



The Role of Narratives for Gaining Domestic Political Legitimacy: China's Image Management during COVID-19

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Abstract

Crises constitute ideal opportunities for authoritarian leaders to promote certain narratives, shaping reality in their favor and crafting their own preferred storylines about current events. In other words: they serve authoritarian leaders on a silver platter the opportunity to instrumentalize these unforeseen circumstances to gain domestic political legitimacy by promoting strategic narratives. The COVID-19 pandemic was no exception in this regard. Ever since its onset in early 2020, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was among the most active actors worldwide seeking to capitalize on the global crisis for legitimation purposes. Whether applying narratives of governance supremacy, portraying the People's Republic of China as a “global savior,” or promoting emotionally appealing nationalistic narratives, the regime used the pandemic as a window of opportunity to rebrand its international role and enhance its domestic legitimacy. When observing the CCP's communication style over the course of 24 pandemic months (2020–2022), however, major shifts become apparent regarding the main narratives crafted in communication with national audiences. Based on this, the paper focuses on the role of such narratives for legitimation claims. Using exemplary media articles collected between the outbreak of the pandemic in China in late 2019 until the harsh Shanghai lockdown in spring 2022, it thus traces the narratives employed by Chinese state elites and explores how they are intertwined with nationalism and broader power claims.

Keywords Authoritarianism · Narratives · Image management · Legitimacy · China · COVID-19

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Introduction

When the first wave of SARS-CoV-2 started to spread across the globe in early 2020, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), pressured by the need to propose a valid counternarrative to the pandemic's emergence in Wuhan, started crafting and actively disseminating narratives of Chinese heroism, supremacy, and strength. While much of this rhetoric was deliberately targeted at foreign audiences, political communication vis-à-vis domestic ones seems even more important in terms of gaining political legitimacy. Despite the overall fear of instability, crises like the COVID-19 pandemic can also constitute ideal opportunities for autocratic leaders to turn these unforeseen circumstances into moments of enhanced political support.

Within these unexpected openings, narratives are a useful and powerful tool in the hands of autocratic actors by which to shape reality in their favor and to turn the burden of instability and chaos into a source of strength instead [3, 9]. While this is true for all contexts, whether democratic or autocratic, authoritarian crisis narratives are particularly powerful in terms of regime survival as well as regarding their potential implications for legitimizing coercive practices with the argument of combating a crisis. At the same time, if interwoven with nationalism, references to times of historic blossoming, or painting a bright and ideal future, they bear the power to create what we might call “autocratic appeal,” thereby winning people's acceptance through affection rather than coercion—although repressive measures often still accompany such “soft” mechanisms.

Hence, narratives are an important strategy for gaining political legitimacy as well as for discursively bolstering authoritarian practices [19]. The paper builds on the literature on domestic legitimation and focuses on the narrative aspects thereof in analyzing the claims made by the CCP to justify and bolster its rule. It considers strategic narratives to be of specific importance here as they affect world politics by convincing global audiences to adopt a certain understanding of reality. Crafting certain “images” and projecting them to multiple audiences, we argue, is key for maintaining authoritarian stability and legitimation. Such “authoritarian image management” is at the heart of what follows. Yet, while the fact that crises are used for political legitimation is not per se surprising, it is interesting to cast a glance at how Chinese narratives were employed during COVID-19 and how they interact with nationalism, emotional repertoires, and national visions.¹ To this end, the paper is guided by the following questions: Which narratives are used by the CCP in its communication with internal audiences? And, what role do these narratives play for winning domestic political legitimacy?

We analyze a selection of media reports from *Global Times* (GD) and *People's Daily* (PD) collected during three phases between the first international wave of the pandemic in 2020 through the harsh lockdown in Shanghai in spring 2022. The main narratives constructed by the CCP and disseminated via the media are explored via political discourse analysis. By comparing the various official narratives crafted

¹ Moreover, this connects to the overall question posed frequently during COVID-19 of whether autocratic or democratic regimes handled the pandemic better [1].

during these three phases, we seek to not only account for context-specific but also for temporal dynamics and adaptations in the rhetoric of the Chinese Party-State.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: The first section introduces the theoretical framework that guides our study and brings together the literatures on authoritarian legitimation, nonmaterial aspect of authoritarianism, and on the role of strategic narratives. The second section then presents our chosen methodological approach and our data corpus. After that, we delve into the analysis of these respective CCP narratives. Finally, we discuss main findings as well as the implications hereof for the long-term legitimation and stability of the Chinese Party-State. This summation, moreover, points toward the paper's key contributions to the study of autocracy and highlights also the importance of narratives and image management in the context of authoritarian stability.

Authoritarian Legitimation, Claims to Legitimacy, and the Role of Strategic Narratives

The question of the CCP's legitimacy and legitimation strategies has been an ongoing debate for more than three decades. The legitimacy crisis following the so-called Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union have seen this question stand at the forefront of national and international debates about China's political system and the future of the Chinese nation as a whole. Many scholars have discussed the nexus between crises and CCP legitimation attempts [16, 24, 34]. But, as history tells us, no past crisis has actually resulted in regime change in China. After major moments of instability, like the aforementioned massacre, the CCP has been able to adapt its internal structures to new circumstances through what has widely been coined China's 'resilient authoritarianism' [21]. In the literature on authoritarian power, it is argued that the stability of any such regime is reliant on enjoying a high degree of acceptance among its citizens; the key question thus lies in how this legitimacy is even generated [7].

