



CHINA IN CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS
JANUARY 2015 TO MAY 2018:
A MASS DATA ANALYSIS

The calm before the storm

The China Institute at the University of Alberta

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FOREWORD

The China Institute at the University of Alberta (CIUA) takes pride in publishing the first of a series of reports that examines news media representations of China in Canada. This report, titled “China in Canadian Newspapers from January 2015 to May 2018: The calm before the storm” pioneers a new chapter of research for the CIUA, in which we depart from annual public opinion polling and instead focus our attention on the Canadian media, other social media and internet data sources.

Perceptions of China in Canada are mixed, while frequently viewed as a valuable economic partner, China is often perceived as an opponent of Canadian democratic and liberal values. This report explores the ways in which Canadian newspapers frame China, and, invariably, shape public opinion of China among Canadians. To do this, we assembled a team of researchers to conduct a mass data analysis on over thirteen thousand Canadian newspaper articles from nine different sources for the period of January 2015 to May 2018. This

period was one of high aspirations for the China-Canada relationship that unfortunately preceded a sharp deterioration of state relations, a calm before the storm as it were.

This report aims to provide a multi-faceted view of the Canada-China relationship that promotes understanding of China in Canada and supports positive relationships between the peoples and governments of both countries.

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INTRODUCTION

China's extraordinary transformation has captured Canadians' attention and elicited questions about the global future. In the 1980s, China accounted for a minor fraction of the global economy and had little influence outside its borders, save for some neighbouring countries. In the 1990s, China established itself as the world's "factory floor." In the 2000s, China emerged as the world's foremost financier and a leading investor across the globe from Eastern Europe to Latin America. Today, China is an outstanding economic powerhouse and in a number of sectors is increasingly becoming a world leader in research and development.

In the last decade, 24.9% of Canadians reported that they were interested in China, with 2.5% naming it the most interesting country¹. National public opinion surveys indicate that nearly 70% of Canadians think of China when they hear the word "Asia"². Canadians also consistently identify China as a country economically important for Canada's short-term and long-term prosperity³. Although Canadian views on China's political development tend to be critical in recent years⁴, an early 2018 survey showed that 59% of Canadians support an FTA with China and 26% believe that it should be the government's top priority⁵. Other research suggests that Canadians have limited knowledge of Canada-China relations and routinely overestimate the volume of Chinese investments in Canada⁶. In sum, there is both a demand and a need in Canada for more information about China.

The landscape of available news sources in Canada is vast and complex. However, despite the growing influence of television and social media, newspapers still have a high credibility among different population groups and in a meaningful way shape public opinion on diverse important social and political issues, ranging from climate change mitigation to foreign policy and immigration⁷. A media-attentive Canadian will be exposed to some combination of stories and headlines coming from the leading Canadian newspapers, either in print or digital forms. Importantly, newspapers traditionally have been in the center of public debate in Canada and provide broader and deeper coverage of political and economic issues than television news or social media.

This report examines the coverage of China in print and on-line editions of Canada's major English-language newspapers between January 2015 and May 2018 (see *Appendix 1* for information on our methodology). Our sample includes the two leading English-language national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *National Post*. We also sampled seven newspapers to offer a general representation

of Canadian provinces, covering a range from Atlantic Canada to the Pacific coast, including British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and four Atlantic provinces (for more information on the sample see *Appendix 2*). The broad scope of the sample allows us not only to represent diverse political positions and "ideological cultures"⁸ but also to determine regional and provincial trends and identify the differences in Canada's local and national media coverage of China.

We use two types of analysis – content and discourse analysis – to evaluate the data. We use **content analysis** to trace the visibility of particular topics in Canadian media coverage of China and map the shifts in media coverage focus over time. Further, **discourse analysis** allows us to examine what ideas about China the media communicate and how they frame different topics related to Canada-China relations. This report focuses on the following interrelated questions:

- What are the main topics in the media coverage of China-related news?
- How do the media organizations identify China?
- How do the media organizations evaluate China's development?
- How do the media organizations evaluate Canada-China relations?

THEMES & TONE

Canadian newspapers have increased their coverage of China over the past ten years⁹. However, despite growing coverage, the variety of themes remains limited. Specifically, our analysis reveals that Canadian media coverage of China is overwhelmingly directed to economic issues (see *Table 1*). Allocations for the coverage of China’s sociopolitical development, foreign affairs, and Chinese diaspora in Canada in all newspapers sampled are significantly less than those for business, financial, and trade negotiations coverage. Economic reporting dominates Canadian media landscape not just as a proportion of total coverage but also in the total volume of stories, with more than a half of examined articles (52.18%) being focused on economic issues.

Articles about China’s social and political development constitute only 9.61% of the total volume of coverage. Only 3.05% of the total volume of articles focus on China’s ideology and statecraft under President Xi Jinping. Domestic issues within China or that involve Chinese nationals constitute 7.99% of the total coverage relating to China. The fourth significant theme is diplomacy (7.14%), with stories focused on the development of Canada-China relations, high-level state visits,

and bilateral agreements negotiations. Canadian newspapers also give attention to long-standing questions about nuclear politics (3.75%) and environmental issues and concerns (3.23%). China’s military potential, science and technology news from China, China’s engagement with international organizations, political flashpoints involving China, China’s growing “soft power” and international influence, and energy issues represent cumulatively less than 14% of the total volume.

We identified 14.8% of articles as neutral-toned (see *Appendix 1* for methodology information). While “positive” framings of China as a rising power (12.6%) and an opportunity (11.3%) are visible and prominent, Canadian newspapers most frequently frame China as a threat (13.1%). Overall, the articles that adopt frames of conflict and competition, as well as those that portray China as unsustainable, unpredictable, and oppressive outnumber positive framings of China as modern, stable, and successful by more than 12%.

The most striking feature of Canadian media coverage of China is the degree of its polarity. Canadian media portray China simultaneously as a source of threats and as a source of opportunities, as a rising power and

Table 1. The key themes and topics

THEMES	TOPICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
ECONOMY	Total	4646	52.18%
	Business	1760	19.77%
	Trade	963	10.82%
	Economic Growth	944	10.60%
SOCIETY & POLITICS	Total	856	9.61%
	Human Rights	232	2.61%
	Crime	176	1.98%
	Censorship	90	1.01%
DOMESTIC ISSUES	Total	711	7.99%
	Chinese-Canadians	239	2.68%
	Real Estate	178	2.00%
	Immigration	135	1.52%
DIPLOMACY	Total	636	7.14%
	Canada	317	3.56%
	United States	225	2.53%
	Asia	23	0.26%

Figure 1. The tone of coverage: Descriptive frames



as a country encountering serious economic and political challenges. For example, articles that frame China as a source of cooperation (7.23%) and as a source of conflict (6.09%) are almost equally prominent.

