

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

REPORT ON BUSINESS

CHINA IN CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS
MAY 2018 TO JULY 2019:
A MASS DATA ANALYSIS

The Storm

The China Institute at the University of Alberta

FOREWORD

The China Institute at the University of Alberta (CIUA) is pleased to publish the second in a series of reports that examine how China is represented by Canadian news media. This report, titled “**China in Canadian National Newspapers, May 2018 - July 2019: The Storm,**” builds on previous research conducted by the CIUA to illustrate long term trends and shifting opinions of China in Canada. To do this, the CIUA assembled a team of researchers to collect, code, and analyze newspaper articles mentioning “China” in the Globe and Mail and National Post from the period of May 1, 2018 to July 31, 2019.

This period was one of tension between Canada and China, characterized by a steep decline in state-to-state relations and the ongoing political fallout following the arrest of Huawei’s CFO Meng Wanzhou. This reality was reflected in Canadian newspapers, where coverage of China skyrocketed. The U.S.-China bilateral relationship and protest movement in Hong Kong also received similarly prominent attention in Canadian print media.

This report provides insight into how China is framed in Canadian newspaper coverage and, naturally, how this may contribute to public understandings and perceptions of China. We refrain from commenting on the accuracy of the coverage, instead aiming to promote a broad understanding of the phenomenon and provide a data driven analysis to our readers.

I would like to thank Evan Oddleifson, Tom Alton, and Sarah Clifford as the co-authors of this report. Liang Ma, Shaoyan Sun, and Xiaowen Zhang also contributed greatly as members of the project team. I would also like to thank Scott Romaniuk for his editorial support, Genevieve Ongaro for her design and formatting contributions, and Jia Wang for her overall project management.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Canada-China and U.S.-China tensions developed over 2018 and 2019, Canadian newspapers took note. This analysis addresses coverage of China in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* from May 2018 to July 2019, comparing our observations with the data of our previous Mass Data Report, beginning in January 2015.

Our findings show significant shifts in the amount, topics, and tone of coverage since the beginning to the middle of 2018. The number of articles published in these newspapers that mention China increased 77% from 2017 to 2018, and another 55% in the first half of 2019. Together, the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* published 3,333 articles over our fifteen-month observation period that contained a significant mention of China, an average of seven articles per day.

Compared with the prior research period, our most recent observations show that coverage of trade related issues increased by seven times, with the ongoing China-U.S. trade war as well as the export restrictions set on some Canadian goods by China being frequently discussed. China-Canada diplomacy also featured more prominently, particularly in 2019, in response to the arrest and subsequent extradition proceedings concerning Huawei Executive Meng Wanzhou and the detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China.

These political and economic conflicts weighed heavily on the way newspaper coverage framed China, with “unpredictable” and “conflict” leaping into first and second place as the most prominent descriptive frames applied to China. Other frames, such as “rising” and “declining,” relating primarily to accounts of China’s economic well-being, fell in prevalence as coverage of the aforementioned conflicts overshadowed that of China’s economic health.

Nearly half of all articles mentioning China discussed U.S.-China or Canada-China relations, yielding some of the most pessimistic coverage of China overall. However, despite appearing in the news less frequently, issues such as the Hong Kong protests, Uighur internment in Xinjiang, and human rights, those that would be considered internal to China, received the most pessimistic coverage with China’s role in these issues overwhelmingly being described as “oppressive.”

One of the most persistent descriptive frames applied to China was “opportunity,” suggesting that Canadian newspapers remain open to the benefits of cooperation with China, particularly when it comes to “business” related topics. However, pessimistic coverage of China did outpace optimistic coverage not only in discussion of explicit tensions

and conflicts but in the coverage of topics such as “climate change” and “science and technology” as well.

To preface this report, the CIUA neither endorses nor opposes the coverage of China discussed herein. This report intends to provide an impartial overview of the content of Canadian national newspaper media to illustrate the messages and narratives on China to which Canadians are exposed.

INTRODUCTION

As China's global economic and political stature has grown, so too has its relationship with Canada. The year 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of formal Canada-China diplomatic relations, which comes at a time of heightened tension in global politics and, in particular, Canada's relationship with China. This has contributed to China's salience in Canadian national newspaper media and among the Canadian public, who are seeing an increasing amount of content covering China across the media landscape.

China is Canada's second largest trading partner and a significant source of investment and tourism spending in Canada. The Government of Canada places the number of Canadians of Chinese origin at just over 1.8 million, and around 140,000 Chinese students attended Canadian schools in 2018 as foreign exchange students.¹ From 2011 to 2016, the Canadian population speaking Chinese at home increased 16.8%.² Canadian imports and exports with China, over the same five-year period, increased 34% and 25%, respectively.³

Accordingly, Canadians have reported feeling significantly more connected to the Asia Pacific region in recent years, with the proportion of Canadians reporting that they think of China as important to Canada's economic well-being increasing by roughly 20% from 2014 to 2018.⁴ However, this outlook may have been negatively impacted given the development of tensions from late 2018 to the present.

Google searches related to China in Canada also increased by over 6% in 2019 compared to the four previous years. While not a perfect indicator for public interest, search data such as this can serve as a proxy for public interest and has been used to do so in other research.⁵

Between increases in newspaper coverage, web searches, and survey responses regarding China, it is clear that China and related topics are as relevant to Canadians as they have ever been. This provides the China Institute at the University of Alberta (CIUA) with a strong mandate to study the coverage of China in Canadian national newspaper media as a means to better understand the messages and narratives regarding China that Canadians are exposed to. Our goal is *not* to argue whether said coverage is accurate or fair, but to inform our readers on *how* China is being depicted so that they may better understand the factors that contribute to Canadian understandings of China, and how this contextualizes the public dimension of the Canada-China relationship.

For this study, we sourced every article and editorial mentioning China published by the Globe and Mail and the National Post between May 2018 and July 2019 using the Canadian Newsstream TM database available through ProQuest. With the Globe and Mail reaching a weekly audience of more than 6.5 million Canadians,⁶ and the National Post reaching approximately 4.5 million,⁷ they are Canada's most prominent English-language newspapers with national circulation. As such, they deliver the most consistent, broad coverage of international news and thus appropriately display the type of Canadian news media surrounding China available to Canadians from coast to coast. This report does not attempt to quantify, examine, or comment on French-language media coverage of China in Canada. The CIUA intends to contribute to a broader understanding of media coverage of China in Canada through the publication of this report.

While this report provides a high-level overview of the themes, topics, and tones of coverage of China, it also delves into a number of key issues such as the arrest and subsequent extradition proceedings concerning Huawei Executive Meng Wanzhou, the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China, issues surrounding national security in Canada, and Canada-China relations more broadly. It will also focus on U.S.-China topics, such as the trade war, and Chinese politics and human rights related topics, such as the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the repression of Uighur Muslim religious practices in Xinjiang.

We address the following five key questions:

- 1) What are the main topics in the media coverage of China related news?
- 2) How do media organizations describe and frame China?
- 3) How do media organizations evaluate Canada-China relations and conflicts?
- 4) How do media organizations evaluate China's conflict with the U.S. and its allies?
- 5) How do media organizations evaluate China with regard to the Hong Kong protests?

METHODOLOGY

Our methodology includes a primary content analysis bolstered by a discursive analysis of specific themes and tonal coverage, and builds upon the China Institute’s previous Mass Data Analysis research that analyzed articles mentioning China published from 2015 to the middle of 2018. While this report focuses predominantly on the period of May 2018 to July 2019, it occasionally draws on our dataset that extends back to January 2015.

Our content analysis classifies all articles published by the Globe and Mail and the National Post that mention China, based on the **(1) theme** of China coverage, determining whether an article focuses on China’s economy, environment, diplomatic relations with other countries, or another major theme. Secondly, it classifies the specific **(2) topic** of coverage as it relates to China, such as trade, state-owned enterprises, censorship, human rights, or other topics. Third, it assigns a **(3) relational adjective**, which defines the way each article frames China, such as “threatening,” “cooperative,” a “leader,” “rising,” or “unpredictable.” Finally, a relevancy factor is assigned to each article to indicate whether or not China is the central focus in the article or if it is of a secondary or tangential mention.

For a full methodological outline, see **Appendix A**.

1. THEME: THE MAIN TOPICS OF MEDIA COVERAGE

The amount of coverage that China received in the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* has markedly increased over 2018 and 2019. As we will explore later, and as our readers likely expect, this is driven in large part by major events such as the arrest of Meng Wanzhou and much of the related diplomatic fallout, as well as the U.S.-China trade war.

The total sum of articles published in these newspapers between our first research period from **January 2015 to May 2018**, and our second from **May 2018 to July 2019**, is similar, with 3,699 and 3,333 articles, respectively. This helps make graphical comparisons of the topic and tone of coverage between these periods more legible on a proportional basis, despite the latter period being only about a third as long as the former.

As shown in Figure 1, the monthly volume of China coverage from 2015 to 2017 in the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* stood between 50 and 150 articles per month. However, since 2018, monthly volume has not fallen below 150, and has peaked above 300 articles per month on three occasions. The first major peak, shown in Figure 1, came in March of 2018, at the beginning of the trade war tensions between the U.S. and China, while the following peak in January 2019 directly followed the arrest of Meng Wanzhou.

This dramatic increase in the volume of China coverage has also been accompanied by a relatively major thematic refocusing of coverage. In the previous installation of this Mass Data Analysis, we reported that 52% of all China-related articles from 2015 to mid-2018 engaged primarily with China's economy. As shown in Figure 2, this has now increased to 67% of all articles. Increased reporting on trade-related topics, which, as a topic, increased from 11% of total coverage to an even more significant 32% of total coverage is responsible for the majority of this surge.

Similarly, the "diplomacy" theme appeared nearly twice as frequently from May 2018 to July 2019 than since the beginning of 2015, increasing from 7% of total coverage to 14%. Again, this can be attributed to an increased number of articles that specifically regard Canada-China relations, largely in the context of Meng Wanzhou's arrest and the related bilateral implications. Conversely, a lack of articles focusing on U.S.-China diplomacy highlights how U.S.-China tensions were predominantly addressed through an economic lens.