While the need for the latter is certain, unresolved issues remain regarding the strategies employed to gain political legitimacy. The most commonly cited original study here is Weber's influential 1922 essay "The Three Types of Legitimate Rule." He argues that any political system, in order for its processes to function properly and its stability to be maintained, must have a basis for its legitimate authority over the people it governs [28]. In turn, the type of legitimacy claimed by the political system will determine the form of domination (or, authority) exercised over the people [28]. This makes it possible to operationalize the concept of "legitimacy" and apply it to the analysis of concrete contexts, by "identify[ing] the narratives [of legitimacy] by which rulers try to justify their rule" [23]. Easton argues that, on the most basic level, a political system processes inputs and turns them into outputs. "Inputs" consist here of demands and support and "outputs" of decisions and actions. For Easton, "a political system can be designated as those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society" [8]. Thus, a political system is not a fixed structure but needs to be able to constantly interact with society to retain its authority. It must, as such, react to "stimuli" [8] from its environment by taking

related decisions and actions. In a feedback loop, outputs are processed by society and transformed into inputs into the political system in the form of demands or support. Only if these claims are supported by people's core belief in the system's legitimacy will they contribute to the system's overall standing.

It is these "claims to legitimacy" that render the study of political discourse and the role of language in contemporary authoritarian contexts important. For instance, Grauvogel and von Soest [26] mention identity-based legitimacy claims next to procedural and performance-related narratives. While nonmaterial factors in authoritarian legitimation and negative emotions such as fear or feelings of oppression have been widely studied [15, 33], the recent literature has started to focus on what can be termed "authoritarian appeal"—namely the role of positive emotions, myths, or narratives for authoritarian stability, as examined via rhetoric, emotional appeals, and state responsiveness to the general public [5]. For instance, Dickson et al. argue that "some autocrats recognize that relying on coercion is costly and seek some semblance of popular support to maintain their rule" [6]. Demmelhuber and Thies introduce the concept of "sentimentality" to the study of authoritarian legitimation meanwhile, honing in on "a broad set of emotional repertoires that oscillate between the present and the past and allow certain forms of relationality between different temporal dimensions" [4]. Often such ideas are conveyed via narratives that are strategically crafted with the aim of directly appealing to people's emotions and thus seek to nurture political legitimacy by means of collective meaning-making and evoking feelings of belonging or pride, for example. It is for this reason that any strategic narratives crafted for legitimation purposes are interwoven with nationalistic references, nostalgic ones to times of past blossoming, or with bright visions of the future.

Now, how does this play out in the case of China? As Holbig and Gilley argue, "legitimacy is not a single continuous variable with a mean value whose implications can be linked in a linear manner to the probability of system-threatening behaviour. Rather it is a cluster of variables [...] of conditional probabilities to system-threatening behaviour" [11]. Due to the opaque and unpredictable nature of the interactions between these variables, the CCP anticipates that circumstances may arise that "suddenly and radically alter the overall level of legitimacy, causing system-threatening events". This, on the one hand, explains the CCP's paranoia in sensing deceptive system-threatening activities seemingly around every corner; on the other, it underpins the key relevance of the Weberian approach to political legitimacy. The CCP has, in consequence, to rely on a multitude of official claims that serve to underline and support the legitimacy of its rule, constantly aiming to improve its related abilities and perpetually seeking to manage the often contradictory and challenging nature of its legitimacy's various pillars. Also, according to Dickson et al., it is widely known that the CCP's legitimacy is based on a "combination of prosperity, nationalism and the fear of instability" [6]. To explore how this all plays out in times of major crisis and instability, and whether and how the CCP manages to turn this turmoil into a gain through the crafting of strategic narratives, we study the official political discourse presented in state media from 2020 to 2022, seeking to provide insight into these top-down narratives and their serving of claims to legitimacy.

Data & Methods

According to Yang [30], mass media in China can be considered the main medium by which CCP authorities guide domestic public opinion. Therefore, we selected the main mouthpiece newspapers *People's Daily* (人民日报 *Renmin Ribao*) and *Global Times* (环球时报 *Huanqiu Shibao*) for the purposes of our analysis. In China, the COVID-19 pandemic is strongly framed by the question of which political system fared best during it—thus being regarded as a source of competition on the international stage. *Global Times* played an important role in shaping readers' opinions on questions regarding the politics and narratives of the pandemic.² *People's Daily* is widely regarded as China's most influential and authoritative newspaper, having been the main voice of the CCP and the Chinese government since its establishment in 1946. Furthermore, the selected primary sources represent the most circulated official Chinese newspapers focusing on politics and international affairs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic—a broad array of potential narratives are hence covered in examining these two outlets closely. Both are published in an English and a Chinese version. For our analysis, the English-language translations were used; articles were cross-checked, however, to ensure their contents matched with the respective Chinese versions.

To select a robust and representative corpus, we employ an adapted form of “constructed week sampling,” a method commonly used to craft newspaper samples for qualitative data analysis. Hester and Dougall suggest constructing at least one and up to five weeks to accurately represent “content in a population of six months of newspaper editions” [10]. To paint a nuanced picture of China's official rhetoric, one that also points to any continuity or change in these narratives and their surrounding contexts, we identified three separate timeframes for data collection. Each spans approximately two to three months, and they are roughly one year apart from each other. For each timeframe, one representative week sample was constructed. Due to the high volume of articles, only two headline stories on each relevant day were chosen. We picked the articles based on their use of the terms “COVID-19,” “coronavirus,” “pandemic,” “epidemic,” and on their respective rankings within the selected editions.

Our coding then proceeded manually and inductively, supported by MaxQDA. We scanned the material for key terms, metaphors, and narratives. To account for temporal changes in China's COVID-19 communication, the first timeframe encompasses the lockdown in Wuhan (spanning January 23 to April 8, 2020). This period is characterized by strong external criticism of the Chinese government for its heavy-handed imposition of anti-pandemic measures and in turn the fighting back against supposed foreign enemies. Similarly, it includes internal rebukes of the CCP's non-transparent notification of the initial outbreak's onset, as personified by the death of

² With its English-language offering, *GT* is also directed at foreign audiences; yet, its Chinese-language version sells approximately five times as many copies as the English-language one does. Using *GT* as a primary source is also based on the observation that externally directed narratives ultimately also serve the purpose of internal signaling.

