China frames: An Analysis of the Plenary Debates of the Dutch House of Representatives

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Master Thesis

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MA Asian Studies: Politics, Society and Economy of Asia

2021–2022

Submission date: December 11, 2021

Word count: 14900

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1. Introduction

For several decades, China has been an important trading partner for the Netherlands. In 2019, the Netherlands earned 4.6 billion euros from the export of manufactured products to China, which was 53 percent more than in 2015 (CBS 2021). In 2020, the export value of manufactures was expected to be even higher, based on the new figures reported by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (ibid.). At the same time, governments, civil society groups, and United Nations officials expressed growing concerns over the Chinese government's human rights violations in 2020 (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). Furthermore, the suspicion of Chinese espionage by hackers and international students raised worries about the security of Dutch companies and universities, as they suspected that advanced technological knowledge was used for Chinese military purposes (Schouten 2021; NOS 2021). Therefore, it is to be expected that Sino-Dutch trade relations and human rights and cybersecurity issues regarding China are frequently discussed topics in the Dutch House of Representatives (DHR). On top of that, as early as 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to the political agenda of the DHR. The fact that the outbreak of COVID-19 was officially declared by the World Health Organization as a global pandemic, which started on January 30, 2020, in the People's Republic of China, has drawn additional attention to China (WHO 2020).

This major "discursive event" of COVID-19 can significantly change the discourse on China (Schneider *forthcoming*, 103). Discourse is defined as a communicative event of written or oral language and consists of multiple discourse genres (Van Dijk 2008, 104). In this research, I will elaborate on the genre of "political discourse" and the way it is used in framing China. Framing is portraying an issue from one perspective, and excluding other perspectives, to affect the value of the issue (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104). Politicians often use frames to influence and manipulate the opinion of others and may reveal racist attitudes towards specific social groups (Van Dijk 1997, 41). Furthermore, journalists often mimic politicians' frames in the media, and thus may also affect public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007, 106).

In this study, I will answer the research question: "How is China framed in the plenary debates of the Dutch House of Representatives, and how have these China frames changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?". I will examine how politicians have framed China in the plenary debates of the DHR in the two years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2018–2019), and two years after (2020–2021).

This research is relevant because the way Dutch Members of Parliament (MPs) frame China, may have implications for The Netherlands, both on the international and national level.

On the one hand, it may affect the development of Sino-Dutch relations. In March 2021, for example, MP Sjoerdsma (D66) accused China's human rights violations on the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang as genocide. As a response, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) placed Sjoerdsma on China's sanction list (Schmidt 2021). A spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands also responded and stated that the so-called genocide in Xinjiang was fabricated by actors and actresses who were anti-China and spread these lies in various ways (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of the Netherlands 2021). On the other hand, how politicians frame China may have negative effects on the way China and the Chinese and Dutch-Chinese population are received in Dutch society. In the United States, for example, President Trump called the coronavirus the "Chinese Virus" (Moynihan and Porumbescu 2020). Increased discrimination and even violence arose against the Asian-American population, presumably as a result, and this development was denoted with the term "Asian hate" (Ibid.). In a Dutch news report, Asians in the Netherlands also indicated that they were increasingly insulted and threatened since the COVID-19 pandemic (Misérus 2020).

This research paper is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework of the main theories of political discourse and framing. Chapter 3 presents previous literature about framing China in the past ten years, and about the discourse on China since the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter 4, the methodology, I introduce the data collection procedure and the analysis model. Chapter 5 presents the results of the analysis. In Chapter 6, I discuss my findings concerning the existing literature and the key theories of this research. I will also mention the limitations of this research and recommendations for future research. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the conclusion and answers the research question. Overall, this study shows that China frames in the plenary debates of the DHR have become more negative since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and that the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in new China frames. This research contributes to the limited research that has been conducted on framing China in the Dutch political context.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter consists of the theoretical framework and introduces the theories of "Foucauldian discourse", "political discourse", and "framing in politics", which are important concepts for understanding and analysing the Dutch political discourse on China within the field of humanities.

2.1. Foucauldian discourse

In this study, the debates in the DHR about China are considered as a discourse in which ideologies, ideas, and opinions about China take shape. This perspective is mainly inspired by the French philosopher Michael Foucault (1926-1984), one of the most prominent scholars on discourse theory in the social sciences and humanities. Foucault (1970, 52) claims there is a strong relationship between language, knowledge, and power, and formulates the following hypothesis: "that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality". Furthermore, Foucauldian discourse argues that discourse is strongly linked to desire and power: "Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Ibid., 52–53).

Many scholars have elaborated on Foucault's vision of discourse. According to Fairclough (1992, 3–4), Foucault has contributed significantly to the development of discourse analysis in various social contexts that focus on languages, such as public discourse, media discourse, and political discourse. The main insights of Foucault principles and practices are summarised by Fairclough in the following quote (1992, 55–56):

1. the constitutive nature of discourse, i.e., discourse constitutes the social, including objects and social subjects;
2. the primacy of interdiscursivity and intertextuality, i.e., any discursive practice is defined by its relations with others and draws upon others in complex ways;
3. the discursive nature of power, i.e., the practices and techniques of modern "biopower" (e.g., examination and confession) are to a significant degree discursive;
4. the political nature of discourse, i.e., power struggle occurs both in and over discourse;
5. the discursive nature of social change - changing discursive practices are an important element in social change.

As Fairclough's fourth principle illustrates, Foucault was aware about power and the political aspect of discourse. However, Foucault does not provide a precise definition of the term "political discourse" or a practical research method to analyse power in political discourse (Fairclough 1992; Howarth 2000). Fairclough (1992, 50) argues that Foucauldian discourse analysis is rather an abstract approach than a practical one. In Foucault's archaeological and linguistic studies, questions about discourse and power are not included. Furthermore,

Fairclough (Ibid., 51) claims that within Foucault's analysis of political institutions, spoken and written language is not a central part of Foucault's discourse analysis, but rather the procedures through which discursive practices are socially controlled and constrained. Howarth (2000, 60) supports the view that Foucault's definition of discourse was only partly political. He observes a relationship between discourse and politics in Foucault's work on scientific discourse. However, Howarth argues that Foucault was more concerned with how political practices transformed the rules of formation of scientific discourse, rather than with defining political discourse itself.

2.2. Political discourse

Several academics have expanded on Foucault's ideas and proposed various definitions of the concept of political discourse. Randour, Perrez, and Reuchamps (2020, 428) examined 164 scientific articles over the last 20 years to investigate what the concept of political discourse itself encompasses. They conclude that in practice, political discourse is generally limited to the discourses of institutionalized politics and most specifically to oral monological speeches. Three of the most influential theories on political discourse are provided by Van Dijk (1997; 2008), Chilton (2004), and Wodak (2004), and provide different forms in which political discourse appears.

Van Dijk (1997, 18) focuses on the political production and function of political discourse, such as a speech, a debate, a political interview, or a policy document. He defines the context in which the practice of the discourse takes place as the decisive component for classifying political discourse. These are the participants and their actions, the political communicative events, and the setting (time, place, circumstances), occasions, intentions, functions, goals, and legal or political implications (Ibid., 14). According to Van Dijk (2008, 180), parliamentary debates are typical political because of the persuasive aspect, in which politicians take political positions, express their opinions and attack those of others within the framework of argumentative structures".

Chilton (2004, 4–5) also adheres to this tradition of western political thought, in which language and politics are fundamentally linked to each other. He applies political discourse to the governance of societies and shares Aristotle's vision that humans (whose nature is to live in a polis) are political animals from the origin and use speech to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, as well as what is just and what is unjust (Ibid., 201). Based on this, Chilton provides two propositions. Firstly, he suggests that political discourse operates indexically. This

means that the choice of language and its features can indicate political distinctions (e.g., a regional accent, words with political ideologies, informal or formal addressing). Secondly, Chilton argues that political discourse operates as an interaction, in which interruptions and overlaps exist. This may cause conflict or cooperation between persons or groups with different ideologies (Ibid.).

Wodak (2004, 381) also looks at political discourse as an interactive process, as "doing politics" covers decision making, negotiating, persuading, including, and excluding. However, she looks further than the political context in which political discourse takes place. She believes that political discourse exists in different levels of communications, such as macro-and micro levels, and different levels of discourses, such as in official, semi-official, virtual as well as private spaces (Ibid.). She suggests that political discourse can be any talk or textual output about a political subject. For example, Wodak (2009) investigates the way politicians "do" politics in the micro-level interaction of day-to-day work within the halls of the European Parliament.