"Protest" usurped "human rights" as the dominant topic within the "society" theme due to coverage of the social unrest in Hong

Figure 1. Total Number of Articles About or Mentioning China by Month

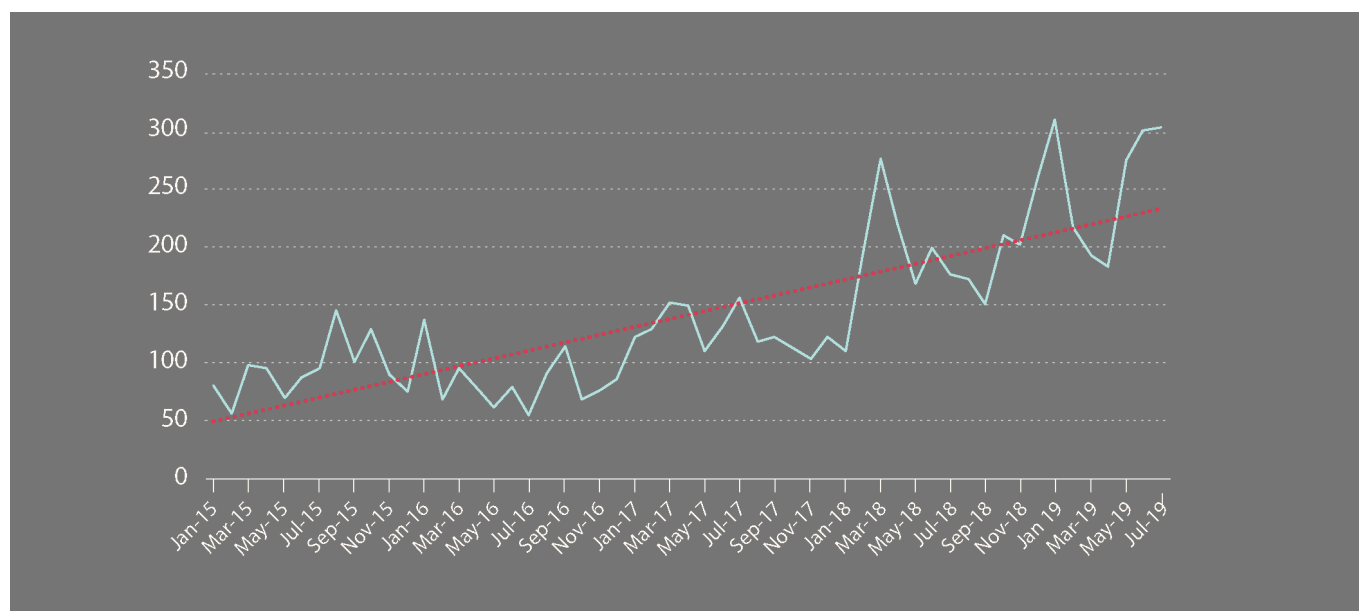


Figure 2. Dominant Topics of the Main Themes

THEMES	TOPICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
ECONOMY	Total	1912	66.69%
	Trade	926	32.30%
	Business/Investment	635	19.01%
	Economic Growth	189	6.59%
DIPLOMACY	Total	399	13.92%
	Canada	313	10.92%
	United States	48	1.67%
	South America	11	0.38%
SOCIETY	Total	227	7.92%
	Protest	54	1.88%
	Crime	44	1.53%
	Human Rights	43	1.50%
DOMESTIC ISSUES	Total	174	6.07%
	Chinese-Canadians	77	2.69%
	Real Estate	37	1.29%
	Immigration	26	0.91%

Kong that began with the proposal of a now withdrawn extradition treaty with mainland China. Likewise, under the “domestic issues” theme, “real-estate” fell below “Chinese-Canadians” as coverage of Chinese investment in the Vancouver and Toronto real-estate markets declined.

Figure 3 shows the most frequently discussed topics in each research period, displayed together, to help illustrate some of these

movements. Notably, coverage of free trade agreements fell sharply from the 5th to 25th most talked about topic. This is due in large part to decreased coverage of the CPTPP and the USMCA, as well as decreased interest in a free trade deal with China due to limiting clauses in the USMCA, Trudeau’s unsuccessful visit to China in late 2017, and a cooling bilateral relationship between Canada and China. Coverage on “North Korea,” “human rights,” and “South China Sea” also all fell as events keeping these issues in the limelight receded from the news cycle. On the other hand, mentions of Uighur internment in Xinjiang rose as further information regarding the issue surfaced and a Uighur activist speaking at an Ontario university garnered significant attention after Chinese students protested her event.⁸

With the start of the U.S.-China trade war in early 2018 “trade” overtook the topics of “business and economic growth,” which were the most discussed topics over the previous research period. Much of the coverage on financial news that mentioned firm level operations or reported on growth rates and conditions also contained mentions of the trade war, which tended to overshadow the former topics. This, in part, reflects the extent to which an issue that becomes a news spectacle, such as the trade war, can re-contextualize China’s representation in news media. This shift was most pronounced in market summaries, which discussed daily or weekly market news. For clarity in reading Figure 3, “Canada” is a topic under the “diplomacy” theme that denotes an article primarily concerned with Canada-China diplomatic relations.

Figure 3. Most frequently discussed topics: Comparing Research Periods

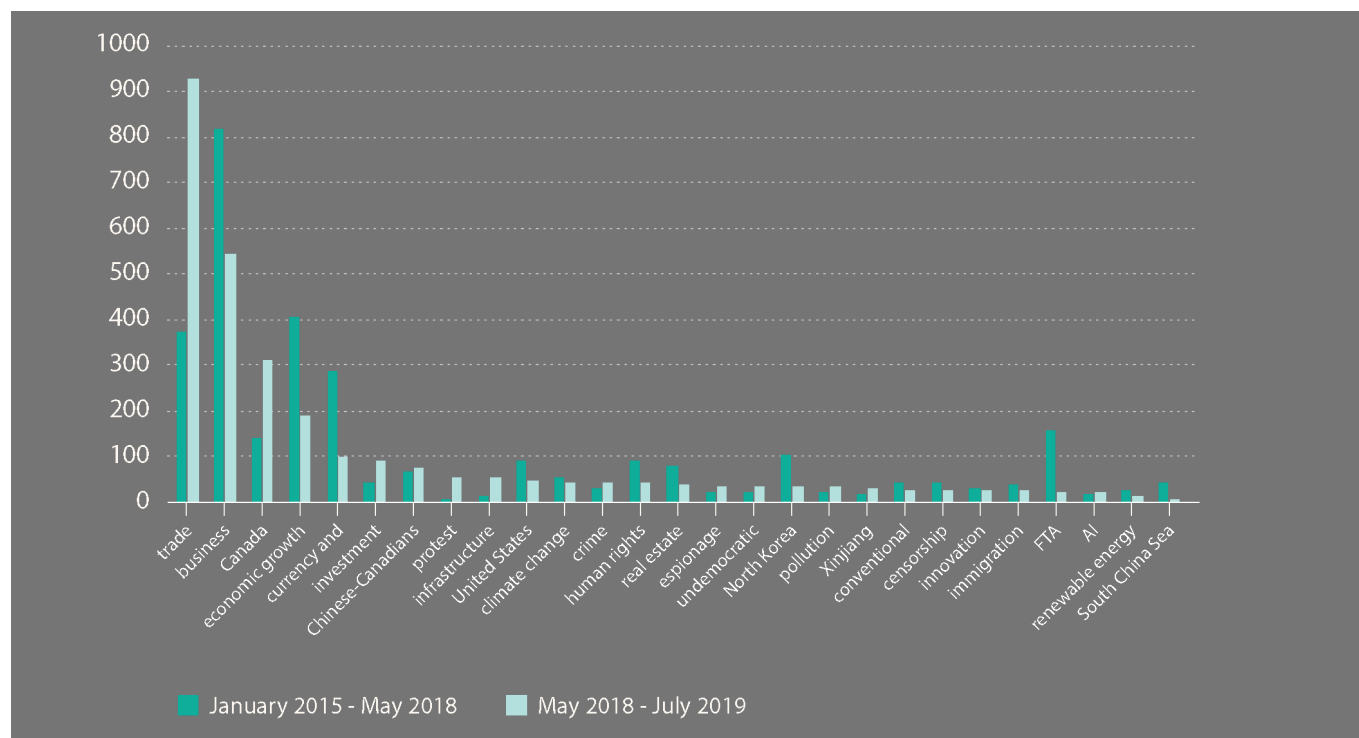


Figure 4. Most frequently used frames to describe China

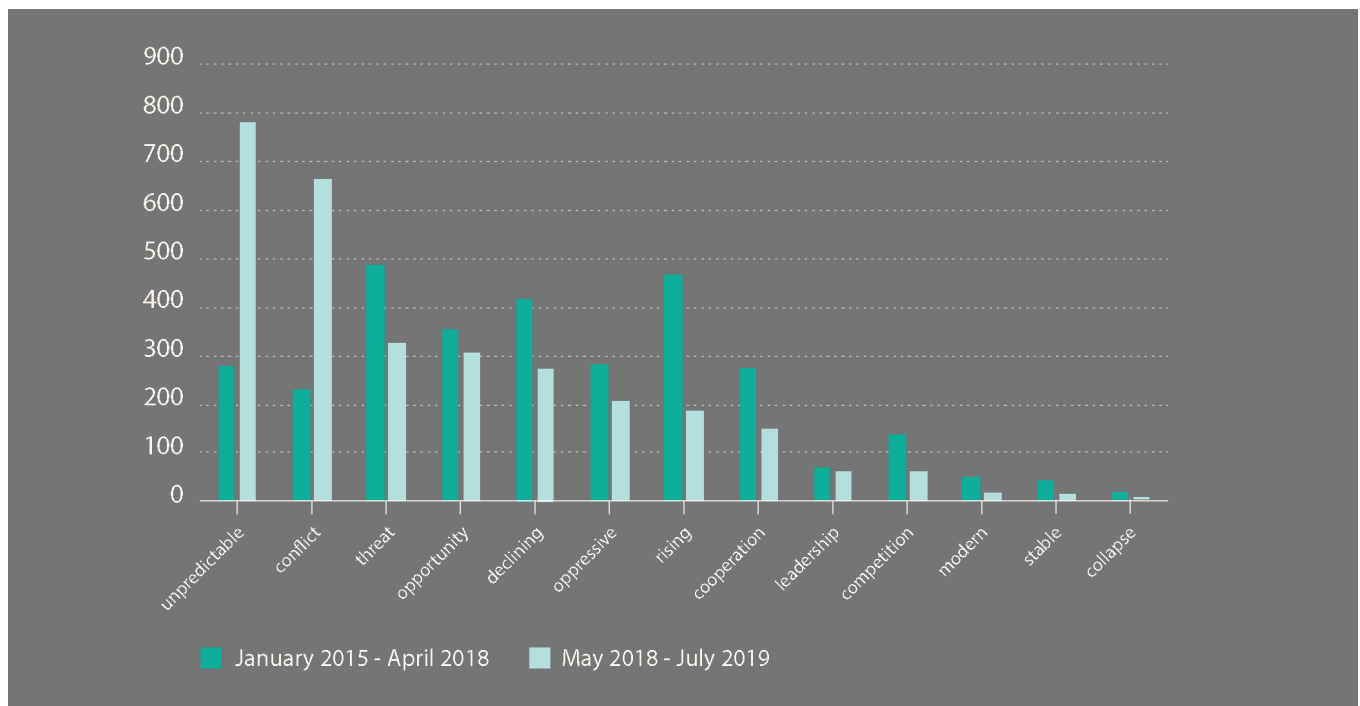


1.1 TONE: HOW CANADIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPER MEDIA FRAMES CHINA

China’s reputation among Canadians was damaged after the arrest of Meng Wanzhou and the widely believed retaliatory detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China. Even prior to those events, Canadians have consistently reported having a more negative attitude towards China than any other country in Asia since 2010.⁹ China’s rise as a global power over this period has had a mixed impact on its reputation, both heightening the sense that it may pose a threat to institutional liberal democratic norms - but also spurring excitement around the economic opportunities that it presents.