Dr. Li Wenliang—one of the first medical professionals to voice concerns about an unknown virus spreading in Wuhan [37].

The second timeframe encompasses the initial major global spike in the virus's spread and the introduction of the first Chinese COVID-19 vaccine (spanning November 1, 2020, to January, 31 2021). This period represents the height of CCP confidence in COVID-19's successful management at home. As the rest of the world battles with the pandemic, China remains largely unaffected and can indulge in its self-perception of being the vanguard of global health—making apparent the advantages of its chosen political system.

The third timeframe, meanwhile, covers the harsh and exceptional (by global standards) lockdown imposed in Shanghai (spanning April 1 to June 1, 2022). This period is characterized by the mismanagement of the Shanghai lockdown by local authorities. Official political communication, in turn, strongly focuses on reassuring people that the “dynamic zero” style of COVID-19 management is indeed the most effective way for China to cope with this health emergency and that the national economy will not suffer any long-term damage from the lockdown's suspending of both social and economic life.

Political Discourse and Media Analysis in China

Fundamentally, Chinese political communication via news media has continued to be based on the principles first laid out by Mao Zedong (毛泽东) in his “Yan'an Talks” of 1943.³ He proclaimed that all media only had the core purpose of advancing the force of the revolution and thus of increasing the CCP's authority and influence. The media serves, as such, to propagate the Party position and is not allowed to criticize the regime [22]. Moreover, it is to guide and inform public opinion. Against this backdrop, news media in China plays a fundamentally different societal role than in liberal democracies, in which it is often referred to as the “Fourth Estate”—namely existing to keep in check and investigate the power of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches respectively. Hence, the necessary precondition for analyzing People's Republic of China (PRC) media output accurately and systematically is to acknowledge that text and context mutually define each other. This also implies that not only are the structural properties of text or talk relevant, as is the content itself, but so too are the context as well as the relationships to surrounding discursive structures [25]. In short: the sociopolitical context of a given text fragment is as important as the possible personal motives that might underlie its composition.

As this paper primarily builds on the output of state media outlets, it might be difficult to correctly infer the intended results of specific narratives. Therefore, we need a robust historical, political, and sociological understanding of each respective object of inquiry. The methodological approach of Political Discourse Analysis is well suited to this aim, since it exceeds a merely linguistic examination of the text, as looking at the meanings connoted by chosen words and objects; the aim herewith

³ These talks, given at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, represent Mao's most influential words offered on the designated role of the media in the PRC.

is also the sociopolitical contextualization of source material. By selecting multiple periods of investigation, the paper also seeks to identify continuity and change in the different narratives over time.

Chinese Narratives during COVID-19: from “Global Savior” to Scapegoating

Over the past few years, and most visibly since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, the Chinese Party-State has used every available opportunity to signal its aspired-to global status [17], manage its (national and international) image, and to “gain face” (要面子 *yao mianzi*). While these endeavors are directed at different foreign and domestic audiences, it is the latter we address here. While COVID-19 represents a key issue for the CCP both at home and abroad, within the Chinese political system domestic politics generally trumps foreign policy [37]. Or, in other words, domestic issues, because of their direct link to the CCP’s primary objective, regime survival, take precedence over external ones. Pu offers a convincing argument for how the Chinese government wants to be received by different audiences: “Status signalling behaviours face a multiple audience problem, and for rising powers, the domestic audience is more important than the international audience” [17]. As the maintenance of domestic political stability is paramount in ensuring the regime’s continued legitimacy, it can be expected that within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic narratives put forth by the Chinese Party-State will take domestic audiences as their primary addressees, as those are ultimately the individuals on which the stability of the political system depends [17, 37].

Against this backdrop, the pandemic thus constituted a welcome window of opportunity for conversing with audiences at home. This is reflected in the employment of specific narratives directed at multiple audiences within the country (and, as mentioned, beyond it). The following section presents our main findings. In particular, scrutinizing media outlets’ words brought to the fore three types of CCP narratives that would be constructed in the context of the pandemic. These are: 1) narratives praising Chinese supremacy and effectiveness; 2) nationalistic narratives interwoven with promises of future greatness and lessons from past plights; and, 3) “Othering” narratives giving voice to anti-Western sentiment. By means of structure, we first present the different types of narratives and then subsequently discuss how they evolved or stayed the same over the course of the pandemic.

Praising Chinese Supremacy and Effectiveness

The analysis shows that performance narratives were a key feature of the CCP’s official rhetoric during all three phases of data collection. We operationalize them as any reference made to the tangible performance of the CCP or “China” as a whole, such as economic growth, governance effectiveness, the sound provision of public goods, or successful pandemic management. Interestingly, the use of performance

narratives increased over time, culminating in the third phase during the harsh lockdown in Shanghai.⁴

Narratives based on economic performance were cautionary in the first period of data collection. Central planners seemingly tried to construct a narrative basis for the possibility of a strong downturn in China's economic growth. They argued that short-term economic losses would not, however, change the country's future comprehensive rejuvenation. While these performance narratives tried to reassure the populace that the Chinese economy was not going to significantly slow down because of the pandemic, cautionary voices were also raised that if it did then such an outcome would be through no fault of the Chinese government itself.

In the second phase, meanwhile, great pride was taken in the fact that in 2020 China had been the only "major" economy to have experienced positive growth indicators. To compensate for the sense of insecurity around the country's economic performance at the time, strong focus was put on the government's pandemic prevention and control measurements, as the following statement shows:

China's efforts to coordinate pandemic control and economic growth have convinced an increasing number of observers around the globe that [its] strategy best suits its own national conditions and also benefits the whole world.⁵

This can be interpreted as proving that the CCP leadership sought to frame the Chinese economic model, a combination of central planning and elements of a free-market economy, as the driving force behind this economic recovery. Nevertheless, the role of the Party-State in steering economic development is presented as the decisive factor here, thereby directly connecting China's strong economy in 2020 with CCP rule. As increasing socioeconomic inequality is oftentimes interpreted as a potential risk to the latter's continued legitimacy, especially against the backdrop of the country's socialist history, this indicative of the attempts made to bolster CCP legitimacy on the basis of strong economic performance.