A specific genre within political discourse is parliamentary discourse. The characteristics of the parliamentary discourse have been described by several authors. Van Dijk (1997, 10) suggests that parliamentary debates are controlled by structures of organization, control, and power. These structures determine what can or should be said in the parliament, and how this can or should be formulated in this social situation. Van Dijk (2004, 368; 2008, 247) suggests that the most important aspect of parliamentary discourse is the political context of the parliamentary debate. These are the overall domain (politics), global action (legislation), setting (House of Parliament), current action (speech), participants (speakers), goals (defend, attack, discredit), knowledge (general, political). During the parliamentary debate, the chairman of the House of Representatives is mainly in control of the situational criteria, and MPs must adapt their text and talk within these elements of the context (Van Dijk 1997, 165).

Chilton (2004, 92) also investigates the structures within parliamentary debates and focuses on the sub-genre "parliamentary questions". He argues that parliamentary questions enable MPs to pose questions and receive replies, but institutionalised procedures and discursive devices may vary per country. Chilton specifically analyses the institutional rules of the parliamentary questions in the British parliament and discovers several institutional procedures. Firstly, the current British system for parliamentary questions consists of an institutionalised turn-taking system, in which "Members put a ritual question, followed by a 'supplementary' question that has not been tabled in advance" (Ibid., 93). Secondly, rule books on parliamentary law and practice, and three kinds of discursive practices, regulate the sub-

genre of parliamentary questions on form and content (Ibid., 94). Finally, within the transcripts of parliamentary debates (Hansard), utterances of speakers, such as mistakes and hitches in ongoing discourse, are corrected or repaired (Ibid., 95). Like Chilton, Fairclough, and Fairclough (2012, 202–3) investigate the structures within the British parliament but focus on the characteristics of the procedural matters in which the parliamentary debates take place. They argue that parliamentary discourse is mostly about the activity of convincing the other participants, to let them accept a particular political discourse, and finally resolve a disagreement towards decision making. This all happens in the structure of eight stages: open, inform, propose, consider, revise, recommend, confirm, and close.

To analyse the discourse in parliamentary debates, Chilton (2004, 198) introduces a framework for Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). PDA investigates the relationship between language ability and political ability. Chilton suggests that his framework is useful for analysing the interactive aspects of parliamentary discourse, i.e., micro-conversations between politicians, interactions between political parties in parliament, and the addressing of political leaders to the public. Furthermore, it allows analysts to uncover how social groups control or distort language to defend their position. The goal of Chilton's PDA framework is to reveal how human interactions and, as a consequence, representations emerge in the process of linguistic communication (Ibid., 197–8).

Although Chilton developed a specific model to analyse political discourse, Van Dijk (1997; 2008) argues that a PDA only distinguishes itself from other types of discourse analysis models because of the political aspect. He claims: "Once we have analyzed the particular properties of political contexts, political discourse analysis in many respects will be like any other kind of discourse analysis" (Ibid. 1997, 24). Furthermore, Van Dijk (2008, 85) explains that PDA stems from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which developed in the field of critical linguistics in the 1970s. CDA views language as a social practice and investigates how power abuse, dominance, and inequality are performed, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in a particular social context. CDA is often used to analyse discourse in political contexts. Therefore, Van Dijk (Ibid.) argues that for the analysis of political discourse, no specific PDA discourse model is needed

Schneider (*forthcoming*, 79) provides a toolbox for discourse analysis that applies to the analysis of political communication, in particular texts. The toolbox "Cheat sheet: discourse analysis work steps", consists of three stages which include the formulation of a research question (stage 0), the setup of the discourse analysis (stage 1), and the implementation of the discourse analysis (stage 2). Schneider illustrates that words have power in political

communication, and therefore word choice has implications for the understanding of the text: "Words invite us to think about and understand the world around us in certain ways. They evoke associations and prompt emotional reactions" (Ibid., 89). To analyse and understand word use and word choice, stage 2 of Schneider's model identifies cultural references (intertextuality) and linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms, which is useful to recognize relevant word groups that push a specific frame onto the text.

2.3. Framing in politics

Social theorist Gofman (1974, 560) introduces the concept of "framing" to indicate that what we perceive as real, is only a perceived reality. He suggests that a frame is not fixed and changes due to interactions and interests of the participants who may blur, change, or confound it (Ibid., xiv). A frame is rather a metaphor for a background, setting, or context, in which the production of meaning is governed by unstated rules or principles (Ibid., xiii). Kahneman and Tversky (1981, 453) apply Gofman's framing theory to a psychological experiment to investigate how decisions are made. The results show that the way someone frames an outcome of a problem (about money, time, or number of lives) has an impact on the decision maker's choice. Based on this, Kahneman and Tversky (Ibid., 457) argue that framing governs the perception of an audience and can change the person's preference for an outcome. With that said, they express concerns about the fact that people use framing to intentionally manipulate a situation as an instrument of self-control.

Entman (1993, 53) designates framing as the processes of selection and salience (i.e., highlighting) and shares Kahneman and Tversky's concerns. He argues that framing also plays a major role in political communication and the exertion of political power because politicians communicate frames to construct an argument about problems, their causation, evaluation, and/or solution. He also believes that the effects of framing have consequences in political communication, as politicians often use framing to seek support from their audience. They are thus compelled to compete in framing political issues, and with journalists over news frames (Ibid., 55). Van Dijk (1997, 38–9) also mentions the negative effects of framing in politics and argues that negative representations of the "other" may contribute to the reproduction of racism in societies, especially through the mass media. He claims that the analysis of parliamentary discourse is relevant as it reveals a politician's bias or view about a given subject, not only by focusing on what is being said but on the way it is said. Therefore, discourse analysis can reveal xenophobic, racist, or Eurocentric attitudes towards social groups (Ibid., 41).

Druckman (2001) and Chong and Druckman (2007) mention the negative effects of framing by politicians. They argue that politicians use framing to mobilize voters behind their policies by highlighting certain features of the policy and by encouraging them to think along particular lines (Chong and Druckman 2007, 106). Politicians often adopt frames from other politicians or the media, and the media mimics those used by politicians, which may influence and manipulate public opinions (Druckman 2001, 1041; Chong and Druckman 2007, 109). In response to this, Druckman (2001, 1061) investigates the credibility of the frame's source to find out whether politicians face limitations of framing to influence and manipulate their audience. He discovers that the intentions of politicians are not to manipulate citizens, but rather that citizens commit themselves to credible elites for guidance systematically and consciously, over which politicians have no influence.

To understand how frames in communication affect public opinion, Chong and Druckman (2007, 106) recommend conducting an inductive research approach to identify frames in political communication. They show that a frame in communication relates to a specific issue, event, or political actor, and therefore this issue is identified first. Then, to understand how frames influence public opinion, it is needed to define the attitude of the frame. To create a coding scheme, the researcher first identifies a sample of frames for an issue inductively. Once an initial set of (predetermined) frames is identified, the researcher selects the research material for the analysis. Eventually, the researcher codes the research material (Ibid., 106–8).

Specifically for categorizing frames, Boydstun et al. (2013, 4–5) provide a resource for pre-determined issue-specific frame dimensions. This "Policy Frames Codebook" applies to any policy issue and in any communication context, such as newspapers, social media, and political debates. The Codebook distinguishes 14 issue-specific frames: economic frames, capacity and resources frames, morality frames, fairness and equality frames, constitutionality and jurisprudence frames, policy prescription and evaluation frames, law and order, crime and justice frames, security and defense frames, quality of life frames, cultural identity frames, public opinion frames, political frames, and external regulation. Just like Chong and Druckman, Boydstun et al. (2013, 6) advise researchers to determine the tone (the attitude) of the text among positive, negative, and neutral tones. They suggest that the "Policy Frames Codebook" is a structure that leaves many options for the researcher to use in the context of any research program.

3. China frames: a literature review

This chapter provides an overview of recent studies that investigated how China has been framed by various discourses outside China. The review consists of studies that were conducted between 2015–2021, some including the event of the COVID-19 pandemic. The studies were carried out in the fields of media- and communication, geopolitics, history, sociology, and interdisciplinary studies. Scholars identified different "China frames" by analysing written text, spoken text, and images, produced by official discourses, expert discourses, and media discourses. The articles represented various countries' perspectives, including Australia, Belgium, British Columbia, Central and Eastern Europe, The Netherlands, Russia, Uganda, the U.K., and the U.S.

3.1. Framing China's rise

Within the past 40 years, China's economy experienced rapid economic growth. As a result of China's reform and opening in 1978–79, China's gross domestic product (GDP) grew above 10 percent per year from 1978 to 2006 (Naughton 2018, 20). These economic developments within China changed the way China is portrayed in the literature.

