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Framing the Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Chinese Media Discourse on the Possibilities for Peace Negotiations

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FRAMING THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Chinese Media Discourse on the
Possibilities for Peace Negotiations

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Leiden University,
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1. Introduction

On the 24th of February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, forming the biggest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades (Zuleeg, 2022). Western actors such as the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) strongly condemned Russia's actions, imposed sanctions, and provided military and financial aid to deter further aggression (Jakupec, 2024). In contrast, China's position has been markedly more ambiguous. As one of the world's largest economies, China's position significantly impacts the effectiveness of Western sanctions on Russia (Swanström & Scobell, 2024). Yet, although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) labels itself as a neutral, passive, and responsible actor, the country remains deeply entwined with Russia, both militarily, economically, and rhetorically (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024). Official Chinese statements neither support nor condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine, notably attributing the war to Western expansionism (Xu & Zhao, 2025). Overall, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has a markedly complex and strategically ambivalent role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

China's ambiguous position is particularly significant when examining the prospects for peace negotiations. Negotiations are important to continuously research as all conflicts must, at some point, come to an end. Since 1800, negotiations have been the most common method for resolving interstate wars (Paffenholz et al., 2023). Despite numerous diplomatic efforts by intergovernmental organisations and individual countries, a lasting and sustainable peace agreement in Ukraine has remained elusive (Bramsen & Svensson, 2024). Now, with Donald Trump's re-election in 2024 and his promise to end the conflict in twenty-four hours, re-evaluating negotiation methods is especially relevant. Whereas the US holds significant leverage over Ukraine, China's strategic ties with Russia provide it with leverage to influence Moscow's stance (Ohle, 2024). Bramsen & Svensson (2024) argue that Russia's dependence on China places the PRC in a unique position to push for a resolution. Additionally, China's ability to reach peace agreements, for example, between Iran and Saudi Arabia, positions it as a potential peace broker (Burton, 2023).

To research China's position on the peace negotiations, this thesis examines how Chinese media portrays the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the associated negotiations. Whereas most academic literature concentrates on realist analyses of Chinese state policies and officials' statements, media analysis offers additional insight into the CCP's position, especially given the party's strict control over virtually all media forms in China (Zhang, 2024). Chinese news channels reflect an image that the party-state wishes to portray to its domestic and international audiences, often reflecting official policy priorities and strategic interests (Zhang & Shaw, 2023).

Specifically, this paper analyses the discourse communicated by Chinese media to a European or European-oriented audience. This thesis examines the European edition of *China Daily*, one of the

primary international news outlets operated by the CCP (Zhang & Shaw, 2023). The European Edition specifically targets an audience of European officials, intellectuals, and policymakers (China Daily, 2012). For China, international news broadcasting, such as *China Daily*, plays a vital role in both international and domestic politics, development, and reform (Zhang et al., 2024). Since Xi Jinping's rise to power, the CCP has become more assertive in managing public opinion abroad (Alvaro, 2015). Through news outlets such as *China Daily*, the CCP aims to enhance China's image, amplify support for its positions, and erase undesired content from international debates (Drinhausen et al., 2023). Consequently, international news broadcasting on conflicts such as Ukraine inevitably reveals a specific stance towards the situation (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2024).

Building on this background, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: "*How does China Daily discursively construct the Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations?*". To answer this question, this study applies Fairclough's (1989) model of Critical Discourse Analysis, examining the text's vocabulary, grammar, textual structure, interaction with the reader, and the broader socio-political context within which this takes place. This theoretical framework enables a deeper understanding of how discourse reflects and reinforces the CCP's ideological positions and power dynamics in the conflict.

This thesis is structured as follows. First, it situates the research within the broader academic literature. Second, it outlines the methodological tools used to collect and analyse the data. Third, the analysis is presented in accordance with Fairclough's framework of vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure. Fourth, the findings are critically discussed in relation to existing scholarship. Lastly, the conclusion reflects on the implications of the results and suggests avenues for future research. Overall, this study argues that *China Daily* constructs the CCP as a neutral mediator, while subtly legitimising Russia and delegitimising the actions of Western powers, especially the US. *China Daily* selectively adopts certain Russian narratives while discarding others, supporting Russia without fully compromising its image abroad, and likely attempts to weaken transatlantic unity by emphasising European overdependence on the US.

2. Literature Review

This section analyses prior academic research on Chinese positioning in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and peace negotiations. Since no existing study has directly examined how *China Daily* frames peace negotiations, the literature is divided into two thematic strands. The first examines previous discourse analyses of Chinese framing of the war. The second reviews China's official stance and diplomatic posture regarding the Russia-Ukraine peace process.

