

UDC: 327(510:73):342.511Цинпинг, С.(042.5)
327(510:470+571):342.511Цинпинг, С.(042.5)
327(510:4-672ЕУ):342.511Цинпинг, С.(042.5)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46763/BSSR242424233f>

CHINA'S STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN RELATIONS WITH THE US, THE EU, AND THE RF¹

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Abstract

This article provides an analysis of the Xi Jinping's statements regarding China's relations with the United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the European Union in the period from 2017 to 2023. Applying quantitative semantic analysis tools, such as Voyant Tools and the GPT-4 language model, made it possible to identify key topics, and visualize the relations between terms. The analysis of the bilateral relations events and the international environment that influenced the subject of Xi Jinping's official rhetoric is offered. The findings show how China positions itself as a responsible major power interested in building a “community with a shared future for mankind” and actively promotes global stability and development. The article also highlights how China uses diplomatic discourse to strengthen its strategic alliances, particularly with Russia, to manage complex relations with the US

¹ This study was conducted in the framework of the Jean Monnet Module “EU Counteraction to FIMI” (No. 101172342 ERASMUS-JMO-2024-MODULE)

and the EU and to respond to global challenges, particularly Russia's war in Ukraine.

Keywords: Xi Jinping's speeches, China's foreign policy, strategic narrative, diplomatic communication, global player

1. Introduction

Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics in order to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Leaders narrate international affairs in public to influence other actors and shape how they understand their interests, their identities and the way international relations develop (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle, 2015). Strategic narratives are at the heart of a nation's foreign policy and as well as being the basis for its ideology. They outline the interactions of diverse actors in the international environment and set a "new world order", which is highly promoted by China.

The strategic narrative unfolds in the context of soft power and is represented in the public speeches of state leaders. We should emphasize that at first the PRC perceived soft power as something to be defended against, but later it was viewed as a tool that China could itself use to create a favorable international public opinion environment for China's national security and social stability (Hamilton and Ohlberg, 2023, p. 25-26) and "to obtain understanding, identification and support of both the domestic and foreign public, establish a good image for the state and the government, create a favorable environment of public opinions, and maintain and promote the fundamental interests of the country" (Yang, 2014, p. 397).

China's strategic narrative positions the state as the main actor in the system of international relations for the "great revival of the Chinese nation" (Rolland, 2018, February 26) and the restructuring of the world geopolitical system for the sake of creating a "community with a common destiny for mankind" (Wang, 2012, p. 17). China's external communication is top-down and controlled by the government, (Chang, 2020) i.e., it is state-sanctioned (Chen, 2014).

Therefore, we believe that the analysis of the public speeches of Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), opens up new perspectives for understanding Chinese foreign policy. We hypothesize that through a careful analysis of the leader's rhetoric, it is possible to identify key strategic directions, goals and challenges facing China in its relations with major international actors. Hamilton and Ohlberg claim that the Party seeks to reshape international alliances and change the way it is perceived in the world as well as expand its audience and ultimately make China the world's number one power. The party's plans are widely covered in speeches and documents. (Hamilton and Ohlberg, 2023)

The importance of such an analysis lies not only in understanding China's official position but also in revealing nuances and changes that may be

hidden behind formal diplomatic statements. Since Xi Jinping's speeches often reflect the broader political and ideological views of the CCP, they are key to understanding the future of international relations.

In the modern globalized world, relations between great powers are of crucial importance for international politics and global stability. Among the most significant and complex bilateral relations are those between major actors such as the US, the EU, China, and Russia. These relations, affecting economic and political aspects of countries, shape the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. This article aims to analyze and interpret quotes from Xi Jinping's speeches, the strategic narratives employed by China, focusing on their impact on bilateral relations between China and the US, the EU and Russia.

To achieve the goal, we have to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does China, through Xi Jinping's statements, position itself with regards to the US, EU, and Russia concerning key international challenges and cooperation?

RQ2: What are the key topics in Xi Jinping's discourse that illustrate China's approach to forming its foreign policy identity and its aspirations on the global stage?

RQ3: How does China's diplomatic discourse adapt to and address global crises and geopolitical shifts, such as the war between Russia and Ukraine?

2. Literature Review

China's relations with key international actors are explored in various aspects. In particular, Kuchins (2021) discusses China's efforts to improve relations with Russia and EU countries, emphasizing historical conflicts and contemporary competition in Central Asia and the Arctic. Deng (2007) studies China's strategic partnership with Russia, the EU and India, highlighting the shared political commitment to maintain positive relations despite competitive dynamics. Theodore, Theodore and Syrrakos (2017) examine trade and security relations between the EU, Russia and China, focusing on mutual commercial interests and contrasting the EU's relations with Russia and China. Garcia-Herrero and Xu (2016, July 14) research how increased economic cooperation between China and Russia affects European exports, identifying sectors that could be affected by closer ties between China and Russia. Wu (2016) examines the trilateral relations between China, the US, and Europe, highlighting China's efforts to strengthen ties with European powers and the complex dynamics with the United States; he draws attention to the need for a more nuanced understanding of China's diplomatic approach which an analysis of Xi's speeches could provide. Hu (2015) discusses the conceptual differences between China and the US regarding the "new model of great powers' relations", highlighting the differences in the visions of their future. Kasim (2019) explores the transformation of Sino-US relations from engagement to increased rivalry, focusing on economic development and foreign policy.

