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Studying the narrative of US policy towards China: introducing China-related political texts in Congress

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How the United States pursues its decoupling policies towards China is an essential topic in studying U.S.–China relations. Although the U.S. policy orientation towards China can be examined from several perspectives, this study uses a text-mining approach by extracting the China-related legislation in the 115th–117th Congress to observe the activities of the U.S. Congress regarding the affairs of China. Our analysis shows that Congress has seen a surge in China-related legislation since the introduction of decoupling policies. At the same time, it has not improved its negative view of China and maintained a competitive attitude in the economic, scientific and technological, and military fields after party rotation. It is worth noting that Congress under the Biden administration has placed greater emphasis on ideological competition, requiring allies who share common values to work together to counter the 'Chinese threat' in various areas. In this article, it is found that congressional legislation, as important political texts, conceal value judgements and institutional orientations that guide and constrain diplomatic practice. Political texts, ideology, and power are intertwined and shape the current U.S. congressional diplomatic strategy towards China.

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Introduction

The U.S.–China relationship has undergone profound ups and downs since the Trump administration. Ongoing trade disputes and ideological confrontations have reshaped high-level perceptions of threats to each other in both countries. As the dominant player in the existing international order, Washington is on high alert for the rise of its adversary, believing that China has transformed itself from a regional to a global challenger, projecting its influence beyond the Indo-Pacific region to global supremacy (Lippert et al., 2020). This vigilance and concern have made U.S. foreign policy towards China more competitive and aggressive. Not only does the U.S. list China as a "strategic competitor", but it has also introduced a series of restrictive policies and regulations to deal with China as a challenger to the neoliberal international order (Glaser, 2019). At the same time, China emphasized that it would no longer submit to the U.S. bullying and demanding that the U.S. stop "political manipulation" against China (Jaworsky and Qiaoan, 2021). If it is because of President Trump's pragmatism and strong leadership style that has exacerbated the standoff between the two countries, but Democrat Biden who resets multilateralism has not changed the tone of the strategic competition between China and the United States (Greve, 2021). Although President Trump's pragmatism and strong leadership style exacerbated the standoff between the two countries, Biden, as a Democrat who supports multilateralism, has not changed the tone of the strategic competition between China and the United States (Greve, 2021). At the first high-level diplomatic meeting between China and the Biden administration, the U.S. Secretary of State accused China of threatening the "rules-based order that maintains global stability". At the same time, China countered that the US was "full of cold war thinking, inciting other countries against China" (Greve, 2021). Undoubtedly, the blame game between the two major powers has deepened the uncertainty in international politics. Moreover, with the frequent clashes of policy goals and ideological confrontations, the Peloponnesian War and the Thucydides Trap have become popular topics of discussion in the international community (Ling and Lv, 2018). In short, this broad strategic rivalry has become the new paradigm of international relations in the last few years. It has shaken the international order, involving third parties passively in geopolitics. The Economist commented on this, noting, "There is less trust between Washington and Beijing than at any point since 1979" ("There is less trust between Washington and Beijing than at any point since 1979," 2020).

With an important role in the U.S. system of separation of powers, Congress is deeply involved in the design of the containment strategy against China. Among other things, members of Congress exert substantial influence on U.S.–China relations through legislation. As Wildavsky's "two presidencies" thesis describes, Congress is another president in the U.S. political system that is exclusively responsible for domestic legislation and foreign policy (Fleisher et al., 2000). The article argues that congressional legislation is a window to observe U.S. diplomatic intentions: on the one hand, reviewing congressional bills helps to understand the changing perceptions of U.S. senior leaders towards China in a dynamic way; on the other hand, as an essential political text, the bills conceal power relations and strategic intentions, which are of inestimable value in judging the direction of U.S.–China relations.

The article's main points are as follows. First, it is found in this article that there are relatively few studies that discuss power and ideology between China and the United States from the perspective of congressional legislative texts. Second, bridging the gaps in existing studies, the article conducts text mining in three dimensions of China-related bills: keywords, semantic network, and topics. It is found in this article that while the themes of the China-related bills during the Trump and Biden administrations are similar, the starting points differ. In addition, it is worth noting that the power and ideological tendencies hidden behind the bill as an essential political text are necessary evidence of U.S. strategic choices regarding China.

Congress: a key player in Sino-US relations

Currently, two types of mainstream U.S. foreign policy studies on China exist. The first is based on traditional international relations theories such as great power relations (Layne, 2020), geopolitics, and strategic games (Southgate, 2021) to examine U.S. strategic choices regarding China. The second type examines the role of the U.S. political system, and most studies in this category focus on the president and their ideological preferences and strategic choices, based on the argument that the head of state is the main protagonist of U.S. diplomatic activities. For example, some scholars have argued that the head-of-state meeting between Top Chinese and U.S. Leaders would provide a more pragmatic basis for U.S.–China relations (Lye, 2017). In addition, some studies highlight that the realist turn of US foreign policy under the Trump administration has reshaped Sino-US relations and discuss whether a new Cold War can be avoided in the context of the pandemic (Feng, 2021). When scholars focus on the Biden administration's policy towards China, they find that it continues President Trump's hard-line approach, leading the two countries increasingly closer to war (Copper, 2021). Content analysis and discourse analysis have been popular research methods in recent years. Some researchers have chosen media reports (Boykoff, 2022; Liu and Yang, 2015), official Chinese discourse (Mochtak and Turcsanyi, 2021; Yang and Chen, 2021) and U.S. presidential tweets (Luo et al., 2022) as research materials to observe U.S. attitudes towards China and its strategic tendencies. Meanwhile, Congressional legislators are key players in diplomatic activities. The actual legislative process can allay presidential doubts and concerns about proposals and induce the president to sign and implement foreign affairs bills that are contrary to his or her intent, ultimately directly affecting the nation's foreign policy (Tama, 2020). In addition, Congress can use annual appropriations bills to limit the administration's policy discretion (Carcelli, 2022) and engage in foreign policy processes through intraparty factionalism, ultimately succeeding in influencing foreign policy in the long run (Lantis and Homan, 2019).