We identified four major themes in Canadian media coverage of China: economy, society, domestic issues, and diplomacy. These themes cumulatively represent 76.5% of the coverage and vary not only in the volume of coverage but in its tone (see Table 2). The theme of economy

is dominated by positive frames of “rise” and “opportunity.” The only negative frame prominent in for this theme is the frame of “decline” that presents China’s development as unhealthy and unsustainable. In contrast, the coverage of the theme of society and politics is overwhelmingly negative, with the major frames being “oppressive” and “threat.” The theme of domestic issues is largely neutral, but the frame of “threat” is noticeable as well. Finally, the theme of diplomacy exhibits the strongest polarity and divergence because negative and positive frames are equally present in the coverage.

The interest in economy manifests overt fluctuations over the study period. The three most prominent topics for this theme are business (19.6%), trade (10.7%), and economic growth (10.5%). The dominant picks in the economic coverage correspond to key economic and financial events involving China, such as stock market turbulence of 2015, establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the US-China trade war. China’s participation in the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference, the landmark meeting of leaders of the PRC and Taiwan in 2015, the announcement of the 13th Five-Year Plan, the highly publicized Belt and Road Forum of 2017, and the 19th National Congress of the CCP did not generate comparable spikes in media coverage. Consequently, the key diplomatic and political events attracted markedly less attention of Canadian media. This indicates that the media tend to portray China through the prism of its participation in the global economy (See *Snapshot No. 1: The 2015 Stock market turbulence and China’s new normal*). Interestingly, the coverage of events related to Canada-China business and trade relations is considerably less intense than that of US-China. The case in point is the US-China trade war (see *Snapshot No.3: US-China trade war, March 2018*).

Overall, positive framing dominates the coverage of economic issues relating to China. Canadian media have tended to portray China as

Table 2. Major themes and tone of the coverage

DESCRIPTIVE FRAMES	THEMES			
	Diplomacy	Domestic Issues	Economy	Society & Politics
Conflict	91	23	282	15
Cooperation	102	30	414	6
Decline	22	13	784	42
Neutral	95	288	463	135
Opportunity	53	48	847	5
Oppressive	31	14	38	394
Rise	48	99	713	44
Threat	100	118	379	125
Unpredictable	54	43	406	38
Grand total	596	676	4326	804

a rising power and an opportunity with respect to economic issues. New media tend to frame China as an irreplaceable and powerful actor of global economy. Acknowledging the challenges of China's ambitious economic modernization and indeed some of the trade, investment and technology controversies that attend that dynamic, Canadian newspapers generally agree that the rapid rise of China brings new opportunities for all stakeholders. Interdependence and interconnectedness are common leitmotifs in the coverage of economic issues that involve China. In this framework China is a contributing member of international community and its development is a part of the positive-sum game.

SOCIETY & POLITICS: CHINA AS A DICTATORSHIP

The second most prominent theme in Canadian coverage of China is sociopolitical issues. While positive images of China as an economic powerhouse are salient in Canadian media, reporting on China's sociopolitical development produce decidedly negative images of China. Despite the prominence of narratives that frame the Canada-China economic partnership as mutually beneficial, Canadian media explicitly target China's most sensitive political areas, including China's human rights situation, alleged persecution of Falun Gong followers, Taiwan and Tibet politics, and speculations about China's economic espionage.

Overall, the coverage of sociopolitical issues is highly critical. The most prominent frame related to the theme of society and politics is "oppression." Introducing contemporary China to their readers, Canadian newspapers often use ideological descriptions and loaded words. China's political regime is frequently labeled as "the largest dictatorship in the world" and described as "increasingly repressive." China is frequently compared to Russia, Saudi-Arabia, Syria, Iran, and other states notorious for inhibiting or restraining basic individual freedoms.

China's socioeconomic challenges, ranging from environment degradation and food security to the rapid expansion of middle class and emergence of new consumer culture values, are also broadly covered in all newspapers that were sampled. These stories sketch a vision of a modern and dynamic society that is also overwhelmed with fundamental problems and struggling to adjust to the extraordinary pace of its economic growth. Canadian journalists tend to frame China's development as a story of rapid change but also as problematic and unsustainable model of growth. Stories about vibrant consumer culture and environmentally-friendly urban initiatives in Chinese megalopolises appear side-by-side with grim reporting on environmental degradation and pollution. For example, one of the most pervasive images is "thick," "grey," "choking," and "vanquishing" smog that covers Chinese major cities. News about instances of food and water contamination also often make headlines and constitute a substantial share of the coverage of everyday life in China.

Interestingly, all newspapers sampled draw heavily upon Chinese Party sources in their reporting on China's social and political



Figure 2. *National Post*, July 31, 2017
"Chongqing has a "Blade Runner"-like feel"¹⁰



Figure 3. *The Globe and Mail*, December 7, 2015
"Tiananmen Square is seen in heavy pollution"¹¹

development. 97% of citations of all articles that were sample came from the top official representatives of China's state, including Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Yi, and spokespersons of the Party and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, the discourse of Chinese officials is the only Chinese discourse presented by Canadian media. Chinese independent non-government sources do not have a voice in Canadian newspapers. This is surprising and counterintuitive, given the widespread public concerns about attempts by China's officials to influence Canadian media coverage.

DOMESTIC ISSUES: CHINA AS A THREAT

Chinese are Canada's third largest immigrant group, with an average of over 30,000 permanent residents admitted every year. In the light of this growing diaspora, it is not surprising that Canadian newspapers bring attention to various domestic issues that involve China and Chinese nationals (7.9%). However, only a small fraction of articles directly address Chinese culture within Canada or the concerns of Chinese Canadians. For example, the only cultural event that receives a noticeable coverage in *National Post* and *The*

Globe and Mail is Chinese New Year. Similarly, apart from *The Vancouver Sun*, regional newspapers also rarely provide extensive and detailed coverage of local Chinese community events.

Many references to Chinese nationals in Canada are only peripheral to the primary focus of the reporting. For instance, articles on immigration and citizenship issues frequently mention the growing Chinese community but, besides general demographic information, provide few details regarding the histories and lives of Chinese Canadians. Similarly, reporting on Canada's positions in the international higher education market cite the increasing number of students from Mainland China as evidence of the internationalization of Canadian universities but do not touch upon Chinese students' lived experiences in Canada.

A bulk of articles that covered "domestic issues" also addresses the role of Chinese investment in the development of local housing markets in British Columbia and Ontario. Newspapers express concerns about the entry of foreign capital and the lack of transparency about the extent of foreign ownership of residential property. The prevalent narrative is that increased foreign real estate investment contribute to growing housing prices in provincial capitals. Specifically, Chinese investors in Vancouver are routinely singled out and portrayed as excessively rich and avaricious in these reports. While the perception that a large proportion of foreign investors in Vancouver's hot real estate market originates from China is accurate¹², the singling out of buyers of Chinese heritage can lead to problematic cultural profiling. The labelling of Canadian Chinese (Canadian citizens) as Chinese investors (foreign nationals) is particularly troublesome because it could feed negative stereotyping of Chinese immigrants.