On the one hand, China's rise has resulted in positive China frames. Golan and Lokito (2015, 764) analysed the U.S. newspapers *New York Times* and *Wallstreet Journal* between 2011–2013 and found that *NYT* articles about China's rise portray China mostly as "an equal economic partner". Lams (2016, 148) also recognised that Belgian and Dutch newspapers, between 2012–2013, referred to China as "the leading economic actor in the world". In the analysis of the two Ugandan daily newspapers *New Vision* and *Monitor*, published between 2013–2014, Nassanga and Makara (2016, 21) discovered that in the articles on Chinese engagement, the press portrayed China often as "a benevolent nation". Zhang and Wu (2017, 29) specifically analysed the perception of China's One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR) (a.k.a. Belt and Road Initiative) in the U.K. in the *Financial Times* and showed that China's rise was portrayed as "having a significant impact on the global economy" (Zhang and Wu 2017,). Xu (2018, 152) analysed 29 magazine covers of the U.S. *Time* magazine and noticed that China's national image gradually shifted to positive over time, between 2001–2014, from "a developing country" to "a hero or a saviour of the world".

Positive China frames were found not only in the mainstream media but also in other discourses on China. McCarthy and Song (2018, 323) suggested that in Australian public discourse, the narrative about China's rise was positively received as "a sign of it [China]

joining the capitalist world system". Furthermore, Chen and Gunster (2019, 445) investigated British Columbia's alternative public sphere (i.e., independent media and progressive non-governmental organisations) between 2012–2017 and found that China was portrayed as "an ambitious global leader in renewable energy and tackling climate change". Li (2020, 117–9) investigates the representation of China and Chinese people in TV commercials and concludes that China in the U.S. was depicted in three relatively positive ways, as "a conversation partner in the cybernetic world", "a complex blend of tradition and modernity", and as "the language of the modern world". Finally, Kolosov and Zotova (2021, 21) compared Russia's official, expert, and media discourse on the Sino-Russian relationship, and showed that Russia's official and media discourses were both optimistic and depicted China as "the great eastern neighbour".

At the same time, China's rise in the global economy also caused concerns and resulted in various negative China frames. Golan and Lokito (2015, 758) found that, in the *New York Times* op-eds section, China was framed as "filled with internal strife", referring to China's economic struggles. In the *Wall Street Journal*, China was continuously negatively framed as "a geopolitical threat" and "an economic threat". Lams (2016, 148) also recognised that articles written by China correspondents and foreign news desks in the Belgian and Dutch news reports were more critical about China and depicted China as "an (unreliable) economic rival". Furthermore, Nassanga and Makara (2016, 21) observed that China's lack of transparency, its marginalisation of local companies, and China's low quality of products were recurring stories in the Ugandan dailies. Zhang and Wu (2017, 40) noticed that in the *Financial Times,* China's OBOR initiative also created negative images of China as "an aggressive", "an authoritarian state", "a militant obstructive force", and as "a geopolitical threat".

Ooi and D'Arcangelis (2017, 270), who examined news media and political rhetoric in economic and security areas between 1990–2017, discovered three negative China frames: "China as cheat" (currency squabbles), "China as a thief" (cyber battles), and "China as a lawless bully" (maritime disputes). Yang (2017) also investigated the political and media discourse during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, 2010 U.S. midterm elections, 2012 U.S. presidential election, and 2014-2015 Chinese cyber espionage controversy. She argued that American journalists often constructed an image of China as "a political threat" to the world position of the U.S.

McCarthy and Song (2018, 323) found that the Australian public discourse on China was infused with a global "Changst" [China angst]. Within this discourse, China's rise was seen as a threat regarding Chinese capital investment projects and the inflow of Chinese international students on Australian campuses. Xu (2018, 153) noticed that China's national images on the

U.S. *Time* magazine covers were filled with dual identities and contradictions, such as "a threatening China versus a friendly China", "a collectivistic China versus an individualistic China", and "a capitalist China versus a communist China". Chen and Gunster (2019, 443) also found a negative attitude in British Columbia's alternative public sphere regarding China's economic activities, in which China was portrayed as a "powerful foreign entity that exerts influence on Canada's economic policies and decisions on energy infrastructure".

Li (2020, 110–6) showed that German TV commercials portrayed China as "an exotic and inconceivable project", "between ancient wisdom and contemporary intellectual property theft", and as "a relic of the German colonial imagination". Han and Marwecki (2020, 9) analysed mainstream German books and articles between 2004–2014 to explore the German discourse on the rise of China. They suggested that book titles, including terms such as "subjugation", "uncanny rise", and "attacks", all could be considered as "China Threat" literature. Finally, Kolosov and Zotova (2021, 11) observed a large gap between Russia's official and media discourse and the expert discourse, of which the latter was sceptical and expressed concerns about China's growing global ambitions, not only in Russia but also in other regions.

Strikingly, most studies concluded that the negative China frames were more dominant than the positive frames. Golan and Lokito (2015, 765) explained that more negative views on China were presented in the *NYT* and *WSJ* due to the newspapers' op-ed function as a platform for critical discussion, and because of the *WSJ*'s conservative organizational world view. Moreover, Lams (2016, 152) concluded that Belgian and Dutch articles were often written by critical China correspondents and foreign news desks. Zhang and Wu (2017, 40) argued that the doubtful and uncertain relation with China regarding the OBOR resulted in Britain's negative view of China. In addition, Xu (2018, 138) declared that China's national images on the U.S. magazine covers were more negative because the American view on China was connected to the western stereotypical image of "China as a threat". Chen and Gunster (2019, 446) argued that in British Columbia's alternative media, China was more often framed negatively, especially because of China's contractionary views in the field of environmental politics.

From the historical perspective, studies showed that negative images of China were more dominant because China's image was related to Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Eurocentrism and Orientalism assumes that writings related to Asia are the result of Western colonial powers who produced discourses about Asia to serve their political and economic objectives in the East (Boden 2016, 126). In these discourses, China was often portrayed as a

distinct, non-western "Other", and a potential enemy. The circulation of these western, anti-Asian discourses resulted in terms such as "Yellow Peril", "Red Menace", and anti-communist stories (Boden 2016; Ooi and D'Arcangelis 2017; Yang 2017; Han and Marwecki 2020). Yang (2017) called these historical representations "memory frames", which were attached to China from the late nineteenth century through to the Cold War and into the present.

Li (2020, 107) agreed and showed that Germany's China frames were influenced by European Orientalist worldviews. However, the American image of China was related to both the past Chinese immigration in the U.S. and the current increasing globalisation in China. McCarthy and Song (2018, 325) also argued that the Australian anxiety frame on China both consisted of the longstanding fear of a large amount of Chinese capitalist investments in Australia and the contemporary anxiety towards China's economic rise.

In two studies, the concept of Eurocentrism was not applicable. In the context of Uganda and Russia, China's rise was mainly framed positively or neutrally, rather than negatively. The results of Nassanga and Makara's (2016, 30) study showed that 36% of articles about Chinese engagement were positive, 45% neutral, and only 19% of the articles portrayed China negatively. They argued this on the fact that most news about China covers diplomatic relations were published by *New Vision*, a partial government-owned newspaper. Kolosov and Zotova (2020, 20) suggested that Russia's optimistic discourse on China was dominant because the media discourse derived from Russia's state-federal TV, which corresponded to the official discourse. Russia's official discourse on China aimed to strengthen relations and create mutual benevolences with China (Russia's "pivot to the East" strategy).

From the above-mentioned literature, I gained several insights. First, most research on framing China is related to the examination of media discourse, and few focus on political discourse. Secondly, positive China frames portray China mostly as a global economic power or partner, and negative China frames depict China as a geopolitical or economic threat. Thirdly, whether a China frame is positive, negative, or neutral, is related to the producer and its view on China within the official discourse, expert discourse, or media discourse (e.g., state/independent media, progressive/conservative, expert, opinion writer). Finally, China frames are produced in different historical, social-economic, cultural-political, and racial contexts.

3.2. Discourse on China since the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the discourse on China became more negative. To explain this, several scholars have examined the discourse on China before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Feng 2021; McCourt 2021; Kavalski 2021). Other scholars investigated the term "Chinese Virus", which was established by right-wing politicians and media pundits during the COVID-19 pandemic (Luckhorst 2020; Jones 2020).

The term "Chinese Virus" was first used by Trump himself in March 2020 to claim that the outbreak of COVID-19 originated in China (Luckhorst 2020, 54). Luckhorst (2020) and Jones (2020) both investigated the origins of the term "Chinese Virus" and asserted that the term was related to discourses of the outbreak of the deadliest diseases, and the Yellow Peril discourse. The discourses of the outbreak of the deadliest diseases fitted in Louis Pasteur's "germ theory of disease" of the 1850s. Such as the existing narratives about the global diseases of Ebola and AIDS, there were various discourses about the outbreak of COVID-19, of which the following became the dominant one: "And so it was that Covid-19 seems to have jumped the species barrier, crashing through our permeable membranes, possibly following the consumption of bat meat from a market in Wuhan" (Jones 2020, 43). According to Jones (Ibid.), this geographical origin was brought together with a long history of "Asian or Asiatic influenza viruses". Similarly, Luckhorst (2021, 55) argued that the "contagion's outbreak narrative" assumed that diseases were coded as a foreign invasion, often embodied by a single, humiliated (Chinese) migrant.