The U.S.–China relationship is undergoing profound decoupling (Cha, 2020), while at the same time, Congress is a key player in determining the direction of the relationship between the two countries. In terms of the research scope, in the current exploration of China-related bills in the U.S. Congress, either all China-related bills are chronologically tracked over a while and their development trends and characteristics are observed (Chang-Liao, 2019; Guo, 2022), or a specific area of Chinese affairs is selected for in-depth analysis of congressional actions; such topics include the Taiwan issue (Lin et al., 2022), the Hong Kong issue (Liu and Cai, 2020), and the South China Sea dispute (De Castro, 2018). From the perspective of research methodology, there are two main approaches to studying China-related bills. One is based on traditional international relations theory, such as the "balance of power" theory, which analyses China's strategic intentions and the power gap between the U.S. and China to explain the U.S.–China policy debate in Congress (Chang-Liao, 2019). Another approach is to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to explore China-related bills in depth. For example, one study provides the number of anti-China bills and China-

related resolutions in Congress, noting that the U.S. Congress is deeply involved in China-related matters (Guo, 2022). Other studies have used regression analysis to explore the factors influencing the output of China-related bills, particularly the two important variables of legislative-executive relations and the degree of congressional fragmentation (Lin et al., 2022). In addition, legislators' voting records are important evidence to explain the process of enacting China-related bills (Seo, 2017).

It cannot be ignored that text mining is increasingly used in the study of China-related issues, especially for political texts. Most of the existing China-related textual materials are derived from U.S. media reports, with less focus on official U.S. discourse and even less on the role of Congress. Legislative texts are a window into congressional policy towards China. The article argues that one should focus on U.S. legislative activities and legislative texts related to China to understand Congress's real intent towards China accurately. More importantly, conflicting interests and diplomatic dilemmas between merging power and existing great power can be found in the political texts. Moreover, in international relations, interactions between states form national identities, which define state behavior, and language influences the maintenance and development of identities (Carta, 2014). Therefore, as an important political corpus, the China-related bills of Congress not only contain the definition of the "self" identity of the U.S. legislature but also show how it constructs the "other" identity and how it takes political action based on identity perception. In other words, ideological tendencies and power claims can be constructed by interpreting political texts.

Overall, this paper is dedicated to exploring three research questions.

RQ1: What are the trends and characteristics of China-related bills in Congress after the U.S. decoupling from China?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences in the themes of China-related bills introduced by Congress in different periods?

RQ3: How do the U.S. China-related bills shape the discourse-power-ideology triangle?

Data collection and methodology

Data collection. As the official website of the U.S. Congress, congress.gov records every legislative activity of legislators and summarizes the content of every bill. The researchers searched Congress.gov for China-related bills from the 115th–117th Congresses (spanning Jan. 3, 2017–Jan. 3, 2023) using the keywords "China" and "Chinese" for a total of 2229 bills. On this basis, the researchers excluded two types of bills. The first category is amendments, with 477 bills, which modify or add to existing legislation and do not involve new legislative acts. The second category of bills, with content not directly related to Chinese affairs, such as protecting the culture of Chinese Americans, included 248 acts. After removing the above two

categories of bills, the researchers finally obtained 1504 bills concerning China in the past three U.S. Congress.

Data analysis. The researchers extracted 1504 official summaries of China-related bills and built two corpuses. The first corpus is the China-related bills introduced during the Trump administration, i.e., the 115th and 116th Congress, with 646 bills. The second corpus is the China-related bills proposed during the Biden administration, i.e., the 117th Congress, with a total of 858 bills. The researchers conducted text mining on the two corpora separately. All work was performed in open-source R language packages and divided into two parts. Text word distribution and text topics were explored.

First, to identify the actual contents of the China-related legislation, the researchers used R Package to describe the high-frequency words of the two corpora separately. In this article, the semantic network was drawn based on the Jaccard coefficient after the keywords were extracted based on the TF-IDF algorithm.

Next, the researchers used topic modeling and latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) to examine the distribution of topics in the two corpora of China-related bills. As a three-level hierarchical Bayesian model, LDA is an unsupervised learning algorithm that has been widely used in political text topic recognition and analysis. (1) The legislation texts were converted into a "corpus" and preprocessed, which included the removal of numbers, punctuation, and stop words. (2) In this article, two approaches were used to determine the optimal number of topics discussed in a corpus. The first one is based on the R* topic models package to calculate the LogLikelihood. The second is to write the four models "Griffiths2004", "CaoJuan2009", "Arun2010", and "Deveaud2014" into the same code and observe the maximum and minimum values of the results to find the range of the best number of topics.[1] (3) The researchers combined the above two methods, tested the model effects sequentially within the available choices and finally determined the optimal number of topics to be 8.[2]

Finally, the researchers ran the LDAvis code in R to model and visualize the topic modeling of the two China-related bill corpora.

