifics of China's cooperation with Central Asian countries, it is necessary to clearly define the essence and meaning of the main concepts and terms of the issue under study. Traditionally, the Central Asian region includes such countries as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan (Păduraru and Voicu, 2020). Sometimes Azerbaijan is included in these countries (due to its partial territorial location in the region), but it will not be considered in this paper.

The essence of such a research method as framing analysis, or framework analysis, is to study the specifics and peculiarities of how an individual, society or other object perceives and understands a particular situation or action (process) in general (Samsudin, 2019; Parveen and Showkat, 2020). This method as a phenomenon was first described by the Canadian sociologist E. Goffman in the book "Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience", published in 1974 as part of the socio-political research (D'Angelo et al., 2019).

Framing analysis is most often used in assessing the impact of a news story or information message on the public (Erbaş, 2022; Al-Rawi et al., 2023; Linström and Marais, 2012). The priority in the activities of media resources is to define certain frameworks, vectors and directions in their activities, and this, in turn, depends on a variety of objective and subjective factors, such as the point of view of the owner of the news source (whoever determines the general orientation of the resource), the material and technical base of the editorial office, the personal qualities of the reporter or journalist (personal and professional), and the national regulatory framework (which acts as a deterrent mechanism), as well as the characteristics of the key audience (age, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, political views, etc.), the level of awareness of local news (about one's city, neighbourhood), the overall trust in a particular media resource among the population, and other (Andersson, 2021; Wong et al., 2023).

### 3.2 Cooperation between China and Central Asia at the beginning of the third millennium

China, similarly to the vast majority of large states on the continent and in the world (for example, the United States), was wary of the prospect of the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of many new republics with a population of millions, unpredictable political processes, economic transformations and, as a result, mass migration from there (Clarke, 2020; Zheng, 2023). However, Beijing soon realised the advantages of cooperation with individual countries in the region, which allowed China to manoeuvre and choose the most optimal ways and options for interaction with each republic, which was virtually impossible in the Soviet Union.

In the 20s of the 21st century, China and the Central Asian republics developed very strong and promising cooperation in various sectors of industry, economy, etc., even though there was a significant difference in many indicators of these countries (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Comparison of the main indicators of Central Asian countries and China as of the end of 2023

Area, km <sup>2</sup>	Population, persons	Form of government	Main religion	GDP*, billion USD	GDP* per capita, USD
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>					
200.105	7.161,910	Presidential republic	Islam (predominantly Sunni)	48.054	6.790
<b>Kazakhstan</b>					
2.724,902	20.075,271	Presidential republic	Islam (70%) and Christianity (26%)	693.415	34.534
<b>Tajikistan</b>					
143.100	10.535,493**	Presidential republic	Islam (predominantly Sunni)	59.415	5.832

**Table 3** (Continued).

Area, km <sup>2</sup>	Population, persons	Form of government	Main religion	GDP*, billion USD	GDP* per capita, USD
<b>Turkmenistan</b>					
491.210	6.377,776**	Presidential republic under an authoritarian regime	Islam (predominantly Sunni)	126.132***	19.938***
<b>Uzbekistan</b>					
447.400	37.139,008	Presidential republic	Islam (predominantly Sunni)	401.838	10.936
<b>China</b>					
9.596,961	1.409,670.000***	One-party socialist republic under an authoritarian system	Officially atheist; major religions include Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity	35.291**	25.015**

**Note:** \*Gross Domestic Product; \*\*United Nations Projection; \*\*\*Data as of 2022.

**Source:** Yazdani (2020), Ali et al. (2021), Berdiyev and Can (2020), Amusan (2021), Bharti (2022).

China and Central Asian countries cooperate in several areas, in particular, in the field of strategic partnership in general, in the context of common culture, traditions and history, in the direction of investment and financial dialogue, as well as at the level of bilateral contacts (mainly within the framework of the Chinese initiative “Belt and Road”). In 2023 alone, trade between Beijing and the region totalled about 90 billion USD (more than a third higher than in 2022) (China reports robust..., 2024).

Although China's economic influence in Central Asia has markedly increased, Russia maintains considerable influence through historical, political, and security avenues. In 2023, China displaced Russia as the predominant commercial partner for the majority of Central Asian nations (Freeman et al., 2023). Nevertheless, Russia maintains robust connections through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In contrast to China's infrastructure- and investment-centric strategy, Russia's involvement in the area is mostly centered on energy commerce, remittances, and initiatives for political integration. Furthermore, Russia's position as a security guarantee, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, persists in influencing regional power relations. Historically, Russia has had robust political, economic, and cultural connections with Central Asian nations, mostly owing to a common history and established institutional frameworks such as the EAEU and the CSTO. Recent developments show a shift in the regional balance of power, with China's economic influence rising considerably.

The increase in the trade volume between China and the five Central Asian countries is ascribed to China's proactive economic strategies, encompassing significant investments and infrastructural endeavours under the BRI, which have surpassed Russian economic attempts in the region. Notwithstanding this economic transition, Russia maintains significant influence in Central Asia via security collaboration and cultural connections (Kendall-Taylor et al., 2024). The CSTO is fundamental to regional security, with Russia assuming a prominent role in military cooperation and defence strategies. The extensive prevalence of the Russian language and media guarantees enduring cultural ties.

Due to positive trends in diplomatic interactions between the responsible representatives of all the countries participating in this regional cooperation, many infrastructure projects are being implemented in Central Asia: construction of a solar power plant in Kapshagai and technological upgrades at the Shymkent Oil Refinery (Kazakhstan), construction of the Dushanbe Thermal Power Plant (Tajikistan), and development of a specialised facility for various sports events in Uzbekistan, etc. (China, Central Asia..., 2024).

An important event in the political and diplomatic cooperation between China and the Central Asian states was the summit in Xi'an (China) on 18-19 May 2023 and the signing of the Xi'an Declaration (Muratbekova, 2023). The event was the first official meeting of this scale between representatives of all countries of the region and China in the China+C5 format after the end of coronavirus restrictions. During the sessions, participants agreed on the need to continue to maintain strong strategic relations and develop and strengthen cooperation in

the face of growing potential threats on the continent and amid a rapidly changing global geopolitical landscape. The next summit is scheduled for early 2025 and should continue the implementation of Beijing's long-term strategies for cooperation with Central Asian states, both within the region and in a bilateral format.

In the wake of a differential approach to foreign policy relations with Central Asian states, Beijing officially established interstate dialogue with Kyrgyzstan in 1992 by signing the Treaty on Diplomatic Relations between the countries (Amusan, 2021). China's investments in the republic are growing every year, and the number of promising projects is increasing (for example, the launch of the Datka-Kemin power line for 400 million USD, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project for more than 4 billion USD, etc.) (Ricklton, 2024). The public opinion of both countries, which in turn is shaped by the media, is central to the implementation of these projects. The culture of media consumption in Central Asian countries differs (due to age, different living conditions, the level of financial security of the population, etc.), but the media is central in shaping the information agenda and creating a holistic picture of political and diplomatic events.

The media environment in Kyrgyzstan, as in all Central Asian states, began to take shape shortly after its independence, but this process was extremely slow at first (Dadakhonov, 2024; Alymbaeva and Alimakhunov, 2021). Amidst the creation of state media, private information resources also emerged on a massive scale, but were criticised by the official authorities. It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that the formation of media resources in the republic accelerated. This is mainly due to the massive flow of information from the East (primarily from China (Melnikovová, 2020; Kurambayev and Freedman, 2019)), but also due to the strong influence of Western media resources, which are becoming increasingly attractive to citizens of the region (e.g., in 2018, the U.S. Agency for International Development presented the Central Asia Media Program (2018) to help to create the most transparent and innovative media space in Central Asia, one that meets the needs of the most active citizens of the region).

The legal framework for news broadcasting in Kyrgyzstan includes, inter alia, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No.106 “On Television and Radio Broadcasting” (2008) – on the development of information infrastructure and news system in the state, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 247 “On the Public Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic” (2011) – on the strategy for the Kyrgyz media sphere to join the regional and global system, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 33 “On the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic” (2022) – on the creation (previously) and functioning of a single information space on the territory of the Republic, etc. In general, the situation in the field of news broadcasting and information policy in Kyrgyzstan remains identical to other countries in the region. There is a confrontation between public and private media for votes and attention.

Central Asia comprises countries with varying levels of natural resource availability, significantly influencing their economic structures and political relations, particularly with China. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are considered resource-rich due to their substantial reserves of oil and natural gas, respectively. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, however, are resource-poor, devoid of significant hydrocarbon deposits, and reliant mostly on agriculture and remittances. The economic inequalities among these nations impact their diplomatic objectives, trade reliance, and reactions to Chinese influence. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan hold substantial deposits of oil and natural gas, establishing them as significant energy suppliers to China. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, devoid of significant hydrocarbon resources, depend more on infrastructural development and economic aid from Beijing.

China's engagement strategy in the region exemplifies these disparities. China prioritises securing energy imports from resource-abundant nations, like Turkmenistan, to support its growing economy. In 2023, Turkmenistan supplied around 32-33 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China, positioning itself as a vital contributor to China's energy diversification efforts (Łoskot-Strachota and Adam Michalski, 2024). Conversely, in resource-scarce countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, China's involvement emphasises infrastructure development and financial assistance. These nations are integral to China's Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI), including significant investments in transportation and energy infrastructure aimed at enhancing regional connectivity. The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project illustrates China's commitment to improving economic corridors in the region (Daye, 2024). This unique method underscores China's strategic aims: securing energy resources from affluent nations while fostering economic growth and stability in less developed countries to create a conducive environment for commerce and investment.

Kyrgyz media mostly emphasises China's participation with these nations through the lens of bilateral economic cooperation, especially the Belt and Road Initiative. The degree to which each nation benefits from or sees China's influence varies considerably. Kazakhstan, being resource-abundant, has adopted a more equitable strategy, utilising its economic power to secure advantageous conditions for trade and infrastructural initiatives (Çelik and Jayawickrama, 2024). Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, lacking in resources, exhibit a heightened reliance on Chinese loans and investments, raising apprehensions over debt sustainability that occasionally emerge in media discussions. The absence of critical analysis in Evening Bishkek about these financial linkages indicates a potential constraint in how media narratives influence public perception of China's presence in the area.

Turkmenistan exemplifies a distinctive situation owing to its diplomatic seclusion and its choice to stay away from multilateral entities like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In contrast to its Central Asian counterparts, Turkmenistan's foreign policy is defined by neutrality, resulting in a more limited interaction with China that primarily emphasizes energy exports. Kyrgyzstan's connection with China encompasses not just economic collaboration but also extensive diplomatic and geopolitical aspects, a topic often emphasised in Evening Bishkek.

### **3.3 Results of the study of news content in the newspaper Evening Bishkek**

Media outlets in Kyrgyzstan have substantial obstacles in reporting and interpreting foreign relations owing to escalating censorship and

political coercion. The implementation of restrictive legislation has enabled authorities to obstruct websites and regulate material without court supervision (Lim and Bradshaw, 2023). The legislation has been employed to suppress independent journalism, as seen by the obstruction of Azattyk Media's websites in October 2022 after they reported on border disputes. The government's increasing control over media is further demonstrated by legislative measures that centralize executive authority and enforce strict rules on non-governmental groups and media entities. These measures have resulted in heightened self-censorship among journalists, as they contend with the dangers of legal consequences and harassment (American Bar Association, 2024). The apprehension and confinement of journalists connected to investigative entities such as Temirov Live highlight the hazardous conditions for anyone involved in critical journalism.

This atmosphere of restriction significantly influences the portrayal of international relations in Kyrgyz media. Journalists, deterred by the prospect of disciplinary measures, may eschew critical analysis or accept narratives that conform to official governmental stances. The compulsion to comply may result in uniform reporting, constraining varied viewpoints and critical discussion on global issues. Thus, the public's comprehension of international relations is influenced by a media environment that suppresses independent thinking and marginalizes alternative perspectives.

Before conducting a framing analysis of the issue under study, namely, the formation of a conceptual framework for the reaction of the Kyrgyz media to the dynamics of cooperation between China and the countries of Central Asia, the relevant information resources were selected and analysed. The electronic newspaper Evening Bishkek, which is among the top 10 most popular news outlets in the country, was chosen as the best object of research (Dos Santos, 2024). In addition to its publications, the newspaper reports news from national and international sources. In addition to traditional reviews, the newspaper

also offers analytical materials, interviews with politicians and public figures, expert assessments of various events, etc.

Evening Bishkek has always been one of Kyrgyzstan's leading Russian-language newspapers, achieving a maximum circulation of 45,000 copies, predominantly concentrated in Bishkek (International Research & Exchanges Board, 2024). The publication has maintained a tense relationship with political leaders. A significant ownership conflict in 2015 was perceived as politically motivated, allegedly influenced by then-President Almazbek Atambayev following the newspaper's critical position towards his administration. Evening Bishkek has occasionally exhibited independence; however, it has also had phases of alignment with authorities, highlighting the difficulties of journalistic freedom in Kyrgyzstan.

The scope of the study includes publications in the newspaper for the period January-June 2023, and a total of 166 articles by various authors were analysed. The framing analysis was carried out exclusively on textual materials. The evaluation of photo and video images was not applied. The media space in Kyrgyzstan includes state-owned, public (currently non-existent), and private media. Evening Bishkek is a private Russian-language publication).

After carefully studying all the text news printed in the newspaper Evening Bishkek in the period from January to June 2023 on the topic of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, some peculiarities and trends in the presentation of material on the topic were identified.

Initially, it is worth noting that during the period under review, all the analysed keywords, namely, "China", "People's Republic of China", "PRC", "Central Asia", "Kyrgyzstan", "Kazakhstan", "Uzbekistan", "Tajikistan", "Turkmenistan" and their derivatives were mentioned in every month (except for some cases). These dynamics indicate that the topic of Sino-Central Asian relations (primarily China and Kyrgyzstan)

was key to the agenda in the first half of 2023 in Evening Bishkek (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Frequency of keywords on the topic of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in the period from January to June 2013 in the newspaper Evening Bishkek

Evaluation criterion	Number of mentions						Total
Keywords	"China", "People's Republic of China", "PRC"*, "Chinese"						96
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	7	4	6	7	18	4	
Context**	7	3	9	4	13	14	
Keywords	"Kyrgyzstan", "Kyrgyz"						96
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	4	3	9	4	10	9	
Context**	8	4	10	5	16	14	
Keywords	"Kazakhstan", "Kazakh"						15
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Context**	2	2	0	4	4	1	
Keywords	"Uzbekistan", "Uzbek"						31
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	4	1	3	1	0	1	
Context**	6	2	3	1	4	5	
Keywords	"Tajikistan", "Tajik"						8
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	0	0	0	1	0	1	
Context**	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Keywords	"Turkmenistan", "Turkmen"						4
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Context**	1	1	0	0	1	1	
Keywords	"Central Asia", "Central Asian"						44
Period	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Title	1	2	1	1	5	3	
Context**	6	0	4	3	11	7	

**Note:** \*In all cases where "China" is mentioned, "PRC" is also present; \*\*The number of articles where the contextual word is mentioned, if it is not specified in the title.