Secondly, the Yellow Peril discourse was first coined in 1895, when Kaiser Wilhelm II used the term Yellow Peril to form an alliance of Europe against the threat of *Die Gelbe Gefahr* (The Yellow Danger) (Luckhorst 2021, 60; Jones 2021, 44). In the years hereafter, the Yellow Peril circulated in various novels and movies as a stereotypical "Asian supervillain" character. One well-known example is Fu Manchu, who was characterized as "a plague, a disease, or a cancer infecting every corner of the world" (Luckhorst 2021, 60). According to Luckhorst (2020) and Jones (2020), these global disease and Yellow Peril representations retrieved the former fear and hatred towards China, but also resulted in new racist theories and discourses towards China, such as American economist Peter Navarro claimed in July 2020 that the Chinese government fabricated a "China Virus" as a bioweapon (Jones 2020, 42 and 47).

In contrast to the discourses of the outbreak of the deadliest diseases and the Yellow Peril from the past, other scholars related the increased negativity towards China since the COVID-19 pandemic to the recent tense relations with China. Kavalski (2021, 80) suggested that the representation of the "Other", and the long-established tropes of a "yellow fear" did not

apply in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the discourse on China after the COVID-19 pandemic. He analysed media representations of China and the COVID-19 pandemic in CEE media (newspapers, TV and radio, social media, blogs, and online advocacy) between 2012–2021 and presented two findings. First, in CEE media, perceptions of China were incorporated into the localization of China (domestic narratives about China), which resulted in more negativity in existing tensions and perceptions of China's lack of democracy, rule of law, and human rights violations. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, CEE media reflected a growing vigilance about Beijing's intentions in the region (Kavalski 2021, 79). Secondly, Kavalski's (Ibid.) results showed that suspicious views on China in CEE media were already present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Hong Kong protests of 2019 (ibid., 79). Thus, in the CEE region, both before and after the pandemic, growing negative attitudes towards China were found, which the COVID-19 merely accelerated.

In the U.S., Feng (2021) and McCourt (2021) also observed a clear negative shift in the American political discourse on China from 2017, when the Obama administration shifted to the Trump administration. Both argued that from Trump's administration, the U.S. China policy changed into a harsh discourse towards China, which was already distributed into the media and public since his presentational campaign in 2016. Speeches of Trump, in which he referred to China as a "stealer", "bully", and "bad player", and the COVID-19 pandemic, added up to the already existing conflicts between the U.S. and China, such as the South China Sea dispute and the U.S.–China trade war (Feng 2021, 138; McCourt 2021, 648). In addition, Feng (Ibid., 130) and McCourt (Ibid.,) noticed that Trump's administration used the COVID-19 pandemic to denounce China in the U.S. by blaming the "Chinese Virus" on Beijing.

In conclusion, the impact of COVID-19 on the discourse on China has been explained from two angles. Luckhorst (2020) and Jones (2020) looked for a historical explanation of China's negative image and indicated that the meaning the of Yellow Peril not only changed through time and context but also the sentiment itself resulted in new terms, such as the "Chinese Virus". Feng (2021), McCourt (2021), and Kavalski (2021) searched for a more recent explanation for the negative discourse on China. They argued that the discourse towards China become more negative due to existing conflicts that already existed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Methodology

The methodology consists of four procedures. First, the data collection, in which I select the transcripts of plenary debates about China between 2018–2021. Secondly, the completion of the analysis model with the necessary data. Thirdly, a framing analysis to reveal "issue-specific" China frames. Finally, a discourse analysis to discover how the China frames are linguistically constructed.

4.1. Data collection

For the data collection, I use the database of the official website of the DHR, "Tweedekamer.nl". This website provides the agendas and supporting documents for plenary and committee meetings and is produced by the DHR' Communications Department (Tweede Kamer, n.d.). The selection of the research material consists of four criteria. First, the research object consists of a plenary debate of the DHR. A plenary debate is held if at least 76 MPs of all 150 members of the DHR are present in the Plenary Hall, which provides a representative view of the Dutch political discourse (Ibid.). Second, the report of the plenary debate must be published between January 1, 2018, and September 1, 2021. This period is selected because it includes the period of two years before and after the specific event of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Schneider (*unpublished*, 103), a "discursive event" can significantly shift the discourse on a certain topic, in this case, China. Thirdly, the topic of conversation is China. Because the search engine of the Tweedekamer.nl database does not provide a function to filter on topic, I will use the keywords "China" and "Chinese" to select the data. To select only the plenary debates that are useful for this study, the fourth criteria is implied, namely, only the debates are included that cover at least one statement about China. A statement consists of one or more sentences and should include a clear frame of "China" or "Chinese".

4.2. Analysis Model

From the data collection of the plenary debates, I transfer all the statements about China from the transcripts into my own analysis model (Appendix 1). My analysis model consists of eight elements: date, speaker and position, subject, statement, issue-specific frame, intertextuality, linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms, and tone. The first three elements of the analysis model provide information about the production of the statement: the date (element 1), the ideological position of the speaker (element 2), and the social relevance of the statement, the topic of the debate (element 3) (Schneider: stage 2, step 2). Although this analysis does not unpack the

complex political field in the Netherlands, the results provide references to the date of the debate, the name of the MP, and the certain political affiliation.

The fourth element consists of the statements that politicians made about China during the plenary debates. The fifth element is the "issue-specific" frame, which contains the dimension from which the statement is made. To discover the issue-specific frames, I will use an inductive research approach, which means that I move several times through the transcripts of the plenary debates and code the statements with labels. I used the Policy Frames Codebook, which provides 14 frame pre-determined dimensions for policy issues, as a guideline to label the issue-specific frames (Boydstun 2013, 4–5). From the Codebook, I will adopt a predetermined frame if it matches the perspective of the statements in my research, adjust the frame, or if needed, I will introduce a new issue-specific frame. The sixth and seventh element of my analysis model consists of intertextual references, such as references to other sources (element 6), and grammar, word choices and -groups that impose a particular China frame (element 7) (Schneider: stage 2, step 7 and 8).

Finally, I will track the tone of each text, which I indicate as positive, negative, or neutral, based on the issue and the word choice of the producer of the statement. A positive tone portrays a favorable image of China, whereas a negative tone shows conflict or an unfavorable image of China. However, a neutral tone is designated if the statement portrays both positive and negative tones to balance out each other or portrays China neither positively nor negatively (Boydstun et al. 2013, 6).

5. Research Findings

This chapter describes the context of the DHR in which the plenary debates took place and presents the issue-specific China frames that were identified within the plenary debates.

5.1. Context of the Dutch House of Representatives

The meeting of all 150 members of the DHR is called a plenary debate. The chairman presides over the plenary debate, which is held in a large meeting room, the plenary room. If at least 76 Members of Parliament (MPs) are present in the DHR, a plenary debate may be held. This is half of 150 MPs plus one and is called the quorum. Before the plenary debate takes place, a specialist subject, such as human rights, is often first discussed in a committee of several MPs. When the subject is discussed plenary, only the spokespersons of the committee are present. A debate always follows a fixed pattern. First, the spokespersons of the political parties have their

say. The minister or state secretary responds to this, which is called the first term. If not all questions have been answered within the predetermined time, a second, or a third term follows. The DHR takes decisions by voting on a subject after discussion in the plenary debate (Tweede Kamer, n.d.).

5.2. Results within the issue-specific frames

In the period 2018–2019, a total of 217 plenary debates were held of which 73 debates discussed topics about China. In 2020–Sept. 2021, there were 163 debates held of which 71 debates were about China (Appendix 2). The analysis model was completed with the data from these 144 plenary debates of the entire period. From these plenary debates, I identified a total of 23 China frames in the seven issue-specific frames of economy, geopolitics, security, human rights, climate, and health (Appendix 3). For each issue-specific frame, I described how China was portrayed based on the topics that were discussed, intertextuality, word choice, and the tone of the statements. In the sections below I present the results for the period 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 separately.

5.2.1. Economic frames

Economic frames were used to portray China's economic relations between China and The Netherlands, but also China's international economic practices.