The invoked narrative of China as great power and international role model vis-à-vis its combating of the pandemic would be frequently underscored by reference to the broad praise it has received from various international organizations. Most notable here were the World Health Organization as well as numerous international leaders. This the following quote exemplifies: "The WHO applauded China for its efforts in combating the epidemic[,] saying it is setting a new standard for outbreak response."⁶

As already mentioned, performance narratives were most dominant in the third time period examined. This can be interpreted as an attempt by the Chinese leadership to (re)gain legitimacy amid the obvious failure of its "zero-COVID" strategy, the renewed rise in infection rates, and the harsh countermeasures that followed. For

⁴ For further reading on campaign governance and COVID-19, see [18]; for further information on COVID-19 prevention and control in China, as well as government performance and its perception, see [29, 36].

⁵ Appendix PD 36.

⁶ Appendix PD 17.

instance, the strict lockdown that was imposed in Shanghai in spring 2022—as leading to widespread complaints by local citizens regarding deteriorating living conditions, food scarcity, and feelings of being imprisoned—was frequently framed as “the best option”⁷ to combat the virus’s Omicron variant. Moreover, the lockdown was also said to help the economy—thus posited as performing excellently in spite of the health crisis. The following statement reveals how the dynamic-zero failures were sought to be mitigated via claims of economic protection:

[C]ontrary to the opinion of some people that dynamic-zero posts a huge impact on the economy, the measure actually protects the economy to the largest extent. According to a preliminary analysis by mathematical-modeling experts, the impact of a dynamic-zero strategy on local GDP is only half of the economic impact of a nondynamic clearing strategy.⁸

Nationalistic Narratives, Historical Myths, and Future Promises

Both before and since the outbreak of COVID-19, the CCP has remained keen to rebrand the Chinese nation domestically as well as internationally. According to Bader and Hackenesch, the main aim here is to “show Chinese citizens that the CCP’s chosen path is the right one” [2]. In particular, during the first two examined phases, nationalistic narratives turned out to dominate the official COVID-19 discourse.

Chinese nationalism has two main driving forces behind it. The first is the projection of the country’s great rejuvenation, which entails the reclaiming of China’s lost international status by its rising within the global hierarchy and exerting of its influence—therewith acting as a role model for other states. The second is the negative attitude toward Western imperial powers, which inflicted great pain on China during “the century of humiliation” [27]. In the context of the pandemic, state media strongly appealed to this nationalism and crafted narratives that entailed related elements such as patriotism, collectivism, or references to China’s greatness. For instance, several snippets from the examined media outlets praised China’s rise within the global hierarchy in the context of its goal of national rejuvenation while at the same time lamenting any perceived blame or criticism directed toward the country’s political system as a direct attack on and insult to the Chinese people.

Typical of the nationalistic narratives of China being a major country now reclaiming its rightful position in the world, as identified in the analyzed media outlets, is the construction of an imagined “international community”⁹ that always takes its side—thus unanimously supporting and praising its COVID-19 policies and global engagement hereon. For instance, one article in *People’s Daily* states that: “It is a consensus among the international community that China’s efforts have

⁷ Appendix GT 7.

⁸ Appendix GT 7.

⁹ Appendix GT 5.

effectively contained the spread of the virus to other countries.”¹⁰ The narrative usually positions this envisaged “international community” outside of the realm of the West’s influence. It also becomes apparent how a sense of belonging and collectivism is nurtured through this vision of an international community, whereas claiming that the pandemic originated in Wuhan is cast aside as baseless whispers:

Groundless conspiracy theories on the origin of COVID-19 were cooked up by certain Westerners and Western media, as the international community are making concerted efforts to defeat the virus.¹¹

The wording of this narrative suggests that the whole world is looking to China for guidance and to act as a role model in how to defeat this health emergency. The narrative is crafted in such a way as to imply that the posited “international community” mostly adheres to the view that China’s handling of the pandemic is indeed the correct approach here. As one article from *People’s Daily* notes:

It is generally believed by the international community that Xi [Jinping]’s remarks and the initiatives proposed by China have provided inspiration for the world to shake off the current crisis and charted the way forward for restoring the world after the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²

Global Times is even more specific in its detailing of China’s new place in the “international arena,” going on to then praise the country’s relative power gains vis-à-vis the current global superpower during the pandemic:

China’s weight in the international cooperation arena has been gaining momentum in recent years and has seen faster growth than the [United States] during the term of President Donald Trump.¹³

Closely related to the construction of this “international community” is the phrase “a shared future for humankind,” which is mentioned most often during the second phase of data collection, when China had most confidence in the success of its methods and how they were being received around the globe. The term has been linked to the Chinese leadership’s overall ambition to create “a new type of international relations.” It equates to efforts to restructure established international norms, based on the argument that the latter were set in motion during a time in which the West and especially the US dominated the global system. In one article from January 2021, *People’s Daily* quotes Xi as arguing that the international community needs to stand united and work together—stressing that people should “let multilateralism light our way toward a community with a shared future for mankind.”¹⁴ The expression “a shared future for humankind” usually has positive connotations, being reminiscent

¹⁰ Appendix PD 3.

¹¹ Appendix PD 7.

¹² Appendix PD 17.

¹³ Appendix GT 26.

¹⁴ Appendix PD 28.

of the time when China sought, in line with Deng Xiaoping's proposal, to rise under the radar.