Regarding the nature of the news and the emotional tone in which events related to a particular subject are presented, it is worth noting that, as well as the frequency of keyword mentions in general and the distribution of positive content, news about Kyrgyzstan, China, and Central Asia is leading, which cannot be said about the other countries (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Genre ratio of publications of the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek on the theme “China” for January 2022 – December 2022

Country	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
China	39	8	49	96
Central Asia	20	3	21	44
Kyrgyzstan	49	6	41	96
Kazakhstan	4	3	8	15
Uzbekistan	18	0	13	31
Tajikistan	4	2	2	8
Turkmenistan	2	0	2	4

**Source:** compiled by the authors of this study.

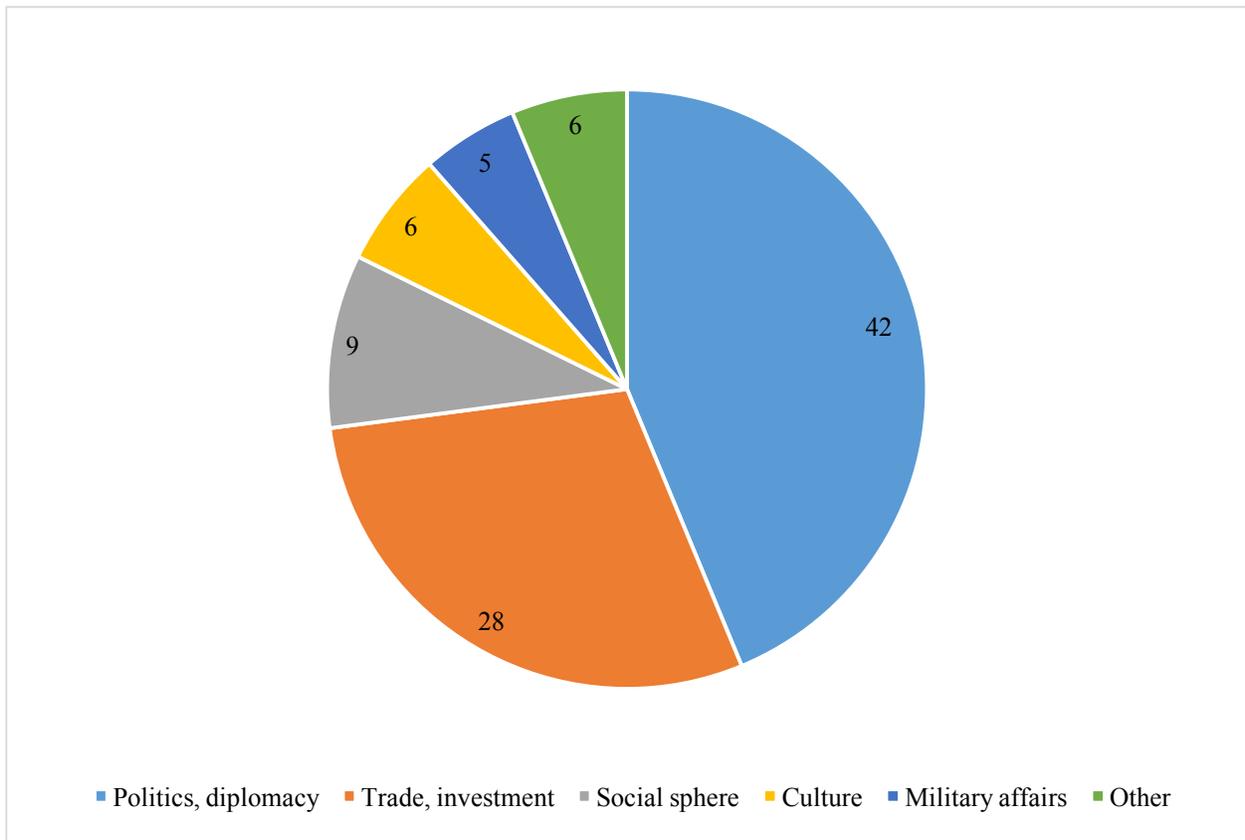
Regarding news categories, the most numerous are reports in the context of politics and diplomatic relations, with a significant advantage over other categories (trade, culture, social sphere, etc.).

**Table 6.** News dynamics by category for the keywords “Kyrgyzstan”, “Kazakhstan”, “Uzbekistan”, “Tajikistan”, “Turkmenistan”, and their derivatives

Country	Scope						Total
	Politics, diplomacy	Trade, investment	Social sphere	Culture	Military affairs	Other	
Kyrgyzstan	44	27	4	10	5	6	96
Kazakhstan	8	5	0	0	1	1	15
Uzbekistan	19	9	0	1	2	0	31
Tajikistan	6	1	0	0	1	0	8
Turkmenistan	3	1	0	0	0	0	4

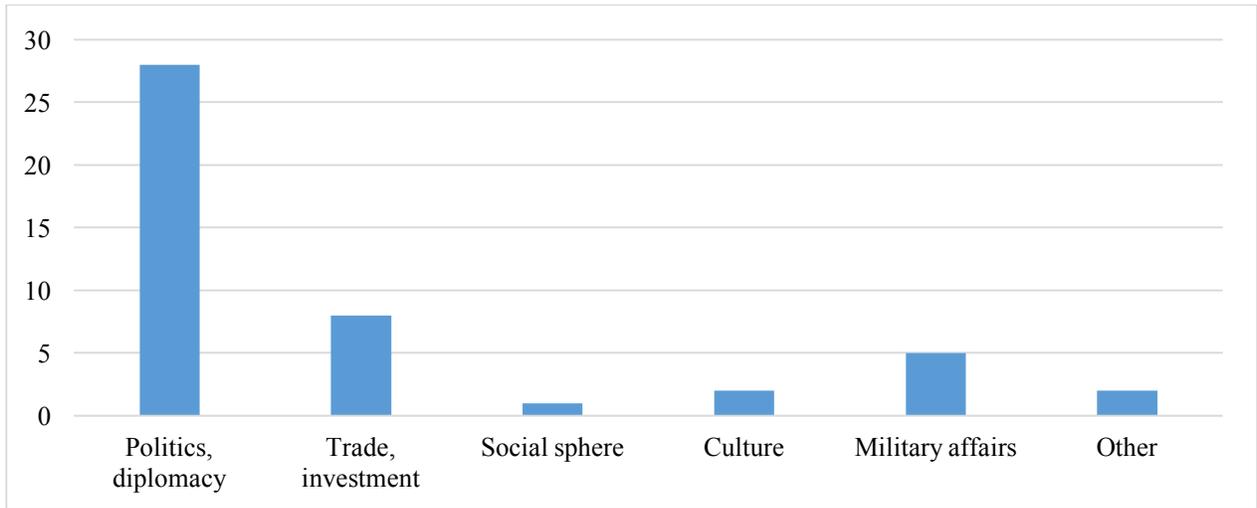
A similar conclusion can be drawn for the keywords “China”, “PRC”, and “People’s Republic of China” and their derivatives (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** News dynamics by category for the keywords “China”, “PRC”, “People’s Republic of China”, and their derivatives



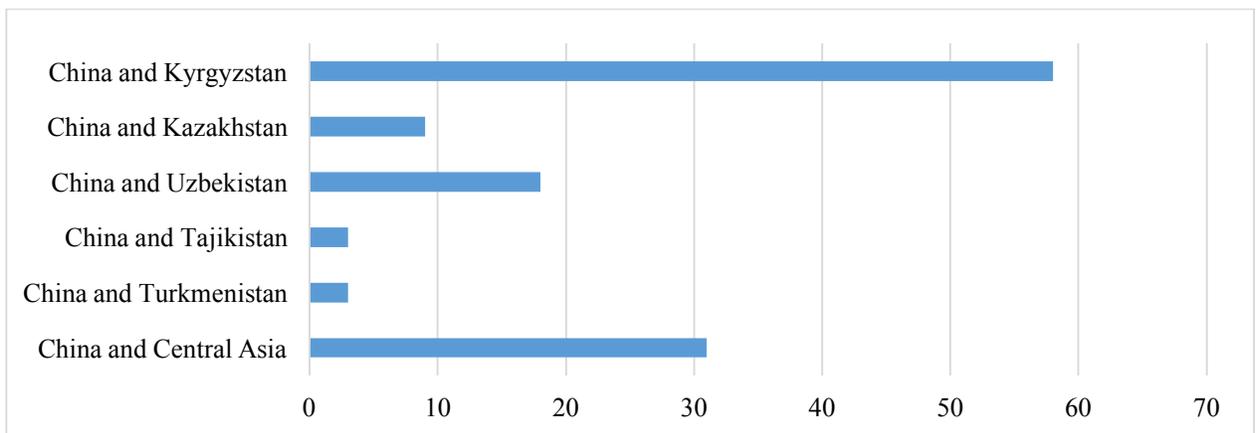
“Central Asia” and its derivatives are most often mentioned in one category, to the detriment of other sectors of the region's social and economic life (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** News dynamics by category for the keyword “Central Asia” and its derivatives



The dynamics of a newspaper's news policy cannot be thoroughly assessed without analysing keywords in conjunction with each other. The following pairs were used in the study: “China” and “Kyrgyzstan”; “China” and “Central Asia”, etc. (including derivatives of all keywords) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Frequency of references in news reports to Chinese relations with other countries and Central Asia



After analysing the news policy of the electronic newspaper Evening Bishkek in January-June 2023 in the context of information coverage of China's cooperation with Central Asian countries, certain conclusions can be drawn.

During the period considered in this paper, the most frequently encountered messages contained the keywords "China", "People's Republic of China", "PRC", "Kyrgyzstan", and "Central Asia" and their derivatives. The rest are much less frequent, which may indicate that the newspaper's journalists are fully focused on the events of Sino-Kyrgyz cooperation, within the framework of bilateral dialogue, rather than within regional projects. As for the nature of the news presented in the media outlet, news with a positive tone (about Kyrgyzstan, China and Central Asia) significantly prevailed, with the same number of neutral news regarding these subjects, and very few negative news. At the same time, the coverage of events in other countries is negative and neutral. This picture confirms the previous conclusion and indicates an excessive focus on the China-Kyrgyzstan interaction.

Regarding the Central Asian states individually, news in the category of politics and diplomatic relations is in the first place in terms of quantity, far ahead of the rest (e.g., economy, social sphere). The same is true for the region as a whole – the social sphere, military affairs, etc., are insufficiently studied. In China, the situation is similar, but investment and trade are also key to the newspaper's news flow. Based on the quantitative indicators of information where China is mentioned in conjunction with other countries, the clear advantage is given to reports containing "China" and "Kyrgyzstan" (including their derivatives), and then "China" and "Central Asia" (including their derivatives).

In summary, it is possible to conclude that Evening Bishkek is active and intensive in informing the public about China-Central Asia relations. However, there is a visible bias towards Kyrgyzstan as a separate state (with little regard for its regional location) and its contacts with Beijing. This situation, in general, confirms the thesis that China is intensifying its activities towards a differentiated approach to building foreign policy strategies and building roadmaps for cooperation with certain countries individually.

Having studied the specifics of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries on the example of the presentation of information about it in the electronic newspaper Evening Bishkek, and having identified the main trends in this process, several practical recommendations can be formulated to improve the media in Kyrgyzstan.

Creators of news content should focus more on attracting more young people under the age of 40, who are the most socially active group. For this purpose, broadcasting on various social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, etc.) will be effective. It is necessary to cover not only urban residents but also those living in remote regions, as well as categories of citizens who speak a local language (dialect) and do not have a university degree. Starting an information channel in the language of the community or locality is the appropriate solution, initiating activities by providing only the most important news in the local language. In this regard, it is necessary to continue to develop such a unique local broadcasting format as community media in the regions. It is advisable to actively resume the activities of the Internet radio station of the National Television and Radio Company "Dostuk", which reflects the diversity of culture and language of the ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, it makes sense to consider the fuller integration of Kyrgyz media into the regional news broadcasting system, on an equal footing, with the same language periods. For this purpose, it is important to harmonise the information infrastructure and improve the legislative framework. It is important to regularly improve the professional skills of journalists and reporters working in various media. To this end, the best way is to organise numerous webinars, seminars, workshops, and master classes to train media professionals, as well as conferences and roundtables to share experiences (including international ones) and learn new skills and techniques in information activities. This strategy is the most effective in terms of improving the professional qualities of journalists.

It is also recommended that government officials and employees of official bodies, to improve the level and quality of interaction with the country's information resources, provide all possible assistance to local media to establish strong mutually beneficial relations and to ensure that they truthfully and

successfully inform the population about Kyrgyzstan's internal and external affairs. The Republic has potentially successful foundations for the development of the media space on its territory, thanks to the mobility of the population and its average age, as well as the return to the principles of transparency and openness in local media broadcasting. In addition, it monitors global trends in the media broadcasting sector through the prism of unifying national legislation and bringing it in line with the norms and standards of the world's leading countries.

#### 4. Discussions

Having examined the key features of cooperation between China and Central Asian countries through the prism of summarising the specifics of news coverage of this cooperation in the media, in the electronic newspaper Evening Bishkek, some factors have been identified. This topic is highly relevant and is being discussed at all levels of national, regional, and international cooperation – both in Beijing and in the countries of the region. The key role of the media in this cooperation is one of the basic elements and integral components of a successful intergovernmental dialogue.

The paper noted that media resources in all countries of the world are crucial in the context of shaping the news and information agenda, which, in turn, is used by the authorities, both for the benefit of national development and to create negative consequences. This idea is similar to Andersson's (2021) reflections that media propaganda can be used both in favour of transforming public opinion for the development of a process or phenomenon and to the detriment of the population to create certain "necessary" moods and thoughts. However, the author did not consider the situation when society does not trust local media, especially those run by the state.

The analysis of how the foreign policy orientations of the Central Asian countries have changed and what reasons and grounds gave rise to the transformation of these orientations was carried out in the context of the study of the overall dynamics of the political life of the region's states in the post-Soviet period. Haerper and Kizilova (2020), who also considered the early 1990s to be

the most active period in the history of the Central Asian republics, suggested that, due to fears of disrupting the usual ties and contacts established during the Soviet era, it was not beneficial for Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and neighbouring countries to radically change external vectors of cooperation at the turn of the millennium. However, experts did not address the fact that, due to the dramatic changes that began on the continent in the 21st century, the region was forced to transform and change rapidly to meet new circumstances.

The peculiarities of media outlets in Central Asian countries demonstrate a differentiated approach to the coverage of news stories related to the situation in the country and the region, as well as beyond, which was presented in the paper in the context of assessing the nature of news coverage on various topics. The problems of ethics, correct and truthful presentation of material in media resources were also considered by Kurambayev and Freedman (2019), who believed that conclusions about the professionalism of certain information sources can only be drawn based on their adherence to the principles of freedom of speech and transparency in the news agenda.

The paper points out that the key feature of China's foreign policy strategy is an exclusive approach to a particular state – a potential partner – namely, how this state can be useful and what help and assistance it can receive from it in the framework of China's large-scale projects and initiatives aimed at improving its financial and economic performance and expanding to the West. Clarke (2020) shared a similar point, emphasising that immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Beijing did not see Central Asian countries as promising allies, but its approach soon changed when the Communist Party appreciated all the positive aspects of cooperation with each state in the region. At the same time, the benefits of China's cooperation within the framework of regional projects were not touched upon by the author.

The element of visual, sound, and audio impact on a person in the process of learning certain information contributes to its quick perception and increases the effectiveness of the introduction of a particular thought or idea (if necessary). This is relevant for news content. Framing analysis, which was used in this paper, as a way of framework evaluation of text data sets in news sources, according to

Parveen and Showkat (2020), is considered to be one of the most accurate and practical tools for forming an idea of the impact of a particular data set on a certain circle of people, and this approach can be used in terms of planning an information strategy in the state.

The framework assessment of information presented in the news media about political and foreign economic events is the most applicable mechanism for studying public sentiment and the broadcasting policy of certain media resources, both state and public. Samsudin (2019) also supported such an idea, explaining that the simpler and more concise the message sounds, the easier it is for a person to perceive it and the quicker it will be possible to create perceptions of events in certain areas.

The media in Kyrgyzstan are, by their nature, quite dependent on the central government, which controls all areas of media activity and monitors their information policy – a situation that does not allow such resources to develop freely and fully fulfil their professional duties. Analysing the state news sources of the country, it is worth noting that because of the strong influence of the supreme leadership and the tangible financial dependence, the information agenda is as convenient as possible for the authorities. The same opinion was expressed by Al-Rawi et al. (2023), considering the situation in this area in the twenty-first century and ways to overcome it so that the media's information activities are as transparent and honest as possible. However, the authors made little mention of the small number of public sources that are trying to stay afloat and inform citizens about the true situation in the country.