2.1. Previous Discourse Analyses

Previous Chinese discourse analyses on the Ukrainian conflict research CCP official statements, domestic media discourse, English media discourse, and social media. Most analyses focus on the first category, how CCP statements and speeches refer to the conflict. For example, an analysis of statements from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) concluded that the PRC's official strategic narratives focus on 1) initiatives for peace, 2) multilateral cooperation, and 3) criticism of Western responses (Xu and Zhao, 2025). For example, official statements often mention terms such as 'peace', 'cooperation', 'dialogue', and stability'. Additionally, a comparison of Chinese and Russian official statements found that China employs comparatively cautious, non-committal, and hedging discourse (Ebim et al., 2022). Russia frames the Ukraine conflict as a "special military operation", justifies Russia's actions through reference to "de-Nazification", Western Russophobia, and Ukrainian corruption and dictatorship, frames the West as an existential threat, and emphasises Russia's moral high ground as a defender. In comparison, Chinese leadership remains ambiguous in its wording, not directly criticising Russia and only lightly suggesting that the US worsens the conflict. Chinese officials also consistently refrained from labelling the events in Ukraine an "invasion", only beginning to intermittently label it a war after a few months (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024). Simultaneously, Chinese officials repeatedly reference China's value for sovereignty, with Ukraine being no exception (Shin, 2022). Overall, Ebim et al. (2022) conclude that the CCP uses a persuasive power style that relies on discursive manipulation, neutrality, and strategic hedging, rather than overt ideological projection or threat.

The second category, discourse analyses of domestic Chinese state-controlled media, reveals a more pro-Russian stance than the CCP's official discourse. Chinese media outlets discuss the conflict less than Western outlets, plausibly to avoid debate on China's position, but when they do, Russian sources and perspectives dominate the narrative (Repnikova, 2022). Chinese media actively disseminates Russian propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and conspiracy narratives (Gündoğan, 2023). For example, the media spread a major unsubstantiated allegation, based solely on information from the Russian Ministry of Defence and Russian state media, that the US military funds biological weapon laboratories in Eastern Ukraine (Cooper et al., 2022). Although these claims were widely refuted and dismissed, the story received extensive coverage in China (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024). On the other hand, coverage of Russian atrocities and war crimes, such as the massacres near Kyiv at Irpin, Hostomel, and Bucha or the siege of Mariupol, were presented in a distorted manner (Repnikova, 2022). While these phenomena are well-documented, party-state-affiliated actors increasingly deploy storytelling and challenge reporting as "fake" (Drinhausen et al., 2023). In recent years, Chinese and Russian state-affiliated media have increasingly aligned through formal

cooperation agreements (Drinhausen et al., 2023). In 2018, both countries' state-affiliated media agreed to increase publication of material approved by the partner's government. Resultingly, Chinese media often echo Russian narratives, especially on contentious global issues like the war in Ukraine. Chinese state-controlled media blame the US, NATO and "The West" for starting the war, criticise sanctions for worsening the conflict, avoid terms such as "invasion" or "war", and instead adopt official Russian terms such as "special military operation," "Ukraine issue," or "conflict" (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024; Gündoğan, 2023). However, the discourse is more complex than simply pro-Russian. Some "Ukrainian" views, such as reports on the damage caused by Russian missiles or on the fleeing refugees, are not entirely excluded, but are overridden mainly by Russian perspectives (Repnikova, 2022).

Third, Chinese state-controlled media in English, targeting an international audience, focuses more on China's international image. Following Crimea's annexation in 2014, *China Global Television Network* (CGTN) aimed to portray China as a peaceful rising power by promoting negotiations and cooperation (Zhang et al., 2024). After 2022, a discourse comparison of Euronews, Al Jazeera, and CGTN found that CGTN rarely framed the war as an "attack", "invasion", or "war" (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2024). Rather, CGTN used the nouns "conflict" and "operation". CGTN primarily used the term "military operation", especially compared to *Euronews* and *Al Jazeera*. Additionally, the few instances in which "war" was used by CGTN referred to other issues such as "a new cold war" or "risk of nuclear war". Overall, this mirrors Russian media narratives of a "special operation", resulting in a "conflict" to be "resolved", avoiding explicit condemnation of Russia's actions (Breeze & Novoa-Jaso, 2024). Another analysis of Chinese state media *Global Times'* strategic narratives concludes that China frames the conflict as a US-Russia proxy war, with Western hegemony as the root cause (Sautédé et al., 2025). *Global Times* portrays Russia as a rational actor, Ukraine as reckless and manipulated, and the EU as fragmented and weak. The *Global Times* portrays China as a neutral mediator promoting peace and multilateral dialogue.