In 2018–2019, I identified three topics in which China was framed either positively, negatively, or neutrally. The first topic was Dutch trade missions to China, which proved to be of great value for The Netherlands according to the Dutch politicians and ministers. Graus (PVV) used the saying "In China they fight each other over our milk powder, because of our food safety and knowledge –April 5, 2018)" to frame China as "an important trade partner" with consumers for Dutch products. This frame was repeated several times, especially concerning the Sino-Dutch veal deal, and expressed a positive tone about the economic aspects of trade missions to China. Chinese investments were a second topic in which economic frames were present. China was portrayed as "a big investor", which resulted in both negative and positive frames. In the negative frames, Buitenweg (GroenLinks) expressed the fear that critical infrastructures, such as ports and nuclear power stations, would "fall into Chinese hands –March 28, 2019". A positive statement was made by Prime Minister (PM) Rutte about the relation with China and the increasing Chinese foreign investments in Europe, such as the BRI, that also offered

"opportunities –March 28, 2019" for The Netherlands. The third topic in which China was economically framed, negatively, was about the level of economic playing field with China. Dutch politicians portrayed China as "an unfair economic competitor", highlighting the unfair trade practices and unfair competition from China. For example, in 2018, Van den Berg (CDA) stated that "Reciprocity seems to be lacking in China at the moment –April 12, 2018". Also in 2019, this frame was repeated in multiple debates. Koopmans (VVD) stated that "China can be a threat to Dutch entrepreneurs and the jobs of the Netherlands –November 13, 2019", Aartsen (VVD) mentioned: "The Chinese are evading our security requirements and our import duties, thereby evading their responsibility –November 14, 2019", Van Haga (Van Haga) argued: "State aid is prohibited here, but the Chinese government sponsors Chinese companies on a large scale –November 26, 2019", and Minister Kaag (Foreign Affairs) stated: "Unfair competition is caused by Chinese companies that receive market-distorting state aid –November 11, 2019". These negative statements were often followed by a call to action. In the debate of November 14, 2019, Aartsen (VVD) expressed: "I think that the State Secretary should hold the Chinese parties accountable for their responsibilities so that we get a level playing field for Dutch entrepreneurs, and Graus (PVV) stated: "I think we should take a stronger and tougher stance towards the Chinese". In another debate, Minister Kaag (Foreign Affairs) announced: "We also want, for example, an adjustment of the status of China as a developing country –November 28, 2019".

In 2020–2021, the three economic China frames from 2018–2019 were repeated in the plenary debates. The statements that were made dealt with the same topics, such as China's need for high-quality products from the Netherlands, unfair competition due to Chinese state support, and China's investments in Europe, in which the tone of the frames did not change. In addition, two new economic frames were found. The first new frame was China as "a risky country for (Dutch) entrepreneurs". With this frame, Minister Kaag (Foreign Affairs) announced that the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) would offer advice for companies, local authorities, and knowledge institutions about the risks of doing business in and with China –December 2, 2020. The second frame was China as "a producer of vital products" on which The Netherlands is too dependent. As an illustration, in the debates of 2020, MPs Amhaouch and Heerma (CDA), Aartsen and Weverling (VVD), Bouali (D66), Segers (ChristenUnie), Asscher (PvdA), Marijnissen (SP), and Bisschop (SGP), argued that during COVID-19, The Netherlands was too dependent on China's medical equipment, such as face masks. Later, in the debates of 2021, MPs Brekelmans (VVD), Van der Lee (GroenLinks), and Boswijk (CDA),

also argued that The Netherlands was too dependent on China regarding raw materials, which were more than 90% owned by China. Both new frames portrayed China negatively.

5.2.2. Geopolitical frames

Geopolitical frames were used to portray China's position in and its relations with the rest of the world.

In 2018–2019, the parliament discussed "China's rise" (i.e., increasing power and influence), nuclear cooperation with China, and China's political system. In the plenary debates, the frames of China's rise were at first sight neutral statements, but during the debate it became clear that the frames were made to express concern, or to warn about China's influence, and thus were intended to be negative. As an illustration, PM Rutte claimed that "China is now the second largest economy in the world, and we see in many parts of the world that China is trying to increase its influence –April 18, 2018". Buitenweg (GroenLinks) agreed that "China has also become a major world power in recent years –October 2, 2018", and also Sjoerdsma (D66) acknowledged that "China is steadily strengthening its geopolitical position –November 13, 2019". Sometimes a neutral or positive expression was followed by a more negative tone. This was reflected in Verhoeven's (D66) warning that "China and the United States are trying to become digital world leaders and Europe will get stuck if we're not careful –March 28, 2019", or Koopmans' (VVD) perception that "China is also becoming more and more prosperous. That is very good for the Chinese, and we are happy to grant it to them. But that country also comes with a very assertive Chinese policy –November 13, 2019". The geopolitical frames were mostly used to call for the strengthening of the EU's collaboration and its position in the world. Mulder (VVD), for example, stated: "Ideally, we should work together with the EU against China. That capitalist-communist with all kinds of subsidies for steel is what we should avoid– March 20, 2018". Also, former Minister Blok (Foreign Affairs) argued that "Many Dutch people believe that if we want to maintain and strengthen our sovereignty, this is only possible with intensive European cooperation –April 25, 2019". Finally, Koopmans (VVD) expressed: "We are aware of how China acts in the world. That could also have consequences for the world order" –November 13, 2019. Another negative geopolitical frame of China was the depiction of "China as a system rival". This frame was emphasized by statements of Buitenweg and Van Ojik (GroenLinks) who highlighted the uneasy relation with China, China as a country with different values, which is trying to exert enormous influence in the world –March 28 and November 13, 2019.

In 2020–2021, the frame "system rival" was also used by Van Ojik (GroenLinks) to indicate that China's geopolitical system threatens the European liberal-democratic governance model: "We talk about systemic rivalry when it comes to relations with China –December 9, 2020". With this statement, he argued for the inclusion of the EU membership in the Dutch Constitution. Likewise, the "China's rise" frame was repeated in this period, but now related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the tone was relatively negative about China. For example, in a debate in which parliamentarians discussed the development cooperation with Africa and the provision of financial emergency support for Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic, Van den Nieuwenhuijzen (GroenLinks) responds to Kuik (CDA): "I saw you say in *De Telegraaf* how important you think it is that we do not let China take our role, but that we take our position in the geopolitical game ourselves –April 8, 2020". In another debate, Asscher (PvdA) stated: "If you see what corona is doing to health and the economy, you should not forget that it also has a huge impact on international relations. China is trying to strengthen its position in the world through mask diplomacy –June 17, 2020". With these quotes, MPs highlighted the perceived seriousness and negative influence of "China's rise" on the EU's global position, namely regarding the EU's role in development cooperation and supplier of vital medical products to developing countries. Prime Minister Rutte shared his concerns about China taking over the EU's role: "If you look at COVID-19, the pandemic, you will of course see that a number of developments that have already been initiated are being strengthened. That is why we do want a decisive geopolitical European Union –September 17, 2020". Another statement was made by Gündoğan (Volt), about China's responsibility in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic: "We should not be surprised that a country like China by vaccinating those parts of the world strengthens its own geopolitical position at the expense of the free, western world – June 24, 2021".

5.2.3. Security frames

Security frames were used to depict China as a (possible) threat to the security and protection of the Netherlands, both in the area of defense and technology.

In 2018–2019, in the debate about the announcement of the US and Russia to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on April 24, 2019, China was first framed as "a favourable nuclear ally", but later in the debate as "an uncooperative ally". In this debate, MPs Ploumen (PvdA), Van Helvert (CDA), Van Ojik (GroenLinks), Sjoerdsma (D66) and Minister Blok (Foreign Affairs) initially preferred "to involve the new superpower China". Yet,

the tone of the debate on China shifted from positive to negative, as the MPs Van Ojik (GroenLinks), Sjoerdsma (D66) and Minister Blok (Foreign Affairs) later argued that China's will for cooperation had "little chance". In the same debate, De Roon (PVV), Van Helvert (VVD), and Van Ojik (GroenLinks), also framed China as a "military threat" because of its large production of long-range missiles. Security frames regarding technology were mainly used by politicians as call for political action, such as asking for stricter security procedures against Chinese interference from Chinese companies and software, such as Huawei, ZTE, XTAL, and Alibaba, and against the inflow of Chinese employees and students in The Netherlands. In the plenary debate on April 11, 2018, China was framed as "a spy", as Van den Berg (CDA) referred to a U.S. government proposal for a new law which banned the use of Huawei and ZTE telecom equipment within government institutions because of concerns about possible espionage by the Chinese government via Chinese telecom companies. Van den Berg (CDA) asked the State Secretary whether these concerns were also present in the Netherlands and, if so, how The Netherlands would deal with this. Also, in 2019, Bromet (GroenLinks) expressed concerns about "the intertwining of the Chinese government with the company Huawei –March 28, 2019", which resulted in the filing of a motion. China was also portrayed as a spy by Tielen (VVD), who referred to the television broadcast of *Nieuwsuur* which stated that "Chinese students and PhD students are studying in the Netherlands and thereby doing research and acquiring knowledge that can be risky for our safety and business –June 25, 2019". These kind of suspicions of Chinese espionage let Kops, Beertema and De Roon (PVV) file a motion with the request to the government "to have visa applications from Chinese (and Iranian) students in sensitive technologies assessed by the MIVD (Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service) –November 7, 2019". In the security frames on technology, China was also portrayed as "a stealer" of business data, personal data, and technological knowledge. In the plenary debates, politicians expressed their concerns about the Chinese: Van der Lee (GroenLinks) stated that "These technologies hold a lot of promise, but we know that a country like China is fully engaged in it and is also trying to gain this knowledge through other avenues without doing so legally –April 12, 2018". Furthermore, Verhoeven (D66) portrayed China as "a surveillance state", with the argument that in the Chinese situation "people are constantly monitored with data analyses, with cameras and with facial recognition: a surveillance state –November 14, 2019".