At the end of the twentieth century, Kyrgyzstan was one of the most politically and economically unstable states in the post-Soviet space, and its prospects for overcoming the crisis were very negative. However, to protect its territory from potential threats from the East (terrorism, extremism, radical movements, etc.), China considered Kyrgyzstan as its main ally in countering these threats and sought to strengthen its position in the international arena. In a similar vein, Dos Santos (2024) reflected on the fact that the number of joint projects and initiatives between China and Kyrgyzstan in various sectors of industry is one of the largest in the region.

In the process of analysing the specifics of cooperation in Central Asia between such players as China, as well as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, several circumstances were highlighted through the reflection of this cooperation in the newspaper Evening Bishkek. The conditions and pace of comprehensive development in the third millennium allow participants in interstate dialogue to use all available tools to improve the quality of cooperation. The media sphere is an important platform for such activities, as well as for analysing the results and developments. The peculiarity of the method used in this paper is that it contributed to a full assessment of the quality and quantitative potential of news coverage of cooperation between Beijing and Central Asian states within a narrow time frame, which made it possible to obtain relevant results.

## 5. Conclusions

Evaluating the history of cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) in the context of political and diplomatic interaction, it is possible to state that this process has evolved from cold formal maintenance of some communication at the highest levels to a strategic partnership in many bilateral and multilateral projects within the framework of initiatives and programmes developed by Beijing. Considering the prospects of its political and economic expansion to the West, China has calculated the possibilities and options for such advancement and concluded that cooperation with Central Asian states – both individually and through joint multilateral projects – is an extremely profitable and effective strategy.

The media is central in shaping the news agenda in political and diplomatic contacts between China and the countries of the region, and it is also important to note their desire to cover as much data as possible for broadcast to the public. The electronic newspaper Evening Bishkek, as one of the most popular news resources in Kyrgyzstan, serves as an effective and efficient source of information

on China-Central Asia cooperation. However, there are still some clear preferences in terms of informing certain subjects of the area under study.

In the framework of the framing analysis of cooperation between China and Central Asian states in the context of the information presented in the newspaper for the first half of 2023, it is possible to state that since the resource is Kyrgyz, the news agenda overwhelmingly consists of information on China, Kyrgyzstan and their contacts in political, diplomatic and – less often – trade and investment activities.

The nature of the news on China-Kyrgyzstan relations has a positive context, which virtually excludes negative news, while neutral reports are sufficient, on a par with positive information. Notably, this implication is not far-fetched or deliberately created – cooperation between Beijing and Bishkek tends to strengthen and intensify ties at all levels of interaction, especially in the sectors of investment, construction, education, and new technologies, which is a sign of Kyrgyzstan's entry into a new, higher level in the international arena.

A limitation of the study was the difficulty of finding publications on certain countries in the newspaper Evening Bishkek due to the absence of their names in the headlines of news reports.

To examine the topic of China's foreign policy dialogue with Central Asian states in more detail and to record the specifics of this interaction, it would be advisable for future research to study Beijing's cooperation with the countries of the region under sanctions restrictions in such areas as construction and trade, and in the context of continuing research based on framing analysis, to study other news resources with a larger audience.

## Notes

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## Soft Power from the Newsroom: Media Diplomacy and Cultural Narratives of China in Kyrgyzstan

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### Abstract

With the development of globalisation and the constant expansion of regional processes, the importance of investigating international news components, which occupy a prominent place in shaping cooperation and cultural exchange between states, is growing. The purpose of this study was to analyse the structure and dynamics of news publications about China in the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek for January 2020-December 2022. The following methods were used to achieve the research objectives: deductive, content analysis, comparative. The findings of this study suggested that Vecherniy Bishkek is the main media outlet in Kyrgyz Republic, whose news reports reflect the objective attitude and position of the government and the people about China. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the materials found that the publications of the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek on the topic "China" are characterised by a balance between a positive perception of cooperation and an understanding of the challenges and complexities of bilateral relations. This

approach helps form an objective and multifaceted view of Sino-Kyrgyz relations. The data analysis showed that the total number of media messages increases from year to year, and the emotional attitude is based on neutral messages, which account for more than 50 per cent. For January 2022-December 2022, 81.82 per cent of publications about China are presented as news stories to optimise and make it easy for readers to get information. The study found that due to differences in national contexts, the content of publications focused on political and economic aspects. Therefore, to improve mutual understanding between the people of the two countries, it is important to strengthen the cultural functions of the media and adopt differentiated strategies in the media space. Practical significance lies in the use of the findings of this study by researchers who investigate the market of communication media, as well as by specialists in the field of media.

**Keywords:** *Mutual Benefit, News Communities, Cooperation, Objectivity, Cultural Exchange*

## 1. Introduction

The connection between China and Kyrgyzstan is historically profound, influenced by geographical closeness, commercial exchanges, and political evolution throughout the ages. The old Silk Road, which enabled commercial and cultural exchanges between the East and West, was pivotal in connecting the two areas. Historically, the regions that comprise modern Kyrgyzstan served as crucial transit hubs for traders, intellectuals, and diplomats journeying between China and the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907), China influenced Central Asia through military campaigns and diplomatic endeavours to ensure stability along its western borders. The Mongol Empire's 13th-century expansion further assimilated the region into a broader Eurasian network, enhancing commercial and political connections. Nonetheless, when transcontinental trade routes declined throughout the early modern period and

the Russian Empire's influence in Central Asia grew, direct connections between China and the Kyrgyz people lessened. The contemporary era of Sino-Kyrgyz relations commenced in the early 1990s, coinciding with Kyrgyzstan's independence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations were formally initiated in 1992, signifying the commencement of a new phase of collaboration (UNESCO, 2025). The relationship has been defined by economic collaborations, infrastructural advancement, and regional security cooperation. China has become a principal economic partner of Kyrgyzstan, with substantial investments in transportation, energy, and commerce enabled by the Belt and Road Initiative.

In 2024, China represents Kyrgyzstan's largest trading partner, with 53 per cent of the nation's total imports (World Population Review, 2024). Bilateral commerce attained USD 22.71 billion in 2024, reflecting a 10 per cent rise from the prior year (Interfax Information Group, 2025). The commercial relationship is characterised by an imbalance. In the first quarter of 2024, Chinese exports to Kyrgyzstan reached USD 4.163 billion, while Kyrgyz exports to China were just USD 22 million. Numerous significant accords have delineated this bilateral relationship. The Bilateral Investment Treaty (1992) establishes a framework for the protection and promotion of investments. China - Kyrgyzstan Tax Treaty (2002), prohibits dual taxes and promotes business interactions. Recent accords encompass the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Project, executed in 2024, designed to augment regional connectivity and prolong Belt and Road Initiative collaboration until 2026, synchronising infrastructure initiatives with Kyrgyzstan's developmental objectives (Khitakhunov, 2025).

The modern world is characterised by the rapid pace of globalisation, affecting the political, economic, and cultural processes of various countries, where a prominent place is occupied by the interaction of regional blocs, forming new partnerships and vectors of development. In recent decades, interest in the relationship between China and the Central Asian states, which represents a synthesis of global interests and regional ambitions, has been actively growing. The media play a key role in shaping public opinion and reflecting the dynamics of these relationships (Hopster, 2021). They not only cover current events, but also

shape images of countries, their political leaders, economic achievements, and cultural values. Modern media actively reflect geopolitical changes and economic specifics of states on the world stage (Cherviakova and Cherviakova, 2024; Ruf, Song and Zhang, 2021). In this context, China's relations with Central Asian states are attracting increasing attention, and regional cooperation within the framework of international initiatives is promoting tourism, science, and education, which is an added incentive to strengthen ties between the countries. However, in the age of information technology, it is important to critically analyse the information presented and to understand the motivational component of the news agenda.

China, as a global economic leader, aims to enhance its influence in Central Asia through market access, resource procurement, and the construction of transit corridors (Stoian, 2024). This collaboration promotes economic development and modernization for Central Asian nations. Media coverage emphasizes economic integration and cultural interchange (Lorenz-Spreen, Oswald, and Lewandowsky, 2023). The Sino-Central Asian connection has consistently garnered media attention (Wen, 2021), influencing public views of this politically and economically significant area (Kamruzzaman, 2022). Nonetheless, issues such as environmental hazards, economic reliance, and media representation also affect these narratives. The media significantly influence perceptions of Sino-Central Asian relations, highlighting both potential and problems in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. This research investigates the impact of media on public perception, diplomatic interactions, and economic relationships. International news stories convey governmental stances and shape global dialogue. An in-depth examination of these processes will elucidate the media's influence on bilateral relations and highlight difficulties and opportunities for collaboration.

There are many studies that explore the various media environment processes that take place within Asian states. Thus, Nurmatov (2019) considers a wide range of interactions between the Kyrgyz Republic and China. This paper is dedicated to reflecting the perspectives of states, given the scale of the mainland. The author focuses on the cooperation of both states within the

framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Commonwealth of Independent States, which affect all aspects of the countries' development in the context of globalisation. Kurambayev (2016) analyses the main mechanisms of journalism and democracy in Kyrgyz Republic. He covers the mechanisms of the impact of victimisation among media industry workers. This study focuses on the processes of democratisation and freedom, which underlie the strong establishment of interconnections between neighbouring states through communication. Chekirova (2022) studies social networks as components of media space. The author describes their cross-border political participation by examining the online activism of Kyrgyz migrants. The topic considers the involvement of the Internet and online platforms in the emergence of social mobilisation as tools of information dissemination in the political influence of states.

Dzhunushalieva et al. (2022) characterise the features of media space in security conditions. Researchers emphasise legal regulation and the right of access to information. They explain the role of modern capabilities and technologies that are transforming the media environment and pushing its boundaries, providing an appropriate regulatory framework for proper media development. Authors considers the relevant criteria and aspects of environmental journalism, taking international media cooperation into account. It is based on specific materials of works by Kyrgyz authors that form the media environment. The paper examines the role of journalism in the international interaction of society with nature, which characterises the formation of environmental consciousness within initiatives and strategies. However, the possible biases and tendencies in the presentation of information, as well as the economic and political interests of media editorial policies within the framework of cooperation between Kyrgyz Republic and China have been understudied. Furthermore, the theoretical aspects of the interaction of global and regional processes on the topic "China" in the context of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* are not disclosed (Dzhumagazieva, 2020).

The purpose of this study was to examine the features and trends of news materials of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* for January 2020-December 2022,

concerning China. In this regard, it is possible to distinguish the following tasks of this study:

- to identify the key themes and accents in the newspaper materials related to the given problematic;
- to assess the volume and dynamics of coverage of topics in different periods;
- to identify the main genre forms in which the materials are presented.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The material base of this study included the news publications of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* about China for January 2020-December 2022. The news publications made it possible to identify the main emphases in the coverage of relations between China and Central Asian countries, as well as to figure out which aspects of events are in the focus of attention of Kyrgyz journalists. These materials helped to assess the objectivity and balance of information, which made it possible to understand whether the newspaper acts as a neutral media outlet or is influenced by certain political or economic interests. The publications under study provided an opportunity to determine the tone of coverage, to identify the dynamics of changes in the coverage of topics. This helped to identify the key issues and challenges of the media space, to establish the role of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* in the development of public discourse on the interaction between China and Central Asia.

The following methods formed the methodological framework of this study: deductive, content analysis, comparative. The deductive method at the stage of formulating the main theoretical assumptions helped to find the key concepts of relations between states and the role of media in the modern world, as well as to identify news aspects and topics in the context of specific states and their relations with China. It helped to reveal factors influencing the relationship between China and the Central Asian states, as well as their media coverage. Its elements provided an opportunity to focus on concrete aspects of the nature of the reflection of events and their interpretation. This method led to the

establishment of trends characterising the coverage of relations between China and Central Asian states in the media space. It provided a coherent approach to learning the topic by combining theoretical concepts with concrete material.

The method of content analysis at the stage of information collection helped to automate a considerable volume of articles and publications from the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* using Python software. Data collection was conducted during August-September 2023, in which 742 publications for January 2020-December 2022 on the official website of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* were analysed using a search engine with the keyword "China". It helped to identify the emotional colouring of the publications, as well as to trace their dynamics and narrative form. Its elements conditioned the highlighting of the main topics discussed in the publications, which helped to better understand the structure of the newspaper's news agenda. This method enabled a detailed quantitative analysis, implemented in Python, which was used to structurally evaluate news publications. It helped to conduct an in-depth and multifaceted analysis of news publications, which contributed to a fuller understanding of the mechanisms of coverage of the interaction between China and Central Asian states in the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek*.

The comparative method at the stage of determining the features of the realisation of news reports made it possible to compare how attitudes and events were covered in various times. It helped to highlight formational differences in reporting approaches, while determining the extent to which the newspaper covered the components of cooperation between China and Central Asia. Its elements helped to find long-term trends in publications over a prolonged period, considering the economic and political initiatives of states. This method provided an objective and complete picture of the specifics of the coverage of relations between China and Central Asian states in the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek*. It helped to understand the cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape the newspaper's coverage of topics and to identify key suggestions and recommendations that will improve the process of relations between the countries.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 Cooperation, principles, and features of international news reporting between China and Kyrgyz Republic**

China and Kyrgyz Republic are two states separated by history and geography, but united by the desire to strengthen peaceful and long-term relations. Their interaction, stretching over many years, has become a model of mutually beneficial cooperation between two different countries. Cooperation between China and Kyrgyz Republic is based on a range of key elements, including political trust, economic interests, and cultural enrichment. These countries learn from each other and find common interests in various fields. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the interaction between China and Kyrgyz Republic has shown dynamic growth (Pak, Menga, Feuer and Dowell, 2020). Economic partnership, political dialogue, and cultural exchange have formed an integral part of their interaction. Both states are firmly committed to strengthening their relations within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, as well as in the broader context of regional security and stability. Proceeding from this, Sino-Kyrgyz Republic relations continue to develop, bringing new opportunities and challenges for both sides, strengthening media cooperation, expanding international ties, improving the quality of news, and the impact of communications, strengthening mutual friendship and expanding partnership to lay a more solid foundation for further regional development. The years 2020-2022 were characterised by the COVID-19 epidemic, which profoundly affected international political interactions and commerce. The epidemic in Kyrgyzstan interrupted supply chains, postponed infrastructure projects, and hindered economic growth, but China persisted as a crucial partner, offering medical assistance and maintaining commerce through modified logistics. Despite the obstacles, diplomatic interactions persisted, with both nations prioritising the enhancement of collaboration in sectors including health, infrastructure, and regional security, within the context of projects like the Belt and Road.

Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov has articulated many assertions underscoring the enhancement of bilateral relations with China. In early February 2025, during his state visit to Beijing, President Japarov affirmed Kyrgyzstan's dedication to advancing high-quality Belt and Road collaboration with China. He emphasised the significance of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, asserting that it represents the most recent accomplishment of the Belt and Road Initiative and is crucial for maintaining the elevated level of relations between the two nations (Jingxi, 2025). Furthermore, President Japarov underscored the necessity of diversifying trade and fostering collaborative investment initiatives that correspond with the mutual interests of both countries. He observed that China's modernisation initiatives provide fresh prospects not only for Kyrgyzstan but also for the broader Central Asian region and other developing nations.

The media play a key role in contemporary international relations. In the case of China and Kyrgyz Republic, they become a valuable tool for strengthening diplomatic ties and expanding partnership between the two countries. In recent years, these states have intensified their efforts to increase information and cultural exchange. Kyrgyz media regularly cover China's economic and cultural initiatives, while Chinese media emphasise Kyrgyz cultural and tourism heritage. One of the key points of cooperation in the media sphere was the creation of joint television and radio programmes, as well as the participation of journalists from both countries in international forums and conferences. Through such interactions, people from both countries can get to know each other better, overcome stereotypes, and create the basis for long-term partnerships. Furthermore, the active use of digital platforms and social media allows for the instant sharing of news and opinions, making interactions more transparent and dynamic. Media space thus becomes a bridge for shaping foreign policy agendas and strengthening friendly relations, connecting China and Kyrgyz Republic in the era of digital diplomacy.