DIPLOMACY: CAUTION AND COOPERATION

Media attention to diplomatic issues does not develop in a linear way but fluctuates and peaks around specific events. In the case at hand, we see peaks during Canadian political leaders' landmark visits to China and important events in Sino-American relations. The clearest example is Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visits to China in August-September 2016 and December 2017, as well as the Mar-a-Lago summit of April 2017, where Donald Trump and Xi Jinping had their first meeting.

Canadian media are recording China's ongoing rise and recognize China as a new trendsetter and a global player of consequence in international politics. Of particular note is the widespread coverage of China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea; media outlets focused on China's role as a threat and cause of conflict, whereas China's participation in Asia-Pacific affairs is more often reported through the frame of cooperation. The discussions of China as Canada's potential partner and ally are also polarized. For example, in the articles focused on FTA negotiations, China is explicitly portrayed as a centralized dictatorship whose ideology is incompatible to Canadian values, and thus a partnership with it might threaten Canadian integrity. This negative framing is at odds with the positive

representations of China's rise as a source of valuable opportunities for Canada and Canadians (See *Snapshot No. 3 Snapshot No. 2: Justin Trudeau's visits to China and FTA negotiations, 2016 and 2017*).

We find that Canadian media very often look at China through the prism of US-China relations. This trend is specifically relevant for diplomacy news: China's relations with the United States are reported in great detail in comparison to other news pertaining to China. The coverage of Sino-American affairs often intersects with the coverage of the ongoing diplomatic processes taking place with North Korea and China's role in international nuclear politics. In addition to this, China is frequently mentioned in reports on Donald Trump's foreign policy initiatives. For example, we observe a rapid and dramatic increase in the number of China-related stories in *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, and *Chronicle Herald* between February and April 2017. A closer analysis of the articles published over these three months reveals that almost 25% of them focus on Trump's trade policies and about 5% discuss the China - United States - North Korea security triangle. Consequently, more than a quarter of all articles are about the US or the US' relations with China rather than about China *per se*. In this sense, the negative tone of the coverage could be at least partially attributed to the critical stance of the three newspaper to Trump's administration and foreign policy.

REGIONAL TRENDS IN MEDIA COVERAGE

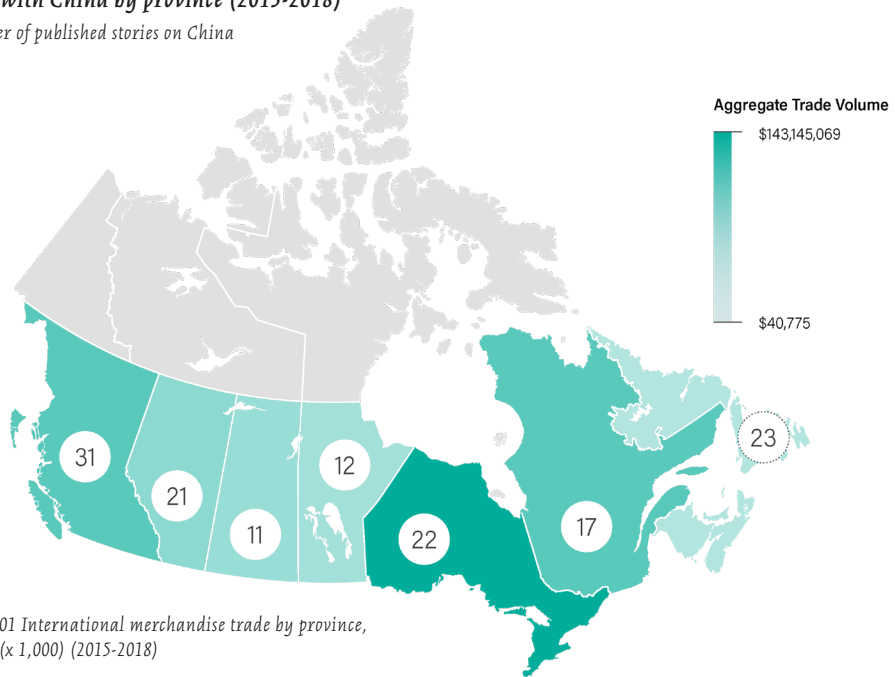
According to the general logic of foreign news, stronger economic ties correlate with a more intensive coverage¹³. We observe this correlation in Western Canada, where aggregate trade volume is roughly proportional to the volume of news stories about China. This trend does not hold true for Eastern Canada. The Halifax *Chronicle Herald* is case in point. China-Maritimes bilateral trading volume is lower than compared to other Ontario and Quebec, yet *Chronicle Herald*, the leading newspaper in the four Atlantic provinces, offered its readership more stories about China (on average 23 per month) than Quebec's *Montreal Gazette* (17 per month) and Ontario's *Toronto Star* (22 per month) (see *Figure 4.a.*).

According to 2016 Census of Population, Chinese Canadians number almost 1.5 million and represent the largest Asian ethnic group in all provinces except Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba (see *Figure 4b*). Chinese Canadians are a significant visible minority group in Canada's major metropolitan areas, including Metro Vancouver, Calgary Region, Edmonton Metropolitan Region, Greater Montreal, and Greater Toronto Area. Nevertheless, we do not see a strong and consistent correlation between Chinese population by province and regional media coverage.

All regional newspapers sampled report local news from journalists in the field and cover the majority national and international topics via international news agencies, such as *Bloomberg News* and *Associated Press*. In addition to this, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Regina Leader-Post*, the *Montreal Gazette*, and the *Vancouver Sun* are all owned by Postmedia

Figure 4.a. Aggregate trade volume with China by province (2015-2018)*

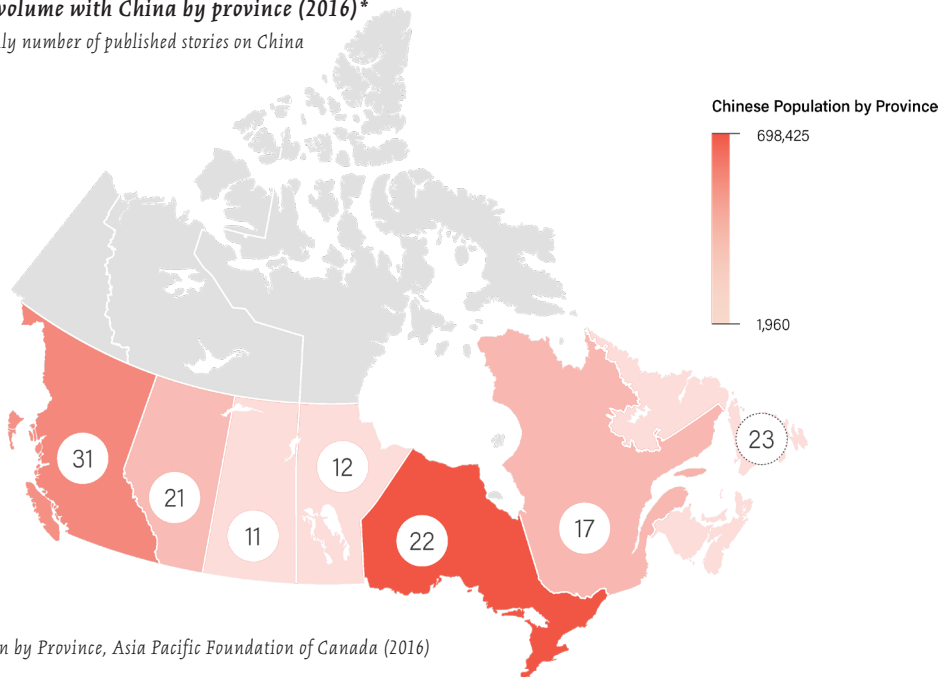
*numbers denote the average monthly number of published stories on China