Illustrated in Figure 5, our research on the tone of China coverage in Canadian national newspapers shows that “opportunity” continues to be one of the most prominent descriptors of China, remaining the fourth most used frame from May 2018 to July 2019 despite extensive coverage on negatively connoted issues such as Canada-China and U.S.-China tensions. This optimistic frame description centers on economic themes and demonstrates the persistent attractiveness of Chinese investment in Canada and market access in China for Canadian companies. That said, other major positive frames, such as “rising” and “cooperation,” have declined steeply from period to period. While Canadian media has not denied that China is a source of opportunity, coverage increasingly airs on the side of wariness towards China.

Figure 5. Comparing media framings of China between research periods: (January 2015 - April 2018 and May 2018 - July 2019)



Increasingly pessimistic coverage on China is partially reflected in survey data collected by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, whose *2019 National Opinion Poll of Canadian Views on High-Tech Investment from Asia*¹⁰ and *2019 National Opinion Poll of Canadians Views on Human Capital from Asia*,¹¹ together suggest that while Canadians are wary of Chinese investment in areas of high-tech, among other issues, they are willing to withhold those concerns for certain economic aspirations.

This aside, the most drastic shift in the tone of coverage on China in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* was the increased framing of China as being “unpredictable” and in “conflict.” As illustrated in Figure 5, the growth in presence of these descriptive frames surpassed that of any other frame, leading them to characterize by far the greatest portion of coverage. Accordingly, this resulted in “threat” framings of China to be proportionally less prominent in the most recent study period. However, year on year, “threat” framings still increased, indicating that, while much coverage did become more definite in its characterizations of China’s conflicts, “threat” framing was not subsumed by “conflict” framing but persisted independently. Figure 5 also illustrates how different framings of China were more evenly distributed over the former research period than the latter, due to the massive spikes in “unpredictable” and “conflict.”

Neither “threat” nor “conflict” necessarily imply a more *negative* tone of coverage than the other; both are pessimistic, but have distinctions based on an article’s content. “Threat” framed articles are likely to discuss negative effects that Chinese investments, policies, or practices *may* have on Canada or others. Conversely, “conflict” frames apply when an article is discussing the immediate consequences of China’s activity. Likewise, “unpredictable” frames were used to categorize articles that show concern about the unknown effects of China’s economic or political actions.

To illustrate these differences, the following is the opening section of a “threat” framed *Globe and Mail* article about Chinese state-owned enterprises buying Canadian companies:

“A Calgary oil company backed by China’s authoritarian Communist Party has emerged as a major buyer of distressed energy assets, prompting new concern over Canada’s push to explore free-trade talks with China. Corporate documents show the Party has an ownership stake in little-known Shanghai Energy Corp., giving China’s political apparatus a financial interest in a key Canadian industrial sector.”¹²

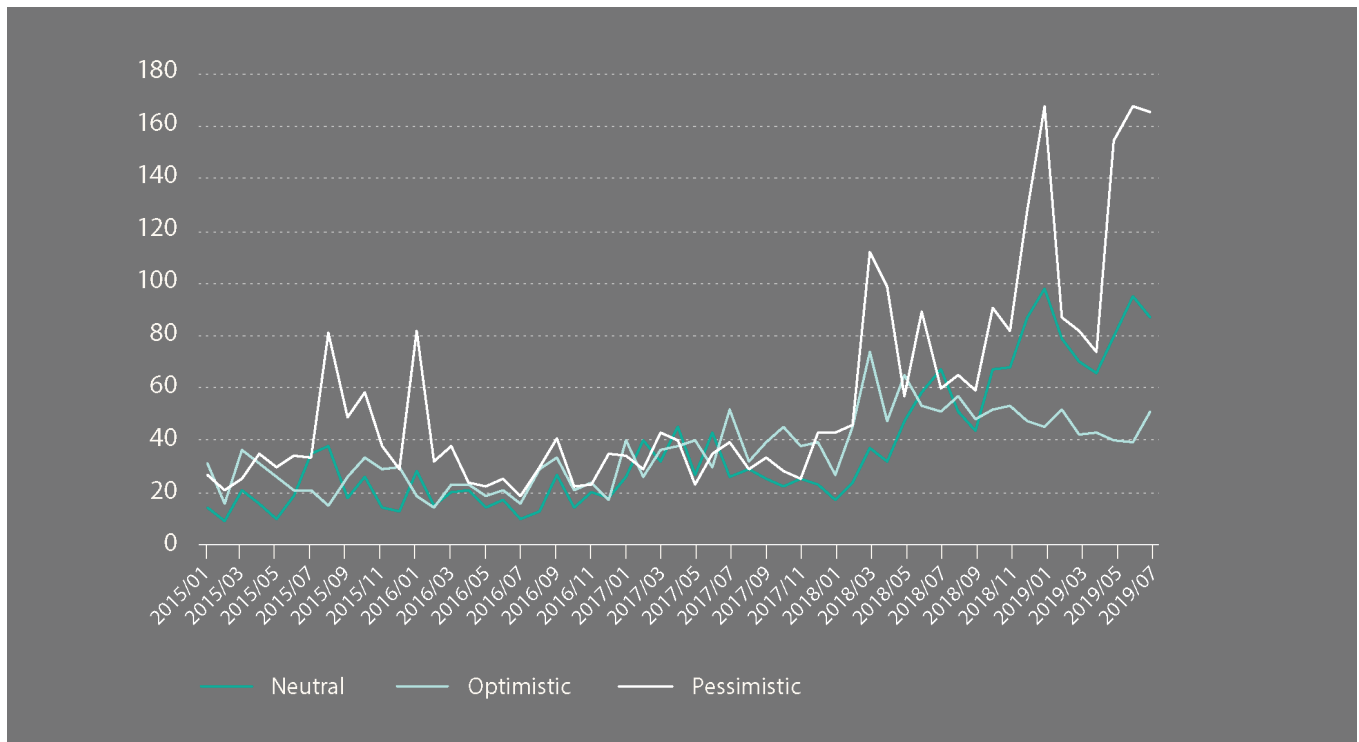
This excerpt does two key things to warrant a “threat” categorization. Firstly, it invokes the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritarianism, a connotatively negative association that serves to prime readers to be critical of China. Secondly, it gives the impression that Canada is vulnerable to China by implicating “China’s political apparatus,” whose authoritarian quality has been foregrounded, to “a key Canadian industrial sector.” While not all “threat” framed articles

will have these exact characteristics, this example shows how our analysis ascribes “threat” framings to invocations of *potential* harms, vulnerabilities, and connotatively negative or ominous organizations. On the other hand, the following article title from the *Globe and Mail* illustrates how we categorize “conflict” framing: “Deteriorating Canada, China relationship takes toll on farmers.”¹³ This article describes the *immediate consequences* of China’s export bans on Canadian Canola and Pork, and ascribes those consequences to punitive diplomacy on the part of China. “Unpredictable” framings often overlap with “conflict” ones, but generally did not relate to specific consequences. For example, a Bloomberg article republished in the *National Post* about the U.S.-China trade war highlighted the planned inclusion of China’s Commerce Minister, Zhong Shan, in future trade talks and characterized him as a “hardliner” and as bringing a more “hawkish”¹⁴ perspective to negotiations. This characterization can potentially leave readers feeling uncertain and wary of China’s faith in or objectives for the trade talks, which exemplifies the broader affective takeaway we aim to codify with the frame description “unpredictable.” Overall, this period saw coverage develop more pessimistically, with “conflict” and “unpredictable” rising. This appears to parallel worsening public opinion on relations with China seen in survey data.¹⁵

Previous research shows what appeared to be a negative correlation between the tone of media coverage and public opinion.¹⁶ In their 2018 newspaper content analysis of China and Japan in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star* from 2000 to 2015, Nathan Allen, Andrea Lawlor, and Katerina Graham reported that the tone of coverage on China improved in these newspapers while, paradoxically, public opinion soured. While their data observation period does not overlap with ours, being that it ends in 2015 before ours begins, we note the opposite trend. As seen in Figure 6, pessimistic reporting on China was not only more prominent than optimistic reporting but it outgrew optimistic reporting over the observation period. Accordingly, The School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia published survey findings in late 2019 showing a two-year chill in Canadian public opinion toward China, with opinion reaching its most negative point in February 2019,¹⁷ directly following the largest spike in pessimistic coverage on China seen in the data as illustrated in Figure 6.

Allen et al. speculated that economic news they categorized as positive based on the connotative value of words and phrases associated with mentions of China may not have actually been interpreted favorably by Canadians, but instead as “threatening.”¹⁸ While we cannot directly compare datasets, the immense prevalence of China’s framing as a threat in the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* suggests that this may be the case. These divergent results are likely pursuant to differences in our coding methodologies, Allen et al.’s being an automated coding process and ours using human coding. Our methodology is incapable of addressing a dataset as large as theirs, however, ours allows for highly focused and complex codifications of the content we analyze. Applying these methodologies on a common dataset would likely yield great insight regarding the precise advantages and limitations of each and may be a fruitful avenue for future research and collaboration.

Figure 6. Aggregate tone of coverage



2. CANADA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS IN CANADIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

Over the past year, Canada-China relations have undergone a tumultuous upheaval with regard to trade policy, diplomacy, and technological rights. This section analyzes the changing discourse surrounding Chinese-Canadian relations, while focusing on how some of Canada’s media organizations view China and Chinese actions in light of these nuanced, diplomatic challenges. This section highlights five key focus points of Chinese-Canadian relations over the past two years: the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, export bans on Canadian goods, intellectual property rights, and national security. We evaluate the coverage of these topics to demonstrate how specific Canadian media organizations represented China through these topics.