The media landscape of Kyrgyzstan comprises a combination of state-controlled, independent, and commercial sources, each exhibiting differing levels of proximity to the government. *Vecherniy Bishkek*, a prominent newspaper in Kyrgyzstan, holds a multifaceted position within this context. Historically, people

have viewed *Vecherniy Bishkek* as a relatively autonomous newspaper that occasionally aligns with governmental themes. This alignment is especially evident during substantial political or economic events, as the media may either mirror the government position or maintain a more neutral, balanced tone to circumvent controversy. The Kyrgyz populace typically views *Vecherniy Bishkek* as a credible information source, maintaining a degree of independence compared to other state-controlled media. However, governmental preferences may influence its editorial practices and reporting on sensitive political or economic matters.

Concerning censorship in Kyrgyzstan, although the nation is sometimes seen as more open than several Central Asian counterparts, media freedom remains constrained, especially for politically sensitive topics. The government exerts control over the predominant media channels, particularly via state-operated stations, but commercial media entities also face pressure and influence. The state uses several strategies to regulate media, including legislative constraints, selective enforcement, and the intimidation of journalists. For example, certain journalists encounter intimidation or threats for disseminating investigative findings on corruption or for critiquing government policy. Moreover, legislation concerning “extremism” or “defamation” may be employed to curtail press freedom and suppress dissenting opinions. Media outlets in Kyrgyzstan frequently practice self-censorship to evade legal consequences or governmental retaliation. The government has been known to exert its influence on advertisers to coerce media outlets into adhering to specific political themes. Nonetheless, a considerable level of media plurality persists, and independent journalists remain essential in ensuring governmental accountability, particularly via internet platforms and social media, which are less susceptible to direct oversight. Recent developments indicate that attempts to enhance the media landscape are underway, but the conflict between preserving independence and conforming to governmental expectations continues to provide a problem for Kyrgyzstan's media.

The international information space stands at the intersection of distinct cultures, identities, and political interests. The coverage of international news

between China and Kyrgyz Republic is no exception and requires consideration of several principles (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Basic principles of international news coverage between China and Kyrgyz Republic

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Objectivity	Journalism dealing with international relations should endeavour to be as objective as possible, avoiding one-sided assessments and bias.
Cultural sensitivity	Considering the cultural and historical differences between China and Kyrgyz Republic, it is necessary to present information in a way that does not cause misunderstandings or conflicts on this basis.
Reliability of information	Adherence to the principle of fact-checking and use of reliable sources of information.
Dialogue and mutual understanding	Coverage of events should enhance dialogue rather than reinforce contradictions or create information barriers.
Ethics and professionalism	Respect for journalistic ethics and professional standards in covering any topic, especially one as sensitive as international relation.
Inclusiveness	Provide an opportunity for different points of view to be presented and the interests of both parties to be considered.
Adaptability	In a rapidly changing information landscape, it is important to be responsive and ready for new challenges

Adherence to these principles allows creating an objective, comprehensive, and multifaceted view of the current state of relations between China and Kyrgyz Republic, and to expand mutual understanding and trust between the countries and their peoples. They promote greater cultural and information exchange, which improves understanding and trust between the two countries. The subjects and audiences of international news events are diverse. Due to differences in the political, economic, and national systems of states, the causes and background of events influenced by ideologies are complex. The essence of the judgement about a particular news process is quite hidden, and its in-depth analysis often has a particular scenario.

China and Kyrgyz Republic, despite their geographical neighbourhood and shared history, represent distinct cultural, political, and social contexts. This is reflected in the features of the international news reports of both countries. Thus, Chinese media, oriented towards a massive population and centuries-old culture, emphasise cultural and historical aspects in their news, when Kyrgyz media emphasise national identity and cultural heritage (Reyaz, 2020). In China, the media is state-controlled, which is reflected in the tone and content of the news. In Kyrgyz Republic, despite its challenges, the media are relatively independent, which creates diversity in news approaches. Chinese news often covers infrastructure projects, investment, and cultural exchange, while Kyrgyz news often covers bilateral relations, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural interaction (Diekerhof, 2023). China's audience is domestically oriented, where, as the country's influence grows, interest in international news increases. In Kyrgyz Republic, attention is paid to both internal and external developments, especially in the context of relations with key partners.

The international relations between China and Kyrgyz Republic have profound historical roots and contemporary economic, cultural, and political aspects, which are reflected in diverse types of news reports (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Types of news stories between China and Kyrgyz Republic

Type	Characteristics
Economic news	They refer to bilateral economic cooperation, investment projects, trade, and economic forums. Elements such as the One Belt, One Road initiative are also discussed in this context.
Political news	Contains information on summits, agreements, diplomatic initiatives, and regional security.
Cultural and educational news	Regarding cultural exchanges, festivals, exhibitions, educational programmes, and scholarships for students.
Technical and scientific cooperation	Reflects research, innovation, technology exchange, and scientific seminars between the two countries.
Social and humanitarian news	Provide reports on humanitarian aid, social projects, and issues related to public health and welfare.
Tourism and sport	News about joint tourism initiatives, sporting events, competitions, and cultural travel.
Environmental news	Reports on joint projects in the field of ecology, sustainable development, and environmental conservation.
Security and defence	News related to regional security, counterterrorism, defence agreements, and joint exercises.

Consequently, the diversity of international news between China and Kyrgyz Republic reflects the depth and diversity of their bilateral relationship, which covers a wide range of areas, from economics and politics to culture and education. In today's world, where globalisation and international cooperation are becoming key factors in the successful development of countries, high-quality and diverse coverage of international news is of particular importance. It is this multifactor interaction that makes the news flow between the countries multifaceted, demonstrating the breadth and depth of their cooperation on the world stage.

Thus, it was determined that in the era of the information society, news serves as a fundamental basis between countries, shaping the image of a nation in the eyes of the world community and building an understanding of foreign policy priorities. International news reports between China and Kyrgyz Republic are no exception. Beyond the mere exchange of information about events and decisions lie deep cultural, economic, and political undertones. In doing so, the

choice of stories, the emphasis of coverage, and the style of reporting in the media of both countries are based on certain principles that provide a solid foundation for understanding the unique dynamics of the media environment, showing how events become a reflection of profound cultural and diplomatic ties. In addition, it is revealed that the features of the international news reports of China and Kyrgyz Republic reflect the uniqueness of each country, their interests, and priorities in the international arena. Their understanding allows to penetrate deeper into the essence of the relationship between the two countries and define their role in global processes.

### **3.2 Analysis of the content structure and dynamics of news publications about China on the example of the Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper**

The Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper has long established itself as one of Kyrgyz Republic's main information sources, covering key events, trends, and news in the region. The newspaper has been a leader among print media for a long time. Through its long history and principles of journalism, it has earned the trust and respect of its readers. The focus of Vecherniy Bishkek is topical news, analytical articles and reports covering various spheres of Kyrgyz life. In the context of intensifying cooperation between Kyrgyz Republic and China, its role in transmitting relevant and objective information becomes even more important. The coverage of bilateral relations, economic, cultural, and political initiatives in the pages of Vecherniy Bishkek not only shapes the image of China among the regional public, but also reflects the interests and sentiments of the Kyrgyz population regarding cooperation. Thus, on the official website of the newspaper, thanks to the introduction of the term "China" as a search engine keyword, the total number of news reports related to assorted topics of the state for January 2020 – December 2022 was calculated (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Classification of thematic content of Vecherniy Bishkek reports on “China” for January 2020 – December 2022

Content	Years		
	2020	2021	2022
Politics	181	238	241
Economy	111	132	137
Public	159	145	121
Culture	32	36	54
Sport	5	8	15
Literature	1	6	12
Training	2	16	20
Tourism	0	3	3
Regions	0	5	0
Elections	0	1	1
President	17	23	41
World news	55	128	130
<b>Total number of publications</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>264</b>

Thus, the analysis of the newspaper’s publications shows that the most frequent reports on “China” are events of political and economic contexts, which have dynamic growth for 2020-2022, as well as world news. Consequently, a great deal of attention is paid to Chinese political life. News about domestic and foreign policy, activities of the head of state, parliament, and government regularly appear on the pages of the publication. The economic section most often contains information on investment projects, exchange rates, trends, and forecasts of economic development. This tendency towards political and economic coverage is due to the fact that, as members of the Shanghai

Cooperation Organisation, the two countries often exchange political opinions (Zelizer, 2019). The two sides also understand and support each other in some international affairs, and their political mutual trust is deepening day by day. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has become an important platform for international interaction between China, Kyrgyz Republic, and other Central Asian countries. Furthermore, large-scale projects are being actively implemented under the One Belt, One Road initiative. States are actively promoting the construction of international highways to effectively facilitate trade, tourism, and transport. Even amid pandemic and global instability, Chinese investment in Kyrgyz Republic continues to grow.

The positive articles emphasise the advantages and triumphs of the Sino-Kyrgyz partnership, highlighting economic growth, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic accomplishments. For instance, they may highlight China's investments in infrastructure or educational partnerships. Conversely, negative stories emphasise the dangers or obstacles, like economic dependency on China, environmental concerns, or security issues, frequently underscoring the possible disadvantages of this expanding connection. An illustration may involve apprehensions over Kyrgyzstan's growing dependence on Chinese loans. Articles that are neutral report events, data, or agreements, like trade volumes or official visits, without giving their opinion on what they mean. They are factual and do not have a clear positive or negative tone. Collectively, these pieces influence public attitudes by offering a balanced perspective on the bilateral relationship.

Vecherniy Bishkek is a full-fledged information resource that provides its readers with a comprehensive understanding of current events and processes between Kyrgyz Republic and China, while covering a variety of spheres of

society. In this regard, when analysing the publications on the topic “China,” certain emotional tendencies are noticeable, which characterise the approach of the editorial staff to the coverage of Chinese-Kyrgyz relations. Thus, most of the publications are neutral. This is especially true for materials on economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and educational programmes. There is a cautious attitude towards some aspects of cooperation, especially economic initiatives that may affect the economy of Kyrgyz Republic (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Emotional trends of publications of the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek on the topic “China” for January 2020-December 2022

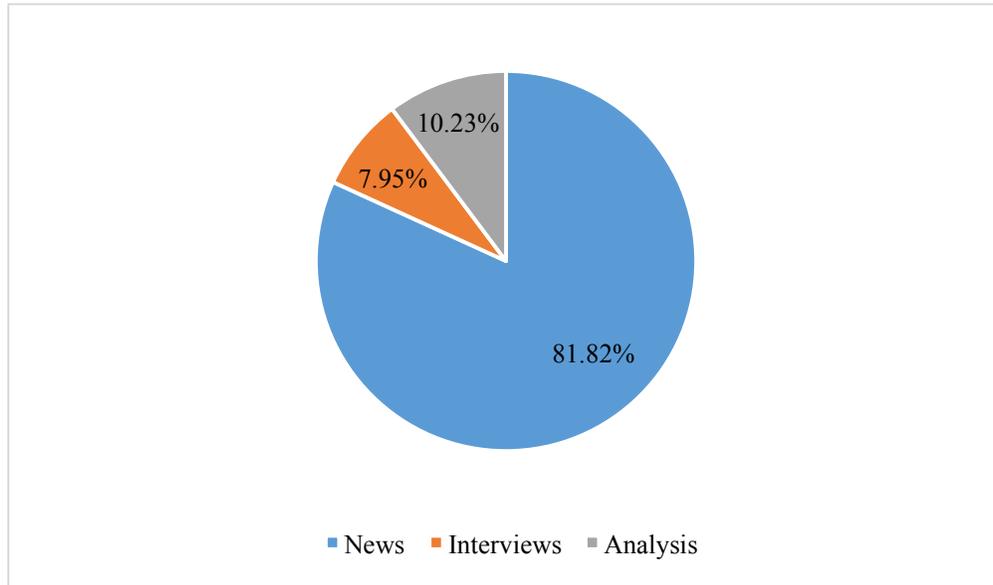
<b>The emotional nature of the trends</b>			
<b>Years</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral (objective)</b>
2020	93	2	125
2021	82	14	162
2022	91	16	157

Among 220 news articles in 2020, neutral reports accounted for 56.82 per cent, positive reports accounted for 42.27 per cent, and negative reports accounted for 0.91 per cent; among 258 news articles in 2021, objective reports accounted for 62.79 per cent, positive reports accounted for 31.78 per cent, and negative reports accounted for 5.43 per cent; among 264 news articles in 2022, objective reports accounted for 59.47 per cent, positive reports accounted for 34.47 per cent, and negative reports accounted for 6.06 per cent. This state of affairs emphasises that the attitude of the Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper of Kyrgyz Republic towards China is generally quite good. Materials on the topic “China”

are often provided with comments of experts, analysts, and specialists, which gives publications additional depth and allows the reader to better understand the essence of the issue. A striking example is the publication on “Chinese modernisation is an alternative model for developing countries” (Nichiporova, 2022). However, despite its positive attitude towards cooperation with China, the newspaper tries to stay objective, covering difficult moments in the relations between the two countries, such as economic or environmental challenges, and looking for possible ways to optimise cooperation.

In recent years, it is noticeable that the materials of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* devoted to China are mainly presented in the format of news. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, China is a country with rapidly changing political, economic, and social dynamics. The events taking place there can have a direct impact on the Central Asian region as well as on the world stage. Thus, informing readers quickly and promptly becomes a priority for the editorial office. Secondly, the news format allows for a concise and succinct presentation of key information, making the material accessible to a wide audience. In conditions of information excess, when the reader is literally “drowning” in the flow of news, brevity and clarity of presentation become the key to successful communication with the audience. Nevertheless, despite the predominance of news content, the newspaper also offers in-depth analytical articles and interviews that allow for a deeper dive into the topic and understanding of the context of what is happening (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Genre ratio of publications of the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek on the theme “China” for January 2022 – December 2022



It follows that news reports – short and concise notes presenting the most recent and topical events – are the most frequently used by Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper. Their specific feature is that such materials contain factual information without in-depth analysis or commentary. The next niche is occupied by analytical articles, which try to delve deeper into the topic, looking at the causes, effects, and potential consequences of a certain event or phenomenon. In the case of China, such publications concern economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and political initiatives. The final link is the interviews. Often, they are used to show readers the different points of view of experts, politicians, specialists, and business representatives (Charron, Annoni, 2021). Therefore, Vecherniy Bishkek, covering the relations between Kyrgyz Republic and China, uses a wide

range of genres, which allows readers to receive multifaceted information about this subject. Such diversity contributes to a full and objective perception of the situation in the region.

Public opinion polls in Kyrgyzstan have clarified the populace's perspectives of China, indicating a multifaceted and dynamic environment. Thirty-seven percent of Kyrgyz respondents perceived China as the foremost economic danger, underscoring apprehensions over economic reliance and the possibility for debt traps linked to Chinese investments (Karibayeva, 2020). In contrast, a 2018 study by the International Republican Institute revealed that 52 per cent of Kyrgyz respondents viewed China favourably, indicating that a substantial segment of the society acknowledges the advantages of Sino-Kyrgyz collaboration (International Republican Institute, 2019). However, Dukeyev (2024) describes a more intricate scenario. The research indicated that over 70.5 per cent of participants in Kazakhstan held a negative view of China, with 35.2 per cent categorising their viewpoint as "somewhat unfavourable" and 35.3 per cent as "very unfavourable." This data relates to Kazakhstan but also mirrors wider regional attitudes that may affect opinions in Kyrgyzstan. These findings highlight the complex and dynamic character of public opinion in Kyrgyzstan about China, shaped by economic ties, cultural interactions, and geopolitical shifts.