In 2020–2021, just as in 2018–2019, China was framed as a "military threat". De Roon (PVV) argued that "China acts as a many-headed Chinese dragon that wants to swallow us by 2049 at the latest –November 11, 2020". Subsequently, he advocated for intensified

military cooperation with like-minded countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Concerning technology security, I identified three frames that were also used in 2018–2019. Regarding China as "a spy" and "a stealer", the tone of the frames remained negative, but the examples in the were used were different. For instance, van Dijk (CDA) illustrated the case of the telecom company KPN: "A secret risk analysis from 2010 showed that the Chinese technology company Huawei had unrestricted access to the KPN network – June 29, 2021". Later, Van Dijk (CDA) drew attention to vulnerabilities of Chinese apps: "Because if the Chinese app TikTok can secretly and on a large scale collect and trade information from children, then all alarm bells should start ringing". Dassen (Volt) also used the frame of China as "a spy" and "a stealer" to raise concerns about the production of mobile parts in China: "Many European tech companies, including Ericsson and Nokia, also have parts of their equipment produced in China in collaboration with Chinese state-owned companies. If the Chinese government wants to build backdoors into our mobile networks, they could do it this way - June 29, 2021". Finally, during question time of the debate on 8 June 2021, Amhaouch (CDA) raised concerns about China as he mentioned the news report "ASML fears thieves will exploit stolen trade secrets in China". The third frame corresponding to 2018–2019 was China as "a surveillance state". This frame was used by Baudet (FVD) with reference to the development of the CoronaCheck-app: "It is the endgame of a perfidious elite who, under the guise of a 'pandemic', want to copy the Chinese mass surveillance, to implement it in our countries of birth –June 24, 2021".

5.2.4. Human rights frames

Human rights frames were used to portray the way China dealt with human rights.

In 2018–2019, many MPs were concerned about China's human rights violations, which resulted in one dominant, negative frame: "China as a human rights violator". MPs often expressed their "worries" about certain population groups in China, for example, Van Helvert (CDA) claimed that "In China, the death penalty is used more often than in all other countries of the world combined. In China, 1 million Uyghurs are imprisoned because they are Uyghurs. Organ harvesting takes place in China. In China there is no freedom of religion and belief –November 14, 2019". Furthermore, the Chinese government was portrayed as oppressor of Uyghurs, not only in China, but also in the Netherlands. To persuade the seriousness of China's human rights violation, politicians used particular words in their speech: "oppression" was mentioned in several debates by Van Ojik and Buitenweg (GroenLinks); Van der

Graaf (ChristenUnie), Öztürk (DENK), De Graaf (PVV), and Sjoerdsma (D66). The word "terrorism" was used by Koopmans (VVD) and Van Helvert (CDA). Sjoerdsma (D66) mentioned "systematic oppression" and "rape of women" to refer to the worrying treatment of Uyghurs. Asscher (PvdA) called the China's human rights violations of China "serious", and Van Helvert (CDA) emphasized the "large-scale" in which this was happening. These statements about human rights were often followed by the submission of a motion with the request for more critically actions towards China regarding trade-relations, or for independent investigation to the situation of Uyghurs. For example, on March 28, 2019, Asscher (PvdA) filed a motion with the following request: "The fate of 1 million Uyghurs imprisoned; that is denied by the Chinese. We ask the PM to press for an independent investigation into this and to make it part of the discussion at that EU-China summit".

In 2020–2021, China was again negatively framed as a "a human rights violator". In the debate over human rights reporting, in May 2020, Koopmans (VVD) mentioned a global decline in democratic-ruled states and increasing repression: "I specifically mention China. In many countries, the COVID-19 crisis came on top of that, which is also used to further increase repression –May 20, 2020". Within the "human rights violator" frame, I found two new China frames. The first was China as "a perpetrator of genocide against Uyghurs". In a motion, an Sjoerdsma (D66) stated: "Genocide against the Uyghur minority is taking place in China – February 25, 2021" and referred to the United Nations resolution 260 of the genocide convention. In the same debate, this new China frame was used by several other MPs and in motions asking the government to address human rights violations in China. Sjoerdsma (D66), Voordewind (CU), and Karabulut (SP) asked the government "to reschedule the 2022 Olympics if China continues human rights violations –February 25, 2021". In the same debate, Kuzu (DENK) requested "to file a case in the International Court of Justice against China over China's genocide of Uyghurs" and "to send at least 10,000 Uyghurs an invitation to grant asylum". The second new human rights frame I found portrayed "China as an undesirable partner". This frame was mentioned in several motions related to the EU-China investment deal and human rights violations in China. Van Helvert (CDA) and Sjoerdsma (D66) asked the government "to agree to the investment treaty only if China has taken a concrete and verifiable step to improve human rights –February 25, 2021". In another motion, Van Ojik and Van den Nieuwenhuijzen (GroenLinks) requested the government "to call on all Dutch companies with activities in China to investigate their supply chains for possible links to the oppression of Uyghurs and to urge them to end all business ties with Xinjiang" –February 25, 2021.

5.2.5. Technological frames

Technological frames concerned China's technological innovations, and its possible leading world position in technology developments.

In 2018–2019, technological frames portrayed China as "a technologically innovative country", in crypto capital, 5G, and artificial intelligence, and as "an emerging tech giant" within the high-tech economy. These frames were formulated neutrally about China but were mostly used to indicate that the Netherlands must invest in technology to "avoid" losing its leading position in its advanced technology, and also to stay "independent" from China. Van der Lee (GroenLinks) argued that "These [China's] technologies hold many promises, but we know that a country like China is fully engaged in this and is also trying to obtain this knowledge through other means without doing so legally –April 12, 2018." In a debate on the technological developments in financial services, Van der Linde (VVD) posed: "Are we now also prepared for the next ten years? Because in ten years we will have Google Pay, Apple Pay, Alibaba and other tech giants from America and China –February 20, 2019".

In 2020–2021, the technological frames remained the same as in the previous period. However, the tone of the frames became more negatively about China. Van der Lee (GroenLinks) framed China as "a technologically innovative country": "It is then about who has the sustainable technology of the future. China is currently very strong there –June 17, 2021" and mentioned that this could lead to future geopolitical implications. Regarding the frame of China as "an emerging tech giant", Verhoeven (D66) stated that China already took a major lead over the EU, and therefore also the Netherlands, in the key technologies (artificial intelligence, photonics, nanotechnology, biotech) –November 4, 2020. He also argued that China is gaining more and more power with its "more assertive" technology strategy. Bisschop (SGP) was tougher on China in the technological playing field as he stated that "My group would like to see the Netherlands especially committed to security coordination and cooperation in the field of digital and technological issues, including a fist against China – December 8, 2020".

5.2.6. Climate frames

Climate frames were used to refer to China's contributions to the fight against global climate change.

In 2018–2019 In the plenary debates of 2018–2019, only one climate frame was found in the plenary debate on April 17, 2018, concerning a trade mission to China. The discussion was about a veal deal between the Netherlands and China, which did not comply with the climate ambitions and caused an increase of CO2 emissions. In this debate, Ouwehand and Van Raan (PvdD) portrayed China negatively as "an undesirable partner".

In the period *2020–2021*, in addition to China as "an undesirable partner", another climate frame of China was introduced. China as "the largest CO2-emitter", framed China negatively by the linguistic and rhetorical mechanism of using specific word groups, such as "polluting Chinese companies" by Jetten (D66) on June 17, 2020, "dirty products from China" by Sienot (D66) on June 25, 2020, and "extremely polluting Chinese mega stables" by Van der Plas (BBB) on June 8, 2021. The frame "China as the largest CO2-emitter" was also used to illustrate China's unfair climate contribution with regard to coal-fired power plants. According to Jansen (FVD), "China reached the limit last year and emits more CO2 than the entire developed world combined –May 11, 2021", and Kops (PVV) stated that "Coal-fired power stations have to make way for more so-called green energy, read: windmills, while in countries such as China and India coal-fired power stations are sprouting like mushrooms –June 25, 2020" In addition to these negative frames, a positive frame about China's contribution to the global climate change was used by Van der Lee (GroenLinks), namely China as "a country that has increased its climate ambitions" –June 17, 2021.