2.1 TOPICS: DIPLOMACY

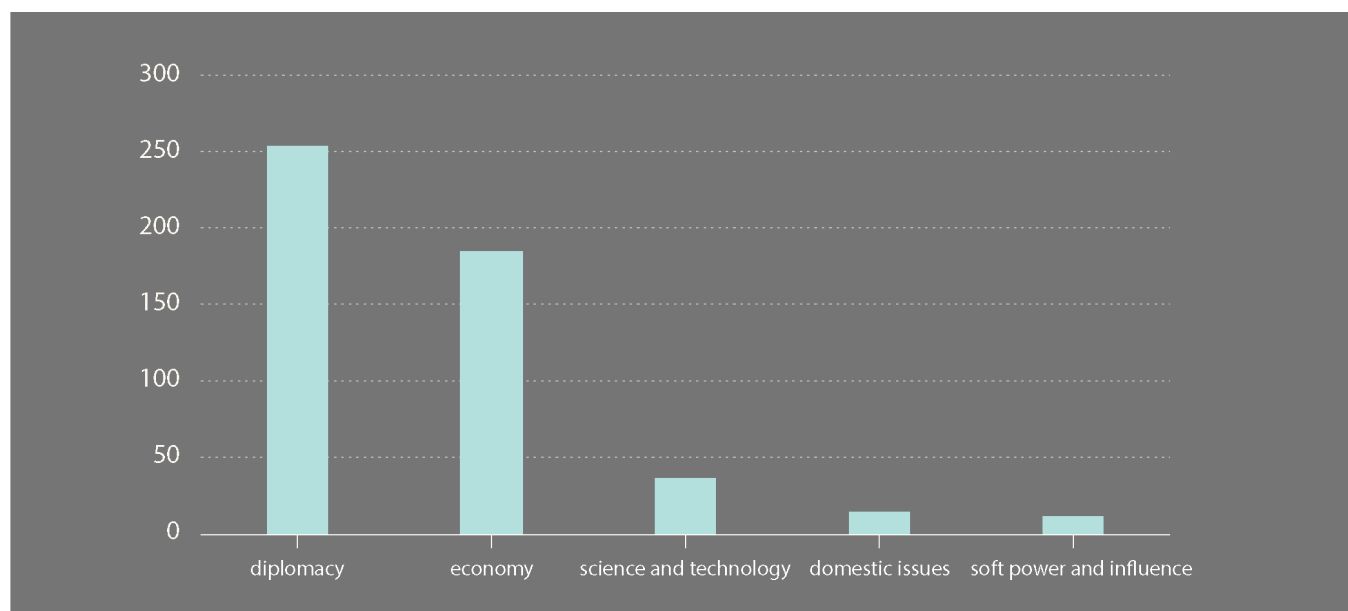
To first understand *how* Canadian media portrayed China and Canada-China bilateral relations, it is also important to discuss *when* this portrayal occurred and under what topics. Overwhelmingly, both the Globe and Mail and National Post discussed these relations primarily referent to “diplomacy,” meaning Chinese government relations and events held in consortium with the Canadian government.

Examples range from broad discussions about Canada and China’s role in global leadership, such as “Justin Trudeau Vs. The World,”¹⁹ or diplomatic spouts such as the arrest of Meng Wanzhou in Canada and the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, the second most prominent theme present in the media’s discussion of Canada-China relations is the economy. Through the recent trade disputes, China and Canada have witnessed an upsurge in dialogue towards the unpredictability of future trade relations and what this means, in particular, for the Canadian economy. Examples include discussing how “Trudeau’s third China policy is one where the options are few”²¹ and that, “[n]ow is not the time for Canadian businesses to retreat from China,”²² showcasing little consensus regarding how Canadian businesses and the government should react in light of the new diplomatic disputes. For the distribution of themes present when discussing Chinese-Canadian relations, see Figure 7.

2.2 TONE: CONFLICT AND MENG WANZHOU

On December 1, 2018, Canadian authorities arrested Huawei’s Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou, following a request from the

Figure 7. Distribution of themes for articles pertaining to Canada-China relations



U.S. under the two countries' extradition agreement. The Canadian arrest released a firestorm of both praise and criticism, which led to disapproval and contempt from the Chinese state who saw the arrest as an unwarranted and aggressive action. The National Post, for example, released multiple articles detailing how "the Chinese Foreign Ministry has objected forcefully and demanded her release" and that "Canada and the United States [were] violating her [Meng's] rights."²³ Our analysis, although beginning in May 2018, focuses extensively on the flare of media attention surrounding Meng's extradition and what role this event has served in shaping the media's perception of China and China-Canada relations.

Prior to Meng's arrest, we found that Canadian media framed Canada-China relations as unpredictable and potentially threatening. Rarely did the media label China as belligerent or instigating conflict - though such framings were more prevalent when discussing export disputes through the ongoing U.S. trade war that also affected Canadian goods. Immediately, through a short analysis of topical headlines, this disjoint is evident. When discussing Chinese business relations in Canada, headlines noted: "Aecon ambiguity: In Ottawa, there are no easy answers to the China question"²⁴ and that, "Canada must recognize that the game is changing."²⁵ Here, within both texts, we see Canadian producers coming to accept the changing economic dynamics between the two states, but still in agreement with the fact that "China [is] an 'essential component' of Canadian policy"²⁶ for economic development and expansion.

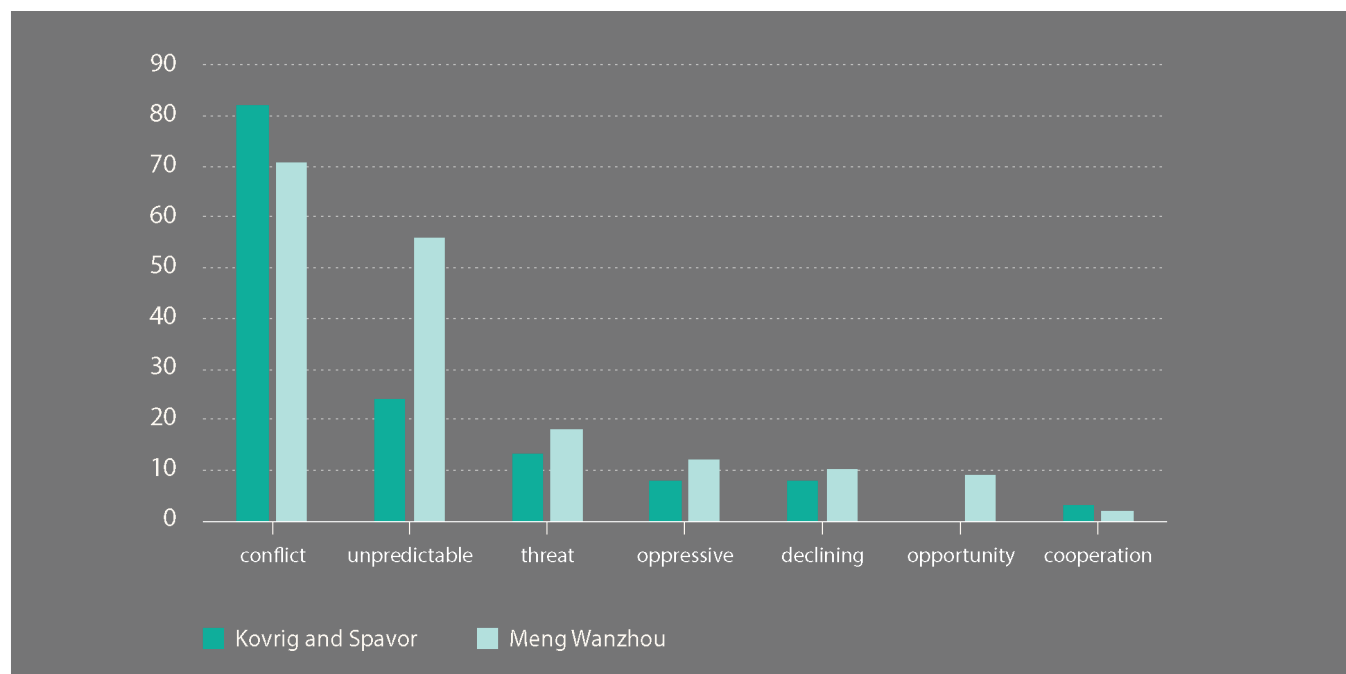
Although these headlines also display an uneasiness to this changing relationship and question the future of Chinese

businesses in Canada, most articles during this period viewed China's economic capacity in an unpredictable light. However, "conflict" and "threat" framings were still present to a lesser degree both when discussing trade and the Canadian economy. For example, headlines such as "[h]ow to do business with countries that have poor human rights records"²⁷ and "Trudeau Cabinet blocks Chinese takeover of Aecon over national security concerns,"²⁸ helped to assert more pessimistic perspectives. However, to rearticulate, for the majority of articles before Meng's arrest, the media viewed China with relative ambivalence.

This discussion regarding the shifting nature of China's portrayal in Canadian media is meant to highlight that, although there are topical events that did influence how Canadian media viewed China, discussion surrounding the state remained relatively unpredictable and neutral until December 2018. Immediately after the arrest, Chinese "conflict" spiked in the Canadian media, with over 42% of all articles analyzed portraying Canada-China relations as being embroiled in conflict. Conflict, as a descriptive frame for China, only grew in light of China's detention of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig. These two events represented over half of all Chinese-Canadian related articles analyzed, signifying the importance of both events within Canadian media but also in terms of Canada's relations with China.

Interestingly, the Canadian media's portrayal of Kovrig and Spavor's detention is described as more heavily conflictual in nature than the arrest of Meng, with the extradition charges labelled as more "oppressive" and "unpredictable" than that of the detention of Spavor

Figure 8. Framing China: Arrest of Meng Wanzhou vs. Kovrig & Spavor



and Kovrig, implying an interesting dichotomy at play. As displayed in Figure 9, although coverage of Meng’s arrest largely invoked conflict as China’s main descriptor, the media also cited great unpredictability and confusion towards the event, with over one-quarter of all articles labelling the arrest as “unpredictable.” For example, much of the uneasiness towards the arrest was situated within the question of whether, and if so how, China would retaliate against the arrest. The National Post is quoted as having said that the arrest “has led many to wonder if China will retaliate in some way against Canada,” while still laying the claim that Canada’s actions were just and that there “were no grounds upon which Canada could refuse.”²⁹ Therefore, although acknowledging the impending conflict between the two states, the National Post placed further emphasis on the aftermath and the question of future relations.