The data analysis revealed that *Vecherniy Bishkek's* reports on China are mainly devoted to politics and economy, while there are too few publications on culture. However, friendship between states lies in mutual closeness between peoples, which requires strengthening the cultural and value connection between China and Kyrgyz Republic according to the principle of "culture first" (Ghaly, Dang and Stathopoulos, 2020). Therefore, it is important for the media to

strengthen the dissemination of the common cultural heritage of the two countries and make full use of the rich historical documents to create and report literary works on the history of friendly exchanges (Rollberg and Laruelle, 2015). In addition, cooperation between Chinese and Kyrgyz media should be strengthened, and cultural exchange, singing, dancing, calligraphy, painting, and food events should be widely organised and expanded (Hutchings, Asamoah-Gyadu, Evolvi and Han, 2020). In the context of globalisation, the media's ability to focus on promoting mutual understanding and recognition in the context of history and reality, and to contribute to the friendly improvement of bilateral relations through an active and open approach, is of particular importance.

Thus, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the publications of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* revealed that most of the messages in the media space belong to the genre of news, and political reports occupy a principal place in the coverage of interrelations between Kyrgyz Republic and China. Political mutual trust is at the centre of attention and dissemination of information between states. The analysis of the content structure and dynamics of news publications about China in the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* revealed a range of noteworthy features and trends. Throughout the period under study, one can observe a persistent interest in Chinese topics, which emphasises the relevance of this direction in the Kyrgyz media. Content analysis showed that most publications are presented in news format. This may indicate the newspaper's desire to quickly inform its audience about key events related to China. However, along with the news reports, there are also interviews and in-depth analyses that allow the reader to get a detailed understanding of the context of current events.

#### 4. Discussions

The international community pays special attention to news media publications that contribute to the “cultural power” of the people to build a country's image and create a national worldview. Information organisations are much more than just information dissemination systems. For countries that intend to promote public diplomacy, international news acts as a primary tool to reinforce state interests on the world stage. According to Coker (2023), international news reports always reflect the voice of the country, which consists in the politicisation of reporting positions, diversification of communication channels, and their methods of dissemination. The very activities of media and public opinion have a strong political nature that can be accompanied by government propaganda, while exporting the values of the state in international communication. The current international news channels are in a trend of diversification. With the help of mobile Internet, big data, social media, and artificial intelligence, they reflect communicative characteristics such as strong penetration and attachment to events, social empowerment, reconstruction of spatio-temporal relationships between information transmission and reception, and the complex transformation of the media environment. Media convergence has undergone all aspects of integration, from digital to organisational form, creating a broader distribution pattern of public access to news information. In analysing the information, it is observed that the media, in one way or another, lends itself to transformational changes that are regulated by the international community, given the political ambitions of the state.

From the perspective of Verboord and Kristensen (2021), in the general environment of global economic integration, the connection between people and the world is becoming increasingly inseparable, which undoubtedly makes the public pay more attention to international events. In today's world, where borders between countries are becoming less and less visible and the process of globalisation is increasing, international news is of particular relevance. But with the active integration of individual states, as economic, political, and social ties are strengthened, international journalism faces new challenges. The coverage

of international events should not only convey relevant information, but also consider the numerous nuances of bilateral and multilateral relations, as well as the specifics of integration processes. International news has always been a living reflection of foreign policy processes and interstate relations. With the increased cooperation of states at various levels, the role of such coverage becomes even more important. When countries join economic alliances, conduct joint military exercises or enter into cultural agreements, the importance of accurate and timely information to citizens about these events increases. This not only allows the population to better understand the current foreign policy situation, but also forms an image of another state, its people and culture. The data reviewed by the researchers echo the findings, emphasising that the media occupy a prominent place in reflecting and shaping relations between states.

The position of Chen et al. (2021) emphasises that the media play a key role in shaping society's opinion of cooperation partners. Their objectivity, professionalism, and responsibility determine how correctly and fully the information will be perceived. Therewith, a balanced and impartial approach to international news coverage is particularly relevant in the context of interconnected countries. Furthermore, the cooperation of states involves the exchange of experience, technology, knowledge, which is also reflected in the news. This can apply to large infrastructure projects as well as small joint initiatives in culture, education, or science. However, one should not forget that in cooperative environments, conflict situations also arise, which also require media attention. In a globalised world, information flows around the world and news of a conflict in one part of the world instantly reaches another. However, when it comes to countries linked by close economic and political relations, reporting on such conflicts requires special tact and neutrality. Here it is particularly important to maintain a balance and avoid misrepresentation of information in favour of one of the parties. The media are responsible for creating an objective and unbiased image of the events taking place. This is particularly important when countries' economic cooperation may suffer due to misunderstandings or misinterpretation of conflict situations. The findings of this study also emphasise

that it is important for the media space to adhere to the principles of journalism by focusing on neutrality and objectivity, regardless of the nature of the events.

According to Brosius et al. (2020), journalists and editors should be aware of the possible consequences of their publications and strive to ensure that their materials contribute to the resolution of the conflict rather than its aggravation. It should also be considered that in the modern world many conflicts have a hidden side, related to the struggle for markets, resources, or influence in a certain region. Political players actively use the media environment as a platform to achieve their goals. This can be the dissemination of certain agendas, image building, compromising opponents, or manipulating public opinion to create the desired image. Economic players, for their part, are also not being left behind. Large corporations and business structures have their own corporate communication media or enter into partnership agreements with independent media. This allows them to build a positive company image, attract investment, influence consumer decisions, or even manipulate markets. However, this impact of media on society has a downside. With globalisation and digitalisation, information spreads instantly, and therefore any attempt at manipulation can be uncovered and cause a backlash. Public scandals related to falsified news or inaccurate information can lead to a loss of trust in a particular resource, negatively affecting international cooperation and integration. The researchers' rationales echo the findings of this paper, highlighting a definite link between the activities of news organisations and the political and economic components of the country in which the media environment operates.

Researchers Howe et al. (2020) believe that considering cultural and social differences between countries will help to avoid misunderstandings and errors in interpreting news. In today's world, media acts not only as a source of information, but also as a platform for cultural exchange between nations. This is especially true for countries actively cooperating in the political-economic sphere. Cultural exchange allows TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers to provide audiences with rich and diverse content, covering events, festivals, traditions, and arts of the partner country. For readers, such a process opens new horizons and allows them to learn more about the culture, history, and customs of

neighbouring countries. In the context of political and economic cooperation, such exchanges through the media help to create a positive perception of the partner country, which is important for building trusting relations. The media environment is becoming an instrument of soft diplomacy, creating favourable ground for resolving issues in the economic and political spheres. Joint projects such as films, documentaries, and music videos stimulate the creative and professional development of media industries, while media content in different languages can be a motivation to learn the speech of the partner country, which reinforces cultural and business ties. The researchers' findings coincide with the conclusions obtained in this paper, emphasising the importance of developing the cultural component of the media, which forms the basis for successful interaction and cooperation between countries.

In conclusion, having analysed the trends and specific features of media functioning in the conditions of interaction of global and regional processes between countries it was revealed that international news plays a crucial role in the development of mutual understanding and trust between countries. They serve as a fundamental element linking peoples and as a tool to help strengthen international relations at various levels. Despite all the complexities and challenges facing the media, the pursuit of balance and objectivity is still the paramount task of journalism. This is the only way to ensure the trust of the audience and to foster international cooperation in the face of global challenges. In addition, cultural exchange through media was found to be an effective tool for strengthening international relations at various levels. In the context of political and economic cooperation, it plays a key role in enhancing cultural dialogue, increasing mutual understanding, and building trust between states.

## **5. Conclusions**

The study found that in the era of globalisation and accelerated information dynamics, the importance of adequate media coverage of international relations is of particular importance. China, as the most important geopolitical

and economic partner for many countries, including Kyrgyz Republic, is the centre of attention of the world and national media. The newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek*, for many years, has been one of the leading information sources in Kyrgyz Republic, covering current news, analyses, and reviews of world and regional events. Among a wide range of topics, special attention is paid to bilateral relations between Kyrgyz Republic and China. This attention to this topic gives rise to a variety of genre forms of information presentation.

The importance of the genre aspect lies in its ability to shape a certain perception of events among readers, to emphasise key moments and to reveal the dynamics of the relationship between the two countries. The basic principles of their coverage were the result of long historical, cultural, and political interactions. Above all, balance and objectivity are at the top of the list. With globalisation and multiple information sources, maintaining the trust of the audience is only possible if the rules of honest journalism are followed. The second key principle is cultural sensitivity. Also noteworthy is a commitment to in-depth analyses and explanations of complex international processes. News coverage is not limited to superficial reporting of facts but aims to give the audience a comprehensive understanding of what is happening. Cooperation between China and Kyrgyz Republic contributes not only to the expansion of the information field, but also to the strengthening of friendly relations between the two states.

Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the publications of the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* made it possible to reveal that a large half of the materials for the period January 2020 – December 2022 on the topic “China” characterizes a neutral attitude and coverage of events, where the economic and political nature prevails, given the joint promotion of various initiatives, strategies, and programmes. In addition, it was found that over 80% of the publications at the end of 2022 are presented by the newspaper in the form of news reports, conditioning their practicality and speed. The specific feature of the newspaper is its in-depth analytical approach to the issues of bilateral cooperation. *Vecherniy Bishkek* not only informs its readers about events, but also provides expert opinions and interviews with specialists, which allow readers to

see the full picture of relations between the two states. Nevertheless, the contributions also reflect the complexities and contradictions that sometimes arise during cooperation. The newspaper endeavours to maintain a balance between positive and critical coverage, allowing readers to make their own assessment of the situation.

The analysis of publications revealed the newspaper's active coverage of prominent moments of bilateral relations between China and Kyrgyz Republic, as well as key events within China of international importance. Thus, the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* plays a vital role in shaping the Kyrgyz audience's perception of China. It provides its readers with relevant, diverse, and competent information, contributing to a profound understanding of the complex dynamics of country-to-country relations and current processes in China. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the purpose of this study was fulfilled. However, the study of socio-cultural aspects within the functioning of modern media requires further research.

## Notes

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## Perceiving China Across Continents: Comparative Attitudes in Indonesia and Hungary toward China's Global Role

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### Abstract

Indonesia and Hungary are influential in their respective regions—Indonesia in Southeast Asia and Hungary within the Visegrad Group. Both maintain close relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and have signed onto the Belt and Road Initiative, making Chinese presence increasingly visible. Yet, little research examines how local citizens perceive this presence. This paper compares perceptions of Indonesian and Hungarian university students regarding China's role. Building on Xi and Primiano's analysis on China's influence in Asia using secondary data, this study surveyed students in both countries that considers historical, political, and social factors. Findings show Indonesians feel closer to China, while Hungarians lean toward the United States. However, generally, both

Indonesians and Hungarians acknowledge China's developmental contributions positively.

**Keywords:** *China's Image, Power, University Student, Indonesia, Hungary*

## 1. Background

Over the past two decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has emerged as a central player in global affairs, particularly through its growing economic influence: in 2014, China became the world's largest trading nation as reckoned by the sum of its imports and exports. Attaining this status, China eclipsed even the United States. This may have contributed to the administration of US President Donald Trump launching a trade war against its near-peer competitor (Grosse, Gamsó, & Nelson, 2021). This shift in economic stature has coincided with an assertive foreign policy agenda, positioning China as an alternative to the U.S.-led liberal international order.

Indeed, even more threatening to the global order than China's global economic reach is Beijing's efforts to transform China's identity and role conception, and the political consequences this may have on the international stage, since the launch of the PRC's "Go Global" (走出去) strategy in the early 2000s (Liu, 2023).

One of the most significant instruments of China's global strategy is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. The BRI eclipses these other efforts to raise China to the position of global superpower, as it is designed as a massive infrastructure development project with global reach, expanding China's power and influence not just to Africa and Latin America, but deep into Europe, as well as closer to home in the Asia-Pacific. It is not only the global south and developing nations targeted by the BRI, but also developed countries with OECD status and states with high GDP per capita. Unlike Western models of development assistance, which are often tied to liberal economic reforms and conditionalities under the Washington Consensus, China offers loans and investment with fewer political strings attached in relational perspective

(Wang, 2021). This has made its model appealing to states dissatisfied with traditional Western approaches to development.

China's approach has been successful because there are ample regimes in the international community that are dissatisfied with the Western approach to development assistance, which they deem restrictive and with double standards. China therefore has presented them with an alternative to the Washington Consensus way of lending that demands liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and maintaining strict fiscal discipline. The development assistance provided by China, in contrast, does away with those strings. However, serious efforts are still needed for the BRI to conform to sustainability norms established by international frameworks (Smith, 2021).

Beijing has also engaged in several other efforts to establish for itself *bona fides* as a major player on the international scene, such as brokering a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore relations, providing aid and loans in Africa and Latin America, and increasingly re-establishing itself as the Middle Kingdom of East Asia. Due to these and other efforts by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China's image is changing, and it is the purpose of this research to examine how these perceptions compare across different regions, specifically in Southeast Asia and Central Europe.

China has engaged in several projects in both Indonesia and Hungary as a part of both its BRI initiative and its "Go Global" strategy. Indonesia is a strategic country; predominantly Moslem and the biggest democracy in Southeast Asia, with an oversized influence in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Indonesia thus could be an important strategic partner for China in securing Beijing's interests in the region. On the other hand, located in the heart of Central Europe, Hungary is a member of both the European Union and NATO, and is a vital foothold for China to extend its influence into Europe. Moreover, it borders Serbia, which is another of the PRC's closest allies in Europe, and a crucial component of Beijing's campaign in Southern and Central Europe.

Indonesia and Hungary have enjoyed intimate relations with China since their respective leaders took office: President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Both of these leaders appear to prefer

to cooperate more with China in strategic projects. For instance, Indonesia enjoyed a loan from China to build a high-speed railway, while Hungary has been focusing on attracting investment from China for providing jobs and establishing manufacturing in Hungary.

In fact, this relationship does not only apply to heads of state at the presidential or prime ministerial level, but also to high-level government officials, bureaucrats, and ministers are getting more comfortable with stronger relations with their Chinese counterparts. For example, at the ministerial level, the Indonesian state has a position, Coordinator for Cooperation with China, to handle paperwork for the large volume of Chinese investments and involvement in various business sectors including nickel smelters, cement, and the steel industry. China's investment has been growing since the Jokowi administration took charge in 2014, and it appears it will continue unabated during the tenure of Jokowi's successor, Prabowo Subianto. The relations between Indonesia and China remains in a good place with the continuation of the Prabowo administration (Peterson, 2024).

Meanwhile, Hungary has been continuing its long, close relationship with China since Budapest officially recognized the PRC in 1949. Both foreign ministers and high officers enjoy friendly interactions and issue joint statements on state visits. Political and economic relations between China and Hungary have been at a high level since Orbán took office in 2010.

The existence of close Indonesia-China relations and long-standing China-Hungary relations, it is interesting to further explore the perceptions of the people of the two countries, and what views they have towards the PRC. Despite these close ties, relatively little research has been conducted on how the populations of these countries perceive China.

Comparative perception studies in international relations explore how states and societies view one another, and how such perceptions influence policy behavior. More recent scholarship employs comparative designs and survey methods to map cross-national perceptions. For instance, Silver, Devlin & Huang, (2019) and Wike et al., (2023) document significant regional variation in global opinions of China; positive in many developing countries, but increasingly

negative in advanced economies. Xi and Primiano (2020), meanwhile, provide a methodological model for studying external perceptions of China.