5.2.7. Health frames

Health frames were used to portray China regarding its transparency in health care, and the prevention, control, and actions against the outbreak of diseases.

Health frames were only found in the period of 2020–2021, all three related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first frame, China was portrayed as "responsible for the spread of COVID-19". MPs stated different arguments to indicate how the COVID-19 virus has spread from China, for example, Ouwehand (PvdD) stated "How many infections started this pandemic? Let me tell you: it was one, in China, from animal to human. And now the whole world is in crisis – November 10, 2020". In an earlier debate, Ouwehand (PvdD), Klaver (GroenLinks) en Van Weyenberg (D66) also noted that "virologists are pointing out that the fur industry may have been the missing link in the animal-to-human transmission of the coronavirus in China – October 28, 2020". Using these statements, MPs were calling for an import ban of fur and wild animals from China to prevent further spread and future outbreaks. To illustrate this,

Ouwehand (PvdD) argued: “There must be a European ban on mink breeding and an import ban on all that fur from China, which is of course also a risk for an outbreak of the next pandemic –October 28, 2020”.

Several MPs assumed that COVID-19 originated in China and emphasized this by using word groups and statements such as: “Chinese flu” by Baudet (FVD) –June 3, 2021, “Chinese virus” by Emiel van Dijk (PVV) –November 25, 2020, and Van Meijeren (FVD) referred to COVID-19 as “that scary” and “that new virus from China” –June 29, 2021. While these words evoked negative associations towards China, Van Esch (PvdD) used a more neutral attitude towards China’s role in the spread of infectious diseases. She referred to the recent WTO call to stop the sale of live animals in markets: “Wild animals in markets are, in addition to the livestock industry, a major source of infectious diseases in humans. Wild animals, such as bats, desert foxes and reptiles, are still sold at markets and fairs not only in China, but also in the Netherlands”–April 15, 2021.

The second health frame which was used in the plenary debates was China as “a withholder of information about COVID-19” in the early days of the outbreak. Wilders (PVV) stated: “It is now clear to everyone that China has lied to the whole world and has informed much too late about the nature and extent of the virus, because of which many more people have been infected worldwide and here in the Netherlands –June 4, 2020”. In the same debate, he also claimed that China was not transparent about the outbreak: “The Chinese knew much earlier that it is transmissible from person to person … and if we had known that we could have acted much earlier”. In another debate, De Roon (PVV) mentioned that “China sowed confusion, confusion about numbers, confusion about the seriousness of the virus and confusion about its origin from the very first infection –November 4, 2020”.

However, the third health frame portrayed China more positively regarding COVID-19, namely as “a tackler of the COVID-19. Van Haga (Van Haga) stated: “It is interesting that the coronavirus originated in Wuhan, but that the Chinese economy is no longer affected by COVID-19 and is now already showing a growth rate of 4.9% in the third quarter. This means that the Chinese economy will once again be positive for the entire year, while in the Netherlands we are still helplessly shooting ourselves in the foot with all kinds of measures that do not expel the virus, but that do destroy the economy –October 28, 2020”. A few weeks later, Van Haga (FvD) repeated his statement regarding the Chinese approach by which the economy came back under control: “In China, as I also said in my first term, they achieved growth in the third quarter of what I believe is 5.7%. Total growth in 2020 will be a positive percentage. We are not going to achieve that –December 2, 2020”. This third frame was used by MPs to call for

a more effective approach to tackle COVID-19 in the Netherlands. Even though China has been praised for its effective handling of COVID-19, it is striking that most MPs were critical towards China.

6. Discussion

In this research, I examined statements about China in 144 plenary debates of the DHR in the period 2018–2021, in which I found 23 China frames. For this study, I conducted the database of the official website of the DHR to collect my research material. To be sure that no selection bias occurred, I included all plenary debates related to China from the predetermined research period based on explicit criteria. Subsequently, I used an inductive approach to identify China issue-specific frames while analysing the statements (Boydstun 2013). The advantage of this method was that I was not limited by predefined frames, but this made it harder to compare my research findings with the results of other studies.

In comparison to the existing literature on framing China, I found similar frames in the issue-specific frames economics, geopolitics, and security. However, concerning the issue-specific frames of human rights, technology, climate, and health, very few comparable frames were found in the existing literature. One reason for this might be that previous studies often categorized these issues in the overarching frame of China's "internal struggles" or "social issues" (Golan and Lokito 2015; Lams 2016; Kavalski 2021; Kolosv and Zotova 2021). Another reason might be that in other studies, China was often portrayed from the economic or geopolitical perspective (Golan and Lokito 2015; Lams 2016; Nassanga and Makara 2016; Zhang and Wu 2017). Among the health frames on COVID-19 which I identified: China as "responsible for the spread of COVID-19", "a withholder of information about COVID-19 outbreak", and "an effective tackler of the COVID-19 virus", these frames were not found in other framing analyses. Nonetheless, some studies investigated the terms "Chinese virus", "China virus", and "Wuhan virus" (Luckhorst 2020; Jones 2020; Feng 2021; McCourt 2021), which matches the health frame of China as "responsible for the spread of COVID-19".

Regarding the tone of the frames, my findings and that of previous research show that in various contexts, China was more often framed negatively than positively, especially in the field of geopolitics, security, technology, human rights. Research that examined the relationship between the portrayal of China and the outbreak of COVID-19, claimed that discourses from the past, and tensions from before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a growing negative attitude towards China, which the COVID-19 merely accelerated (Luckhorst 2020;

Jones 2020; Feng 2021; McCourt 2021; Kavalski 2021). This might explain why I identified more negative China frames in the plenary debates since the outbreak of COVID-19, as existing China frames became more negative, and I found new negative frames.

As framing theories suggest, politicians often use framing as a strategic tool to blur, change, or confound a specific view, and to convey this view to the public (Gofman 1974; Entman 1993). To elaborate on how China frames in the plenary debates of the DHR operated in terms of their language, I investigated intertextuality and linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms (Schneider *forthcoming*). Within the statements of MPs, I found that MPs made various intertextual references to substantiate their argument about China. For example, Van den Nieuwenhuijzen (GroenLinks) used a statement of Kuik (CDA) in the newspaper *De Telegraaf* to make a statement against Kuik (April 8, 2020); Van den Berg (CDA) mentioned a US government law proposal about the ban of Chinese technology to express his concerns about the effects of the use of Chinese technology (April 11, 2018); and for the same purpose, Van Dijk (CDA) referred to a secret risk analysis from 2010 that showed that the Chinese technology company Huawei had unrestricted access to the KPN network –June 29, 2021.

Besides intertextual references, MPs used several linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms to frame China in a certain way. They used proverbs to exaggerate their statement, such as “in China they fight each other for our milk powder”, “critical infrastructures fall into Chinese hands”, “China acts as a many-headed Chinese dragon” or “a fist against China”. Furthermore, MPs used negative words and word groups to express disagreement with, or the dishonesty of China, especially in the human rights, climate, and health frames. For example: “oppression”, “terrorism”, “rape of women”, “polluting Chinese companies”, “dirty products from China”, “Chinese flu”, “Chinese virus”, and “that scary virus from China”. Finally, MPs made assumptions, expressed anxiety, or gave warnings about China: “China can be a threat” or “Europe will get stuck if we’re not careful”.

As I both performed a discourse analysis and framing analysis in this study, I gained more insight into the different types of China frames that were constructed, and how politicians used these frames in the plenary debates of the DHR. In the discourse analysis, I examined the sources of the statements that the MPs used (e.g., newspaper, television program, expert analysis). Furthermore, I investigated the use of certain proverbs and negative words by which MPs expressed opinions on current policies, to request the government to take political action, or to make a general statement about China. The fact that MPs talked about China in a certain way to achieve a specific goal, confirms the theory of political discourse, in which political

language is seen as powerful and inherently persuasive (Foucault 1970; Chilton 2004; Van Dijk 1997, 2008).

Framing by politicians is not without risks. Theories on the effects of framing suggest that by framing political issues, politicians can influence and manipulate public opinion (Kahneman and Tversky 1981; Van Dijk 1997; Druckman 2001; Chong and Druckman 2007). Van Dijk (1997), for example, warns about the negative impact of framing, as a politician's speech about minorities might reveal xenophobic, racist, or Eurocentric political attitudes. However, he and other scholars also mention that the influence of politicians' framing practices is limited because politicians are controlled by parliamentary rules and procedures (Van Dijk 2004, 2008; Chilton 2004; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012).