The term "multilateralism," as used in the above-cited quote, has been incorporated into this narrative of "a shared future of humankind." This is a more recent rhetorical development and mainly results from the shift toward unilateralism seen in the US under the Trump administration. Linking "multilateralism" to "a shared future for humankind" thus serves here to connect China to global-governance initiatives and signals its cooperative behavior on the world stage. It can also be interpreted as a claim to represent a responsible international power, one that care about others, contrary to US unilateralism. This fits into a larger context in which CCP narratives have in numerous instances sought to reinterpret or reframe codified international norms, such as universal human rights, global governance, or democracy for all. The established link serves, further, to prove to domestic audiences that China is looked up to all around the world, and that the CCP is evidently leading the country in the right direction:

These propositions and initiatives have once again fully demonstrated the Chinese leader's sincere wish to pursue common health for mankind and secure stability for the world, embodied China's firm will to join hands with other countries to overcome the current difficulties, and won high praise and positive responses from various parties.¹⁵

Hence, as already pointed out by Yeophantong and Shih [32], Chinese nationalism during the pandemic would primarily be politically engineered as "both a strategic and an emotional response to external accusations that point[ed] to China or Wuhan as the origin of the novel coronavirus." Nationalistic legitimacy claims are furthermore used to invoke positive emotions among their recipients too. Namely, around China's rise within the global hierarchy and the praise received from international actors. This narrative is invoked to ascribe China's "great national rejuvenation" directly to CCP rule.

Besides these positive narratives appealing to nationalism, pride, and visions of future greatness, the COVID-19 pandemic proved also to be an opportunity for the CCP to capitalize on negative sentiment within Chinese society related to the humiliation the country has historically suffered at the hands of Western powers. Of course, the question of who exactly is to blame for the pandemic is not conducive to divulging how the Chinese government instrumentalizes this narrative to foster regime legitimacy. At the same time, the aggressive tone and blame game that the Trump administration upheld vis-à-vis China only contributed to the deepening of nationalistic resentment in the latter [12]. Interestingly, this narrative also used codified terms to describe the ways in which the West / the US tarnishes China's national pride. "Scapegoating," "mudslinging," "smearing [China]," "blame game," "blame-shifting," "slandering," and "China-bashing" thus all regularly feature.

¹⁵ Appendix PD 3.

In the analyzed media outlets, these critiques are often framed as general insults not only to the Chinese political system or the CCP's pandemic management but also to all Chinese people indeed:

Harboring deep insecurities about their own economic future, some Western countries, represented by the United States, are again accusing China groundlessly in an attempt to shift the blame from mistakes entirely of their own making.¹⁶

This rhetoric plays on the negative nationalistic emotions of the Chinese people, serving a dual purpose: Domestically, first, it is used by the CCP to demonstrate proof of the country's ostensibly ongoing repression by Western powers and to present itself as the voice of the Chinese people in speaking out against such enduring injustice. This is a tactic, second, commonly known as "rally-around-the-flag," by which a certain authoritative figure incites group hostility against a common enemy, thereby instrumentalizing the collective so as to further the goals of the leader in question and to increase in-group cohesion. It presents the CCP with an opportunity to signal to the Chinese people that it not only was on the right side of the argument, but also that it operates from the moral high ground [13].

"Othering" Narratives and Anti-Western Sentiment

The concept of "[Otherness]" is about series of complex social practices, sociological questions, and reproduction of social boundaries" [20]. As Neumann [14] argues, "the lineation of an 'in-group' must necessarily entail its demarcation from a number of 'out-groups' and that demarcation is an active and ongoing part of identity formation". The delineation of social boundaries is therefore not a by-product of the formation of societies, but rather one of its "necessary a priori ingredients." In the Self-Other nexus, the external Other is constructed as the exact diametric negative opposite of the own positive Self. The attributes connoted hereby serve as a contrast against which normal, central, and correct self-identification are defined. The state-sponsored "Othering" in Chinese media can therefore be regarded as an elite discourse that seeks to influence self-identification processes in the ways most favorable to the type of governance and society preferred by the Chinese Party-State's elites. Lams argues that Chinese official narratives constantly engage in "categorizing processes that position the actors as antagonists [China and the US] within a victim/aggressor framework, discursive ideological mechanisms of reification, legitimation, dramatization and generalization" [13]. In the analyzed media reports, we found many "Othering" narratives entailing anti-Western—or more specifically, anti-US—sentiment. These findings strongly support the notion of the US being the single-most significant object of Chinese "Othering" narratives in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This construction of a positive Self and negative Others, as found in the examined media reports, largely reflects the findings of Yang and Chen in their article on globalism and nationalism in Chinese official discourse during

¹⁶ Appendix PD 35.

COVID-19. They posit, in a similar vein, that this “Othering” helps to reinforce the legitimacy of the CCP at home as well as the international reputation of the PRC under the leadership of Xi [31].¹⁷

“Othering” narratives identified in the analyzed media reports almost exclusively targeted the US and sometimes the so-called West as an extension thereof. This intertwined simultaneously negative positive and negative framing of the respective global powers has a dual purpose: First, this approach can be considered to be rather outward-looking and aimed at strengthening China’s international standing by highlighting the country’s positive contributions to the international community while at the same time discrediting the US. Second, such a framing can be considered as rather inward-looking and directed at domestic audiences too. Accounts of Chinese moral superiority as well as of tangible and intangible victories are contrasted with Western moral decay and failure.¹⁸ Chinese self-identification with this sense of superiority is then sought to be directly associated with the CCP’s successful leadership of the nation.

Interestingly, in the COVID-19 context, Chinese “Othering” narratives often seem to be closely intertwined with nationalistic and performance-related ones. When stressing the demonstrated supremacy of the CCP’s reaction to the pandemic, this is often interwoven with nationalistic references to collectivism, solidarity, and a shared destiny of humankind. At the same time, performance narratives often find their reference frame in broader “Othering” narratives that mostly hint at the ostensible failures of an abstract “West”—with the latter either poorly combating the pandemic in general or certainly worse so than the PRC at least. While performance narratives themselves stress China’s evident superiority, “Othering” narratives pick up on that notion and subsequently predict a general decline of Western hegemony and a major global power shift in the country’s favor. Interestingly, in comparison to performance and nationalistic narratives, “Othering” ones appeared less often in the analyzed material. While in the first examined time phase these latter narratives came up frequently, they were only scarcely used during the period of the Shanghai lockdown.