Despite these advances, the literature remains dominated by state-level and elite-focused analyses (Shambaugh, 2013; Ho and Lee, 2024; Yang and Keller, 2025). This leaves only a limited understanding of how public or generational perceptions contribute to shaping foreign relations narratives. This gap is particularly relevant as younger cohorts, empowered by digital media, increasingly participate in international discourse and influence foreign policy climates. Integrating insights from both soft power and perception studies thus offers a more comprehensive view of how China's global image is constructed, contested, and localized across diverse political and cultural contexts.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how young people in Indonesia and Hungary perceive China and how these perceptions contribute to the evolving discourse on foreign relations. As digital-native generations increasingly shape public opinion, policy debates, and transnational communication, understanding their views offers novel insight into the social foundations of international relations. By focusing on youth perspectives, this research not only enriches the literature on China's global image but also reveals how generational worldviews may influence the future trajectory of bilateral relations. In doing so, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how China's rise is interpreted across different regions and political systems. How do public perceptions of China vary between Indonesia and Hungary across political, economic, and cultural dimensions? This sort of China perception study has been undertaken in several nations since the relative rise in China's prominence in politics and economics, and hence in the public's consciousness. However, there has been little research comparing two different countries' perceptions of China, let alone on different continents. In this study, the authors aim to compare Hungarians' and Indonesians' perceptions of China.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Data**

The study uses primary data collection from citizens in Indonesia and Hungary to describe their perceptions of their countries' relations with China. The data was collected through a survey using a questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of China's influence and role in their respective countries with online and informed consent. The selected and accessible sample consisted of students in both countries, using local online surveyors. The sample was obtained through accidental/purposive sampling based on accessibility. The sample consisted of individuals of different ages and geographical backgrounds. In addition, the majors chosen by these young people also varied. The survey collected data related to respondents' views on aspects such as China's economic and political influence, China's role in development, and their attitudes towards Chinese norms and values. By combining samples from two geographically and culturally different countries, this research can provide a comparative picture of China's image in Central Europe and Southeast Asia. The model is inspired by the studies that were conducted by Xi and Primiano (2020) and ISEAS (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies)- Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore on Southeast Asian Survey 2023 (2023) and it has conducted reliability test for its questionnaire with the rate of scale reliability coefficient 0.6804.

### **2.2 Rasch Model**

To analyze respondents' perceptions, this study used the Rasch Model, which is one of the methods in item response theory (IRT). This model was chosen because of its ability to accurately measure individual responses to poll questions, while considering the difficulty level of the items asked (Parmaningsih and Saputro, 2021). In addition, the Rasch Model also has several advantages for conducting analyses in social science because it fulfills the five principles of measurement models. First, it is able to provide a linear scale with equal intervals. Second, it can

predict missing data. Third, it can provide more precise estimates. Fourth, it can detect model inaccuracy. Fifth, it produces replicable measurements (Sumintono and Widhiarso, 2014).

In the context of this study, the Rasch Model was used to measure student perceptions of China in several key dimensions, such as economic influence, politics, and China's contribution to development in the respondent's country. Each dimension of perception served as a parameter to be measured by the Rasch Model, with the aim of identifying the extent to which respondents' views of China varied between them. This analysis allows the research to explore more detailed and reliable differences in perceptions between individuals as well as between countries.

Through the use of the Rasch Model, the study was able to produce objective and comparable measurements, helping to understand more in-depth perceptions of how university students in both countries view China, including the factors that are influential in shaping perceptions of the relationship. The table below shows the dimensions of perception that were measured by the study:

**Table 1.** Research Dimensions

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer Choices</b>
Development	China's role in development in your country?	Worsen Significantly / Worsen / Remain the Same / Improved / Improved Significantly
	China should make bilateral trade truly mutually beneficial by addressing trade imbalances?	Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
	China should resolve all territorial and maritime disputes peacefully in accordance with international law?	

Table 1 (Continued).

Dimension	Question	Answer Choices
Democracy	The development of democracy in China?	Worsen Significantly / Worsen / Remain the Same / Improved / Improved Significantly
	Get rid of parliament / Strong leader to decide things?	Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
	Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office?	
	The army should come in to govern the country?	
	We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people?	
Future Relationship	The future of Indonesia/Hungary closer to? (US/China)	US/ China
	Cooperation preference of Indonesia/Hungary?	
	The future of Indonesia-China/Hungary-China relations?	Worsen Significantly / Worsen / Remain the Same / Improved / Improved Significantly
Chinese Influence	Chinese influence in your country?	Positive/Negative
	Use of economic tools and tourism to punish my country's foreign policy choices?	Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
	Mistreatment of its minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang and its handling of Hong Kong?	
	Strong-arm tactics in Taiwan, the South China Sea and the Mekong?	
	Growing economic dominance and political influence in my country?	
	Tacit support for Russian invasion of Ukraine?	
	Interference in my country's domestic affairs (including influence over the ethnic Chinese citizens of my country)?	

### **3. Discussions**

#### **3.1 China and Indonesia Relations**

The perception of China among the Indonesian public is a fraught one. It is colored by the long history, going back as far as the days of the Dutch colonial times, of prejudice against the country's ethnic Chinese population. During the Second World War, members of the Chinese diaspora were perceived to have been sympathetic to communism, and more recently, rich Chinese-Indonesian businessmen further invite resentment and suspicion among the local population. Indonesia saw a purge of communist insurgents in the 1960s, in which hundreds of suspected communists, many ethnically Chinese, lost their lives after the Indonesian military claimed that a coup was underway. Likewise, the aforementioned Chinese tycoons were blamed for the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s, and this erupted in riots in 1998, in which an estimated 1,000 people were murdered, many of them ethnically Chinese. Though comparatively tempered, such ill-feeling persists, with many Indonesians referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus," and some netizens calling for a fatwa on Chinese nationals and even Chinese-Indonesians. This section will review the factors that influence public perception of China in Indonesia, primarily the economic and trade ties, people-to-people interactions such as tourism and education, and the military interactions that receive much attention in the media (Rakhmat and Pashya, 2020). Against this historical backdrop, many Indonesians today are no longer consumed by the kind of anti-Chinese sentiment that erupted violently in 1998. The country's democratic transition, combined with greater cultural diversity and exposure to global norms, has gradually reshaped public attitudes. Lessons drawn from the dark history of 1998 have also played a role, creating stronger awareness of the dangers of ethnic scapegoating and the need for national cohesion. Among younger generations, particularly university students, there is a noticeable shift toward greater openness and friendliness toward Chinese Indonesians. This is reflected not only in daily social interactions but also in collective political behaviour. The most recent example came during the September 2025

demonstrations, which, unlike the riots of 1998, were not marked by looting or violence targeting Chinese-owned businesses or communities. Instead, the protests remained focused on broader political and economic grievances, signalling that anti-Chinese sentiment is no longer the automatic outlet for popular frustration but tend to be grassroots racism (Tanasaldy, 2022). While underlying prejudices have not disappeared entirely, the relative absence of ethnic scapegoating points to a generational change in attitudes (Fitriani, 2018) and provides a foundation for more constructive perceptions of China and its role in Indonesia's development.

Given this difficult history, recent progress in the relationship between the two countries has been promising. When China first launched its BRI program in 2013, its focus was on the construction of enormous infrastructure projects such as railways, roads, and ports. Recently, however, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced a shift in focus toward "small but beautiful" projects in Beijing's partner countries, mostly those related to connectivity. Of the BRI participating countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the largest. The scheme has led to billions of dollars' worth of investment in nickel processing, as well as the region's first high-speed rail project. The shift, however, means that new projects will be less high-stakes, and smaller in scale. This downsizing of the BRI is likely due to the downturn in the global economy, as well as that of China, and the trade war with the United States. This is also likely aimed at rehabilitating China's public image, which took a hit when several BRI-recipient countries, including Sri Lanka and Zambia, defaulted on their BRI loans, prompting claims that China was setting "debt traps" to ensnare, and thereby put itself in a position to manipulate, poorer countries (Syarif, 2023).

China is Indonesia's largest trading partner, as well as its second-largest investor origin country. The trade value between the two countries exceeded USD133 billion in 2022, while investment volume reached a value of USD8.2 billion that same year. In 2023, China played host to a number of high-ranking Indonesian officials, suggesting that those numbers had nowhere else to go but up. Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo met with his Chinese counterpart in July 2023 to seek help to build industrial facilities in North Kalimantan, as well as

to develop the Nusantara Capital City. The meeting produced no fewer than eight memorandums of understanding (MOUs) covering increased Chinese purchases of *porang* flour (which is a raw material for certain types of processed snack foods), tabasheer powder (a raw material used in pharmaceutical and cosmetics products), and bird's nests. A bird that is common in parts of Indonesia, the swiftlet, is known to make its nest out of dried saliva, and this nest can be harvested and made into a soup that, according to Chinese belief, has a number of health benefits, in addition to being delicious. This soup carries a high price tag in China, making the harvesting and exportation of these nests a big business. Other commercial medical areas covered by the MOUs included vaccine production, equipment for diagnosing diseases, and health information systems, as well as other economic cooperation (Bhwana, 2024).

Indonesia is a favored destination for Chinese companies to build factories. There are a number of reasons for this, most especially the ready availability of raw materials such as bauxite and copper. Moreover, since the Sino-US trade war began, a number of Chinese companies have found that it may be easier for them to penetrate the US market if they pose as an Indonesian, as opposed to a Chinese, exporter. This can be especially profitable in the lucrative electric vehicle (EV) market. Wuling Motors, a company with headquarters based in China's Guangxi province, recently opened an assembly plant just outside Jakarta, and its Air EV hatchback dominates EV sales in Indonesia. Moreover, the Chinese battery manufacturer Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., (CATL) committed last year to a US\$5.97 billion joint investment plan for lithium-ion battery production in Indonesia, covering every step in the supply chain, from mining the raw materials, to fabricating the battery cells, to end-of-life recycling. This venture is made possible by Indonesia's wealth in nickel that, thanks to Chinese investments in mining and processing, turned Indonesia into the world's biggest nickel producer. Several Chinese players in EV battery production, including CNGR Advanced Material Co., Ltd., Ningbo Lygend Mining Co. Ltd., and Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt Industry Co., Ltd., are opening smelters in Indonesia to process nickel for battery production (Maulia et al., 2023).

Trade and investment are not the only avenues of exchange between China and Indonesia. Education, which is also a big business, is a sector in which many Indonesians come into contact with their Chinese peers, helping to inform their opinions of the country. Perhaps the biggest soft-power effort launched by Beijing to improve China's image abroad has been the Confucius Institutes.

No fewer than six Confucius Institutes, in collaboration with Indonesia's Coordinating Board for Mandarin Language Education, are in operation across Indonesia to teach Mandarin and promote Chinese culture. Student exchanges have been taking place since 2011 between Nanchang University in China's Jiangxi province and South Sulawesi's Hasanuddin University. A reported 2,000 Indonesian students took part in exchange trips to China from 2011 to 2015. Moreover, East Java's Muhammadiyah Malang University, Bandung's Maranatha Christian University, and West Kalimantan's Tanjungpura University also run Confucius Institutes. Other institutions with a focus on Chinese culture include Al Azhar Indonesia University in Jakarta, and Petra Christian University in Surabaya, whose Center for Chinese Indonesian Studies opened in 2011. These establishments, especially the Confucius Institutes, are designed to address the problem of anti-China sentiment in Indonesia (Budhwar, 2023).

The question remains an open one, however, as to whether the Confucius Institutes, though they unquestionably have helped Indonesians learn about Chinese language and culture, have done anything measurable to improve China's image in that country. Indeed, by many accounts, there remains a lingering anti-China sentiment just under the surface, one that has long been present. According to some analysts, this could be due to the fact that most Confucius Institutes are located in big cities, whereas anti-Chinese attitudes are most pronounced in the villages, towns, and countryside. This calls into question their efficacy (Rakhmat and Pashya, 2020).

The increased interaction between Indonesian and Chinese people is not restricted to students in the big cities. Tourism between the two countries is strong, and growing—especially since Jakarta enacted a policy of granting visa-free entry to Chinese passport holders. The number of Chinese tourists visiting Indonesia increased by 18 percent in 2020, before the industry was flattened by COVID-19.

In seeking to undo the pandemic-related damage, Indonesian tourism authorities have held a number of promotions touting the country's most favored destinations among Chinese tourists, who tend to prefer visiting Jakarta and Bali, and who stay longer than tourists from other countries. Other destinations receiving promotion include Lake Toba in North Sumatra, Mandalika in West Nusa Tenggara, and Likupang in North Sulawesi. In reciprocation, at least a dozen China-based airlines announced that they had relaunched direct flights to Indonesia. These include China Eastern Airlines, Juneyao Airlines, and China Southern Airlines (Indonesia aims, 2024; Budhwar, 2023).

One of the biggest sticking points in the relationship with China, as with anywhere in the Indo-Pacific, is in the realm of military and security. For four decades, the claims and counterclaims over islands, islets, and features in the South China Sea—officially renamed the North Natuna Sea in 2017 by the Indonesian government—have kept tensions high. Any form of peaceful settlement has been elusive. On April 12, 2024, however, a spokesman for the PRC Defense Ministry announced that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) wanted to improve ties with Indonesia. This appears to have been a clear response to the February election victory of Prabowo Subianto, a former Minister of Defense, and Prabowo's choice to make his first post-win visit to China (Dipua et al., 2021).

Although China and Indonesia have enjoyed a degree of defense and security cooperation for many years, including in terms of defense technology, personnel training, and joint drills, there remains friction. The waters near the Natuna Islands, owned by Indonesia, are often the site of incursions by PRC coast guard ships and those of its maritime militia—a deputized fleet of fishing boats that Beijing often deploys to establish a physical presence in the waters surrounding islands that it claims. In most cases, Indonesia has employed Track-II diplomacy to mediate such disputes, in order not to provoke the PLA and imperil economic ties. It has been suggested that, from China's perspective, the aforementioned increase in trade and financial ties with Jakarta is also useful in building leverage against any moves Indonesia might be tempted to make in terms of forcefully defending its rights in the waters around the Natuna Islands, or even mediating in another party's favor in China's many island disputes with other members of the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In other words, the closer Jakarta comes economically to Beijing, the fewer options it has to defend its interests in the maritime domain (Rakhmat, 2024).

Despite this difficult backdrop, however, recent developments suggest a shift in attitudes. Survey data among university students suggest that Indonesians view China as a close partner, more so than Hungarians in a comparative context. This reflects not only the strength of economic ties, China as Indonesia's largest trading partner and second-largest investor, but also growing exposure through education, tourism, and cultural exchanges. Many students acknowledge China's role in infrastructure development, investment in critical industries such as nickel and electric vehicles, and opportunities provided through scholarships and Confucius Institutes. While lingering anxieties about Chinese influence persist, especially regarding sovereignty in the North Natuna Sea, these are tempered by recognition of China's material contributions to Indonesia's growth. Thus, the data suggest that public perception in Indonesia is marked by ambivalence: an enduring undercurrent of distrust rooted in history, but also a pragmatic appreciation of China's developmental role and an increasing sense of closeness among younger, educated Indonesians.

### **3.2 China and Hungary Relations**

President Xi Jinping made a state visit to Hungary in May, 2024, along with two other European countries, on his first visit to Europe in five years, in what *The New York Times* characterized as part of an effort to exacerbate Europe's growing fissures with the United States and position China as a potential leader in a post-American world order (Cohen and Buckley, 2024).

It was not the first time the Hungarian leader has been accused of supporting the recent movement, led by Russia, China and Iran, to dismantle the Western-led Liberal International Order governed by rules and norms. On October 17-18, 2023, at the 3rd Belt & Road Forum in Beijing, Orbán—the only EU leader present—spoke on his views of the West's decline. The 14 years that the Orbán administration has been in power saw a shift in Hungary's role in the global order,

with not just the government, but government-supported media outlets and think tanks promoting anti-Western perspectives and offering a pro-China, pro-Russia view. As a result, Hungary has emerged as a European beachhead deep in the heart of the EU, as well as in NATO (Hompot, 2023).

Beijing's BRI initiative made a synergistic counterpart to Budapest's "Opening to the East" policy. This seemed a natural fit for Hungary, which became the first European nation to sign on to the BRI. So far, the biggest and most high-profile infrastructure project has been the Budapest-Belgrade railway, which would profit not just Hungary but Serbia; another China-friendly destination in Europe. In 2023, Chinese investments reached almost 8 billion euros: the lion's share of the 13 billion euros that Hungary received in foreign direct investment that year. In financial ties, Hungary is proving to be an attractive destination, with a number of Chinese financial institutions eyeing branches in the country, after seeing the Bank of China's successful establishment of its Central and Eastern European headquarters in Budapest. China Construction Bank (CCB), too, has established a financial technology product innovation laboratory in Hungary. Like Indonesia, Hungary is an attractive partner for CATL, as well as EV firms such as Eve Energy Co., Ltd. and BYD Auto Co., Ltd., which seek to make Hungary the site for their European hub for manufacturing batteries and electric vehicles (Will Hungary's new, 2024; Bráder, 2023).