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 12-10-0119-01 International merchandise trade by province, commodity, and Principal Trading Partners (x 1,000) (2015-2018)

Figure 4.b. Aggregate trade volume with China by province (2016)*

*numbers denote the average monthly number of published stories on China



Source: Population by Ethnic Origin by Province, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (2016)

Network and thus draw extensively on the *National Post*, the flagship publication of their parent-company. As a result, the coverage for Post Media outlets is very similar, particularly with respect to international issues. In contrast, *Toronto Star* and *Chronicle Herald* frequently reprint reports from *the Globe and Mail* that are ideologically closer to them, and

thus produce coverage that is distinct from the Post Media coverage but are similar to one another. The independently owned *Winnipeg Free Press* draws largely upon *The Associated Press* and only occasionally reprints stories from national newspapers, yet its coverage of China still follows closely the pattern of Postmedia's outlets.

Table 3. Regional trends for the top-five topics

TOPIC	REGION						
	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Quebec	Ontario	Maritimes
Diplomacy	4	3	3	4	4	3	4
Domestic Issues	2	5	6	2	3	4	5
Economy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Energy	11	6	13	11	11	13	12/13
Environment	10	9	9	5	8	6	7
Government	5	8	7	7	6	7	10
Military	8	7	4	8	7	8	8
Nuclear Politics	9	10	5	9	9	5	2
Science & Technology	6	4	8	6	5	11	11
Society	3	2	2	3	2	2	3

The economy is the most prevalent topic in China coverage across all provincial newspapers sampled (see Table 3). The top five topics also include diplomacy, socio-political development, and diplomacy. Overall the variations in coverage volume of topics from province to province are marginal, but there are some meaningful exceptions. For example, *the Regina Leader-Post's* top five does not include domestic issues. Instead, Saskatchewan's flagship newspaper covered extensively military issues and nuclear politics.

The most notable and meaningful deviation in provincial coverage is *the Calgary Herald's* reporting on energy related topics. Energy is the sixth most reported topic in *the Calgary Herald*, while in other newspapers it is at the very bottom of the list. A bulk of articles discuss foreign investment in oil sands, as well as new pipeline infrastructure projects that could support trans-Pacific trade and allow Alberta to capitalize on China's growing oil demand. *The Calgary Herald* reporting indicates that Albertans are interested in Chinese market but concerned about the growing influence of Chinese investment in Canadian energy sector. The tone of the coverage varies from province to province more significantly than the thematic content. Albertan news framed China mostly through the prism of cooperation and opportunity. These positive frames were much less popular in neighbouring British Columbia and Saskatchewan. The Maritime *Chronicle Herald's* provided the least threatening image of China, whereas Manitoba's *Winnipeg Free Press* used the frame of threat most often.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MEDIA COVERAGE PICKS

This section presents three snapshots: Chinese stock market turbulence of 2015, Justin Trudeau's visits to China and FTA negotiations in Sept. 2016 and Dec. 2017, and US-China trade war, March 2018. These events were chosen for several reasons: first, they correlate with some of the most significant peaks in media coverage of China; second, they are representative of two major themes – economy and diplomacy; third, they allow comparison and analysis of variations over time.

SNAPSHOT NO. 1: THE 2015 STOCK MARKET TURBULENCE AND CHINA'S "NEW NORMAL"

In mid-2015, Canadian news media covered the Chinese stock market crash, which began with the “pop” of a stock market bubble on 12 June 2015. Subsequent stock market turbulence continued until early February 2016. During the first three months of the stock market slump, China was under significant scrutiny of Canadian newspapers, who framed China as the source of instability.

The consensus view was that the slump was a consequence of stocks being wildly overvalued at a time when the Chinese economy was losing steam. China is identified as a new “trouble spot.” The media speculated that individual investors, who were borrowing from brokers to buy securities, became the major reason of the market collapse. These small retail investors were described as “amateur,” “inexperienced,” and “panicky.” The prompt response of China's securities regulators to the market turbulence and the actions of People's Bank of China were assessed as effective but also criticized for failing to restore market confidence.

Reports highlight that China's economic slowdown and move towards a “new normal” was felt beyond its borders, having a negative impact on international trade flows and commodity prices. Media coverage framed China's economic slowdown as having an outsized negative impact on advanced economies, such as Canada. For this reason, the tone of the coverage was decidedly negative. Pointing to multiple and complex interdependence, Canadian media framed China as a threat and a source of challenges. In July and August, Canadian newspapers ran alarming stories about China's economy, with titles such as “The first cries of havoc”¹⁴, “Desperate measures in Beijing”¹⁵, “Commodities plunge amid fears of deeper Chinese slowdown”¹⁶, “Bloodletting on the stock markets”¹⁷, and “Economic crises all connected”¹⁸.