These publications offer insight into the multifaceted nature of China's relations with important global players, shedding light on diplomatic, economic and strategic aspects. Khoma and Vdovychyn (2024) claim that non-democratic regimes like China and Russia employ neo-authoritarian intervention as a strategic mechanism to strengthen their internal stability and expand their influence on the international stage. Their study highlights the modernization of classical authoritarian tools through digitalization, AI and ICTs, to propagate their influence and challenge democratic norms. Their perspective highlights how these regimes adapt classical tools of authoritarianism to the digital age, providing a valuable framework for interpreting China's strategic narratives in its relations with major global actors. However, today there is an obvious interest in a deeper understanding of China's position in relation with those international actors who began to play key roles as a result of an increased tension after 1) the start of a full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, 2) the introduction of a series of sanctions against Russia, 3) the beginning of large-scale security and economic transformations in Europe (new waves of NATO and the EU expansion to the east) and 4) positions of the USA and the EU in these aspects. China shows impartiality in these matters. Therefore, we believe that the analysis of the diplomatic rhetoric of the Chinese leader can contribute to a deeper study of China's position in relations with the mentioned key actors. It is also important to examine how Xi Jinping's speeches reflect China's strategic response to these changing dynamics.

The diplomatic communication of the Chinese political elite attracts the attention of many researchers. Liu, Yan and Yao (2023) examine the underlying ideologies and values in China's diplomatic speeches, providing insights into how China uses language to shape its international image and engage with global audiences. Jiang's article (2023) on China's diplomatic narratives of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of BRI's portrayal in Xi Jinping's speeches and official documents. A number of works reveal the peculiarities of China's use of narratives to achieve its strategic goals by influencing both domestic and foreign audiences. Specifically, Zhang and Tang (2024) scrutinize how China's state media channel diplomatic messages to influence public opinion and nationalism, highlighting digital diplomacy's dual role in bolstering domestic political legitimacy and international discursive authority. Chu and Sun (2022) shed light on China's endeavor to craft a global image through a unique national discourse system.

Weithmann (2018) discusses China's new role in international trade, highlighted by President Xi Jinping's pro-globalization speech at the World Economic Forum in 2017. Zhang (2018) explores China's conviction under President Xi Jinping to articulate and build its vision of regional and international order. Luo (2021) focuses on President Xi Jinping's speech at the UN General Assembly and reveals strategies aimed at fostering a sense of global unity and positioning China as a responsible global leader. Huang and Wang (2019) examine how the Chinese government has used diplomatic

Twitter accounts to build a communication network by adhering to Xi Jinping's directive to "tell China stories well".

Cheng and Chen (2019) provide insight into the diplomatic strategies and framing used by Xi Jinping in international contexts. Luo (2021) examines Xi's diplomatic discourse, which is key to understanding China's position on global cooperation and solidarity in the face of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Liao and Han (2019) conduct a quantitative analysis of the inaugural speeches of Trump and Xi Jinping to illustrate the ideological differences between America and China. Zappone (2018) explores how translations of the Chinese leader's speeches are carried out to create a specific narrative of China that supports its global ambitions and soft power strategy. Another study (Zappone, 2021) focuses on a combined quantitative-qualitative approach to explore China's self-definition through its leader's language. Zappone (2022) also studies how Chinese identity is constructed in political discourse, particularly in Xi Jinping's speeches to foreign audiences.

These publications demonstrate the various strategies employed by China, including its official channels and President Xi Jinping's speeches, to shape global perceptions and promote a positive narrative regarding its international relations and global aspirations.

We did not find specific studies that directly analyze the semantics of Chinese leader quotes in the context of international relations from 2017 to 2023. There is a lack of focus on researching China's narratives regarding relations with great powers. So, our study aims to address this gap by shedding light on the mechanisms behind China's international strategy formation, thereby enhancing our understanding of global politics and diplomacy. We believe it is necessary to expand the current research on China's interactions with major international players, given the evolving dynamics in the international arena. Specifically, our study will utilize linguistic tools and semantic analysis to uncover new insights into China's strategic narratives, its efforts to influence global perceptions, and the implications of its foreign policy decisions.

3. Research Methodology

Realism and constructivism theories lay the grounds for this analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of how narratives promote China's strategic objectives and impact its advances in global power. Realism, focusing on power dynamics and national interests, reveals China's diplomatic narratives as strategic instruments to assert its position in the global hierarchy. China's emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and a multipolar world can be interpreted as efforts to counter perceived hegemonic tendencies, particularly from the US, and to assert its power and influence on the international stage (Hudda, 2015, April 3). Constructivism helps us see how China uses its diplomatic narratives to show its identity, norms, and values and to shape global perceptions and norms. China seeks not only to extend its economic and strategic influence but also to spread its beliefs and values globally. By doing

this, China aims to influence the global power balance through ideas rather than just actions (Jamison, 2021, May 19). Through these theoretical frameworks, we can see China's diplomatic narratives as multifaceted instruments designed to advance its interests, secure its position, and influence the international order. The combination of realism and constructivism provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between material power and ideational influence, highlighting the strategic depth of China's involvement in international affairs.

Xi Jinping's quotes and speeches are the study object in the analysis of China's relations with major powers for several reasons:

1) Xi Jinping plays a pivotal role not only as the leader of China but also as a key figure in shaping and executing the country's foreign policy. His views and assessments reflect China's official stance on international relations and strategic priorities;

2) Xi Jinping's speeches often reflect China's response to global challenges, including changes in the international order, global crises, and regional security. Through these speeches, we can gain insight into China's positioning in its relations with other major powers and the strategies it employs to enhance its role on the global stage;

3) Xi Jinping utilizes his public speeches as a means to communicate China's intentions to the international community. Analysis of these messages can help understand China's future moves in its relations with other countries, especially with such key players as the US, the EU, and Russia;

4) Xi Jinping's speeches also reflect the cultural and ideological dimensions of Chinese foreign policy, which helps one to understand how China uses its traditional values and modern ideological concepts to shape its international strategies.