EV-related projects seem to be the vanguard of Chinese firms' interest in Hungary. BYD, which took the global top spot in manufacturing electric and hybrid cars last year, has earmarked billions of dollars to open a factory in Szeged—its first European plant. The company, headquartered in Shenzhen, already has a fair-sized presence in Hungary, with an electronic components factory in Páty, an eBus factory in Komárom, and a battery assembly plant in Fót. These are just a few of the 33 projects financed by Chinese investors that over the past five years have created more than 13,000 jobs and marked China as Hungary's largest investor nation for the second time since 2020. China is also its ninth biggest trade partner, with 4 percent of total foreign trade volume. Today, more than 400 Chinese companies enjoy a presence in Hungary, employing approximately 20,000 people. The largest of these firms is undoubtedly

BorsodChem which, since being purchased by China's Wanhua Chemical Group Co., Ltd., has enjoyed revenues of over USD3 billion (Chinese Investments, 2024).

All of this investment promises to transform Hungary into an EV powerhouse in Europe—or at least host nation to a Chinese EV powerhouse. The same pattern is developing in the realm of 5G technology, with Hungary taking a central role in logistics and manufacturing for Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., which is developing the local 5G network and using Hungary as its European hub. This is despite warnings from Washington that Huawei cooperates with the CCP government and represents a clear intelligence and security threat (Gizińska and Uznańska, 2024).

The Hungarian relationship with China goes deeper than trade and investment. In terms of tourism and cultural exchanges, 277,000 Chinese tourists visited Hungary in the year before the outbreak of COVID, and tour operators are keen to see a return of such volumes. China began issuing visas on arrival to Hungarian citizens on March 14, and 13 weekly flights link Budapest to large Chinese cities. Reciprocally, the Hungarian government offers long-term visas for the heads of Chinese firms that invest in Hungary. On its end, China has awarded Hungary with the Gold Certificate of Quality Destination from the Chinese edition of National Geographic Traveler, as well as the New Emerging Destination of the Year from Voyage Magazine in China and two other awards from China's National Tourism News (China to offer, 2024; Domestic Tourism, 2024).

Recently, the relationship has bled into the realm of regional politics. On six occasions, Hungary used its veto power in the EU Council to shut down attempts to officially condemn China's record on human rights and other crimes. The Hungarian government also became the first on the continent, though sadly not the last, to permit Chinese police officers to be deployed to patrol the streets of its capital, as well as cooperation in other areas of "public security." Ostensibly deployed to protect Chinese tourists in Budapest, in fact the Chinese police are often found to be tracking down dissidents against the Communist regime and monitoring the actions and opinions of the members of the Chinese diaspora, of whom there are approximately 18,000 in Hungary (Gizińska and Uznańska, 2024).

Budapest appears to have rushed in where its neighbors fear to tread, taking advantage of the vacuum formed by the larger trend among countries in Europe and elsewhere to “de-couple,” or at least “de-risk” from China that is equally eager to establish a presence in Europe. As already examined, this advancement is intellectually consistent with the rhetoric coming out of Orbán’s government to the effect that the Western nations are not the only game in town, and that China, and to a lesser degree, Russia, present a viable alternative to which Hungary can hitch its wagon. According to Orbán, “We are convinced that this is an initiative that will change the world, transform the global economy, and serve the well-being of more people than ever before” (Gizińska and Uznańska, 2024; Bráder, 2023).

Alas, this may all prove to be a Faustian bargain. The more Hungary advocates for China within the European Union and NATO, the more it erodes its own good standing within those bodies. Likewise, China’s reputation within Europe suffers by being so inextricably tied to this “troublemaker” country, as Hungary is increasingly seen in the EU (Horváth, 2025). Moreover, the close relationship cannot help but affect the Hungarian public’s perception of China. While the government narrative is one of “China as friend,” today’s citizenry has alternate channels, other than the government-approved media outlets, from which to find information, and public opinion often deviates from the official line on certain issues. This was certainly the case recently with the proposed plan to allow Shanghai’s Fudan University to build a campus in Budapest. The public strongly opposed the plan, and took to the streets of Budapest in protest in 2021. They feared the seemingly untrammelled growth of Chinese influence in Hungary, as well as the implicit intelligence threat of this closeness between the regimes in Beijing and Budapest (Qin et al., 2025; Gizińska and Uznańska, 2024).

Much has changed in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) since China launched its 16+1 initiative in 2012. Today, CEE countries generally fall into one of three categories. Hungary, along with Serbia, represent the first group, which continue to enjoy active across-the-board engagement and make Beijing ties a central component of their foreign policy.

The second category tends to view China as a potential security threat, and they are wary about engaging Beijing. The Baltics and the Czech Republic make up this group, with the former having already abandoned the 16+1 scheme, and the latter currently considering doing the same. The third category, and the largest, tends to be the most pragmatic, viewing engagement with China as a game of tradeoffs between profit and peril. Poland represents a typical example. They also perhaps best reflect the Europe-wide approach to China: once a hopeful new trade partner and member of the international community of nations that held exciting promise; now a potential superpower peer competitor seeking to use the region as a Trojan horse to enter the continent (Šebok et al., 2024).

Yet public opinion does not fully mirror the government's enthusiastic embrace of Beijing. While Hungary benefits economically from Chinese investments, protests against the proposed Fudan University campus in 2021 revealed anxieties about sovereignty, security, and the growing influence of Chinese institutions. Surveys among Hungarian university students further reflect this ambivalence: compared with Indonesian students, Hungarian students feel closer to the United States and remain skeptical of China's political role, though they do recognize China's importance as a developmental and economic partner. This divergence between elite discourse and popular perception highlights the contested nature of Hungary's alignment with Beijing. On one hand, China's material contributions are welcomed; on the other, the Hungarian public remains wary of overdependence, particularly when framed against broader European debates on "de-risking" from China.

This dynamic may also be attributed to Orbán's nationalist approach, in which foreigners, particularly those who are not ethnic Hungarian, are often portrayed as potential threats to local identity and social cohesion (Nagy, 2025). Within this framing, the government's political closeness to China does not necessarily translate into societal acceptance of Chinese influence or people. The relationship between Hungary and China at the leadership level is built on strategic pragmatism and shared skepticism toward Western liberalism, yet this elite alignment does not automatically foster grassroots affinity. Although an

increasing number of Chinese students pursue higher education in Hungary, their presence raises questions about integration and everyday social interaction. Do Chinese and Hungarian students genuinely engage with each other, or do cultural and political divides limit meaningful exchange? The persistence of skepticism among Hungarian students toward China, despite recognition of its economic role, suggests that people-to-people ties remain underdeveloped. This gap underscores the broader divergence between state-led cooperation and public perceptions in Hungary, where economic pragmatism coexists uneasily with cultural distance and latent anxieties about Chinese influence.

#### 4. Analysis and Findings

The summary statistics reveal distinct demographic, academic, and geographic profiles between respondents from Hungary and Indonesia. In the Hungarian sample (N = 43), the average age was 23.9 years, with females comprising 65.1 per cent and males 34.9 per cent. In contrast, the Indonesian sample (N = 172) had a younger average age of 19.8 years and a reversed gender distribution, with males representing 55.8 per cent and females 44.2 per cent.

In terms of academic background, more than half of respondents in the first group were studying Business (58.1%), followed by Arts and Social Sciences (16.3%), Humanities (9.3%), Medicine (7.0%), and smaller proportions in Computer Science, International Relations, Natural Sciences, and Political Sciences (each 2.3%). Meanwhile, in the second group, the largest academic concentration was in International Relations (70.9%), followed by Political Sciences (25.6%), and a smaller share in Business (3.5%). These findings suggest substantial variation in disciplinary representation between the two samples, with the first group being dominated by business-related fields, while the second is largely composed of students in political and international studies.

Geographically, respondents in the first group were predominantly located in Budapest (88.4%), with only small proportions residing in Körösladány, Alsónémedi, Erdőkertes, and Uppsala (each below 5%). In

the second group, the majority of participants were from Java (73.8%), followed by Sumatra (13.4%), Kalimantan (5.2%), Nusa Tenggara and Bali (4.1%), Sulawesi (2.3%), and Papua (1.2%). This indicates that while the first group is concentrated in a single European city, the second group is more geographically diverse across multiple Indonesian regions. Overall, the table highlights clear demographic, academic, and geographic differences between the two respondent groups.

**Table 2.** Summary Statistics

		<b>N</b> <i>(Hungary)</i>	<b>%</b> <i>(ave.)</i>	<b>N</b> <i>(Indonesia)</i>	<b>%</b> <i>(ave.)</i>
<b>Total Samples</b>		43	23.9 years	172	19.8 years
<b>Gender</b>	Female	28	65.1	76	44.2
	Male	15	34.9	96	55.8
<b>Study Area</b>	Business	25	58.1	6	3.5
	Arts and Social Sciences	7	16.3		
	Humanities	4	9.3		
	Medicines	3	7.0		
	Computer Science	1	2.3		
	International Relations	1	2.3	122	70.9
	Natural Sciences	1	2.3		
	Political Sciences	1	2.3	44	25.6
<b>Area</b>	Budapest	38	88.4		
	Körösladány	2	4.7		
	Alsónémedi	1	2.3		
	Erdokertes	1	2.3		
	Uppsala	1	2.3		
	Jawa			127	73.8
	Kalimantan			9	5.2

**Table 2** (Continued).

		<b>N</b> <i>(Hungary)</i>	<b>%</b> <i>(ave.)</i>	<b>N</b> <i>(Indonesia)</i>	<b>%</b> <i>(ave.)</i>
<b>Area</b>	Nusa tenggara & Bali			7	4.1
	Papua			2	1.2
	Sulawesi			4	2.3
	Sumatera			23	13.4

The table below presents the perceptions of citizens from Indonesia and Hungary with regard to China's influence, development, and democratic processes in their respective countries. A majority of citizens in both Indonesia and Hungary perceive China's influence more positively than negatively. Both countries are in need of China's participation in their development plans, such as transportation infrastructure and raw mineral extraction and processing. Hungary relies on China for industrialization and as a trading partner, as well. In terms of democratic awareness, however, people in both countries seem to disagree with the basic principles of China's governance structure.

**Table 3.** China's Influence Overview

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
China's Influence	Positive: 79,7% Negative: 20,3%	Positive: 53,3% Negative: 46,5%
China's role in development	Improved significantly: 68,8%	Improved significantly: 72,1%
China's democracy development	Worsen significantly: 80,2%	Worsen significantly: 79,1%

Still looking at democratic awareness, Hungarians are more concerned, and more assertive in expressing their disapproval of Chinese power practices, than Indonesians are. However, both Hungarians and Indonesians disagree with the majority of the governance practices employed by China, and are wary of implementing these in their own countries.

**Table 4.** Democratic Awareness

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
There are too many political parties in my country; there should only be one.	Strongly Agree	1.1	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	1.7	Agree	7
	Neutral	17.2	Neutral	4.6
	Disagree	51.7	Disagree	18.6
	Strongly Disagree	28.3	Strongly Disagree	69.8
We should get rid of parliament and let a strong leader decide policy.	Strongly Agree	1.1	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	5.2	Agree	4.6
	Neutral	9.8	Neutral	11.6
	Disagree	43.1	Disagree	14
	Strongly Disagree	40.8	Strongly Disagree	69.8
The army should have a larger role in governing the country	Strongly Agree	0	Strongly Agree	2.3
	Agree	8.6	Agree	0
	Neutral	19.5	Neutral	14
	Disagree	44.9	Disagree	27.9
	Strongly Disagree	27	Strongly Disagree	55.8
We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people.	Strongly Agree	0.6	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	7.5	Agree	9.3
	Neutral	8.5	Neutral	11.6
	Disagree	42	Disagree	32.6
	Strongly Disagree	41.4	Strongly Disagree	46.5

Additionally, it can be noticed that a close to zero respondents from Hungary favor closer ties with China, and the vast majority of respondents favor closer ties with the United States. While the difference is less pronounced, the majority of respondents in Indonesia also favor closer ties to the United States than to China, though only by a few percentage points.

**Table 5.** US vs China Perception

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
The future of my country would be better if we became closer with China and farther from the US.	Strongly Agree	0	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	8	Agree	4.7
	Neutral	60.9	Neutral	18.6
	Disagree	28.7	Disagree	48.8
	Strongly Disagree	2.4	Strongly Disagree	27.9
My preference is for my government to cooperate with the US rather than China.	Strongly Agree	0	Strongly Agree	9.3
	Agree	9.8	Agree	44.2
	Neutral	61.5	Neutral	30.2
	Disagree	25.9	Disagree	11.6
	Strongly Disagree	2.9	Strongly Disagree	4.7

On the aspect of the outlook of Indonesia and Hungary's relationship with China in the future, Indonesia has a percentage of ±39 per cent stating that their country's relationship with China will be positive. Hungary only has a percentage of ±22 per cent stating that their country's relationship with China will be positive. This analysis suggests that Indonesians are more likely to agree, and are more optimistic about, future relations with China.

**Table 6.** Perceptions on Hungary and Indonesia's relations with China

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
The future of my country's relations with China are very positive.	Strongly Agree	1.7	Strongly Agree	2.3
	Agree	37.4	Agree	20.9
	Neutral	53.4	Neutral	41.9
	Disagree	7.5	Disagree	27.9
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	4

In terms of China's negative influence, a larger percentage of Indonesians agree with statements to the effect that China is having a bad influence in the economic and military fields. For example, more Indonesians believe that China uses its economy and tourism as tools, dominates the economy, is aggressive in the South China Sea, and supports Russia's actions in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Hungarians have a higher percentage who believe that China does not treat minorities in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong properly. This suggests that Hungary's democratic values are more dominant, while Indonesia is more pragmatic in responding to China's actions, both militarily and in its political and economic policies. This may also reveal a qualitative difference in the media narrative, in Hungary compared to Indonesia, about the plight of China's Uighurs and its other ethnic minorities (Hasram & Suryana, 2025; Turcsányi et al., 2019).

**Table 7.** China's negative influence

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
China uses economic tools and tourism as punishment for my country's foreign policy choices.	Strongly Agree	4.6	Strongly Agree	4.8
	Agree	38.5	Agree	7.1
	Neutral	40.8	Neutral	52.4
	Disagree	14.4	Disagree	28.6
	Strongly Disagree	1.7	Strongly Disagree	7.1
China treats its minorities in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong very well.	Strongly Agree	0	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	7.5	Agree	4.9
	Neutral	43.1	Neutral	31.7
	Disagree	40.2	Disagree	34.1
	Strongly Disagree	9.2	Strongly Disagree	29.3

**Table 7 (Continued).**

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Beijing interferes in my country's domestic affairs (including influence over the ethnic Chinese citizens living in my country).	Strongly Agree	0.6	Strongly Agree	0
	Agree	15.5	Agree	14.6
	Neutral	50	Neutral	63.4
	Disagree	30.5	Disagree	19.5
	Strongly Disagree	3.4	Strongly Disagree	2.4
Beijing tacitly supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine.	Strongly Agree	2.9	Strongly Agree	9.5
	Agree	28.7	Agree	26.2
	Neutral	56.9	Neutral	52.4
	Disagree	11.5	Disagree	9.5
China's economic dominance and political influence in my country is growing.	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	2.4
	Strongly Agree	12.6	Strongly Agree	14.3
	Agree	65.5	Agree	47.6
	Neutral	17.3	Neutral	23.8
	Disagree	4.6	Disagree	11.9
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	2.4
China uses strong-arm tactics in dealing with Taiwan, the South China Sea and the Mekong.	Strongly Agree	6.9	Strongly Agree	7.1
	Agree	46.6	Agree	42.9
	Neutral	40.2	Neutral	40.5
	Disagree	6.3	Disagree	7.1
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	2.4

In terms of China's normative actions, Indonesia is more assertive in wanting China to act accordingly in the areas of people-to-people relations, respect for the sovereignty of other countries, and a balanced trade policy. On the other hand, Hungary has a higher percentage who believe that China should

peacefully resolve territorial issues, both on land and at sea, and respect the applicable international laws. Although Hungary has been excoriated by the West for what they claim are illiberal border politics (Scott, 2023) stripping away its democratic values, Hungarian youth still hold normative values more strongly than their Indonesian counterparts. This is an interesting point worthy of further exploration. This may be due to the strong foundations laid before Orbán took office in 2010, when Hungary was one of the frontrunners of democracy in Europe (Bos and Lorenz, 2023). This may indicate that the interaction between China and Hungary has been going better than in Indonesia, which may be more threatened by China's actions in the region and fearful of their more asymmetrical relationship.