Figure 1 illustrates the research process of this paper.

Results
Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of legislation by session and party affiliation. First, the amount of China-related legislation in Congress has increased dramatically since the U.S. abandoned the engagement policy, with 166, 480, and 858 China-related bills in the last three Congress, respectively. The number of China-related bills in the 117th Congress has increased more than five times compared to the 115th. Regarding party affiliation, the number of China-related bills proposed by the Republicans is
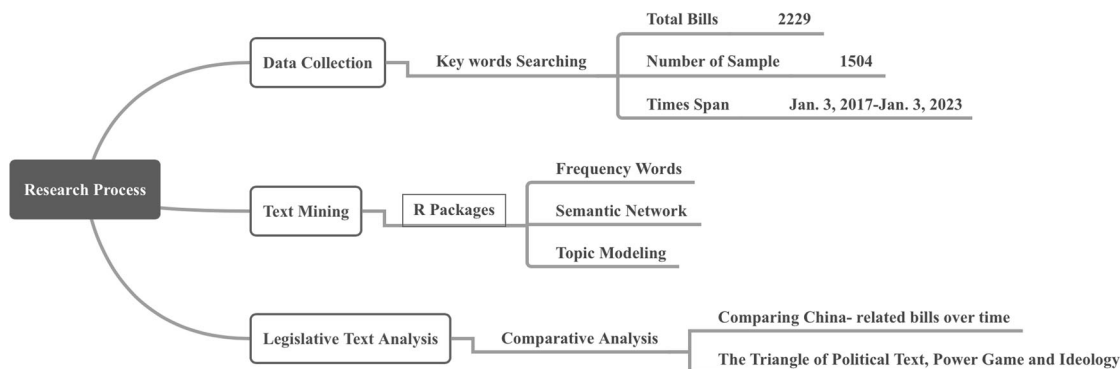

Fig. 1 Article research processes.

much higher than that of the Democrats, with an average of 2.4 times more bills proposed by the Republicans than the Democrats per Congress.

Figure 3 shows the division of the subject-policy area of all legislation on the official website of Congress. Nearly half of the bills involving China are in the area of international affairs, comprising 734 items. Foreign Trade and International Finance, Armed Forces and National Security were the next most important concerns of lawmakers, with 112 and 111 bills in that order. The remaining seven areas are Energy, Commerce, Health,
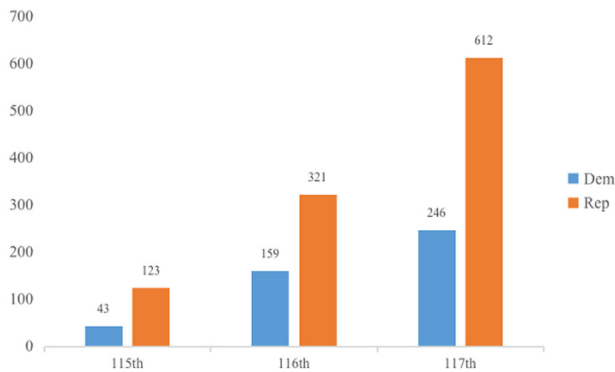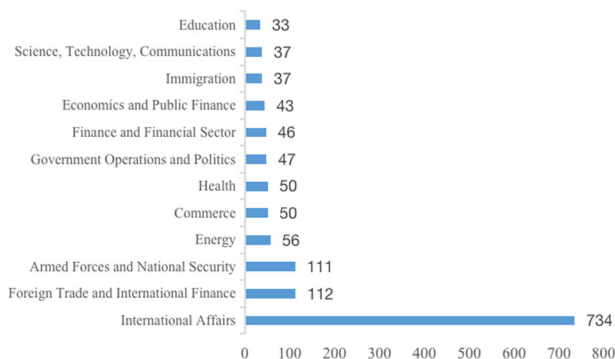
Government Operations and Politics, Finance and Finance Sector, Immigration, Economics, Public Finance, Science, Technology, Communications, etc. The number of bills is balanced between 33 and 56.

China and the U.S. emerged as the top two highest frequency terms in both corpora. The researchers removed these two terms from the high-frequency word list and did not display them. Figure 4 shows the top 20 high-frequency words in the China-related bills of the two administrations. In addition, the data show that "security", "Taiwan", "Russia" and "Entity" are high-frequency words shared by both governments' legislative texts. In addition, "Hong Kong (184)", "coronavirus (176)", and "sanction (160)" are high-frequency words specific to the legislative texts of the 115th–116th Congress, and "economy (326)", "defense (292)", and "CCP (266)" can reflect three critical areas of concern in the 117th Congress.