Thus, an analysis of Xi Jinping's quotes and speeches may reveal a deeper understanding of China's foreign policy strategy, its relations with key global players, and its aspirations for the role of global leader.

The research approach is based on the thesis that the CCP controls the media space in the country (Li, 2014; Xu, 2014, September 25). Hence, it is reasonable to regard all ideas, expressions, and statements disseminated through official Chinese media sources as representing the official stance aligned with the interests of the CCP and the government of the country. Materials are meticulously prepared and contain information that has been officially released over an extended period and on a substantial scale. Therefore, our objective is to analyze these datasets to discern the key messages conveyed by the leadership of the PRC across various domains.

We analyzed all statements made by Xi Jinping from 2017 to 2023, published on the China's Diplomacy in the New Era website (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). It serves as an official platform showcasing Xi's views on diplomacy and China's foreign affairs and policy. This site is a collaborative effort between the China Internet Information Center and the China Institute of International Studies (Casarini, 2012). This institute is a professional think tank, that analyzes the international situation in real-time, generates opinions

and proposals on realities and hotspots for decision-making, and provides information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Shambaugh, 2002). Given the site's specificity and its official status, it was deemed an ideal source for accurately reflecting the strategic narratives under investigation. The timeframe was chosen based on the availability of statements, starting from 2017, when the publication of such statements first appeared on this site, to 2023, the last complete calendar year before our research in early 2024.

This research has passed several stages: 1) selecting Xi Jinping's statements for thematic analysis; 2) a quantitative semantic analysis to identify key themes and patterns. We employed quantitative semantic tools like Voyant Tools and GPT-4 for in-depth textual analysis, identifying key topics and visualizing term relations. Voyant Tools online utilities were applied to analyze the content of speeches to understand China's strategic narratives;

3) generalization and synthesization of the quantitative analysis results and determination of intentions were performed by the GPT-4 language model.

The tools used for analysis are particularly suited due to their advanced capabilities in handling large volumes of text and detecting nuanced patterns within the data. Voyant Tools allows for an in-depth exploration of text through visualization and textual analysis, enabling the identification of key topics and trends (Gregory et al., 2022). Using this tool facilitated the extraction of consistent keywords and themes from a digitized archival collection. Miller (2018) underscores Voyant Tools as a user-friendly and versatile tool for digital humanities projects, for deep content analysis, thematic exploration, and historical connections. This aligns with our methodological needs to dissect and interpret the complex narrative structures within Xi Jinping's diplomatic discourse.

GPT-4, with its advanced natural language processing capabilities, can understand and interpret complex narrative structures, providing insightful analyses that highlight subtle nuances in diplomatic discourse. Fang et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of ChatGPT as a data augmentation tool to improve compositional generalization to reveal intentions for training specialized models for intent analysis. ChatGPT can be used for a professional assessment of intentions (Levkovich & Elyoseph 2023). Jeong (2023) proves the advantage of ChatGPT in recognizing intentions over traditional chatbot systems. Elyoseph et al. (2023) claim that ChatGPT can also successfully identify and describe emotions. He and Garner (2023) evaluated the ability of large language models, particularly ChatGPT, to detect intentions in spoken language (Spoken Language Understanding, SLU); these models can achieve intent classification accuracy close to the accuracy of supervised models, although there are serious problems with the application of these text models on SLU (He and Garner 2023). ChatGPT can be used to reliably identify intentions and emotions, at least compared to the capabilities of human experts. However, we applied ChatGPT to detect messages in texts of a political nature published on the official information platform. These types of documents do not pose the above-mentioned SLU problems as they correspond to valid orthographies. Such texts are usually carefully prepared to deliver appropriate

messages to the target audience. Such selections of quotes, being ordered by the time of presentation, enabled us to track temporal changes in intentions.

4. Research Findings

4.1. *How China Positions itself in Relations with the USA, the RF and the EU*

A total of 92 texts (quotes) on China-US relations, 67 on China-Russia relations, and 47 on China-EU relations were analyzed. Quotes cover 2017-2023 period.

All quotes have been compiled into three documents: Chinese-American (document China-USA), Chinese-Russian (document China-Russia) relations, and relations between China and the EU (China-EU).

The term frequency list (“China” – 716, “cooperation” – 421, “relations” – 361, “development” – 288, “Russia” – 269, “countries” – 245, “united” – 205, “international” – 190, “world” – 176, “states” – 166, “sides” – 166, “EU” – 154, “new” – 149, “promote” – 147, “strategic” – 146, “Sino” – 126, “people” – 114, “mutual” – 114.) and the connection diagram (Fig. 1) offer an insight into the key themes and relations within the whole corpus of documents.