6.8%

China's economic growth in 2015

282%

China's debt to GDP ratio

150%

A rise of China's Shanghai Composite index between 2014 and 2015

32%

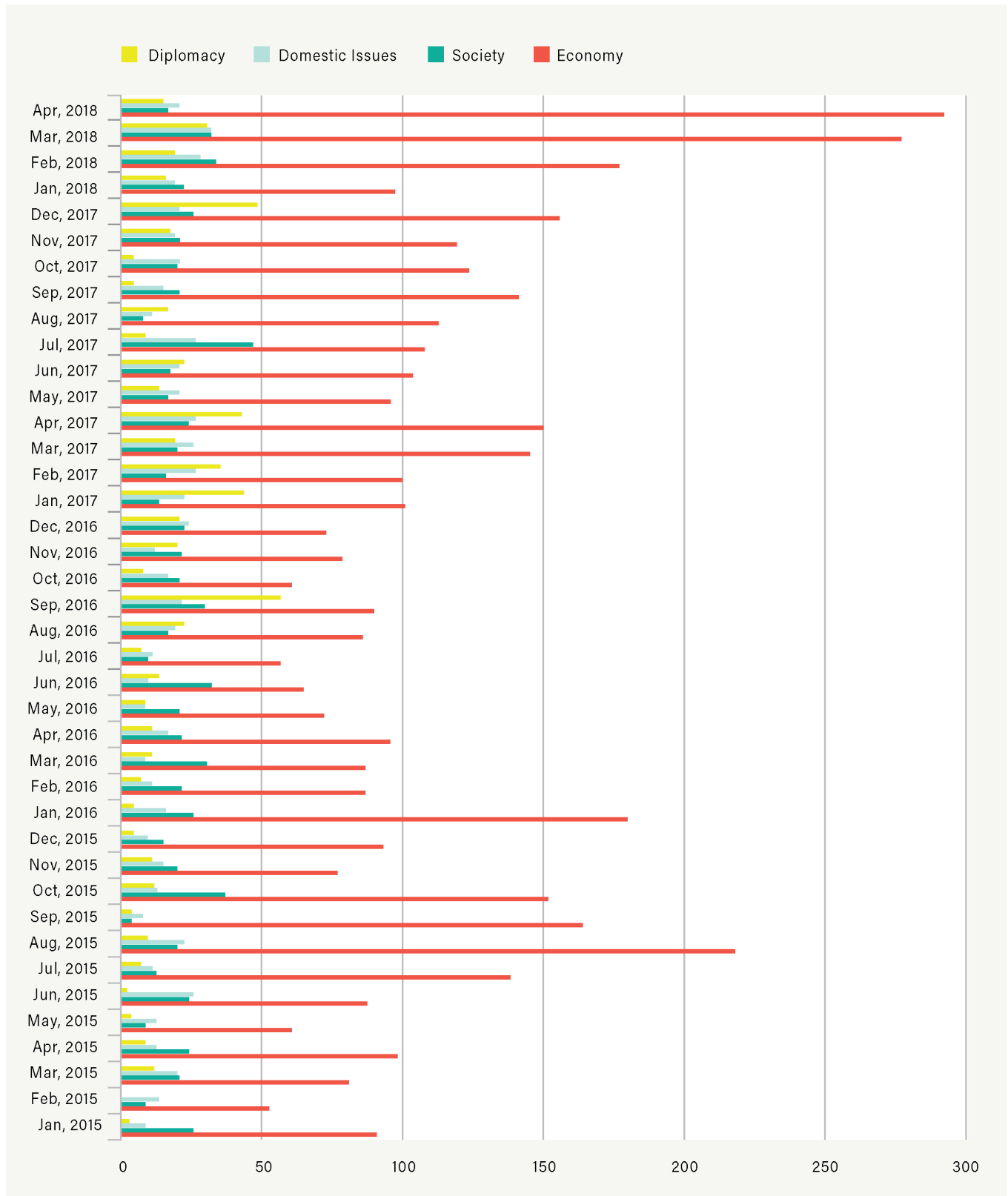
A decline in less than a month following the popping of the stock market bubble on 12 June 2015

Some observers argued that China will not be able to sustain high-speed growth because of the structural nature of the economic slowdown and multiple development bottlenecks (e.g. inefficient capital allocations and low-technology production). Most reports, however, converged on the idea that, despite a slowdown, the size and global impact of China's economy remain strong in absolute terms. Overall, China's economic troubles were identified as driven by transitory and cyclical factors rather than by fundamental weaknesses.

SNAPSHOT NO. 2: JUSTIN TRUDEAU'S VISITS TO CHINA AND FTA NEGOTIATIONS, 2016 AND 2017

On 30 August 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau started his first official visit in China. Canadian media closely followed this 10-day trip that was packed with business-related meetings, including the G20 Summit in Hangzhou. The reporting focused on Trudeau's China policy and the potential for an FTA with China. In August, China was most commonly framed as a “rising power.” In September, the number of

Figure 5. The four key themes: January 2015-April 2018



articles that framed China as an “opportunity” increased significantly. However, the key negative frame – “threat” – also markedly increased in coverage relating to China over these two months. Overall, all newspapers sampled, regardless their ideological inclinations, offered balanced coverage of Trudeau’s China trip, presenting a spectrum of diverse, multifaceted, complex, and often contradictory opinions about China and Canada-China rapprochement. In this case, media coverage converged with public opinion, with the latter being divided in 2017 over whether deepening economic ties with China would be beneficial for Canada¹⁹.

Back in 2013, Trudeau awkwardly expressed his admiration of China, stating that he respects China’s “basic dictatorship” for its ability to “turn [national] economy around on a dime”²⁰. Once in power, Trudeau and the Liberal Party demonstrated that they wanted to revive and deepen Canada-China relations, correcting what they saw as diplomatic omissions by Harper’s government. On the eve of Trudeau’s first trip to China, possible breakthroughs in the development of trade cooperation preoccupied the attention of Canadian media no less than the case of Kevin Garratt. Many articles anticipated that the Liberals’ fascination with a dynamic, innovative, growth-orientated, and competitive China would be transformed into a clear and coherent strategy that could help the Liberal government to reconcile political differences between China and Canada.

The media appeared to be supportive of strengthening ties with China, tending to frame China as an actor that makes rational decisions and follows a coherent market-based strategy, prioritizing economic growth and cooperation. The overarching idea was that Canada needs China more than China needs Canada. Against the background of increasing volatile Canada-US relations, China was portrayed as an indispensable trading partner for Canada. In this context, observers often pointed to China’s huge middle-class consumer market and rapidly growing energy needs as opportunities for Canadian businesses. Australian approach to China was described pragmatic and proactive and promoted as a model for Canada.

At the same time, Trudeau’s previously expressed respect for China’s “basic dictatorship” was frequently cited as an evidence of his inability and reluctance to pressure China to comply with international human rights norms and other ethical standards. Some journalists mocked Trudeau’s government for “pussyfooting” with China and warned the Prime Minister that “dictatorships don’t make good trading partners”²¹.

Among the major reasons to limit economic rapprochement with China and reject an FTA with it, many reports cited China’s economic espionage and reluctance to follow foreign laws. China was framed in such reports as a threat, and was described as a “selfish”, “unreliable”, and “untrustworthy” partner. The appropriateness of opening up Canadian market to China’s state-owned enterprises rose particularly strong concerns. Likewise, a number of observers cited heated public

debates about the 2012 Nexen-CNOOC deal, reminding that takeovers of Canadian firms by Chinese state-owned enterprises have proved highly controversial and subject to intense criticism. It is clear that the Nexen-CNOOC deal left many Canadians experts with distrust regarding Chinese investment, and overall there was significant coverage that conveyed apprehension of deepening political ties between Ottawa and Beijing.

Much reporting also focused on China’s poor environmental record, violations of human rights, and ineffective labour regulations. In this context, articles often turned to Canada’s role in defining international standards of human rights protection and Canada’s commitments to environmental protection. China was frequently portrayed as hostile to “core” Canadian cultural and political values; several journalists suggested that Canada’s economic rapprochement with China should be conditioned by its willingness to comply with Canadian standards.