Figure 5 shows the semantic network analysis of the corpus.[3] After the researcher debugged the data several times, we found that the semantic network of all China-related bills includes a total of 6 larger clusters. The core word of the first cluster is "Russia", linked to the words "adversary", "Cuba", "North Korea", "democracy", "nuclear", "missile" and "defense", indicating that these countries are often mentioned together with China in the same bill and are often associated with the military field. The core word of the second cluster is "Taiwan," and the connected words include "diplomacy", "relationship", "military", etc., reflecting the U.S. Congress' intention to strengthen economic and military ties with Taiwan. The third cluster has the central word "entity", which has a high correlation coefficient with the words "trade", "Huawei", "cyber", "sanction", "company" and "finance", indicating that the Congress often proposes bills related to China in the economic and technological fields. The central word of the fourth cluster is "security", which maintains a high correlation with words such as "Hong Kong", "coronavirus", "alliance" and "telecommunication", reflecting that national security is an important motivation for Congress to introduce various bills related to China. The fifth central word is "economy," which is linked to the words "investment", "energy", "development", "supply", and "independent" to express that Congress' concerns about supply chains, energy issues, and economic security are related to China. The core word of the sixth cluster is "prohibition", and the related words under this cluster are "human right", "property", "transfer", "impose", "CCP", "company", etc. It can be

Fig. 2 China-related bills in 15th–17th Congress.

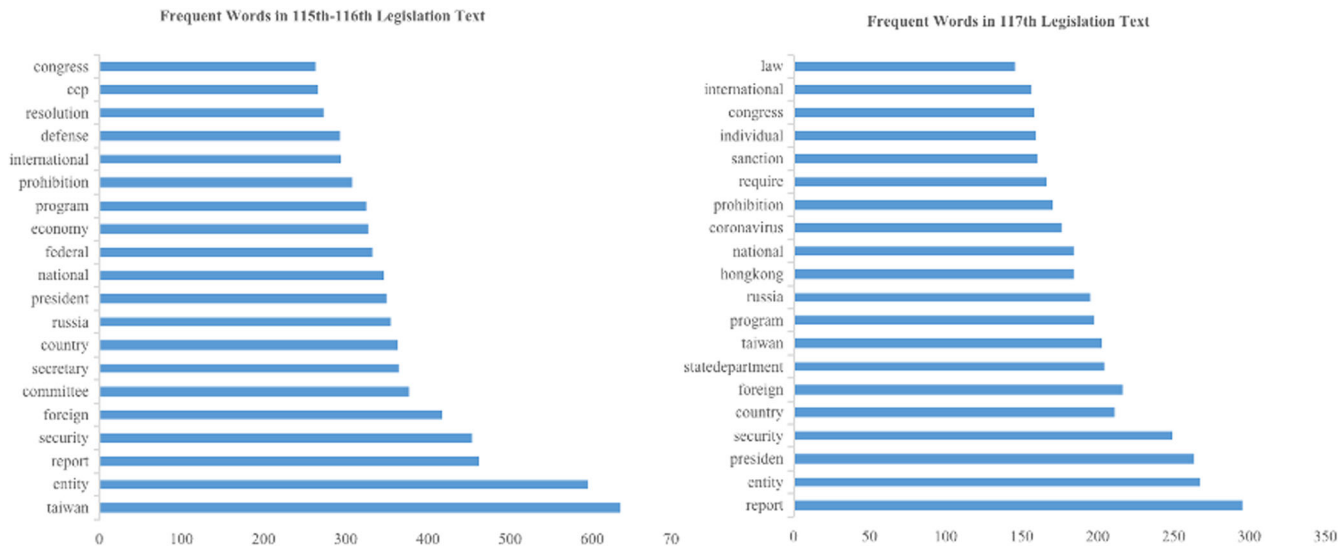**Fig. 3 Subject-policy area of China-related bills in 15th–17th Congress.**

Fig. 4 Frequent words in 115th–117th legislation text.
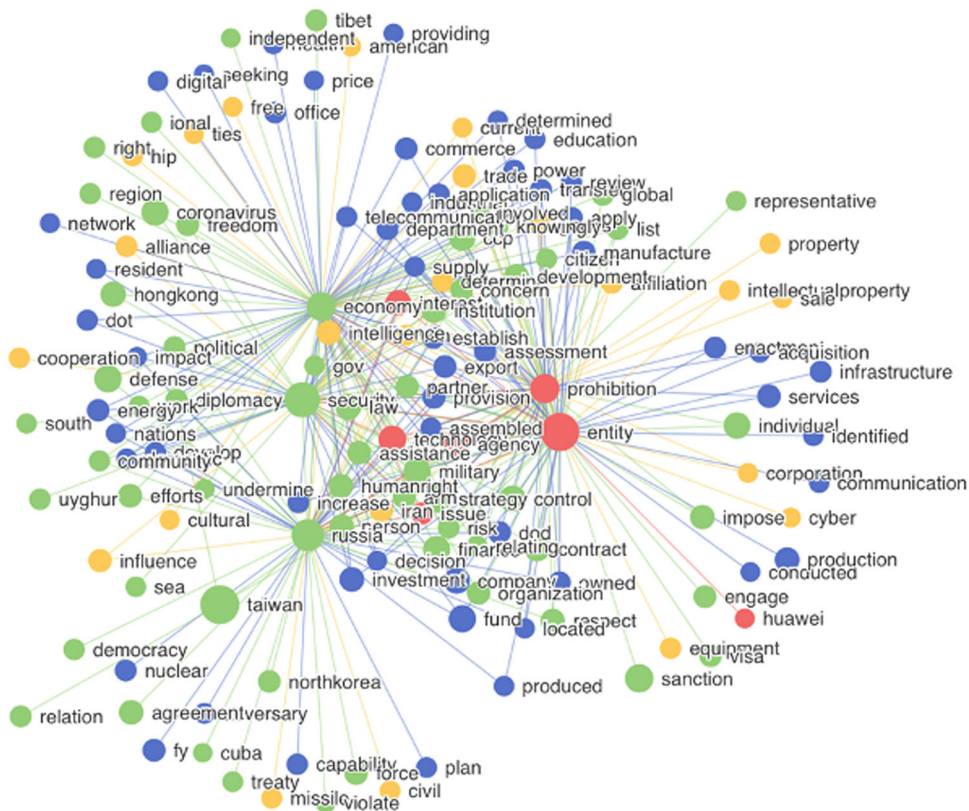
Fig. 5 Semantic network analysis in China-related bills.