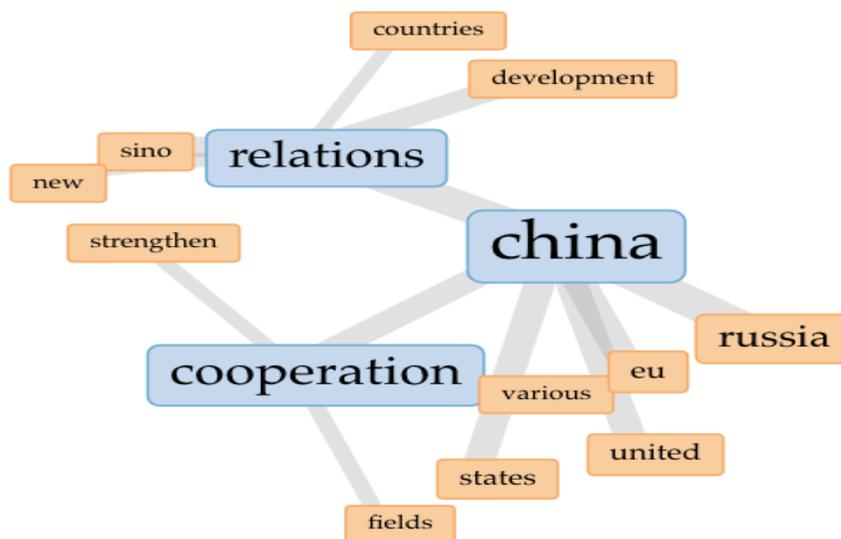


Fig. 1. The term connection diagram

“China” is the central node, reflecting its core position in all discussions.

“Cooperation” is the second most frequent term and is closely linked to “China”, which underscores the emphasis on collaborative efforts in all relations.

“Relations” and “development” are strongly linked with “China”, suggesting that the development of relations is a major focus in China’s foreign policy narrative.

“Russia” and “EU” are significant nodes, indicating that relations with these entities are of considerable importance.

The terms “United”, “Sino”, and “States”, likely referring to the United States, demonstrate the bilateral nature of the discussions and the global context within which China operates.

The interconnectedness of “cooperation”, “relations”, and “development” with various geopolitical entities (Russia, EU, United) highlights China’s multifaceted approach to diplomacy.

This network visualization provides a snapshot of how China conceptualizes its foreign relations, focusing on cooperation and development within its key bilateral relationships.

We have identified 10 topics with 10 terms in each topic (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Topics and their distribution by documents

The identified topics cover the following issues:

- (1) Collaborative effort and Prosperity focuses on mutual efforts to strengthen communication and work together willingly for shared prosperity.

This can be perceived in China-EU document, underlining that mutual reinforcement and prosperity issues are key to the relations with the EU.

- (2) Trade and cooperation highlights active engagement in trade, cooperation at various levels, and managing differences, particularly in the Pacific region. Undoubtedly, this topic is the most represented in the China-USA document showing the maximum interest in maintaining trade relations and cooperation with the USA. Its relatively large share is a sign that cooperation, trade, and the management of differences consistently remain central in China's foreign relations.

- (3) Strategic relations and people-to-people exchange emphasizes the importance of strategic relations, promoting interests, and continuing people exchanges under new circumstances. The topic is most represented in the China-Russia document and considerably presented in China-USA and China-EU documents. This could be reflective of the strategic and, at times, competitive relations between China and the USA.

- (4) Development and expansion stresses the expansion of Sino-foreign relations across various fields, contributing to the development and interaction between peoples reflecting the vast array of bilateral interactions. The Sino-US and Sino-Russian relations seem to be more productive than the relations with the EU.

- (5) Security and stability centers on maintaining long-term security, stability, and peace for mutual benefit, guided by policy. This topic occupies relatively small shares in all documents but is less represented in the China-Russia document indicating that China is less concerned about problems in this area regarding Russia.

- (6) Challenges and opportunities in Europe focuses on common challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the need to adhere to principles and enhance cooperation despite differences. The topic is more pronounced in the China-EU document but it does not directly mean a stronger focus on the specific challenges and opportunities within Europe.

- (7) Economic growth and regional stability highlights the significance of economic relations for stability and growth in Asia and beyond, including hopes for military cooperation. It is most stressed in the China-USA document.

- (8) International friendship and multilateral benefits stresses safeguarding core interests and the benefits of multilateral cooperation in the face of global challenges. It is found in all documents but is visible in China-Russia relations, signifying that there is heavy emphasis on friendship and multilateral benefits with Russia.

- (9) EU-China dialogue and global development focuses on building trust, respect, and understanding through dialogue for global development. It is most visible in the China-EU document, it reflects emphasis on trust, respect, and consultation regarding the EU.

- (10) China-Russia coordination emphasizes comprehensive cooperation and coordination between China and Russia on international issues,

respecting each other's interests. It is a feature of the China-Russia document that underlines full coordination and partnership between the two countries.

These topics reflect the multifaceted nature of China's foreign relations, highlighting a strategic approach to international diplomacy, economic cooperation, security, and global governance.

The mind map, generated by GPT-4 (Fig. 3), presents the structure of concepts based on these topics, which essentially illustrates the structure of China's diplomatic narratives.



Fig. 3. Synthesizing China's diplomatic narratives: a thematic mapping of Sino-American, Sino-Russian, and Sino-European relations

In Figure 3, there are common topics, such as cooperation and trade at home and abroad, in China's diplomatic discourse. However, there is also a unique emphasis in each bilateral relation, be it the strategic competition with

the USA, security with Russia, or mutual challenges and opportunities with the EU.

The China-EU document topic distribution reflects strategic diplomatic positioning within a complex global landscape. The emphasis on mutual communication, strategic partnerships, and addressing global challenges collectively suggests an effort to position China as a cooperative and responsible global actor. This approach aims to counteract any narratives of rivalry, particularly with the West, by highlighting common interests and the benefits of cooperation. For instance, the focus on the BRI underscores China's ambition to lead global infrastructure development, offering a platform for economic cooperation but also raising concerns about strategic influence. The topic of cooperation with Russia aligns with China's strategy to foster strong bilateral relations that can serve as counterbalances to Western alliances. This narrative is carefully crafted to promote a vision of a multipolar world where China plays a central role in shaping the international order, advocating for respect, dialogue, and consultation as foundational principles.