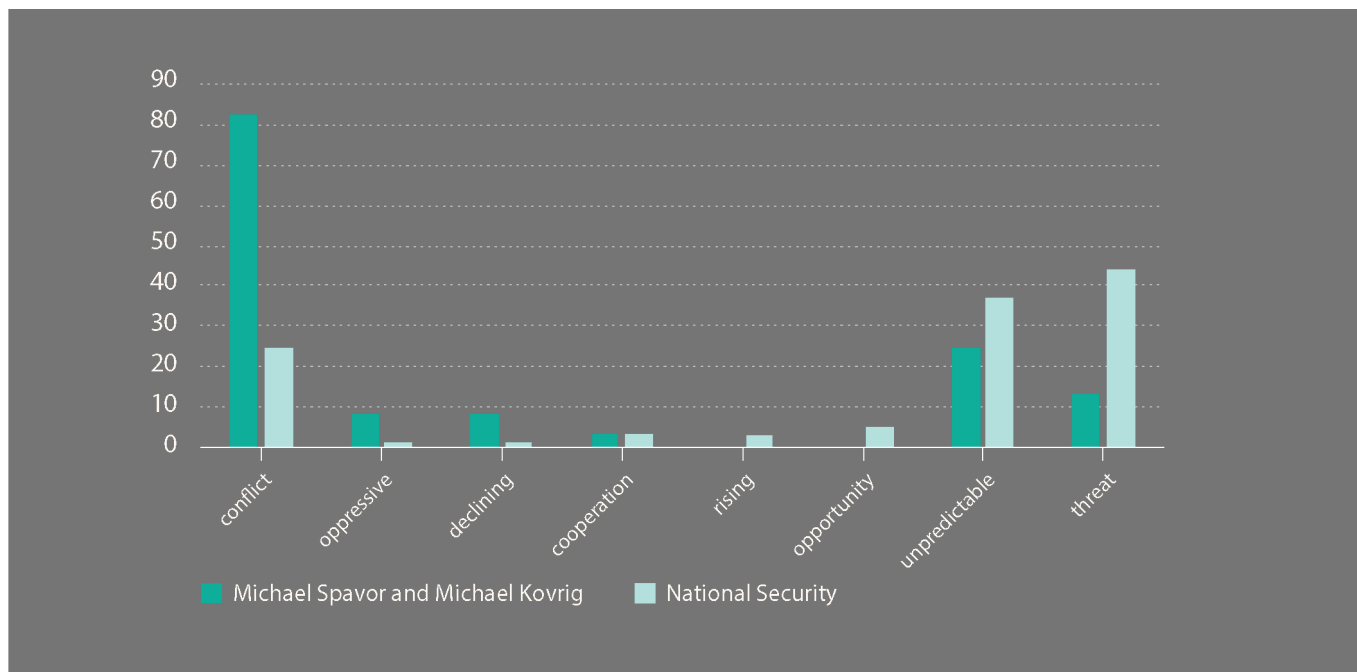
Due to the dominating coverage of these two events within Canadian media, they exerted a large influence on the overall portrayal of China as an aggressor state. If one were to remove both the arrest of Meng and the detention of Spavor and Kovrig from the analysis and focus solely on how China is viewed during times absent of crises, Canada-China relations are characterized much more favorably and in a more unpredictable light. It is also evident that although Canadian media views China and bilateral relations very negatively and in a conflictual sense, coverage of Canada-China relations have become dominated by two greatly negative events that have overshadowed the more general, unpredictable relations between the two countries. For a visual comparison of how China was represented in articles discussing Meng’s arrest and Spavor and Kovrig’s detention see Figure 8.

2.3 NATIONAL SECURITY, EXPORT BARRIERS AND IPR

Comparatively, national security, China’s ban on specific Canadian exports, and intellectual property rights, garnered less coverage. These topics accounted for less than 40% of the total Canada-China topic media coverage, once again illustrating the attention that Meng, Spavor and Kovrig received in Canadian newspapers. National security, which in large part pertained to recent discussions regarding concerns over 5G infrastructure and Huawei’s purported ties to the Chinese government, was the primary topic in 22% of articles involving Canada-China relations. Huawei has since “rejected claims that it could use the infrastructure to spy on behalf of the Chinese government,” but much of the media coverage sought to highlight how countries such as “the U.S., Australia and New Zealand [have] bann[ed] Huawei’s technology from being used in 5G wireless networks because of cybersecurity fears.”³⁰ Moreover, descriptive framings of China in these articles juxtapose those of the previously documented ‘conflictual’ relationship between China and Canada by representing China more as threatening and unpredictable, as seen in Figure 9.

A number of indicators in our data show increased attention to issues of security in our current research period compared to the previous study. For example, the frequency with which cyber security was brought into question with regard to China increased by 280%; likewise, mentions of possible Chinese espionage increased by 350%. From 2015 to mid-2018 most mentions of national security dealt with the implications of Chinese state-owned enterprises acquiring stakes in Canadian markets, with coverage of the proposed takeover

Figure 9. Framing China: Kovrig & Spavor vs. National Security



of Acon by the China Communications Construction Company being the primary locus for security discourse. Conversely, the vast majority of national security related articles in the present research period discussed Huawei, with the bulk focusing on Huawei's business operations and a smaller portion focusing on the technological dimension of 5G infrastructure. In both periods, most invocations of national security corresponded to the economy, suggesting that Canada's economic linkages to China are central to Canada's perceived vulnerability to Chinese espionage or influence. Based on our data, it does appear that Canadian newspapers have developed a more acute attention to potential national security implications of Canada's relationship with China.

Articles mentioning Huawei's potential role in Canada's network infrastructure predominantly characterized this involvement as threatening; however, the coverage was relatively ambivalent regarding what the Canadian government will choose to do. Articles about intellectual property rights (IPR) also portrayed the relationship between China and Canada in a more threatening light, with articles discussing such things as: "the danger of scientists with Chinese connections helping Beijing illegally acquire intellectual property."³¹ Though this article states that there is "no evidence" for this accusation, it does not relinquish any fear of Chinese manipulation and acquisition of information regarding Canadian intellectual property. Lastly, it is important to draw attention towards the current 'trade war' that has resulted in the Chinese imposition of trade restrictions on Canadian canola and meat. It is no surprise that, because these trade restrictions are ongoing, these export bans are framed as a site of conflict. Moreover, this export section also points to the vast effect Canada's conflict with Huawei, and more broadly, China, has had on the economy. In March 2019, the National Post quoted how the "Huawei cloud now looms over Canada's canola industry" and that canola is becoming "a target in the escalating political spat."³² Thus, even three months after the conflict, this coverage offered the view that Canada's economy was still feeling the reverberations from what would later become a battle that has lasted for over a year. This quote is meant to display the gravity and overarching effect that Canada's conflict with Huawei executive Meng has had not only on political, but also economic relations.

Drawing attention, however, to the relatively low number of articles detailing export issues in comparison to that of extradition, national security, and detention is important. This also displays the reduced interest in export matters related to China and instead, the media's greater interest in portraying events that are more diplomatic in nature, such as both the extradition and detention crises. Although one could hypothesize that this is in part due to the position of the media sources, with export issues being predominantly a Western Canadian issue and thus not garnering as much recognition within national media sources, testing this hypothesis would require further data collection. Instead, we showcased the dominating nature of these two political conflicts in Chinese-Canadian relations and how that has come to affect other industries and sectors within Canada. Canadian national newspapers often represent China in an

unpredictable or threatening light. However, coverage of Meng, Kovrig, and Spavor tends strongly to skew framing towards conflict. Thus, there is no general characterization of China across the five themes, except for Canadian media's relative ambivalence towards China in the absence of conflict.

3. U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS IN NATIONAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

Since the beginning of 2018, U.S.-China relations have been defined in large part by an ongoing trade war, diplomatic tensions, and a global technological rivalry with national security implications. This contrasts with the reality of rising economic interconnectedness and strong people-to-people ties between the two nations. It is a relationship that attracts wide-ranging media attention, including from Canadian sources. Canadian interests are susceptible to fallout arising from conflict between the world’s major economic and political powers. This section isolates and examines articles covering key issues in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, namely the trade war, U.S. national security concerns regarding China, and U.S.-China disputes over intellectual property rights.

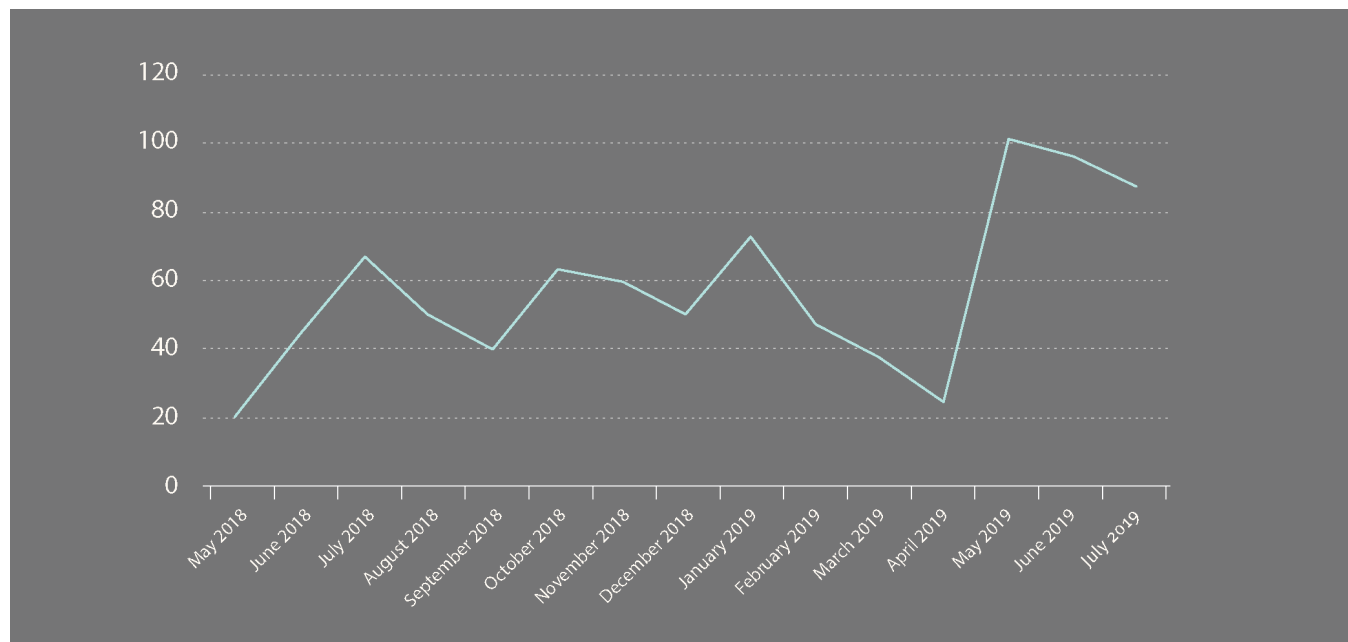
3.1 OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND TOPICS

Of the 3,333 relevant articles reviewed from May 2018 to July 2019, 861, or 26% of the total, referenced the U.S.-China bilateral relationship in some capacity. The vast majority of this coverage (815 articles) was referent to the U.S.-China trade war. Articles on U.S.-China disputes over national security and intellectual property rights received comparably low coverage, with just 39 (5%) and 7 (roughly 1%) articles, respectively.

However, it is important to note that U.S.-China relations and tensions were not the central focus in nearly two-thirds of these articles, but were instead referred to indirectly or were given secondary importance. Compared to the overall article population, and the article group concerning Canada-China relations, a far smaller portion of U.S.-China articles were centrally concerned with China. This speaks to the pervasive nature of trade war mentions in coverage of many, mainly financial, topics. For example, market summaries frequently referenced the trade war as a source of market volatility.