Table 1 Semantic content network of China-related bill.	
Category	**Vocabulary**
I	fund; company; investment; production; manufacture; commerce; FY; export; DOD; adversary
II	Taiwan; Russia; security; coronavirus; sanction CCP; economy; individual; Hong Kong; human right
III	Iran; influence; trade; intelligence; alliance affiliation; equipment; relationship; cooperation; cyber
IV	entity; prohibition; technology; agency; interest issue; Huawei; executive; SBA; Paris Agreement

found that the ban issued by Congress to China is multifaceted in reasons and areas.

In addition, the results of the semantic network diagram demonstrate that the congressional text involving China includes four categories. As shown in Table 1 below:

Figure 6 presents the visualization results of the topic models of the China-related bills of the two administrations. It can be observed that the distribution of circles is balanced, and there are differences in the positions of the circles between the two models, which indicates that the model is effective and interpretable. The visualization diagram of the topic model consists of three parts. On the left side is a topic distribution map consisting of 8 circles. Each circle is a topic, and a larger circle indicates a higher percentage of that topic in the corpus (how prevalent is each topic). The distance of the circles indicates the degree of similarity of the topics (how do the topics relate to each other). The right side of the model shows the terms under each topic in order of scale so that the researcher can summarize the topic's meaning (What is the meaning of each topic) (Sievert and Shirley, 2014). The top left side of the model is the λ-value adjustment column. When observing the modeling results, the λ in the top bar of the right panel is used to rank the terms in a given topic. If the λ value is close to 1, high-frequency words will appear; if the λ value is

closer to 0, it indicates a more specific and unique word under that topic (He, 2015).

Figure 6 shows the text-mining results of the two corpora separately. The top half of the image shows the distribution of topics in the 115th–116th Congress. Taking Topic 2 as an example, the high-frequency words under this topic include "Russia", "North Korea", "finance", "intelligence", etc.… The bottom half of the image shows the distribution of topics in the 117th Congress. Taking Topic 6 as an example, the high-frequency words under this topic include "economy", "entity", "arm", etc.

The researchers obtained the terms under each topic in the LDAvis model by adjusting the λ values and eliminating nonsense words. Then, the terms were combined with the original text of the bill to obtain the topics of the bills related to China under the two administrations, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The first column of the table is the topic serial number, the second column presents the filtered terms, and the third column is where the researchers combined terms with political texts to summarize the labels.