The China-Russia document outlines the evolution of Sino-Russian relations from 2017 to 2023, emphasizing strategic partnership and cooperation across various sectors. Key topics include the promotion of the BRI, the expansion of mutual interests, and a focus on international coordination and comprehensive strategic partnerships. These topics reflect a deep commitment to fostering stable and beneficial relations amidst a complex international landscape. The document also focuses on enhancing bilateral security cooperation and ensuring regional stability. The international friendship and multilateral benefits document indicates the importance of long-standing relations and mutual support within the international arena. The coordination with Russia document being unique to this document underlines the extensive strategic partnership, which encompasses various dimensions of the bilateral relations, including political, economic, and military aspects.

The China-USA document highlights strategic relations, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of Sino-American interactions encompassing both cooperation and competition, i.e., a strategic approach managing differences and expanding common interests. The economic importance, growth and regional stability document underscores the critical role of trade and economic issues. The development and expansion document focuses on the growth of bilateral relations across multiple domains. The distribution of these topics points to dynamic relations and encompasses a broad range of strategic interests, with economic ties being a major factor.

The Voyant Tools Mandala visualization suggests a conceptual mapping of how terms and documents relate in the corpus (Fig. 4). Each term pulls documents based on the term's relative frequency in the corpus. The proximity of the documents to terms like "China", "relations", "world", and "cooperation" suggests these are central themes in the discourse across all three sets of relations.



Fig. 4. The relations between terms and documents

“China” is centrally located, connecting to all three country-specific nodes (China-EU, China-Russia, China-USA), reinforcing its central role in each relation.

“Cooperation” is near the China-EU and China-Russia nodes, implying a significant emphasis on cooperative actions.

“Development” and “relations” are close to each other and to “China”, indicating these are likely discussed together and are core to China’s approach to international affairs.

“World” and “international” appear connected to all three relations, indicating a global perspective in the discourse.

The “united” and “states” seem to be slightly more distant from “cooperation”, which may suggest more complex relations characterized by a mixture of cooperation and competition.

Overall, the Mandala visualization shows the interconnected and multifaceted nature of China’s foreign relations as presented in these documents.

This corpus has three documents with 28,315 words total and 2,225 unique word forms. The most frequent words involve “China” (716); “cooperation” (421); “relations” (361); “development” (288); “Russia” (269). Distinctive words (compared to the rest of the corpus) include:

- China-EU: EU (154), europe (41), european (28), green (9), differences (20);

- China-Russia: Russia (269), Russian (34), Putin (27), justice (19), union (18);
- China-USA: States (162), Sino (98), U.S (25), Taiwan (16), differences (33).

We identified China's key intentions in its relations with major partners. The USA (a strategic competitor) and Russia (a strategic ally) are at opposite poles; China's position on relations with the EU is less radical. Due to the semantic analysis, we have summarized how China perceives the USA, Russia and the EU:

United States: China views the US in terms of competition and somewhat as a rival, especially in matters of trade and security. The emphasis on cooperation and conflict resolution suggests complex relations where there is competition and coexistence and strategic rivalry is evident.

Russia: China views Russia as its paramount ally, underlining strategic cooperation, mutual benefits in security, and economic spheres. This partnership, deeply rooted in shared geopolitical goals and support for initiatives like the Belt and Road, is designed to counter Western dominance. Russia is seen as a critical strategic partner, with whom China enjoys deep political trust, working together to foster a multipolar world and to protect mutual interests.

European Union: the relations with the EU are portrayed more neutrally and pragmatically, focusing on mutual benefits, dialogue, and cooperation in global governance and economic areas. While there are efforts to strengthen ties, the approach seems more about leveraging opportunities for cooperation rather than forming a deep strategic alliance or viewing the EU as a competitor.

Based on this result, we will take a closer look at Xi Jinping's statements regarding relations with the USA and Russia as being radically different from the standpoint of China's strategy. Considering China's pronounced competitiveness with the USA and emphasized friendliness towards Russia, we separately analyzed the respective Xi Jinping's speeches, taking into account the temporal dynamics.

4.2. China – the US Relations in Xi Jinping's Speeches

Fig. 5 shows 10 topics (15 terms each) regarding China-US relations and their distribution in quotes by year (in 2023, statements during the meeting between Xi Jinping and Joe Biden on November 15 in the USA).