Beyond these descriptive patterns, inferential analysis further clarifies how different variables relate to perceptions in each country.

**Table 8.** China's normative action

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
China should deepen mutual understanding by enhancing people-to-people relations with my country.	Strongly Agree	9.8	Strongly Agree	4.8
	Agree	52.3	Agree	38.1
	Neutral	31.6	Neutral	35.7
	Disagree	6.3	Disagree	19
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	2.4
China should respect my country's sovereignty and not try to influence my country's foreign policy choices.	Strongly Agree	52.3	Strongly Agree	48.8
	Agree	40.2	Agree	31.7
	Neutral	7.5	Neutral	14.6
	Disagree	0	Disagree	4.9
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	0

**Table 8 (Continued).** China's normative action

Variable	Indonesia		Hungary	
	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
China should resolve all territorial and maritime disputes peacefully in accordance with international law.	Strongly Agree	37.9	Strongly Agree	42.9
	Agree	50	Agree	28.6
	Neutral	10.9	Neutral	23.8
	Disagree	0.6	Disagree	4.8
	Strongly Disagree	0.6	Strongly Disagree	0
China should make bilateral trade truly mutually beneficial by addressing trade imbalances.	Strongly Agree	31	Strongly Agree	16.7
	Agree	52.9	Agree	42.9
	Neutral	14.4	Neutral	31
	Disagree	1.7	Disagree	7.1
	Strongly Disagree	0	Strongly Disagree	2.4

On the Indonesian side, it can be seen that the variables relating to China's role in development and China's future relations with Indonesia are significant with China's influence in Indonesia. The influence of China in participating in Indonesia's development is getting stronger. As noted earlier, flagship infrastructure projects (the Sumedang dam, the Jakarta–Bandung rail, and nickel processing investments) shape perceptions of China's role: one that is felt to be beneficial by the community. This is especially the case on the island of Java, which is home to the majority of the Indonesian population.



**Table 10.** Hungarian perception

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Iteration 0:  log pseudolikelihood = -29.700593
Iteration 1:  log pseudolikelihood = -15.133242
Iteration 2:  log pseudolikelihood = -14.823324
Iteration 3:  log pseudolikelihood = -14.813368
Iteration 4:  log pseudolikelihood = -14.813351
Iteration 5:  log pseudolikelihood = -14.813351

Logistic regression                                Number of obs    =          43
                                                    Wald chi2(6)     =          14.44
                                                    Prob > chi2      =          0.0251
Log pseudolikelihood = -14.813351                Pseudo R2       =          0.5012
    
```

influence	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
development	5.141992	2.114232	2.43	0.015	.9981736	9.285811
democracy	2.512399	1.043325	2.41	0.016	.46752	4.557277
china_future	2.032134	1.495849	1.36	0.174	-.8996763	4.963945
demo_awarnes	-7.479529	4.676621	-1.60	0.110	-16.64554	1.686479
china_worse	-20.83305	9.821755	-2.12	0.034	-40.08334	-1.582763
china_better	-22.37393	15.17865	-1.47	0.140	-52.12355	7.375684
_cons	2.699717	2.917619	0.93	0.355	-3.018711	8.418145

## 5. Conclusions

Indonesia and Hungary are strategic partners of China in Central Europe and in Southeast Asia. The closeness of these two countries to China is illustrated not only by the warm relationship that Xi Jinping enjoys with Jokowi and Orbán, but also by the many strategic BRI projects run by China in both countries. While neither Indonesia nor Hungary wants to become ensnared by China in debt trap diplomacy, they are aware of the mutual benefits that come from being Beijing's strategic partners.

This is also reflected in the perception of the people in both countries in seeing China as a country that plays a role in the development of their country.

In general, people in both countries see China's influence as more positive than negative. However, people in both countries agree significantly that China's role in development increases China's influence. Indonesians see better Indonesia-China relations in the future, which will increase China's influence. Survey responses suggest that Hungarians are more concerned about democratic values and want to see less negative Chinese actions internationally before they will be amenable to an increase of China's influence in their country.

This research serves as a foundation for future inquiries that could build upon it by using a more representative sample of people in both countries. Moreover, such future research can be done qualitatively by making a comparison of expert opinions related to Indonesia-China and Hungary-China relations. An appreciation of how China is perceived in Indonesia and Hungary can be instrumental in facilitating a greater understanding of the relationship China has with these two countries. Moreover, such knowledge is instrumental in better equipping policymakers to chart their future engagements, trade, and negotiations with Beijing.

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This study complied with all applicable ethical standards. An informed consent was obtained from all survey participants in both countries prior to data collection.

## **Notes**

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## Book Review

**Scott M. Moore, *China's Next Act: How Sustainability and Technology are Reshaping China's Rise and the World's Future*. Oxford University Press, 2022, 320 pp. + xvii**

Scott M. Moore's *China's Next Act: How Sustainability and Technology are Reshaping China's Rise and the World's Future* presents a compelling and nuanced argument that moves beyond the standard frameworks of great-power competition to analyze China's global role. This book is a vital and timely contribution to the field of China studies and international relations. In a landscape dominated by talk of a new Cold War, Moore successfully pulls the focus to the transnational, non-military issues that will inevitably shape humanity's shared future. His core argument that China's rise is now inextricably linked to its sustainability dilemma, is persuasive, well-structured, and supported with compelling evidence from sectors like renewable energy, water policy, and

diplomacy. The book's most significant achievement is its reframing of China's global engagement from a zero-sum struggle for dominance to a complex, interconnected challenge of managing global commons. By explaining Chinese actions in the Pacific through the need for fisheries access and influence over ocean governance, Moore provides a more coherent and less alarmist explanation than theories centered solely on military basing. This makes the book an indispensable guide for policymakers in the West, urging them to compete not just on military might but on offering better, more sustainable solutions to partners in the developing world.

The book's central thesis is that the defining challenge of China's rise in the 21st century is no longer just its economic or military growth, but how it manages and is shaped by "transnational sustainability issues", particularly climate change, energy transition, resource scarcity, and public health. Moore, drawing on his background in environmental policy and China studies, argues that China is caught in a "sustainability dilemma." In this regard, China is simultaneously: (1) The world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases and a source of significant pollution; (2) The leading manufacturer and deployer of renewable energy

technologies; and (3) A country facing severe domestic constraints in water, arable land, and key natural resources.

This dilemma, Moore contends, forces China to look outward. Its foreign policy is increasingly driven by a pragmatic need for “resource security” (water, food, energy, critical minerals) rather than a purely ideological or territorial ambition. The book reframes China’s international engagements, including its activities in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), not as a simple “resource grab” but as a complex strategy to secure the inputs needed for its own survival and continued development.

Moore argues that China’s unprecedented economic growth has collided with ecological and resource limits. This is not a distant concern but a present-day crisis that shapes policymaking at the highest levels. Managing the world’s second-largest economy and a population of 1.4 billion people, many of whom are entering the middle class, requires staggering quantities of resources. China is already the world’s top importer of oil, natural gas, iron ore, soy, and other key commodities. Yet China faces acute domestic scarcity. It is water-stressed, with per capita water availability far below the global average. Arable land is limited, and while China possesses some mineral deposits, it remains heavily dependent on imports for critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths, which essential for everything from smartphones and electric vehicles to advanced military hardware. Even China’s ambitious green transition, central to its “Ecological Civilization” vision, demands massive upfront resource investments. Building solar panels, wind turbines, and EV batteries is resource-intensive, creating a paradox: to become green in the future, China must secure vast quantities of minerals today.

Moore distinguishes China’s actions from colonial or imperial models of the past. Rather than pursuing expansionist conquest, China’s approach is pragmatic. The goal is not territorial acquisition but the security and stability of supply chains. This is achieved through long-term contracts, strategic investments in extraction and infrastructure, and diplomatic relationships that position China as a preferred partner. While China does have territorial disputes, such as in the South China Sea, Moore contends that its broader global engagement, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific, is not about claiming land for settlement or direct rule. Instead, it is about constructing a resilient web of resources that flows back to the mainland. This strategy is commercial and diplomatic, leveraging economic power rather than military force. China’s

resource strategy is multifaceted. It includes investment in extraction, such as copper in Peru, cobalt in the DRC, and iron ore in Australia. It also involves building logistics infrastructure like ports, railways, and pipelines, which not only facilitate trade but also create strategic footholds. Diplomatically, China uses aid, political support, and climate cooperation to build influence with resource-rich countries.

The book is organized into nine chapters. The Introduction frames China's rise not just in terms of power politics, but through its role in global sustainability and technological transformation. Chapter 2 depicts the End of Growth and the Rise of Sustainability. It argues that China's economic model is shifting from rapid growth to sustainability, driven by environmental limits and social pressures. Chapter 3 analyses China's Climate Challenge. It explores China's central role in global climate efforts, highlighting domestic constraints and international implications of its energy transition. Chapter 4 is about the Global Battle over Technology, which examines how competition over emerging technologies, such as the artificial intelligence (AI), biotech, green tech, which is reshaping geopolitics and global governance. Chapter 5 explains China's Innovation System; It analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of China's innovation ecosystem, including state-led initiatives and private sector dynamics. Chapter 6 describes the Politics of Global Challenges that discusses how transnational issues like pandemics and climate change are politicized, and China's evolving stance in multilateral forums. Chapter 7 is about China's Global Role in Sustainability and Technology, which details China's influence in setting global norms and standards, especially in green finance, infrastructure, and digital governance. Chapter 8 tells us about the Future of US-China Relations. The chapter argues that sustainability and tech will increasingly define the bilateral relationship, with cooperation and competition intertwined. The concluding part, chapter 9, explains a New Era of Global Politics. It calls for a reframing of international relations to prioritize shared challenges over zero-sum rivalry, with China as a pivotal actor.

The book's significant key concepts include: (a) The Ecological Civilization. Moore analyzes this official Chinese ideology not just as empty rhetoric, but as a flexible and powerful framework that legitimizes both domestic action and foreign policy, providing a "green" justification for its overseas investments and partnerships; (b) The Pacific as a Microcosm. The Pacific Island Countries are used as a key case study. Moore explains China's interest in the region through the lens of fisheries (securing tuna stocks), ocean governance (influencing rules for the "Blue Economy"), and climate diplomacy (positioning itself as a leader for

developing nations). Furthermore, while the Pacific is used effectively as an illustration, the analysis remains largely Sino-centric. A fuller picture would require weaving in more of the “view from the shore”: how Pacific Island nations, with their own acute climate priorities and “Blue Pacific” identity, are skillfully playing great powers against each other to maximize their own benefits; (c) China’s Shift in Power Tools, which argues that influence in the future will be wielded not just with aircraft carriers, but through control over green technology supply chains, setting global standards for sustainability, and “vaccine diplomacy.”

The strengths of Moore’s book lie in several grounds. First, its greatest strength is its rejection of the “China Threat” vs. “China Opportunity” binary. It provides a sophisticated, multi-faceted explanation for Chinese behavior that accounts for both its vulnerabilities and its strengths. Second, the book’s focus on non-traditional security. By centering the argument on environmental, health, and resource drivers, Moore captures a critical and often underappreciated dimension of 21st-century statecraft. This feels more relevant and modern than analyses focused solely on military basing or diplomatic recognition. Third, the book captures the effective reframing of motives by offering the concept of “resource security.” This concept is a powerful corrective to the more sinister narrative of a deliberate “debt-trap diplomacy.” It presents Chinese actions as often driven by pragmatic, internal pressure rather than purely expansionist malice, making its behavior more predictable and analytically accessible. Lastly, the book is considered as timely and relevant. Published in 2023, the book expertly incorporates recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic (and China’s “mask/vaccine diplomacy”) and the China-Solomon Islands security pact, placing them within its overarching framework.

Moore used the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) as a case study. For Moore, the Pacific Islands offer a compelling case study of this “resource security” framework. Rather than interpreting China’s presence in the region as a military encirclement of Australia or a direct challenge to the U.S., Moore suggests we view it through the lens of securing critical resources. Fisheries are a prime example. The Pacific Ocean holds over half the world’s tuna supply, and for a protein-conscious nation like China, access to these fisheries is a matter of food security. This explains China’s vast distant-water fishing fleet and its active engagement with small Pacific nations that control large exclusive economic zones (EEZs). China’s goal is not only to catch fish but also to influence the regional bodies that set fishing quotas and rules. China is also positioning itself for the future of the “Blue Economy.” The Pacific seabed is rich in polymetallic nodules

containing nickel, cobalt, copper, and manganese, minerals vital for high-tech and green industries. China, a global leader in deep-sea exploration, seeks to shape the governance of these resources by building strong ties with PICs. Climate diplomacy is another tool. As Pacific nations face existential threats from climate change, China presents itself as a leader in climate action and a reliable partner for adaptation projects. This builds goodwill and increases the likelihood that PICs will support China in international forums, including those governing fisheries and seabed mining. Moore argues that viewing China's Pacific policy solely through a military-strategic lens misses the point. The ports China helps build are as much about supporting fishing fleets and resource extraction as they are about potential naval use. The diplomacy is aimed at securing votes in regional fisheries organizations. China's ambition is not to colonize the Pacific, but to become an indispensable player in its resource ecosystem, ensuring the steady flow of food, energy, and minerals vital to its survival and continued ascent.

Despite its significant, relevant, timely, and critical view on China's act, this book finds its limitations. While the book uses the Pacific as a case study, the perspective of the PICs themselves can sometimes feel secondary. The analysis is more about what China is doing "to" or "in" the region, rather than a deep exploration of how Pacific Island leaders and communities are actively shaping, resisting, or leveraging China's engagement for their own ends. Furthermore, while Moore rightly complicates the simplistic "debt-trap" narrative, some may argue he leans too far in absolving China of any responsibility. The book could benefit from a more detailed discussion of the legitimate concerns about debt sustainability, governance, and transparency, even if the primary intent is not strategic entrapment. The book could more critically interrogate the gap between the ideology of "ecological civilization" and on-the-ground practices of Chinese companies abroad. Is this framework a genuine driver of policy or a sophisticated form of greenwashing that legitimizes continued resource-intensive growth? Finally, a key criticism is whether Moore overestimates the primacy of sustainability while downplaying continued hard-power ambitions. The simultaneous rapid modernization of the PLA, assertiveness in the South China Sea, and threats towards Taiwan suggest that sustainability is a "new, crucial layer" of strategy, not a replacement for traditional geopolitics. The book's strength is also the source of its main weakness. In his focused pursuit of this sustainability thesis, Moore creates an analytical framework that is occasionally too tidy. The relentless pace of China's military modernization and its coercive diplomacy in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea are potent reminders that

traditional hard power has not been relegated to the past. Sustainability is a powerful new act in the play, but the older, more familiar acts of military and geopolitical competition are still being performed on stage simultaneously.

Despite these limitations, *China's Next Act* is essential reading, highly recommend to students, scholars, and policy makers. It may not be the final word on China's complex evolution, but it is a profoundly important one. It forces the reader to look beyond the immediate headlines of confrontation and consider the deeper, structural forces that are reshaping China's relationship with the world. It is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the nuanced and critical role that climate, resources, and health will play in the geopolitics of this century.

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## Notes

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