Table 2 presents the results of topic model mining for the 115th–116th Congress. The study shows that the areas of China-related legislation in Congress during Trump's term are mainly focused on economy, technology, and local Chinese affairs.
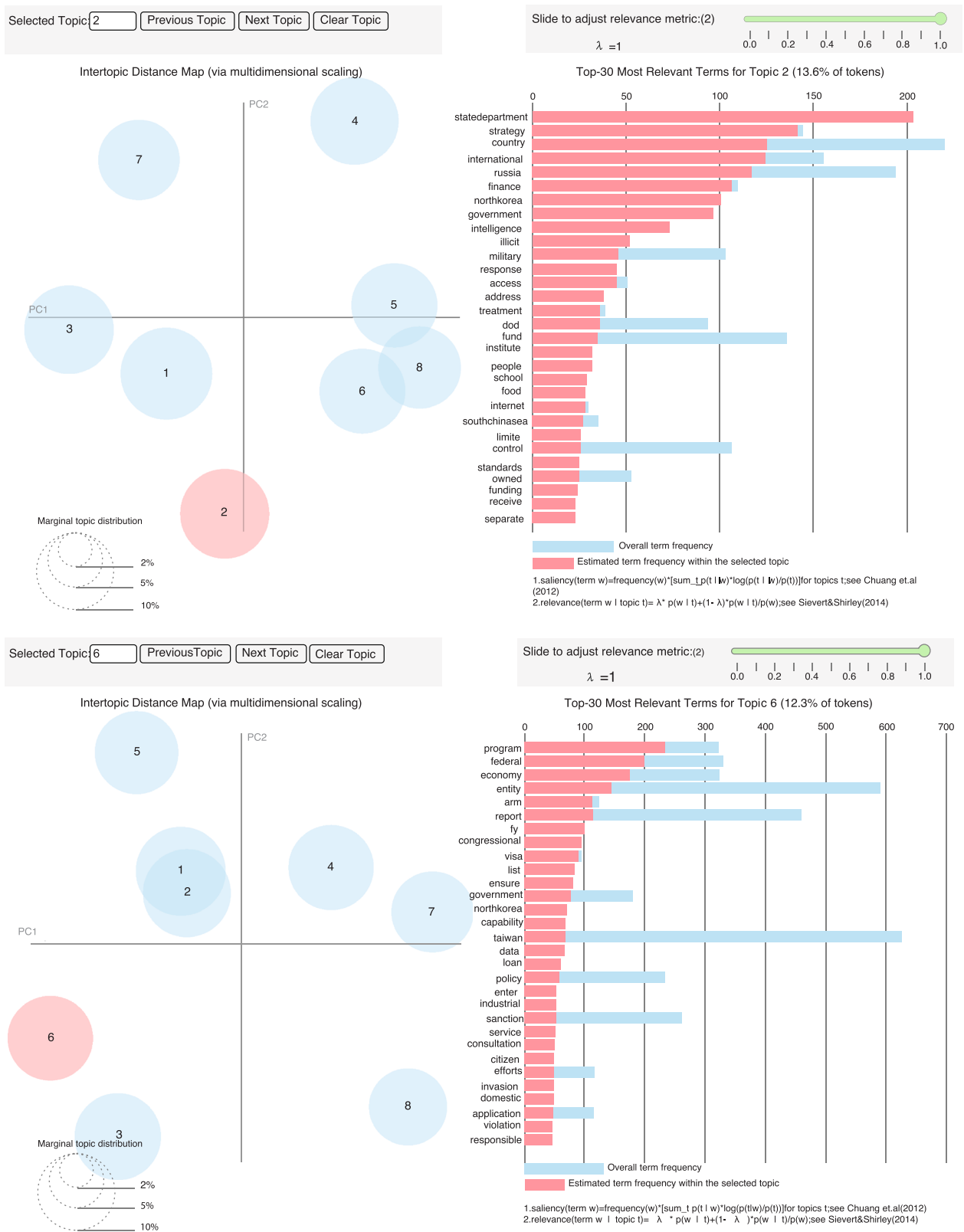
Fig. 6 LDAvis visualization in China-related bills.

Among them, resisting foreign governments in Topic 1, political value in Topic 4, and national security in Topic 6 reflect the legislative motives of Congress. Table 3 describes the text-mining results of the 117th Congress. The areas of China-related bills in Congress during Biden's presidency showed greater similarity to the 115th–116th Congress, with technology and local Chinese affairs also being the focus of attention in the 117th Congress. In addition, the ideological field emerged more frequently than in the previous Congress, with an increase in the number of topics aimed at the Chinese Communist Party in particular.

Table 2 Topic modeling in 115th–116th China-related bill.

Topic modeling in 115th–116th China-related bills[*a]

Topic ID	Key terms for topic	Label
1	foreign; security; economy; fund; export; Russia; influence; restriction; trafficking; FY	Financial allocations to resist the economic influence of adversaries.
2	State department; strategy; Russia; finance; North Korea; intelligence; illicit; military; treatment; DOD; people	Collecting military and economic intelligence on hostile countries.
3	president; security; coronavirus; appropriation; alliance; company; policy; force; country; control	Cooperating with the alliance on the pandemic.
4	entity; Taiwan; Tibet; manufacture; contract; investment; commerce; Xinjiang; condemn; status	Waging a trade war with China based on political values.
5	impose; sanction; person; diplomacy; services; treaty; energy; fentanyl; program; development	Diplomatic sanctions against individuals.
6	Hong Kong; production; human right; Iran; individual; law; telecommunication; cyber; Taiwan	Defending a democratic Internet environment and the security of telecommunication.
7	technology; freedom; coronavirus; duty; foreign governments; cooperation; list; report; assessment; weapon	Technology, military cooperation with foreign governments that share the same values.
8	prohibition; trade; sanction; visa; individual; equipment; humanitarian; requirement; assistance; agency	Banning individuals and institutions based on values.

[*a] The third "label" column in the table was derived by combining keywords from the topic model with the original text of the China-related bills in Congress.

Table 3 Topic Modeling in the 117th China-Related Bills.

Topic modeling in 117th China-Related Bills[*b]

Topic ID	Key terms for topic	Label
1	investment; defense; person; coronavirus; sanction; ccp; law; regulation; campaign; services	Sanctions were imposed on the Chinese Communist Party on multiple fronts.
2	Secretary; Hongkong; engage; contract; assessment; media; communication; fund; country; political	Removing economic privileges for Hong Kong and supporting democracy in Hong Kong
3	entity; security; military; global; finance; economy; adversary; safety; organization; system	Military, financial and other means to deter the adversary and protect U.S. national security
4	foreign; international; uyghur; affiliation; critical; Taiwan; agreement; diplomacy; principal; support	Sanctions against institution affiliation with Chinese Communist Party due to human rights issues.
5	Taiwan; control; trade; congress; provision; partner; fund; human right; energy; entity; defense	Strengthened economic and military relations with Taiwan.
6	economy; entity; arm; FY; visa; list; North Korea; loan; program; federal	Economic sanctions and military competition with specific countries.
7	Russia; technology; Iran; manufacture; strategy; House; influence; transfer; company; prohibition	Technology and financial blocks against specific countries.
8	security; company; production; agreement; operation; purchase; business; Intellectual property; minority	Prohibiting the purchase of goods from Xinjiang origin.