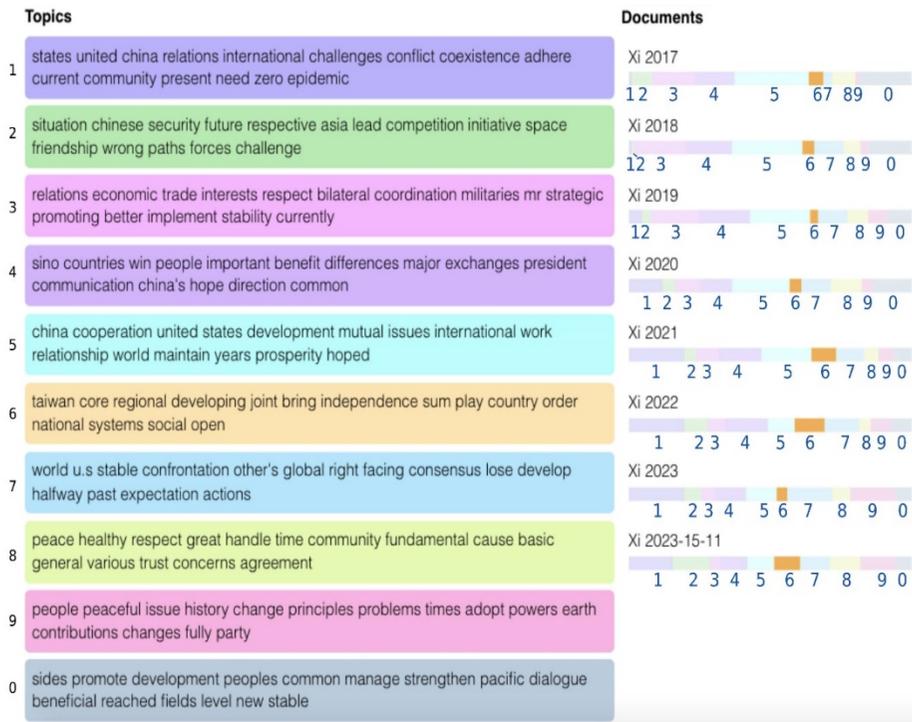


Fig. 5. Key topics and their evolution in Sino-American relations (2017-2023)

These topics could be interpreted in the following way:

- (1) Diplomatic engagement and challenges focuses on the complex interplay of cooperation and competition, emphasizing the need for coexistence and addressing shared global challenges.
- (2) Security and competitive dynamics highlights the security landscape and competition in Asia, indicating the importance of strategic positioning and alliances.
- (3) Economic and bilateral coordination stresses economic ties, trade interests, and the role of military coordination, reflecting the pragmatic aspects of the bilateral relations.
- (4) Common ground and communication underscores the significance of finding common ground and maintaining open lines of communication, despite major differences.
- (5) Mutual development and international relations emphasizes shared development goals and the maintenance of a stable international order through mutual efforts.
- (6) National interests and regional development discusses the balance between national interests, regional development, and the global order, indicating the intersection of domestic and foreign policy.

- (7) Global stability and consensus reflects on global stability, the quest for consensus, and the challenges of facing international expectations and actions.

- (8) Foundational values and community focuses on the fundamental values that underpin the international community and the importance of handling these relations with respect.

- (9) Historical perspective and global responsibility considers historical changes and the responsibilities of major powers to contribute positively to global issues.

- (10) Development cooperation and pacific dialogue highlights the focus on development, cooperation, and managing relations in the Pacific, emphasizing this key geographic area.

Analysis of the topics temporal dynamics indicates the following:

2017: The focus is on establishing a foundation for relations, addressing international challenges, and emphasizing the need for coexistence.

2018: Security concerns come to the fore, alongside competition in Asia. There is an emphasis on future directions and the balance of power.

2019: Economic ties, trade, and bilateral coordination with the military becoming prominent. This reflects a strategic approach to managing economic and defense relations.

2020: Communication and finding common ground are emphasized, suggesting a year of diplomatic efforts despite major differences.

2021: Mutual development and maintenance of the international order are highlighted, indicating an emphasis on shared prosperity and global stability.

2022: National interests, regional development, and the global order are key themes, likely reflecting domestic concerns within the broader international context.

2023: Stability and consensus in the face of global challenges are discussed, indicating a focus on maintaining balance and expectations internationally.

2023 (November 15): A specialized focus, reflecting specific issues discussed in the meeting between Xi and Biden, possibly addressing immediate concerns and bilateral agreements.

The dynamics shows a shift from establishing a foundational relation addressing global challenges and emphasizing economic ties, before moving into more specific issues of national interest and international stability. It is a responsive and evolving discourse aligned with global events and bilateral developments.

Changes in Xi Jinping's statements on Sino-American relations from 2017-2023 reflect major international events:

In *2017*, the inauguration of Donald Trump and his subsequent foreign policy decisions had a global ripple effect on China-US relations. Trump's approach to international agreements and his unique style of diplomacy through Twitter, could have impacted the themes of cooperation and conflict in

international relations as addressed in Xi's statements. Additionally, global economic trends and the continuing concern over North Korea's nuclear ambitions were significant in shaping the discourse of China's foreign policy and its relations with the U.S. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, December 15).

2018: Trump's disruptive diplomacy and the US-China trade war escalation could have influenced the themes of economic trade interests and bilateral coordination as China sought to navigate the heightened economic tensions (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, , December 20).

2019: Continued flare-ups in the Persian Gulf and ongoing US-China trade tensions kept the focus on security and economic relations. The emphasis on maintaining stability in the international order could be seen as a response to these developments (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019, December 23).

2020: The COVID-19 pandemic, tensions between Iran and the US, and significant shifts in oil prices influenced the communication topics and the finding of common ground as the world grappled with the pandemic and economic instability (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, December 17).

2021: The emphasis on mutual development and prosperity could relate to global efforts to recover from the pandemic and the need for stable international relations to support economic growth (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021, December 15).

2022: The deepening of humanitarian crises, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the shift to the left in Latin American politics shaped the topics of global stability and consensus, reflecting China's position on these evolving geopolitical turns.

2023: Significant challenges like the Israel-Hamas conflict and the ongoing effects of the Russia's war in Ukraine influenced the themes of world stability and the need for a global consensus as China positioned itself in response to these international issues.