Assessing the outcomes of Trudeau’s diplomatic mission, many observers praised him for putting “a fitting focus on soft power” and effectively using his “exceptional relationship-building skills to warm relations”²². The most cited line of Trudeau’s official statements during this China trip was his presentation of Canada as a country that stands up for its values: “We’re Canadians – we travel with our values and we don’t hesitate to share them whenever and wherever we see opportunities.” Most reports highlight these remarks as a sign of Trudeau being ready to take a strong stance on human rights. For example, in a report published by *Chronical Herald*, Trudeau’s “blunt” political statements were framed as being in line with Canadian best diplomatic traditions. Some observers, however, saw Trudeau’s strong human rights message as hypocritical and contradictory. For example, John Ivison, a political columnist for the *National Post*, described Trudeau’s remarks as “the thick coating of self-congratulation” that was “clearly aimed at a domestic audience” and reckoned that “the Trudeau Liberals are as bifurcated about China as were the Harper Conservatives.”²³

In sum, media coverage of Trudeau’s first visit to China and FTA talks reveals that in 2016 Canadian newspapers were cautious but optimistic about the long-term future of Canada-China economic cooperation and supported the warming of political relations with China. However, in December 2017, the tone of coverage shifted.

The 2012 Nexen-CNOOC takeover attracted broad and prolonged media and public scrutiny. In July 2012, the China National Offshore Oil Company’s (CNOOC) announced its intentions to purchase Nexen Inc. for a total bid of \$15.1 billion. The deal was soon accepted by Nexen. This news immediately captured the attention of experts and the media, as it was the largest energy deal ever for China and Canada. Continuing debates focused on the application of Canada’s foreign investment policies to foreign SCEs. In September 2012, under the pressure from the opposition, Stephen Harper’s government announced that it would review the deal under the 2002 Investment Canada Act. The review was eventually prolonged until the early December. Harper’s government eventually granted its approval to the Nexen-CNOOC takeover. However, while China was celebrating the purchase as an “important mutually beneficial step” in China-China relations, Harper made it clear that this deal was an exception rather than a beginning of a new trend.

Kevin Garratt, a Canadian Christian aid worker, was detained in China on espionage charges in 2014. Garratt was released in September 2016.

Despite earlier positive signals, Canada’s and China’s governments could not reach an agreement on moving forward with an FTA. This tension was in the background of Trudeau’s second trip to China. Covering Trudeau’s meetings with the Chinese at the end of 2017, reporters framed China as a rising power, increasingly aware of and ready to use its growing influence. Going through the list of China’s faults – state interventions in the economy, a poor environmental record, disregard for human rights and the rule of law, questionable labour practices and standards – Canadian newspapers portrayed China as a threat rather than an opportunity. The overarching message in the media construction of Canada-China relations was that if Canada’s China opportunities are to be realized, Trudeau’s government needs to make vigorous and determined efforts to balance Canadian values and economic interests, protecting the former and advancing the later. *The Globe and Mail* described Trudeau’s second China trip as “rocky,” doubting China’s willingness to meet Canada halfway. It also pronounced the coverage of Canada-China negotiations in Chinese media as “a continuing offensive against Canadian media” and an encroachment on the freedom of press²⁴.

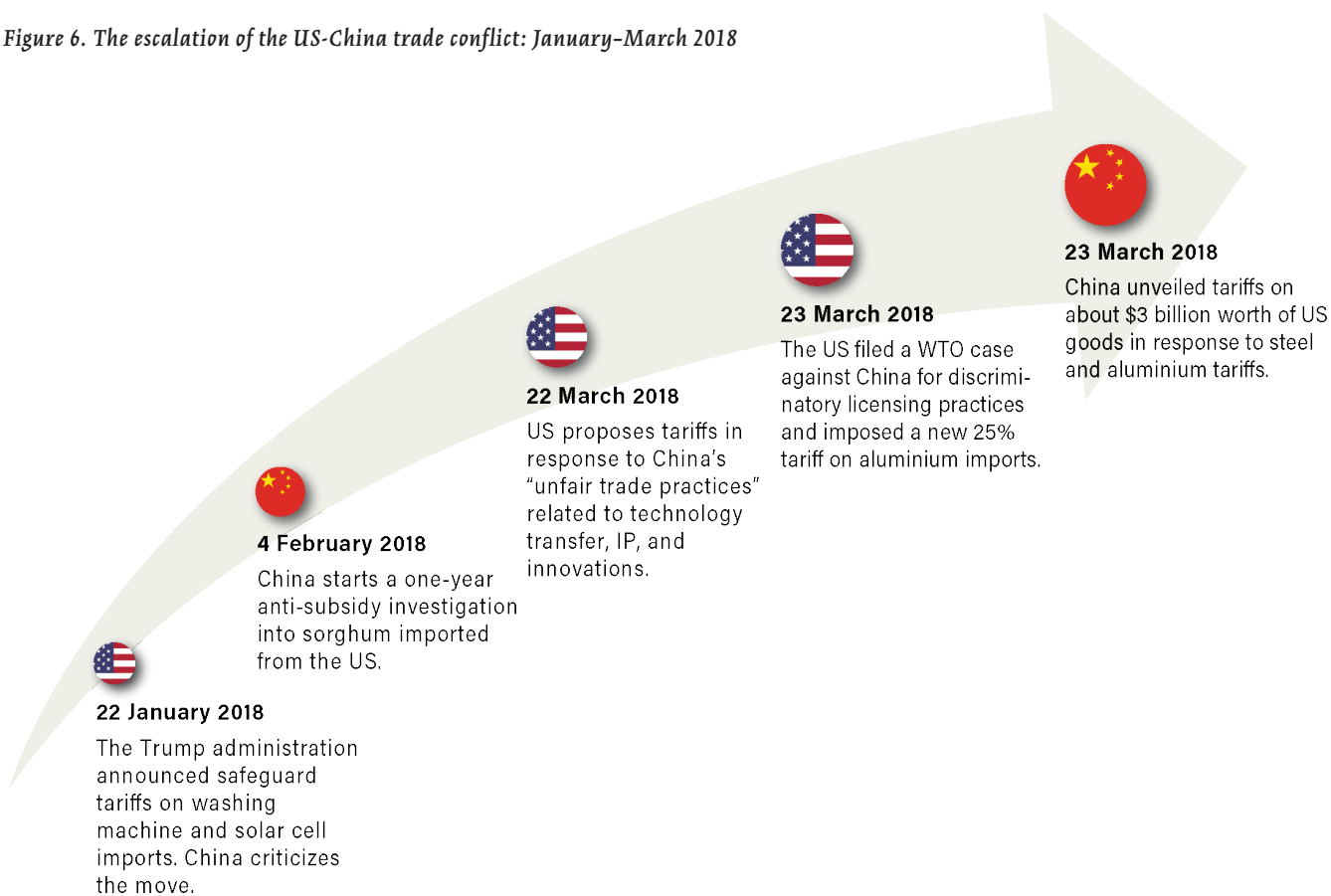
National Post’s vision was similarly grim, with its key reports titled “Canada hit impasse on trade” and “China won’t change for us”²⁵.