This might be explained by the specific nature of the “Othering” narratives that are often used to depict the (alleged) supremacy over the West—and, in particular, the US. While China’s model of combating the pandemic seemed rather successful initially, this first time period was flanked by “Othering” narratives based on carefully selected examples in which China seemingly objectively triumphed over the West in terms of infection rates, effectiveness of the political system, and the responsiveness of the healthcare sector. The sociopolitical climate around the flare-up of cases that led to the harsh lockdown in Shanghai in spring 2022, in combination with a global trend toward fewer restrictions amid the Omicron wave, did not offer the same fertile ground for such “Othering” narratives.

The analysis shows that the majority of articles with content focused on the US specifically and the West more generally either employed a neutral or openly negative/aggressive rhetoric here. The dissection of the US and its failings within the data corpus focused

¹⁷ For additional reading on pandemic nationalism in China, see [32].

¹⁸ For examples, see Appendix: PD 1; PD 3; PD 8; PD 13; PD 15; PD 18; PD 29; PD 39; PD 40; GT 1; GT 2; GT 3; GT 5; GT 6; GT 7; GT 9; GT 10; GT 13; GT 16; GT 17; GT 19; GT 20; GT 23; GT 27; GT 32; GT 41.

on two major themes: First, the latter's political system, as well as "Western culture." Second, the international role played by the US, constantly depicted as "irresponsible" and "egoistic." Through the lens of "Othering," the US is hence lambasted as the diametrical opposite of China. The strong focus on the former's political system and its international affairs also offers insight into what the CCP's political priorities are. It seems to be of especially high importance to signal to domestic audiences the superiority of the Chinese political system, as well as the central role "responsible" China plays internationally.

One specific narrative addressed the US's political system, deeming it "inadequate" based on an individualistic Western culture that hinders the coordinating of coherent and efficient responses in moments of crisis given the required intensity and speed here. Western democracy is also portrayed as having been hijacked by influential and wealthy interest groups and paralyzed by polarization and partisanship, akin to what Zhang Weiwei has called Western "vetocracy" [35]. Western politicians are further depicted as "immoral" given the nature of their pandemic responses. While China is presented as having put "people's lives first,"¹⁹ Western politicians are said to have disregarded public safety in favor of individual freedoms and willfully caused the death of their citizens:

This also fully showed that some US politicians ignored public safety and lives, go against science, and are obsessed with making propaganda about conspiracies and spreading "the political virus."²⁰

Another frequently recurring narrative would be one depicting the US as an irresponsible player within the international community. Examples such as its withdrawal from international treaties, for example the Paris Agreement, were hence brought up to illustrate this declining role of the US within the global system. A very illustrative example in this regard is the following quote by Xi:

Flouting rules and laws, treading the path of unilateralism and bullying, and withdrawing from international organizations and agreements, [this runs] counter to the will of the general public and trample on the legitimate rights and dignity of all nations.²¹

In a similar way, narratives about vaccine politics were constructed for the purpose of "Othering" the US and asserting Chinese supremacy. For instance, it was mentioned a number of times that "China walks the talk on COVID-19 vaccine sharing."²² In turn, the way the US handles the distribution of vaccines is interpreted as an example of the country's "immoral" nature, of the alleged politicization of COVID-19 vaccines, and of their ostensible misuse as a means of political bargaining. For instance, one article from *Global Times* remarks that: "The US seems to be deliberately distributing vaccines to reshape the attitude of Western countries and the world, trying to restore the so-called leadership it lost in the fight."²³

¹⁹ Appendix PD 3.

²⁰ Appendix GT 27.

²¹ Appendix PD 16.

²² Appendix PD 24.

²³ Appendix GT 19.

Discussion of Results and Temporal Trends

Regarding these three types of employed narratives, certain temporal patterns became visible in the course of the analysis. First and foremost, it is noteworthy that the different types of narratives found throughout the data corpus are not mutually exclusive but rather closely intertwined with each other in a manner that serves to be reinforcing of them all. While it is helpful to discuss them separately, namely by means of structuring the results, the following section discusses instead how they are interconnected as well as how they evolved between January 2020 and April 2022. The following table sums up the temporal trends and shows the shifting CCP narrative strategies throughout the pandemic—ranging from + + (used very frequently) to – (used very scarcely). It is important to note that these results are not based on quantitative analysis but rather extracted as patterns from the qualitative one we performed (Table 1).

While *othering narratives* were particularly strong in the first two examined time phases, when the CCP tried to generate legitimacy around its alleged success in keeping the rate of infection to zero and thereby helping present China as superior to the West, they would appear less frequently in the third phase (the harsh lockdown in Shanghai). This is not surprising, as the failure of the CCP's dynamic-zero policy did not provide fruitful ground for "Othering" narratives. Instead, during the Shanghai episode, the focus seemed to have been on persuading both internal as well as external audiences that China's economy would survive the lockdown and that, in the long run, this would still turn out to be the best strategy for combating COVID-19 alongside boosting the economy.