Each of these topics can be seen as reflective of China's strategic responses to global events, signaling its diplomatic priorities and the evolution of its foreign policy approach in the context of a rapidly changing international landscape.

The overarching pattern in the themes of Xi Jinping's statements on Sino-American relations from 2017 to 2023 reflects a strategic responsiveness to global events. The inauguration of President Trump in 2017 heralded a period of adjustment in diplomacy and trade, with China seeking to recalibrate its approach to cooperation and conflict resolution. Through 2018 and 2019, escalating trade tensions and regional security issues prompted a focus on economic strategy and maintaining international order. In 2020 COVID-19 marked a pivotal shift, emphasizing the necessity for clear communication and unity in the face of a global crisis. The subsequent years show China's discourse adapting to the pandemic's economic aftermath, the geopolitical shifts caused by war in Ukraine, and political changes in Latin America, always aiming to project stability and seek a global consensus amid evolving challenges. These

topics suggest China's agile diplomacy, calibrated to safeguard its interests while navigating the fluctuating landscape of international relations.

4.3. China - the RF Relations in Xi Jinping's Speeches

The conducted analysis of Xi Jinping's quotes regarding China's relations with Russia defined 10 topics of 15 terms each (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Key topics and their evolution in Sino-Russian relations (2017-2023)

The identified topics reflect a broad range of diplomatic concerns and strategic interests:

- (1) Global community and health diplomacy is a focus on international health collaboration, scientific progress, and global community building, potentially in the context of addressing global health crises.
- (2) Bilateral relations and energy emphasizes comprehensive coordination between China and Russia, highlighting national interests, energy cooperation, and peace efforts.
- (3) Development and diplomatic strategy points to the development of diplomatic strategies aimed at strengthening international relations and leveraging mutual interests.

- (4) Multilateral internationalism and Russian ties discusses ongoing coordination within international frameworks, likely referencing the United Nations and multilateral opportunities, emphasizing continuous engagement.

- (5) Political determination and union strength suggests a mutual resolve to achieve favorable political outcomes and build a strong, unified approach to international challenges.

- (6) Strategic cooperation and communication highlights the strategic alliance between China and Russia, focusing on safeguarding mutual interests and enhancing regional communication.

- (7) Security and BRICS collaboration refers to the security concerns within the BRICS framework, indicating efforts toward revitalization and integration.

- (8) Eurasian stability and economic development stresses the importance of stability and economic development within Eurasian frameworks, suggesting a focus on infrastructure and economic ties.

- (9) Multilateral technology and security implies a collaborative approach in technology and security, aiming to promote fairness and a multipolar balance of power.

- (10) Innovation and expanded cooperation emphasizes the need to jointly pursue innovation and expand upon existing cooperative models for continued prosperity.

We can infer the following dynamics in the context of Sino-Russian relations:

2017: An emphasis on foundational aspects of the bilateral relations, possibly focusing on shared scientific and community goals.

2018: A continuing development of the relations, with energy cooperation and comprehensive coordination.

2019: A diversification of the bilateral agenda in various sectors and deepening strategic interests.

2020: The health theme becomes significantly more prominent, reflecting the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting enhanced collaborative efforts in public health between China and Russia.

2021: Political determination to strengthen the Sino-Russian alliance and achieve mutual goals, suggesting a concerted effort to consolidate the partnership in the post-pandemic era.

2022: The focus on strategic cooperation and communication suggests a maturing partnership, with an ongoing commitment to safeguarding regional and global stability.

2023: Security, along with BRICS collaboration, indicates a focus on geopolitical and economic dynamics, with an emphasis on multilateral security arrangements and economic revival within the BRICS framework.

We can draw the following conclusions about the main narratives in Xi Jinping's speeches:

In *2017*, Xi Jinping's quotes on Sino-Russian relations highlighted a harmonious partnership aligning with fundamental interests for mutual benefit

and robust development potential. Emphasis was on a shared commitment to sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, reflecting a united front on core interests. That unity was further solidified by mutual support in international forums and advocacy for a multipolar world (e.g., the BRI, the Eurasian Economic Union's integration). The focus on strategic coordination, cultural exchanges, and regional stability implied a strong alliance capable of influencing peace and development regionally and globally ("In this Issue", 2019). The topics of cooperation, strategic partnership, and shared geopolitical visions were influenced by global security concerns and the evolving landscape of international trade and diplomacy.

In 2018, the discourse on Sino-Russian relations centered around strengthening strategic coordination in complex international environments. Key areas included deepening practical cooperation, particularly in energy, agriculture, finance, and technology, reflecting a commitment to solidifying the Sino-Russian partnership. High-level exchanges were prioritized to maintain close strategic coordination, emphasizing the countries' roles as major global players advocating for multilateralism and opposition to unilateralism. The statements indicated a mutual interest in addressing common security threats and contributing to global peace and stability. This narrative aligns with the then international tensions in trade and geopolitical shifts (Sun, 2021).

In 2019, Xi Jinping's statements on Sino-Russian relations celebrated the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties, emphasizing a new era for a comprehensive bilateral strategic partnership across various fields. The narrative stressed mutual support in international forums, advocating for a multipolar world and opposing unilateral actions, reflecting a commitment to global governance and shared security interests.

In 2020, the focus significantly revolved around mutual support and cooperation in the COVID-19 pandemic. The period was characterized by joint efforts in combating the health crisis (Shevchuk & Tykhonenko 2022). The China-Russia "Year of Science and Technology Innovation" event emphasized the stable development of bilateral economic and trade cooperation under the pandemic conditions. The two nations reinforced their commitment to safeguarding international fairness and justice, the construction of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for humanity. This narrative underscores the adaptation of the Sino-Russian strategic coordination to address immediate global challenges while maintaining a focus on long-term collaborative goals.