[*b] The third "label" column in the table was derived by combining keywords from the topic model with the original text of the China-related bills in Congress.

Discussion

As one of the most important bilateral relationships in the international community, the transition of US policy towards China from constructive engagement to strategic competition has been widely debated within academia. The continued deterioration of U.S.–China relations has become indisputable, and academics have expressed concern that the two powers will fall into a Thucydides trap, which is part of traditional international relations theory. From the perspective of the history of international relations, some experts liken the great power rivalry between China and the United States to the Anglo-German rivalry in the nineteenth century (Wu, 2016). Based on this, they suggest that the United States should adopt a more sophisticated and fuller range of instruments to weaken its adversaries (Brunnermeier et al., 2018). Other scholars have used power transition theory to describe the state of strategic competition between China and the United States as the inevitable result of power shifts in the international system or the structural contradictions that result

from narrowing the gap in total national power (Zhao, 2019). In contrast to traditional qualitative studies of national strategy, in this article, it is argued that, as an important pillar of the U.S. political system of separation of powers, Congress holds legislative power and uses it to drive domestic and foreign policy. Among them, congressional legislative texts are some of the most potent evidence for observing the orientation of U.S. policy towards China, and it is necessary to analyze the political texts in depth to observe the changes in congressional positions since the decoupling from China. The study attempts to further discuss official U.S. discourse.

From a party perspective, Republicans are more concerned about Chinese affairs than Democrats. In fact, Republican lawmakers created the China Task Force in the 116th Congress in response to the challenge from China, which impacted the legislative preference foreign policy outcomes of the Republican Party. As mentioned above, factionalism is a vital dependent variable in U.S. policy-making process. On the other hand, it

cannot be ignored that the Democratic Party is also becoming increasingly involved in China-related issues, and the number of proposed China-related bills is increasing each year.

From the perspective of thematic content, our research reveals that the topics of China-related legislation in the two corpora have similarities. Tables 2 and 3 show that in some areas of national security and national interest, such as technology, intellectual property, and economy, the words "sanction", "illicit" and "visa blocking" are often associated with China, which shows a conservative and competitive attitude towards China. Further-more, ideological differences were often mentioned in the Con-gress after the declaration of decoupling from China. Specifically, the following points characterized similar China-related themes in the 115th–117th Congresses.

First, countries such as China, Russia, North Korea and Iran often appear in legislation as hostile states that are identified as threats to the United States and the liberal international order. Such legislative initiatives are consistent with the reality of the U.S. national strategic choices. The 2017 National Security Strategy report labeled China and Russia as "revisionist power" and "strategic competitor" that want "to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests" (House, 2017) The 2018 US Department of Defense stressed "the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition" with China and other rival states (Defense, 2018). On the diplomatic front, the U.S. Congress has proposed restrictions on economic, military, and technological cooperation against hostile countries. Congress' belief that "entities that pose a cyber threat to the United States should be evaluated, including but not limited to that may be owned, directed, or subsidized by the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or the Russian Federation." (Congress.Gov, 2021c).

Second, the U.S. continues to focus on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibetan affairs, and the underlying motivation behind this is irreconcilable ideological differences (Zhao, 2019). In the key terms of Tables 2 and 3, we find that the terms free-dom, democracy, and human rights often appear together with these words. Congress's perception of the confrontational power relationship between the United States and China is behind this ideology. It has long been reflected in foreign policy, such as choosing to strengthen economic and military cooperation with Taiwan (Congress.Gov, 2020b, 2021h), supporting political pro-tests in Hong Kong (Congress.Gov, 2020a), and expressing dis-satisfaction with China's governance in Tibet and Xinjiang (Congress.Gov, 2021a).

Third, Congress has shown a solid willingness to decouple in the economic and technological spheres. Academics have long been concerned about the phenomenon and concluded that "the trade war between China and the United States has evolved into a technology war, and the intense competition in this field has reached the level of the Cold War" (Ferguson, 2020). This study shows that this "hard decoupling" has influenced U.S. foreign policy in the form of legislation. In the technology field, Congress legislatively prohibits transactions involving the information and communications technology of a foreign adversary (Congress.Gov, 2019a), and advocates sanctions against Huawei and ZTE, parti-cularly technology export restrictions (Congress.Gov, 2019b, 2019c). On the economic front, Congress has increased the regulation and tracking of Chinese companies (Congress.Gov, 2021f, 2022a). Moreover, the push to bring manufacturing back to the U.S. is one of the key tools Congress has used to implement hard decoupling in the economy (Congress.Gov, 2021i).

On the other hand, through a comparison of the corpus of China-related bills during the Trump-Era and the Biden Era, it is found in this article that although there are certain similarities in the subject matter of the two, one cannot ignore that differences also exist at the same time.