Nationalistic narratives functioned best during the first two phases meanwhile, during which China could offer its winning formula to the world based on its low number of domestic cases, as well as address external critiques by blaming Western powers for trying to sabotage the country and tarnish its image. Finally, *performance narratives* in the first two phases constituted an important basis for the CCP's overall claims to legitimacy, yet differed strongly in their usage, content, and frequency as compared to the third phase. The first two phases were thus used to depict China's strong state capacity and ability to quickly and effectively coordinate its different healthcare measures. Performance narratives in the third phase mainly sought to reduce the political damage from the CCP's mishandling of its pandemic response as well as from the prospects of a recession ensuing.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the crafting of CCP narratives over the course of the first three pandemic years (2020–2022), with particular focus on those directed at domestic audiences. The analysis departed from the assumption that narratives are a powerful tool regarding legitimacy claims and that crises thus constitute related ideal opportunities for enhancing political standing. While it is commonly

Table 1 Chinese COVID-19 narratives over time

	1 st phase	2 nd phase	3 rd phase
Performance narratives	–	+	++
Nationalistic narratives	++	+	–
Othering narratives	++	+	–

Authors' own compilation

known that the CCP's legitimacy is based on a “combination of prosperity, nationalism and the fear of instability” [6], we sought to explore whether and how the Party-State managed to turn this very instability into a moment of gain by capitalizing on the global crisis in promoting self-aggrandizing strategic narratives to domestic audiences. The analysis of state-media output from *People's Daily* and *Global Times* showed that Chinese elites crafted three different yet closely intertwined types of rhetoric here: 1) narratives of supremacy; 2) nationalistic narratives; and, 3) “Othering” narratives based on anti-Western sentiment intended for consumption by audiences at home.

Covering the time span of 2020 to 2022, the paper sought to account for context-specific as well as temporal trends regarding the CCP's construction of COVID-19 narratives serving its own purposes, as well as their adaption and repetition throughout the course of the pandemic. Moreover, by focusing on narratives' role in the crafting of autocratic appeal and persuasion, we partly addressed also the under-researched question of whether authoritarian regimes yield “soft power” to gain legitimacy, and the role language plays herein. Overall, the importance of strategic narratives to legitimacy and managing one's image was found to be very apparent.

Against the backdrop of the broad literature on autocratic stability and rule, this work constitutes a vital addition to the scholarship by providing insight into the mechanisms of legitimation via narration, per the example of China during COVID-19. In that sense, it can be understood as an empirical contribution to discussions about legitimation strategies in times of crisis, achieved by exploring the global crisis responses triggered by the pandemic. Comparing the narratives crafted during the latter to those employed during other crises of similar magnitude would be of great benefit going forward.

Appendix

People's Daily (in chronological order)

1.	2019-nCoV outbreak mirrors morality of international community	06.02.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0206/c90000-9654842.html
2.	Xi: Nation can win battle against virus	06.02.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0206/c90000-9654623.html

3.	Xi talks with Trump over phone on novel coronavirus outbreak	07.02.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0207/c90000-9655290.html
4.	Solidarity, cooperation indispensable to battle against novel coronavirus	08.02.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0208/c90000-9655524.html
5.	Xi stresses unremitting efforts in COVID-19 control, coordination on economic, social development	24.02.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0224/c90000-9661105.html
6.	Xi stresses COVID-19 scientific research during Beijing inspection	03.03.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0303/c90000-9663971.html
7.	Conspiracy theories won't hold water when evaluated with science, rationality	03.03.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0303/c90000-9664154.html
8.	Is US able to protect the lives of its people as COVID-19 spreads?	03.03.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0303/c90000-9664189.html
9.	Xi stresses coordinating epidemic control, economic work, achieving development goals	01.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0401/c90000-9675032.html
10.	Politicizing China's foreign assistance does no good for global efforts against COVID-19	01.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0401/c90000-9675037.html
11.	Scientists: origin of COVID-19 remains elusive	03.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0403/c90000-9676123.html
12.	What experience can China share with the world in combating COVID-19?	03.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0403/c90000-9676056.html
13.	Actions and missteps of US govt's coronavirus response: think tank report	03.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0403/c90000-9676118.html
14.	Int'l community called to further cooperate in COVID-19 fight, saving lives top priority	04.04.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0404/c90000-9676354.html
15.	U.S. cultural infiltration threatens global security	12.11.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1112/c90000-9779505.html
16.	Xiplomacy shows China's sense of responsibility in time of pandemic, global recession	25.11.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1125/c90000-9788905.html
17.	China helps chart way forward for restoring world after COVID-19 pandemic	26.11.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1126/c90000-9791105.html
18.	The US is a thief crying "Stop thief!" and poses military threat to the world	13.11.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1113/c90000-9779789.html
19.	Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy guides China's actions as responsible country amid pandemic	20.12.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1220/c90000-9800848.html
20.	Xi Jinping's Economic Thought steers China through challenges for sound journey ahead	22.12.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1222/c90000-9801417.html
21.	China grants conditional market approval for its first homemade COVID-19 vaccine	31.12.2020	http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1231/c90000-9804787.html
22.	Xi delivers New Year speech, hails hard-won achievements in "extraordinary" 2020	01.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0101/c90000-9805141.html