Due to this prevalence in trade war coverage, articles within this subset were largely classified under the “economy” theme and found to be primarily about trade, with a select few focusing on U.S.-China business or economic growth. A markedly smaller amount was found to be about diplomacy, science and technology, or international organizations. This stands in contrast to articles about the Canada-China relationship, where the most prevalent theme was “diplomacy.” This may reflect the “Canadianness” of the perspectives analyzed. Which is to say that, while Canadian news sources view Canada’s relationship through both diplomatic and economic lenses, these newspapers present U.S.-China relations mainly through an economic lens, as the impact of U.S.-China relations on Canada are principally economic in nature.

Figure 10. U.S.-China articles by monthly publication



Coverage of this topic was unevenly distributed across the observation period, with increases in coverage as developments took place. As illustrated in Figure 10, the initial July 2018 spike came with the first round of U.S. tariffs directed at China (“Trump unleashes \$34B tariff barrage on China”)³³ and subsequent Chinese response. There was also a significant jump in coverage from April to May 2019, due to the U.S. tariff increase on May 10 (“Escalating U.S.-China trade war causing anxiety in America’s heartland,”)³⁴ Chinese tariff retaliation on May 13 and 15, and President Trump’s executive order effectively banning U.S. firms from doing business with Huawei on national security grounds - a move deemed to have escalated existing tensions from the trade war (“Canada says it won’t be pushed to ban Huawei after Trump signs executive order.”)³⁵

The prevalence of “trade” as a topic of discussion may reflect a limitation arising from the coding process. Our coders could only assign one topic to each article. Therefore, the prevalence of articles coded as “trade” does not imply a singular focus. These articles are inherently connected to topics like business, diplomacy, and economic growth - even extending to relatively obscure topics such as rare-earth metals. For example, a July 30, 2019 National Post article carried this headline: “Trump digs in as China plays rare earths card; Bargaining Chip; U.S. looks to end its reliance on Beijing.”³⁶ The article profiles American efforts to re-launch domestic production of rare earth metals, a key resource for domestic technology companies that is “almost exclusively mined and refined in China.” While this subject-matter could be construed to be coded under “energy” (for “resource extraction”) or “science and technology,” the article states that these metals “are increasingly being seen as a clever bargaining chip by China” in the ongoing trade dispute - the connecting thread and underlying reason for the article. This is true throughout much of the full dataset, which contributes greatly to the overall frequency of trade as a topic.

3.2 TONE OF COVERAGE

The U.S.-China relationship, as portrayed by Canadian media, was dominated by two main frames, “unpredictable” and “conflict” - characterizing 337 (39%) and 282 (33%) of the articles, respectively. These were trailed by threat (63 articles, or 7%), declining (63 articles, or 7%), and opportunity (36, or 4%). Unlike in coverage of Canada-China tensions, “unpredictable” beat out “conflict” as the most prominent frame of China, suggesting that the tone of coverage of U.S.-China topics is less definitive than that of Canada-China coverage.

The trade war’s unpredictability, as evidenced by tariff escalations, numerous trade truces, and combative rhetoric, was reflected heavily in this subsection. Unanswered questions and missed deadlines were frequent. In a February 8, 2019 report published in the National Post, titled, “No Trump-Xi talks before March 1 tariff deadline,” Trump’s response to questions asking if there would be any sort of upcoming meeting between China and the U.S. were quoted as, “[n]ot yet. Maybe. Probably too soon. Probably too soon.”³⁷ In the same article,

Larry Kudlow, the White House economic advisor, was further quoted as saying that, “[a]t some point the two presidents will meet, that is what Mr. Trump has been saying. But that is off in the distance still at the moment.” Another report published in the National Post on June 11, 2019, titled, “Trump renews attacks on Fed putting central bank in a bind; Lower rates may look like bowing to demands,” states that “[t]he president’s ongoing trade war with China - including his threat to slap tariffs on virtually all remaining Chinese imports if no agreement is reached - is creating uncertainty, causing businesses to put off investment and hiring.”³⁸ This style of writing was prevalent in coverage of the trade war, as neither side followed a predictable path. China’s framing reflects the inherent uncertainty and unpredictability in the type of stories that were reported over this time period.

“Conflict” was the second most frequently used frame, reflecting a slightly different narrative. This frame includes articles with an emphasis on the actual “tit for tat” measures undertaken by the U.S. and China, more directly reflecting the concept of an actual trade “war.” China, in taking decisive action against the United States, was framed as a major source of this tension. Naomi Powell’s July 11, 2018 article in the National Post, which profiles the collateral trade war damage facing Canadian soybean farmers titled: “Soybean Farmers Caught in China vs. U.S. Tariff Row” describes the “25 percent retaliatory tariff on U.S. soybeans last week after U.S. President Donald Trump followed through on threats to levy US\$34 billion worth of Chinese imports.”³⁹ China also enacted measures to hurt American firms directly - including “putting off accepting license applications from American companies in financial services and other industries until Washington makes progress toward a settlement” in September 2018.⁴⁰ These are just two examples from a stream of decisions, from both sides, that heightened the bilateral conflict. Whereas the unpredictable frame described China as being a source of instability in the trade talks (and for markets, business), the conflict frame profiles China’s frequent escalation and engagement in the already protracted dispute. This reflects a subtle, but important, difference in the way Canadian newspapers portrayed China to its readers.

“Threat,” the third most prevalent frame in this subsection, was over-represented in articles where U.S.-China national security was the primary topic. Although there were only 39 articles (5% of the total in this subsection), they comprised 29% of all articles where China was portrayed as a “threat.” The high-stakes U.S.-China national security debate largely centers on the risks of doing business with Huawei, the world’s largest provider of telecommunications equipment⁴¹ and the second largest maker of smartphones.⁴² American lawmakers accused Huawei of being a threat to the 5G network infrastructure of its allies - especially members of the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance. This led the U.S. to ban Huawei from its networks and actively pressure countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom to do the same.

A May 31, 2019, Globe and Mail piece titled “Pence urges Trudeau to bar Huawei from 5G,”⁴³ profiles the “personal appeal” made by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to request

a Huawei ban. Marking the “highest-level official U.S. request of Canada since the Trump administration and bipartisan members of Congress began actively lobbying allies last year.” Pence cited “the fact that companies in China are required under law to conduct espionage at the request of Beijing’s security services.” Further, on July 20, 2019, a National Post article titled “Committee urges quick decision; Lawmakers hope next British PM acts fast on 5G,”⁴⁴ stated that “the United States has threatened to cut off intelligence sharing with allies who use Huawei equipment, which it says China could exploit for spying.” We found the American side often using threatening language to portray China as an adversary to Western security and privacy.

There are, of course, elements of China’s unpredictability in articles falling under the “conflict” frame - and vice versa. This analysis is not an objective proclamation, but simply the code determined to best reflect China’s portrayal in the article. Taken together, the codes signify a pessimistic framing of the U.S.-China relationship as a whole. Just 90 articles (10%) out of the 861 used an optimistic frame such as “opportunity” or “cooperation” to describe the relationship.

This is indicative of a more expansive dispute between the world’s two largest economies - the U.S. and its allies view China as a challenge to the current world order and Western hegemony. This extends beyond trade - China’s rise is rapidly shaping and shifting economic, technological, geo-strategic, and cultural realities around the world. Even with a recently signed U.S.-China trade deal, it is likely that the unpredictable and conflictual relationship will continue.

4. HONG KONG PROTESTS IN CANADIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

The protest movement and associated civil unrest that gripped Hong Kong in 2019 was triggered in response to a proposed extradition law amendment that, if passed, would have allowed individuals arrested in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China.⁴⁵ Hong Kong's pro-Beijing Chief Executive Carrie Lam, along with legislators who supported the bill, faced widespread opposition from those who believed it would unduly expose Hong Kong's independent legal system to judicial overreach from mainland China.

The Hong Kong protest movement largely entered the Canadian public consciousness, by way of increased media attention, in June 2019. On June 9, 2019, an estimated one million members of the public marched en masse in opposition to the extradition bill.⁴⁶ One week later, after the bill was suspended but not fully withdrawn, it was estimated that almost 2 million people (or 30% of the Hong Kong population) gathered to voice their continued opposition.⁴⁷ Widespread and often violent protests have continued into 2020. Although the extradition bill (which was formally withdrawn from legislative consideration on October 23, 2019) was the initial catalyst for the movement, demonstrators used a groundswell of public support to advance pro-democracy ideals and actively defend the rights and semi-autonomy of Hong Kong. The unrest has unsettled Beijing, where government officials have issued warnings emphasizing Chinese rule, arrested thousands of citizens of Hong Kong, and made claims of foreign interference.⁴⁸

Recent distrust around elections highlighted divisions within Hong Kong society, with almost 60% of voters choosing pan-democracy candidates while over 40% of voters chose pro-Beijing candidates. Accordingly, Hong Kong is one of the most pressing challenges for Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is also balancing a trade war, a public health crisis, and notably, international criticism over the treatment of Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

This section isolates articles in our dataset that deal specifically with Hong Kong, in order to investigate how its coverage may differ from other main subject areas, including the Canada-China and U.S.-China bilateral disputes. The analysis also branches out to explore media frames of the situation in Xinjiang and other human-rights related topics, which would also be considered "internal issues" to China.

4.1 TOPICS OF COVERAGE

Only 2% of the articles collected from May 2018 to July 2019 were found to reference the protest movement in Hong Kong. There were

15 articles primarily focused on the extradition bill (which sparked the protest movement) and 48 about the protests themselves, including responses from the Hong Kong police and government.

The "society" theme was applied to 71% of articles in this subset. This, in part, highlights how the protests in Hong Kong are largely represented as an internal Chinese social issue. While the protest movement has drawn international attention and support, it is inherently linked to the domestic concept of "one country, two systems." Of the 45 articles with the "society" theme, 41 were coded under the "protest" topic. There was a comparably low frequency of articles with a focus on China's government structure, Canadian diplomacy with China, or domestic Canadian issues in relation to Hong Kong.