First, the China-related bills in the 117th Congress emphasize the confrontation between China and the United States regarding values and ideology more than in the past two Congresses. Such confrontational discourse reflects how the United States defines self-identity and other-identity and how identity-defining differ-entiation affects congressional political behavior and legislative output. Specifically, the bill cites China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and Cuba as disruptors of the liberal international order and threats to U.S. national security (Congress.Gov, 2021d, 2021e). Examining the corpus, the researchers found that in the 117th Congress, these hostile states were present in 108 bills compared to 100 bills in the 115th–116th Congress. The common feature of these bills is the expression of the discourses of democracy, freedom, and human rights. They propose political measures of condemnation, restrictions, and sanctions against China.

Second, the China-related legislation in the 117th Congress emphasizes allied cooperation, which means that Congress believes that allies who share values should cooperate on all fronts in dealing with the China threat. Such allies include Japan, South Korea, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Eur-opean Union, and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, Congress wrote in the legislation that authoritarian lea-ders have deliberately chipped away at the pillars of democracy, and the competition between democracies and autocracies has again become an animating feature of global politics (Congress.Gov, 2022d). With the text of the legislation, Congress demonstrated its recognition of the identity and responsibility of allies, namely, that the United States and its allies are important pillars in maintaining freedom and peace (Congress.Gov, 2021g). This legislative shift reflects that the Biden administration is ending the Trump-era unilateralist and isolationist approach. In contrast, they opted for a multilateralist Moreover, value differences appear increasingly fre-quently as necessary discursive expressions in congressional poli-tical texts, and ideological confrontation becomes a justification for decoupling. In the 115th and 116th Congresses, lawmakers intro-duced bills on the grounds of intellectual property protection and national security to require technology restrictions and shut down research exchanges for Chinese technology companies, such as Huawei and ZTE; in the 117th Congress, the reasons for this decoupling behavior were explained as ideological confrontation. For example, legislators argue that the Chinese government's use of technology to monitor citizens' behavior threatens the principles of the open internet, self-expression, and the rule of law (Congress.Gov, 2022c). This is also implemented in diplomacy, with congressional lawmakers encouraging the world's preeminent democracies that they must combat the forces that threaten market-driven economic systems and ensure that democracies lead in technology and innovation (Congress.Gov, 2022b).

After comparing the similarities and differences between the two corpora, the researchers found that these acts constitute a triangular relationship among "political texts, ideology and power". First, the value judgements and institutional orientations implicit in the political texts guide and constrain U.S. diplomatic practice. Next, the power relations and power struggles that emerge from the diplomatic process are again reflected in the political texts (Halliday et al., 2014). The result is that the U.S.-China relationship is defined and shaped. In other words, the U.S. has defined its own identity in its diplomatic interactions with China. It has also tried to use an externally hostile state to bridge its internal differences, such as partisan polarization, leading to identifying differences and an ongoing power play between the U.S. and China (Nymalm, 2013). In this context, the bill's content actually goes beyond the original meaning of economic and technological issues. It could reflect what Congress sees as America's identity as the vanguard of liberal democratic capital-ism and its perception of China as an illiberal and threatening

player. This dichotomy of values shaped U.S. diplomacy of "the one" and "the other" and has determined its mode of competition with China.

Conclusion

The two corpora of China-related bills in the 115th to 117th Congress of the article involve the presidencies of Trump and Biden. On this basis, researchers compared and analyzed the two corpora from three perspectives: word frequency, semantic network, and topic modeling. It is argued in this article that a large number of China-related bills not only reflects the fact that China is a major concern in U.S. foreign affairs but also epitomizes decoupling.

The results demonstrate that the U.S. is systematically implementing a decoupling policy. The increasing number of China-related bills yearly reveals that Congress is pushing for decoupling from China on several fronts, including economic, technological, cultural and academic exchanges. Notably, this decoupling has not slowed down with Biden's rise to power. In other words, whether the U.S. president chooses the "America First" dogma or multilateralism, US-China relations may not improve substantially. Moreover, although there are similarities in the topics of China-related bills between the Congress under the Biden administration and the Trump administration, our results show differences in the discursive formulation of the two. On the one hand, the new Congress combines decoupling with anti-communism, using the phrase "against the Chinese Communist Party" rather than the traditional ideological dichotomy, and calls on allied countries to fight the threat of authoritarian states together based on democratic values (Congress.Gov, 2021b).

Our research suggests that the U.S. Congress will practice a competitive model of diplomacy in the coming period, continuing to propose bills fraught with ideological confrontation in important areas. All legislation will significantly impact the future direction of U.S.-China relations and will need to be tracked on an ongoing basis. Finally, some shortcomings of our study need to be noted. First, this study is concerned with only including congressional bills in the analysis, and further attention can be paid to other congressional activities, such as Committee Reports, Committee Publications, and Congressional Records, to enrich the research materials and examine congressional activities related to China more comprehensively. Second, this study discusses U.S.-China relations from the perspective of congressional political texts. In future studies, the cooperative network of legislators can be used as one of the variables to discuss votes on China-related bills to more deeply understand the political attitudes and positions of Congress.

Data availability

Notes

1 Code Source: https://rpubs.com/MNidhi/NumberoftopicsLDA
2 Because China and the United States appear repeatedly in the bill, the researchers removed these two terms when building the topic model to avoid a negative impact on the effect.
3 The researchers removed some high-frequency but meaningless words such as "including" "bills" "China" "United States" "president" etc. to ensure a more effective and realistic semantic network analysis.

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Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

Supplementary information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01894-6.

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