SNAPSHOT NO. 3: US-CHINA TRADE WAR, JANUARY-MARCH 2018

The US-China trade conflict that erupted at the beginning of 2018 (see Figure 4) sharpened the focus of Canadian media on China. However, 47% of articles that mentioned China between January and March 2018 focused specifically on the diplomatic and trade maneuvers of Trump’s administration. In this sense, the rapid increase in the volume of coverage is related to the Canadian media interest in the US rather than in China. All newspapers convey and reproduce anxiety about Trump’s trade war with the world and portray the US-China conflict as one of Trump’s many battles.

Reports discussed the three major reasons presented by Trump’s administration to justify its new aggressive trade policy: China’s large trade surplus against the US, China’s failure to comply with World

Figure 6. The escalation of the US-China trade conflict: January–March 2018



Trade Organization (WTO) commitments, and China's acquisition of US technology coupled with systematic violations of intellectual property rights. Questioning the legitimacy of these claims, newspapers pointed out that one of the fundamental causes of the US trade deficit is its persistent saving deficiency. At the same time, China has been positioned as an antagonist to the US and constructed as a challenger to US interests with an emphasis on America's lead in technology. Many reports supported accusations in breaching intellectual property rights and economic espionage against China and agreed that China still has significant room for improvement in terms of meeting its key WTO commitments.

Canadian newspapers provided a balanced and comprehensive coverage of the unfolding conflict and avoided taking sides in it. Overall, coverage recognized that Trump's claims to China are partially justified, but framed the US as a disruptor of the global economy and portrayed China as being forced to take a defensive position. The general view was that even though China's leaders would have preferred to evade confrontation with Trump, they are ready to fight a war of attrition and will strike back. As a result, many reports predicted that both sides - as well as the rest of the world - will incur heavy losses.

A substantial number of reporting focused on the estimation of collateral damage of US-China trade conflict and consequences experienced by Mexico, Canada, the European Union, and other American allies. In this context, Canada is portrayed as one of random victims of Trump's crusade against China. Discussing Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs, *The Globe and Mail's* political observer Campbell Clark argues that "Mr. Trump supposedly aimed this blow at China, but seems to have hit Canada, and in the process, he [is] shaking the world." Other journalists of *The Globe and Mail* describe these tariffs as "a key plank of the nationalistic platform that carried Trump to power."²⁶ Similarly, *National Post's* observers point out that the "tariff threat jolts the markets" and hurt all parties involved, including Canada and the US themselves.²⁷

Consequently, a bulk of the coverage was not about China but about what China is conceived to be by Trump and what Trump's tariff war on China conveys for American allies. Chinese thinking on trade and Chinese vision of the development of US-China relations are pushed to the very margins of the discussion and are not covered in detail.

CONCLUSION

The most striking feature of Canadian media coverage of China is its polarity. Canadian media portray China simultaneously as a source of threats and as a source of opportunities, as a rising power and as a country encountering serious challenges. Underlying images of China constructed by Canadian media often contradict each other. Stories about a clumsy and inept dictatorship run side-by-side with stories about a skillful modern state and new economic powerhouse. Overall, the tone of the coverage is negative, with China being framed as oppressive and following an unsustainable path of development.

Canadian media coverage of China is event-driven and reflects domestic rather than global concerns. Our analysis reveals a disproportionately high coverage of China's economic development and China-related business issues. All newspapers that were sampled are preoccupied with China's economic miracles and its growing influence in international markets. Media coverage focuses heavily on China's ongoing rise and recognizes China as a global player of consequence but also bluntly brings to the fore less favorable aspects of China's economic success and are quick to criticize the environmental and social costs that have accompanied China's development. Canadian media coverage also tends to focus deeply on the flaws of China's political system.

Chinese are Canada's third largest immigrant group, with an average of over 30,000 permanent residents admitted every year. As reported by 2016 Census of Population, Chinese Canadians stand at almost 1.5 million and represent one of the largest Asian ethnic group in the country. In the light of the growing Chinese diaspora, it is not surprising that domestic issues that involve China and Chinese nationals garner media attention. However, the majority of other references to Chinese nationals in Canadian media are only peripheral to the primary focus of the reporting. Only a small fraction of news stories directly addresses Chinese culture within Canada or concerns of Chinese Canadians.

A bulk of news stories focus on the increasing activity of Chinese investors in Canada. Specifically, many reports doubt the appropriateness of opening Canadian market to China's state-owned enterprises. In these regards, it is clear that the 2012 Nexen-CNOOC deal left many Canadians experts with a bad taste regarding Chinese investment in Canada's strategic economic sectors and a suspicion of deepening political ties between Ottawa and Beijing. Additionally, a significant number of articles discuss the role of Chinese investment in the development of Canadian housing markets with a distinct focus on metropolitan areas in British Columbia. Journalists link Chinese investors to housing affordability concerns and call for a robust

control over foreign ownership of residential property. While most of these reports are evidence-based and accurate, the singling out of buyers of Chinese heritage can lead to controversial cultural profiling. Specifically, portraying Canadian Chinese (Canadian citizens) as Chinese investors (foreign nationals) is worrying because it risks negative stereotyping of Chinese immigrants in Canada.