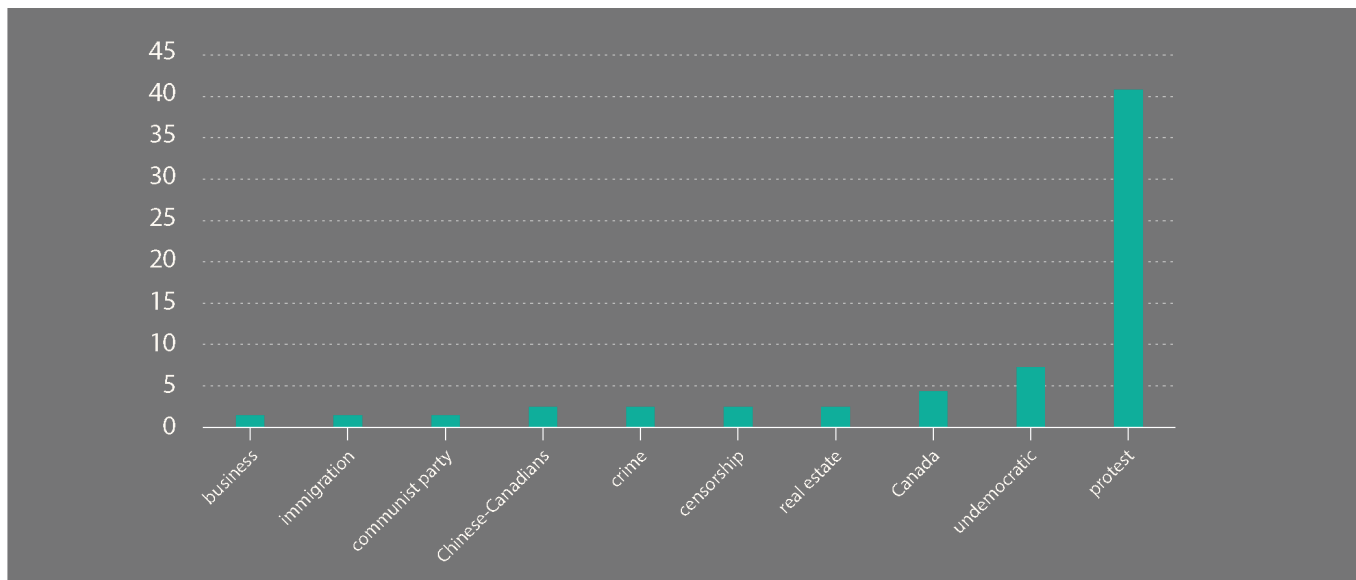
4.2 TONE OF COVERAGE

In these articles, China was predominantly characterized as "oppressive" (22, or 35%), followed closely by "conflict" (20, or 32%) and "unpredictable" (12, or 19%). Articles framing China as oppressive were found with a higher relative frequency in the Hong Kong subset versus the overall dataset, where it was used just 6% of the time. Hardly any articles described China's role in the conflict optimistically. Many, but not all, Hong Kong citizens are increasingly worried about the rise of Chinese influence and overreach in the region - which connotes an oppressive, undemocratic regime. The following quote from a Globe and Mail article titled "Hong Kong protesters challenge a larger crackdown on China's cities"⁴⁹ illustrates these oppressive framings:

"You could see mainlandization in action in the shocking response to masses of citizens by the Hong Kong Police Force, which sent more than 5,000 elite officers to fire thousands of rounds of crippling riot-control ammunition and tear gas directly at protesters in tactics that hospitalized scores. That sort of disproportionate reaction, in a city whose authorities have long tolerated expressions of dissent, appears to be a direct response to Beijing authorities who have criticized the city's police and judges for failing to crush protest movements."

The use of the words "disproportionate" and "crush" highlight allegations of Hong Kong government aggression in dealing with the protests and serve to frame China as unreasonable and oppressive. Such treatment of China was characteristic of this article group, which

Figure 11. Topics of coverage



tended to lend more sympathy to the protesters, with multiple articles carrying headlines such as “We should all stand with Hong Kong.”

Articles that framed China as being in conflict with Hong Kong provide a slightly different view of the protest movement. This view often characterized the protestors as combatants engaged in a protracted conflict, and less as victims of the Chinese or Hong Kong government. Articles under this categorization included headlines such as “Authorities ban protests amid rising tensions”⁵⁰ (which is a National Post republication of a Calgary Herald article) and “Massive turnout at Hong Kong protest keeps heat on Chinese government.”⁵¹ Previous research has noted that since the early 2000s, reporting on Chinese social and political issues has decreased and been replaced by economy-related news of China’s rise and growing relationship with Canada.⁵² We also see few articles regarding Chinese social issues in our dataset. However, the coverage of these Hong Kong protests does contribute to a small, and potentially temporary, resurgence of interest in such news. This example, in particular, highlights just how negatively Canadian media covers issues related to political rights in China.

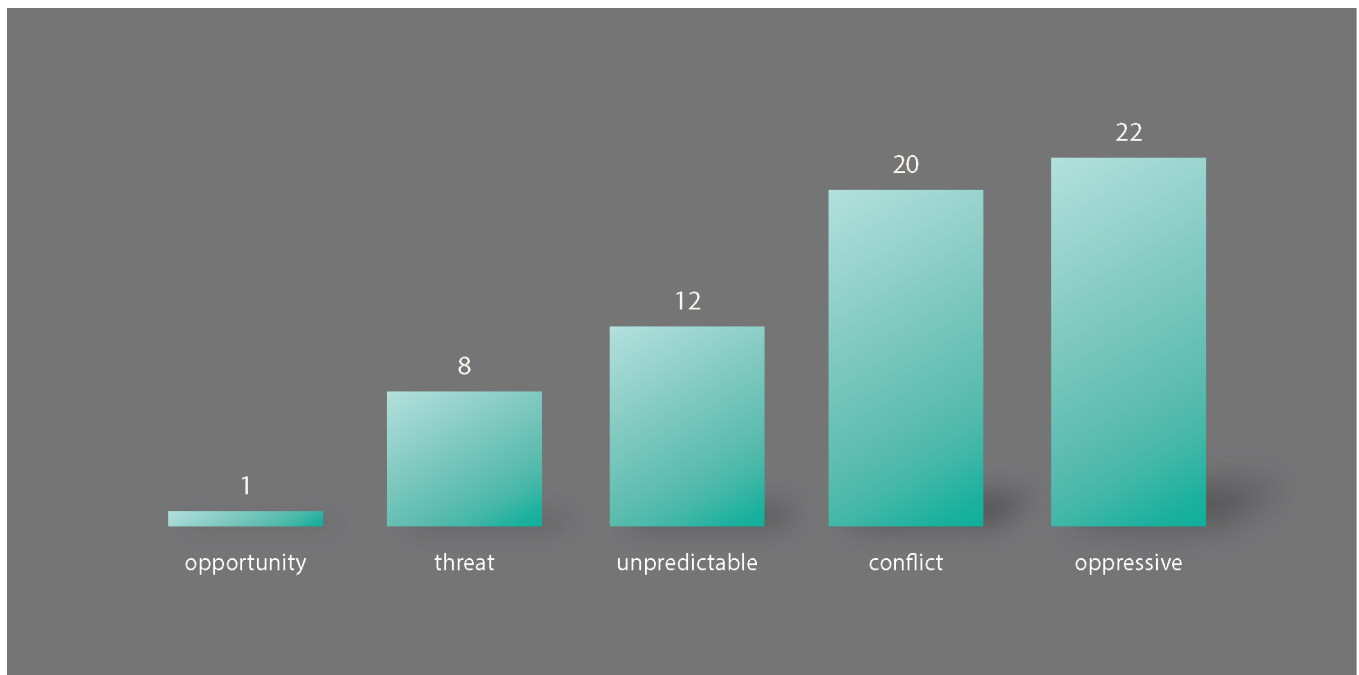
Other issues elicit similar framings of China in their coverage, such as the forced internment of the Xinjiang Uighur population, which Chinese government officials have called “Vocational Education and Training Centers” that provide career and language-based education for people in the region on a voluntary basis. However, articles we examined included ex-detainee⁵³ testimony and leaked government documents⁵⁴ that described “prison-like”⁵⁵ conditions wherein as many as two million Uighurs Muslims are “subjected to mind-numbing political indoctrination.”⁵⁶ 32 (just under 1% of the total) articles in the dataset primarily discuss this issue, 30 of which frame China as “oppressive.”

The catch-all topic of human rights, of which there were an additional 43 articles (1.3% of the total), was also predominantly populated by articles framing China as oppressive, with 36 of the 43 articles categorizing China as such. These articles address issues such as China’s system of capital punishment (“China’s leadership remains keenly attuned to the power of death”)⁵⁶ treatment of women and members of the LGBTQ+ community (“A long-ago suicide sparks a new conversation in China”)⁵⁷ and participation on the United Nations Human Rights Council (“U.S. quits UN rights council; Claims Of Bias”).⁵⁸

Overall, we see a clear connection between Chinese social issues and the framing of China as an oppressive state. This may inform and be informed by the way Canadians perceive China, as is reflected in survey data. In the November 2019 “Third National Survey on Canadian Public Attitudes on China and Canada-China Relations,” 59% of respondents stated that China’s human rights record has a “somewhat negative” or “extremely negative” impact on their overall view of China (just 11% expressed an extremely or somewhat positive view, and 30% were neutral).⁵⁹ Similarly, 51% of respondents either “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that the political rights of Chinese citizens have not improved over the past ten years (23% disagreed somewhat or strongly, and 26% didn’t know). This suggests that Canadian perceptions of China are negatively impacted by the human rights situation, as exemplified by Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

However, the same survey respondents ranked human rights as the fourth highest priority for the Canadian government’s relationship with China, falling behind “trade and investment,” “cooperation on global values,” and “protecting Canadian values” respectively. While not the highest overall priority, it’s an issue connected to trade and economic integration - with survey results also suggesting that

Figure 12. How is China framed in articles about the Hong Kong protests?



Canadians view “provisions and practices” built into trade agreements as the preferred method for human rights advancement in China. That said, because of the disproportionately high amount of reporting on economic issues over social ones, and the relatively higher ranking of the importance of economic issues in survey responses, there may be cause to say that there is a “first level” agenda setting by media coverage.⁶⁰ That is to say, published articles on serious social and political issues in China may be overshadowed by the more numerous economy-related articles, leading readers to view economic issues as more significant. However, it may also be the case that these journalists and editors are responding to what they perceive to be the interests of their readers.

5. OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST

5.1 CLIMATE CHANGE: CHINA NO LONGER SHOWN AS A LEADER

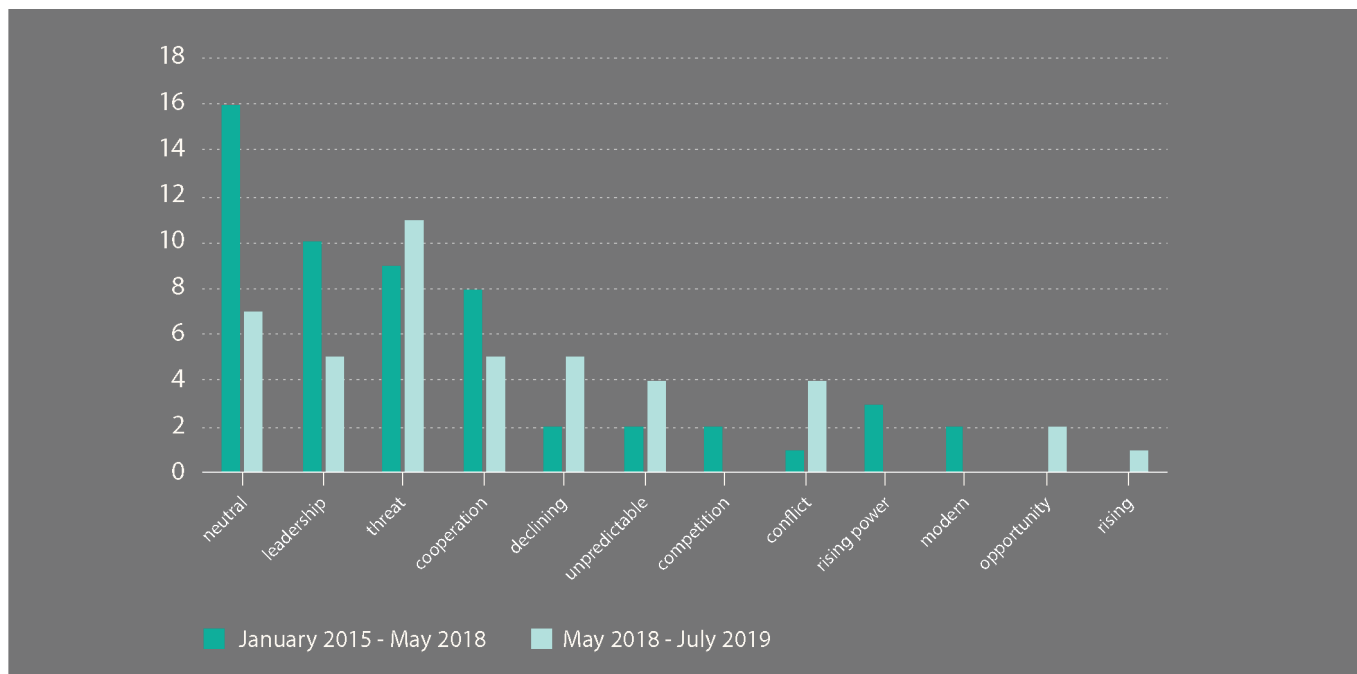
Much of the rise in “unpredictable” and “conflict” framings of China can be attributed to coverage of the U.S.-China trade war and Canada-China tensions surrounding the arrest of Meng Wanzhou. However, we also witnessed broader shifts in the tone of coverage that encompassed other topics, such as climate change.

Throughout the previous study period, from January 2015 to May 2018, the most prominent non-neutral frame used to describe China in relation to the issue of climate change was “leadership.” This was largely driven by coverage about China’s growing investment in renewable energy technologies, its relatively strong electric vehicle market, and Chinese commitment to international climate change mitigation initiatives. While many articles during this time period also covered China’s growing coal consumption and pollution problems in a more negative light, they did not seem to crowd out the more optimistic reports on China’s environmental initiatives. Comparatively, a lesser proportion of articles cast China as a climate leader from May 2018 to July 2019, while a greater proportion described China as an environmental “threat.”

Based on our data, much of this shift in tone does not appear to correlate with any major events or external factors that would influence the topics of coverage. Rather, it appears that coverage on the topics that tended to elicit positive framings of China, such as Chinese investment in green tech and electric vehicle prevalence in China, declined, resulting in a decreased prevalence of optimistic frames. This suggests that media interest in these topics was weaker during this period, possibly reflecting a lesser willingness to frame China positively due to worsening public attitudes towards China in general or simply by the overshadowing of optimistic article topics by pessimistic ones. Therefore, it may be the case that decreased “leadership” framing and increased “threat” framing reflects the inclination of the newspapers in question to critique China.

On the other hand, decreases in the “cooperation” frame for this topic can be more readily explained. During the previous study period, the Paris Climate Accord was signed by nearly every country, including China. This event received significant coverage that lent itself to commentary on China’s agreed upon commitments, often against the backdrop of U.S. withdrawal. This event has, to an extent, faded from public attention and thus produced less media coverage in which China appears as a cooperative partner.

Figure 13. Climate Change: Descriptive frames of China



5.2 CANADIAN DOMESTIC ISSUES

Most of our observations regarding articles that covered Canadian “domestic issues,” including those that discuss Chinese-Canadians, immigration, real estate, tourism, and international university students, paralleled the findings of our previous report. “Neutral” was the most prominent descriptive frame for this category as a whole due in large part to the most prominent topic, “Chinese-Canadians,” being predominantly neutral in nature. Articles about Chinese “immigration” tended also to be neutral, and discussed its increase in recent years. “Tourism” followed a similar trend. The topic of “real estate” saw a shift from “threat” to “declining” from the previous to current research period, reflecting a decline in property acquisition by perceived Chinese buyers or reduced public anxiety.

The greatest change occurred to the topic of “university,” which saw an uptick in activity after mid-2018, framing China as threatening. This

coverage tended to implicate Huawei’s funding of universities with intellectual property theft, and speculate about the associations of Chinese student groups with the Chinese Communist Party through Chinese Consulates.

As was the case with coverage regarding “climate change,” coverage of “domestic issues” was more pessimistic after May of 2018 than before. This further highlights how the tone of newspaper coverage on China experienced a general cooling that was not confined to coverage of major events such as the detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China, or the trade war.

CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed the coverage of China in the Globe and Mail and the National Post from May 2018 to July 2019 highlighting a number of shifts in coverage regarding the topics and tone of coverage. Overall, trade issues and China-Canada relations featured much more prominently in 2018 and 2019 than they did in the three years prior. These issues also garnered a more pessimistic tone of coverage, with “unpredictable” and “conflict” becoming the preeminent ways China was framed. “Threat” and “opportunity” remained prominent frames within coverage as well, though, we did witness generally greater pessimism in the tone of the overall body of China related articles, with issues such as “climate change” and “science and technology” also yielding a more pessimistic tone of coverage in 2018 and 2019 relative to 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Concluding this report, we draw attention back to the intricate and elastic nature of the Canada-China relationship. Despite the chilling of public attitudes towards China over the past few years, the relationship remains an important avenue for cultural and economic sharing that enriches the lives of people in both countries. While Canada-China relations are clearly at a low ebb, China’s rise over the past 40 years has made China much more significant to Canada, even if the reverse is not true.

As we reach the fiftieth anniversary of China-Canada diplomatic relations later this year, we look cautiously, but with guarded optimism at the potential for engagement with China over the next half century. The China Institute remains committed to providing impartial analysis and scholarship of Canada-China relations, and of China’s broader global engagement.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY SECTION

We collected articles published from **May 2018 to the end of July 2019** in the Globe and Mail and National Post that mentioned “China” or “Chinese” at least once, using the ProQuest Canadian Newsstream database. This search returned roughly 4500 articles, some of which were immediately determined as irrelevant and excludable during the download process. Together, this search process returned **4,319 articles** for the initial dataset.

This search process returned all mentions of “China OR “Chinese” across all material published by the Globe and Mail and National Post - including articles, columns, editorials, updates, and special reports. Many articles in these national newspapers are supplied by wire services, such as Reuters or the Canadian Press. This combination of materials and sources reflects what an average Canadian would see when they open a newspaper or access a news website.

Whereas the previous China Institute Mass Data project drew articles from nine Canadian newspapers located across the country, this iteration used only two major Canadian national newspapers: The Globe and Mail and National Post. It was determined that duplicate articles showing up in the five newspapers owned by Postmedia in the first project created an unnecessary level of repetition for coders and results. This also allowed for a less time-consuming, and therefore more manageable, data collection and coding process for our research team. The two national sources used provide appropriately broad and comprehensive coverage of China topics in Canadian English language media.

All articles were then **manually coded** using an established **codebook**. The codebook outlines and defines 13 themes, 86 topics, and 14 relational adjectives. Articles were coded as “other” if they were determined to have mentioned China in a non-relevant way for the purposes of this report. This includes articles on, but not limited to, food, art, sport, and music - all topics that are generally not substantially related to political, economic, social, or environmental elements of China and the Canada-China relationship. These articles were not assigned a theme, topic, relational adjective, etc. Removing these articles left **3333 articles** where China is mentioned in a relevant manner.

Each article was assigned a: theme (representing the main idea or concept behind the article), topic (given the theme, a description of main subject of the article), a relational adjective (describing the way China is portrayed in the article), a relevancy code (denoting how relevant China is as a topic is within the article), and a Huawei code (for whether or not the article mentions Huawei). This process largely mirrors that of the China Institute’s first Mass Data project.

This report further **isolated** articles on particularly salient China-related themes including US-China relations, Canada-China relations, and the Hong Kong protests. We also isolated articles pertaining to specific topics, such as the U.S.-China trade war, the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, national security issues in both the U.S. and China, espionage concerns surrounding Chinese 5G technology, and protests in Hong Kong among other issues. Any article determined to include these themes/topics, either as a main topic or tangentially, was assigned a secondary theme, secondary topic, and secondary relevancy code.

The China Institute research team was comprised of six individuals, and each was assigned a section of articles spanning the entire data collection period. This was designed to minimize a single coder’s impact on time-trend representations of the data. Researchers also participated in periodic **reliability tests** to ensure a consistent application of the codes throughout the full coding process. This process involved each researcher coding the same set of ten articles, followed by a comparison of the results to determine what code, and which coder, diverged from the relative majority. Reliability over the full coding process, a useful metric of intercoder consistency, was 88% for themes, 82% for topics, and 72% for relational adjectives.

Multiple themes, topics, and descriptive frames often overlap within a single article and thus much of our effort in this project was directed towards the minutia of discriminating the best categorization for each article. That said, reasonable people, content analysts and media audiences alike, will sometimes disagree. Therefore, it is inevitable that the categorization of every article is subject to the unique interpretations of the reader. The codes we associate with each article in our dataset reflect these interpretations, which to some degree in turn reflect the spread of unique interpretations by the audiences of the publications we analyzed. As such, our data is most useful when aggregated as it allows the fair interpretations of multiple coders to work together to better reflect the impressions left by this media on Canadians in general. Therefore, while we draw on examples from specific articles in our dataset, our goal is not to show how any particular Canadian may interpret said content but to illustrate what we mean by the specific words we use to classify articles.

We used **content analysis** to evaluate the data and identify trends, visibility, and shifts in media coverage focus over time. We also used targeted **discourse analysis** to supplement our analysis and evaluate the type of language used to describe and characterize China in Canadian media.

APPENDIX B: CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS

NATIONAL POST

Founded in 1998 around the long-running Financial Post, the National Post is the flagship newspaper of the Postmedia conglomerate. Conrad Black stated that he founded the paper after “conclud[ing] that practically all of western Canada, and the sizeable conservative (whether traditionalist or libertarian) minority in eastern Canada, were practically unrepresented in the national media.”⁶¹ It is traditionally regarded as a right-leaning, conservative paper.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Founded in 1844, the Globe and Mail is widely regarded as a centrist publication - liberal when compared with the National Post. It is owned by The Woodbridge Company, a private investment firm that also boasts a controlling interest in the Thomson Reuters media conglomerate.⁶²

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, Embassy of Canada. "Bilateral Relations." Government of Canada, (March 22, 2019), https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/china-chine/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/index.aspx?lang=eng.
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