Returning to the effect of framing in plenary debates of the DHR, this study shows that the framing of political issues in the media and the parliament influence each other. Politicians, the media, and their audience, constantly select the information they receive in a way that corresponds with their general sentiment of the topic and can frame this information in a way that suits their purpose. Consequently, this might result in an "echo chamber" within the Dutch society, which may create tensions in international cooperation, which is especially necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to prevent MPs' China frames from having a negative impact on the Chinese population, it is desirable that future China frames become more balanced. Politicians should portray China not only negatively as an influencing global economic power, or geopolitical threat, but must also consider looking at China's possibilities and opportunities on cultural and social issues. Possibly, this may lead to a better representation of China.

7. Conclusion

In the past decade, China gained increasing attention because of its newly gained position as a world player in the geopolitical and economic arena. For this, China is admired and despised. In 2020, various sources claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in China, which influenced the political debate about China in the Netherlands. In this research, I examined how the MPs of the DHR framed China in the plenary debates, and whether these China frames changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, I conclude that the MPs framed China in seven issue-specific frames in the field of economics, geopolitics, security, human rights, technology, climate, and health. Secondly, they framed China more negatively in the

period 2020–2021 in comparison to the period of 2018–2019. Finally, MPs produced health frames that emerged simultaneously with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be more specific, in the period 2018–2019, Dutch MPs framed China in 15 ways. Economically, they framed China as "an important trade partner", "an unfair economic competitor", and "a big investor". Geopolitically, China frames consisted of "China's rise" and "a system rival". Security frames portrayed China as "a favourable nuclear ally", "an uncooperative ally", "a military threat", "a spy", "a stealer", and "surveillance state". Human rights frames depicted China as "a human rights violator". Furthermore, in the of technology, the MPs framed China as "a technologically innovative country" and "an emerging tech giant". Finally, climate frames portrayed China as "an undesirable partner". Out of these 15 China frames, two frames were positive (economic and geopolitical), three were neutral (economic and technological), and ten frames were negative about China.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I identified even more (21) China frames in the plenary debates of the DHR. Out of these, 13 frames were similar as in 2018–2019, but two frames were not mentioned in 2020–2021, namely China as "a favourable nuclear ally", and "an uncooperative ally". The MPs added nine new China frames. Regarding economics, they framed China as "a risky country for (Dutch) entrepreneurs" and "a producer of vital products". Concerning the human rights frames, MPs framed China as "a perpetrator of genocide against Uyghurs" and "an undesirable partner". Within the climate frame, MPs portrayed China as "a country that has increased its climate ambitions" and as "the largest CO2-emitter". Finally, I identified three health frames, which depicted China as "responsible for the spread of COVID-19", "a withholder of information about COVID-19 outbreak", and "an effective tackler of the COVID-19 virus". Out of the 21 China frames in 2020–2021, three frames were positive (economic, climate, health) and 19 frames were negative about China.

In comparing the period of 2018–2019 and 2020–2021, the results indicate that China frames became more negative since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the nine newly introduced China frames in 2020–2021, eight frames were negative and two were positive. Furthermore, of the 13 China frames repeated from the plenary debates in 2018–2019, two neutral frames changed to negative in 2020–2021: China as "a technologically innovative country" and "an emerging tech giant". Only one economic frame remained positive throughout 2018–2021, namely China as "an important trade partner". However, some MPs contested this frame by framing China as "an undesirable partner" in the human rights and climate frames.

Regarding the theories of political discourse and framing, I recognise three limitations of my research. Based on these limitations, I will provide three recommendations for further

research. Firstly, in my research, I focused on the analysis of the transcripts of the plenary debates. According to Chilton (2004), political discourse is not just about speech, but also about the way speech is used, such as word choice and tone. In the analysed transcripts, these language characteristics were not included, as mistakes and hitches in ongoing discourse were often corrected or repaired before it was published. Therefore, I encourage future studies to examine both the political text and behaviour of the politician when analysing political discourse, as this will provide a better insight into how politicians use frames.

Secondly, in my research, I mainly focused on the frames that resulted from the plenary debates about China, and less on the person who produced the frame. Chilton (2004) proposed that political discourse operates in interactions between different social groups with different ideologies. Politicians use framing to distort language, strengthen the vision of their group, and achieve the goal of that group. The use of various frames might lead to conflicts between certain groups and politicians. I did not include these interactions in my research. Since there are 16 different political parties represented in the DHR, I recommend that future research systematically examines how these affiliations affect discursive and framing activities.

Thirdly, in my research, I focused on the macro-level of politics discourse in the plenary debates of the DHR. According to Wodak (2004), political discourse is not only present in political institutions, but in various macro-and micro levels, and different levels of discourses, such as in official, semi-official, virtual as well as private spaces. It might be interesting to examine how politicians talk about China in other contexts than the DHR, for example on social media.

Finally, more extensive discourse analysis is desirable. Future research might use my research model as a basis to identify frames based on political statements. They might add categories that focus specifically on the participants, their actions, and the setting from Van Dijk's (1997) discourse analysis method, or they might focus on the indexical and interactive features of the language, as mentioned by Chilton (2004). Additionally, a powerful contribution to the framing analysis could be a more participative observation method in which the researcher observes and talks with the respondents to obtain more in-depth information about the way politicians frame China, which is part of the research method of Wodak (2004, 2009). This might be useful to gain more insight into the way politicians construct frames and how they use framing during the debate.

In retrospect to the relevance of this research, I argued that the way MPs frame China may affect the development of Sino-Dutch relations, and the negative China frames may affect the way China and the Chinese/Dutch-Chinese population is perceived in Dutch society. As

COVID-19 now holds a solid position on the Dutch political agenda, it is of importance to get insight into the way politicians construct China frames, especially during a global crisis. This study is also relevant because it contributes to the limited academic research on framing China in the Dutch and political context. Furthermore, it shows that politicians during a major discursive event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, changes the way they frame China. Finally, this research demonstrates how (negative) framing in politics impacts the way other politicians and the media perceive China and Chinese people. As is known, politicians and the media influence public opinion. This is therefore a message to all Dutch politicians, namely that especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, politicians should pay particular attention to the way in which they frame China, to stop discrimination and racism against Asians in the Netherlands, which is yet another topic on the political agenda of the DHR.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Analysis model

1. Date	2. Speaker and position	3. Subject	4. Statement	5. Issue-specific frame	6. Intertextuality	7. Linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms	8. Tone

Appendix 2. Data collection

	2018	2019	2020	2021 (until Sept 1.)	2018–2021
Total Plenary debates	109	108	100	63	380
Plenary debates about China	29	44	45	26	144

Appendix 2. Issue-specific frames

Issue-specific frame	*Tone*
Economic frames	
2018–2019	
1. "an important trade partner"	Positive
2. "a big investor"	Neutral
3. "an unfair economic competitor"	Negative
2020–2021	
4. "a risky country for Dutch entrepreneurs"	Negative
5. "a producer of vital products"	Negative
"an important trade partner"	*Positive*
"an unfair economic competitor"	*Negative*
"a big investor"	*Neutral*
Geopolitical frames	
2018–2019	
6. "China's rise"	Negative
7. "China as a system rival"	Negative
2020–2021	
"China's rise"	*Negative*
"China as a system rival"	*Negative*
Security	
2018–2019	
8. "a favourable nuclear ally"	Positive
9. "an uncooperative ally"	Negative

10.“a military threat”	Negative
11.“a spy”	Negative
12.“a stealer”	Negative
13. “a surveillance state”	Negative
2020–2021	
“a military threat”	*Negative*
“a spy”	*Negative*
“a stealer”	*Negative*
“a surveillance state”	*Negative*
Human Rights	
2018–2019	
14.“a human rights violator”	Negative
2020–2021	
15.“a perpetrator of genocide against Uyghurs”	Negative
16.“an undesirable partner”	Negative
“a human rights violator”	*Negative*
Technological	
2018–2019	
17.“a technologically innovative country”	Neutral
18.“an emerging tech giant”	Neutral
2020–2021	
“a technologically innovative country”	*Negative*
“an emerging tech giant”	*Negative*
Climate	
“an undesirable partner”	Negative
2020–2021	
19.“the largest CO2-emitter”	Negative
20.“a country that has increased its climate ambitions”	Positive
“an undesirable partner”	*Negative*
Health	
2020–2021	
21.“the responsible for the spread of COVID-19”	Negative
22.“a withholder of information about COVID-19”	Negative
23.“an effective tackler of the COVID-19”	Negative

*Repeated China frames are cursive