23.	Xinhua Commentary: Caution, science to help China tame COVID-19 during holiday travel rush	05.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0105/c90000-9806015.html
24.	Commentary: China walks the talk on COVID-19 vaccine sharing	06.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0106/c90000-9806215.html
25.	China administers over 9 mln doses of self-developed COVID-19 vaccines	10.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0110/c90000-9807636.html
26.	China's solutions to global challenges in tumultuous age	18.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0118/c90000-9810321.html
27.	Chinese COVID-19 vaccines gain more intl recognition	18.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0118/c90000-9810442.html
28.	President Xi calls for multilateralism to light up way forward amid pandemic, recession	26.01.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0126/c90000-9812857.html
29.	Foreign businesses undented as Shanghai continues massive COVID-19 testing	02.04.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0402/c90000-10079097.html
30.	New candidate vaccines against COVID-19 variants designed: study	06.04.2021	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0406/c90000-10080428.html
31.	"Zero-COVID" strategies were best option: <i>New Scientist</i>	08.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0408/c90000-10081722.html
32.	"Omicron just a big flu" a misperception; some in West attempt to delude Chinese public	11.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0411/c90000-10082167.html
33.	COVID-19 controls won't shake China's economic fundamentals	16.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0416/c90000-10084833.html
34.	Shanghai tackles logistics bottlenecks amid virus resurgence	17.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0417/c90000-10084984.html
35.	Experts warn COVID-19 pandemic not over as global cases surpass 500 mln	18.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0418/c90000-10085349.html
36.	China's economy on solid footing despite challenges of COVID, external uncertainty	19.04.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0419/c90000-10085593.html
37.	China will surely win anti-COVID war in Shanghai, with time-tested epidemic control policy: top leadership	06.05.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0506/c90000-10092678.html
38.	China adheres to zero-COVID policy, minimizes epidemic's impact on economy	10.05.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0510/c90000-10094431.html
39.	Studying and Implementing Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy in a Deep-Going Way and Opening up New Horizons in China's External Work	16.05.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0516/c90000-10096955.html
40.	Commentary: The Western media's absurd logic behind China's efforts to resume production	19.05.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0519/c90000-10098443.html
41.	WEF applauds China's commitment to combat COVID-19 pandemic: senior healthcare executive	26.05.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0526/c90000-10101556.html
42.	Shanghai as we knew it is coming back	02.06.2022	http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0602/c90000-10105208.html

Global Times (in chronological order)

1.	Western fear mongering hinders virus fight	04.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178492.shtml
2.	Anti-China actions amid epidemic should be punished	04.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178524.shtml
3.	China deserves praise, not ill will, for efforts to curtail spread of coronavirus	06.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178761.shtml
4.	Coronavirus a common foe the global village must fight together	06.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178729.shtml
5.	US criticism toward China reveals a country unwilling to learn	09.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178944.shtml
6.	<i>New York Times</i> wrong to accuse China of lacking global cooperation	09.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1178975.shtml
7.	US political system stymies effective virus response	26.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1180822.shtml
8.	China has changed course of COVID-19 outbreak through pragmatic approach: WHO expert	26.02.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202002/1180804.shtml
9.	West continues to smear China to deflect criticism over mishandling of virus crisis	02.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184549.shtml
10.	China-bashing politicians should investigate US' failures in fighting virus	02.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184509.shtml
11.	Politicization of Chinese aid negatively impacting China–Europe cooperation	03.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184609.shtml
12.	WHO's remarks on China's COVID-19 response objective, unbiased: China's chief epidemiologist	03.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184635.shtml
13.	Those in West indifferent to China's early pain now blame China for their loss	04.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184687.shtml
14.	China grieves for nation's sacrifice in fighting COVID-19	04.04.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202004/1184661.shtml
15.	Coronavirus contaminated shrimp from Saudi Arabia found in NW China's Lanzhou	14.11.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1206796.shtml
16.	Experts look forward to Biden administration addressing issues that separate China, US	14.11.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1206789.shtml
17.	Biden can't save US from darkest period of epidemic	26.11.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1208201.shtml
18.	Southeast Asian countries eye co-prosperity with China via enhanced party-to-party exchanges	26.11.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202011/1208212.shtml
19.	Risky for Europe to bet on US COVID-19 vaccines: <i>Global Times</i> editorial	22.12.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1210692.shtml
20.	Lessons for China from US COVID-19 crisis	22.12.2020	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1210673.shtml
21.	Wider wealth gap looms, dimming India's economic recovery in 2021	01.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211549.shtml

22.	UPDATE: Returning student from UK suspected of contracting new variant, but wild spread is ruled out	01.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211560.shtml
23.	NYT piece "Propaganda for China?" US elites too fragile to face reality	06.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212041.shtml
24.	Beijing "political moat" clamps down to fight COVID surge	06.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212026.shtml
25.	Spring Festival travel rush to scale down amid virus resurgence	10.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212377.shtml
26.	Cooperation in public health to spearhead China's international efforts, rekindling US interest welcomed	10.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212381.shtml
27.	"Mr Liar" Pompeo stages final madness on origin of coronavirus: Chinese FM	18.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1213158.shtml
28.	China takes global lead in economic recovery, boosting national pride	18.01.2021	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1213183.shtml
29.	2,086 + 7,789! China's daily COVID-19 infections reach record high, with Shanghai most affected	02.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1257437.shtml
30.	China's services, factory activities hit by COVID-19 outbreaks in March: private survey	06.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1257630.shtml
31.	Shanghai registers 130,000 COVID-19 positive cases amid Omicron outbreak; one in critical condition	08.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1258825.shtml
32.	US' questioning of China's zero-COVID strategy a veiled attempt to create chaos	10.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1258940.shtml
33.	Shanghai steps up efforts to ensure daily necessities supply; neighboring Suzhou tightens epidemic control	16.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1259461.shtml
34.	Several Chinese cities put under "static management" against COVID-19 to "minimize social, economic impact"	17.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1259539.shtml
35.	Dynamic zero-COVID policy is the best option currently: chief epidemiologist of China's CDC	19.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1259664.shtml
36.	EU, US adjust COVID response, refusing to say "pandemic is over"	28.04.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1260616.shtml
37.	Shanghai vows to firmly implement dynamic zero policy after CPC leadership meeting	06.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1264988.shtml
38.	Beijing issues new guideline for home quarantine, conditions "grow mature as most people vaccinated"	10.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265282.shtml
39.	China should invest more resources on COVID-19 prevention to avoid treatment pressure: health chief	16.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265784.shtml

40.	“Brain drain” nonsense won’t undermine China’s growing tech competitiveness	19.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266042.shtml
41.	US urged to disclose more info, conduct deeper probe into mysterious hepatitis outbreak in children	26.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266576.shtml
42.	China rolls out 33 detailed measures to boost growth; major rebound expected in Q3	31.05.2022	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1267079.shtml

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Data Availability Data can be made available upon request.

Declarations

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