In 2021 Xi Jinping underscored the resilience and new vitality of Sino-Russian relations. The year was characterized by mutual support on issues of core interests and national dignity, with extending the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation into a new era. The narrative emphasized the role of China and Russia as major global influencers, committed to safeguarding long-term peace and stability, and resisting hegemonic behaviors. The discourse highlighted the importance of controlling their nations' futures and resisting external interference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, December 15).

The statements of 2022 reflect a mutual commitment to strengthen their strategic coordination amidst a chaotic international environment. While the document does not explicitly mention the RF's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the emphasis on supporting each other on core interest issues, deepening practical cooperation, and coordinating closely on the international stage suggests an indirect acknowledgment of the geopolitical shifts and challenges arising during that period. The focus is on the desire to navigate through tumultuous times together. The year was marked by fruitful strategic communication, advancing cooperation across all fields, including trade, agriculture, and connectivity. Since 2022, the rapid intensification of bilateral trade has begun (Khokhlov, 2024, January 22).

The 2023 statements reflect a long-standing partnership and strategic coordination, resonating with the global expectations for stability and multilateralism. While there is no direct mention of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the focus on mutual support in international forums, safeguarding food and energy security, and enhancing global peace suggests an indirect influence of the geopolitical climate. The commitment to supporting mutual core interests, resisting external interference, and promoting a multipolar world indicates a strategic alignment in times of global shifts.

The evolution of 2017 – 2023 key topics underscores a dynamic partnership. The initial focus on foundational cooperation broadened to address acute challenges. The sustained emphasis on security, multilateralism, and shared objectives highlights a deepening alliance, poised to tackle both immediate crises and long-term global shifts.

4.4. Reflection of the War in Ukraine in Xi Jinping's Speeches

The Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022 caused the biggest security challenge for Europe since World War II. We assumed that could be reflected in Xi Jinping's speeches since the war could not be ignored in the planning of China's strategy in its relations with great powers.

After reviewing all three documents on China's relations with Russia, the USA, and the EU, we have observed that there are no explicit mentions of Ukraine or the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The documents focus on strategic partnerships, global governance, and multilateral relations without directly addressing the war in Ukraine. This suggests a deliberate diplomatic approach in public statements, possibly reflecting China's stance on navigating sensitive geopolitical issues while maintaining its strategic partnerships.

The same refers to Xi Jinping's statements in the 2023. The focus remains on reinforcing the strategic partnership and coordination between China and Russia, emphasizing mutual support on core interests, enhancing global governance, and promoting a multipolar world.

Hence, China's positioning towards the USA and the RF reflects a strategic approach shaped by global dynamics. While there is no direct mention of the war in Ukraine or the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the underlying topics suggest a cautious navigation of geopolitical tensions.

China's emphasis on mutual respect, economic cooperation, and multilateralism with the EU and the USA, alongside a deepening strategic partnership with Russia, indicates an effort to balance its international relations while promoting a multipolar world order and addressing global challenges without directly confronting sensitive geopolitical issues.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of Xi Jinping's statements from 2017 to 2023 regarding China's relations with the USA, the EU, and Russia demonstrates China's adept navigation of complex international waters. Through a strategic blend of competition, cooperation, and alignment, China articulates a vision of multilateralism and global governance, subtly influencing global narratives without directly confronting contentious geopolitical issues like the RF's aggression against Ukraine.

Xi Jinping's statements serve a strategic purpose to showcase China's diplomatic philosophy and priorities under his leadership. These statements are intended to project China's image as a responsible global power, keen on fostering stable and cooperative international relations, while also asserting its stance on key global issues and relations with major powers like the USA, the EU, and Russia. This effort aligns with China's broader goal to shape the narrative around its rise and role in the world order.

China positions itself as a cooperative yet competitive player with the USA, a multilateral partner with the EU, and a close strategic ally with Russia, reflecting a multifaceted diplomatic strategy in shaping global perceptions and policy discourse. Despite no explicit mention of the RF's war in Ukraine, the documents reveal a strategic and nuanced approach in navigating geopolitical tensions. Xi does not position China as a major international power in his speeches; instead, he portrays China with a multifaceted identity, emphasizing strength in relative terms rather than absolute power (Zappone, 2022).

Consequently, the research findings address the initially posed research questions as follows:

RQ1: China positions itself as a major global player advocating for multilateralism and a multipolar world order. It emphasizes mutual respect, cooperation, and non-interference in internal affairs, particularly highlighting strategic partnerships with Russia and seeking balanced relations with the US and the EU.

RQ2: The key topics in Xi Jinping's discourse are cooperation for mutual development, advocating for a "community with a shared future for humanity," and emphasizing China's role in global governance and peacekeeping. These narratives reflect China's approach to fostering positive international relations and its desire to be seen as a responsible global leader.

RQ3: In response to global crises like the RF's war in Ukraine, China's diplomatic discourse adapts by reinforcing the importance of international solidarity and cooperation. China uses these narratives to assert its global

influence, advocating for stability and development, and positioning itself as a key actor in addressing international challenges.

Hence, we conclude that China, through its strategic narratives and diplomatic discourse under Xi Jinping, seeks to shape a favorable international environment that supports its rise as a global power, emphasizes peaceful development, and promotes a vision of global governance based on cooperation and mutual benefit.

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