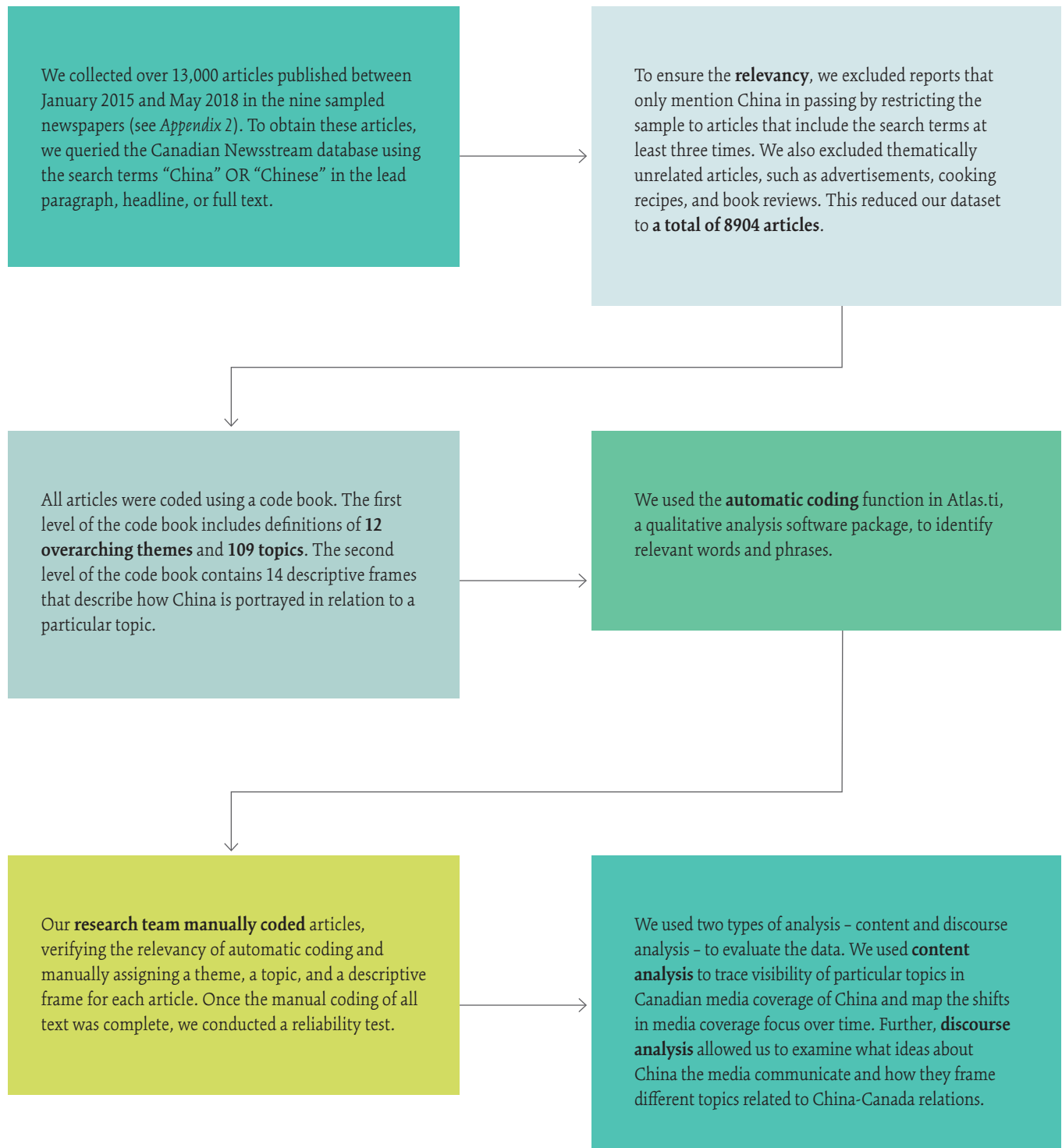
Despite the ambiguous and often contradictory interpretations of China's ongoing rise, all reporting on Canada-China relations vividly conveys the idea that a deeper engagement with China is not a choice but a necessity for Canada. While coverage focusses heavily on negative aspects of China's political rise, such as state interventions in the economy, a poor environmental record, disregard for human rights and the rule of law, and questionable labour practices and standards, Canadian newspapers frame China a troublesome but indispensable partner for Canada. Most reports supported Prime Minister Trudeau's agenda of deepening engagement with China, highlighting that his primary challenge will be balancing Canadian values and economic interests.

One of the most significant findings of this report is that Canadian media often look at China and its international relations through the prism of US-China relations. Particularly, China is frequently mentioned in reports on President Donald Trump's foreign policy initiatives. The coverage of US-China affairs often intersects with the coverage of the ongoing diplomatic processes taking place with North Korea and China's role in international nuclear politics. Many of these news stories are not about China or the development of US-China relations, but rather speculate on how President Trump views China, and what his China policy means for American allies. Importantly, all Canadian newspapers rely heavily on US-based news agencies for covering international issues and events involving China. They also cite extensively American sources, including media outlets, experts, and public officials. Canadian sources are often overshadowed in the discussion of international issues, with Canadian experts and public officials often invited to comment on domestic, rather than international, China stories.

In sum, Canadian media coverage of China in the media survey timeframe, January 2015 – May 2018, was polarized and limited, but unbiased. Canadian media avoided sensationalizing China's rise and remain open to pro-China voices. China coverage is driven by the actions of Canada's political elites, international flashpoints, and competition for readership rather than partisan logics or ideological preferences. The primary and overwhelming focus of

Canadian newspapers on economic and business issues coupled with relentless attention to American politics overshadows geopolitical, environmental, energy security, and sociocultural contexts of China's development, creating an informational vacuum that most probably filled with news content from the US. In this sense, Canadian newspapers provide a one-sided picture of China's development and miss the opportunity to present Canadian views on the political and social consequences of China's rise and China's relations with the world to Canadians.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY – DATA COLLECTING AND CODING



APPENDIX 2: SAMPLED NEWSPAPERS

GEOGRAPHY	NEWSPAPER	OWNERSHIP	CIRCULATION	COMMENTS
British Columbia	<i>The Vancouver Sun</i>	Postmedia Network	144,929	<i>Vancouver Sun</i> is the only daily broadsheet published in the most populous city of British Columbia. It is a moderately conservative newspaper.
Alberta	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	Postmedia Network	113,335	<i>Calgary Herald</i> is the only daily broadsheet published in Calgary, the most populous city in Alberta. In the context of Alberta, the newspaper has a moderate bias and a centrist editorial stance.
Saskatchewan	<i>Regina Leader-Post</i>	Postmedia Network	36,672	<i>Leader Post</i> is the only daily broadsheet published in Regina, the capital and the second-largest city in Saskatchewan. It has a conservative editorial bias.
Manitoba	<i>Winnipeg Free Press</i>	FP Newspapers Inc.	110,572	<i>Winnipeg Free Press</i> is the only daily broadsheet published in Winnipeg, the capital and most populous city in Manitoba. It is an independently owned newspaper and its political orientation often shifts depending upon the issue, the journalist, and the editor.
Ontario	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Torstar Corp.	342,527	<i>Toronto Star</i> is one of two daily newspapers published in Toronto, the provincial capital and Canada's largest city. The high circulation figures in Ontario give the Star the 2nd highest circulation figures of any Canadian newspaper. It is widely known for supporting socially liberal views.
Quebec	<i>Montreal Gazette</i>	Postmedia Network	91,241	<i>Gazette</i> is Canada's oldest continuously published newspaper and the only English-language daily broadsheet published in the city of Montreal, the most populous city in Quebec. The newspaper supports Canadian rather than Quebec nationalism.
Nova Scotia	<i>Chronicle Herald</i>	Halifax Herald Ltd.	91,490	<i>Chronicle Herald</i> is the only daily newspaper published in Halifax, the capital and most populous city of Nova Scotia. It is a flagship newspaper in the four Atlantic provinces and one of the oldest independent newspapers in Canada. It is conservative in bias and its reporting on many stories favors the right.
National	<i>National Post</i>	Postmedia Network	182,847	<i>National Post</i> is widely recognized as conservative in its views, and is known to craft its content to the more affluent political and business community and cater to a right-wing "highbrow" readership.
National	<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	Globe and Mail Inc.	358,187	<i>The Globe and Mail</i> is widely recognized as liberal and left wing in its political orientation and a supporter of Canadian federal nationalism. It is the single most circulated Canadian newspaper.

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