Fourth, various analyses examine discourse on Chinese social media platforms (e.g Rogers & Zhang, 2024; Tao & Peng, 2023; Zhou & Repnikova, 2024). However, these analyses are less relevant to this thesis, as this study investigates discourse from Chinese state-affiliated news outlets, rather than the individual beliefs of Chinese citizens. The only social media discourse analysis relevant to this thesis is Bailey's (2023) analysis of Chinese state-backed media rhetoric on Facebook about the Russia-Ukraine conflict, including posts from *China Daily*. Similar to previous findings, Bailey identifies two main narratives: 1) China is a neutral, responsible, peace-seeking global leader, and 2) NATO and US aggression caused the conflict. The first narrative is considerably more significant. Most content focuses on promoting the PRC as a responsible actor. Bailey concludes that China aims to balance

between maintaining ties with Russia and upholding its international image, using terminology like “indivisible security” to avoid explicit condemnation. Additionally, Bailey concludes that attention to the conflict had already reduced by April 2022.

To my knowledge, no academic literature has analysed Chinese media discourse on Russia-Ukrainian peace proposals and negotiations specifically, providing this thesis with a unique angle of analysis. Existing discourse analyses of official CCP statements, online social media, and state-owned media on the conflict present a solid base for further exploration and discussion.

2.2. Peace Negotiations Context

Since no previous discourse analysis research has examined the Chinese media’s portrayal of peace negotiations, this section evaluates previous realist analyses of the Chinese state’s role in negotiations. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Chinese MFA endorsed the 2015 Minsk II agreement as the ideal political and diplomatic solution (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024). This agreement, which prioritised a ceasefire over the protection of Ukrainian sovereignty, is commonly interpreted as a pro-Moscow solution. After the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine flagrantly breached the agreement, Minsk-2 was also dropped from the CCP’s official statements. In February 2023, the PRC published its own peace proposal: “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The CCP condemned military solutions, such as providing defensive arms, and economic solutions, like sanctions, instead urging de-escalation through political and diplomatic means (Sjøli, 2023).

Some authors applaud China’s peace plan for respecting Ukrainian sovereignty and, for example, opposing the use of nuclear weapons (Ferrari, 2023). However, Western actors widely rejected the 12-point proposal as being ambiguous, vague, and scattered, lacking a concrete roadmap to peace (Gabuev, 2023; Singh, 2024). Whilst presenting itself as a neutral mediator, China’s actions seem to differ. The PRC’s proposal was criticised for mirroring Russian narratives by criticising sanctions and asserting that Western governments are responsible for the 2022 invasion (Geostrata, 2024). Additionally, several measures proposed by China, if implemented, provide clear advantages to Russia. For example, the proposal calls for the immediate lifting of all sanctions not approved by the United Nations (UN) Security Council, where Russia wields veto power, and for a ceasefire that would effectively solidify the presence of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory (Bloomberg, 2023). The proposal overlooks Ukrainian security concerns and overemphasises Russian foreign policy interests and concepts, such as ‘indivisible security’ and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) expansionism (Ohle, 2024). China also showed no consideration for Ukraine’s 10-point peace initiative and no inclination to involve itself in the conflict resolution process deeply (Singh, 2024). However, although Washington outrightly dismissed the Chinese peace proposal as justification for Russia’s

territorial gains in Ukraine, Kyiv did not, likely in the hope of maintaining open diplomatic channels with Beijing (Singh, 2024).

Understanding China's position in peace negotiations remains difficult. The CCP's mirroring of Russian narratives contrasts sharply with the state's self-portrayal as a neutral mediator. Research speculates about the CCP's motivations in mediating the conflict, ranging from economic benefits to soft power projection (Ferrari, 2023). Various analysts conclude that, in Chinese foreign policy, geopolitical and ideological objectives often take precedence over genuine commitments to conflict resolution, thereby precluding it from becoming a credible peace facilitator (Ohle, 2024). Some commentators have suggested that the PRC hoped to act as a "mediator" in the conflict in order to negotiate an honourable exit for the aggressor, Russia (The Soufan Centre, 2022). To better understand the Chinese state's position in the Russia-Ukraine negotiations, a deeper understanding of Chinese narratives and their ideological underpinnings is needed. Thus, a discourse analysis could help clarify how China seeks to shape global perceptions of its role and balance strategic alignment with Russia against broader ambitions of being seen as a responsible global power.

Specifically, this thesis researches the time period from January 1st to March 7th, 2025. Due to the contemporary nature of this topic, to my knowledge, no academic research exists yet on China's stance on the Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations in 2025. The time range from January 1st, 2025, to March 7th, 2025, encompasses various significant events in the negotiation process (Walker, 2025). For example, on February 12th, Presidents Trump and Putin agreed over the phone to begin negotiations to end the war. Simultaneously, at a NATO meeting, US Defence Secretary Hegseth rejected the possibility of NATO peacekeeping troops and NATO membership for Ukraine. Additionally, the US-Russia summit took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 18th. President Zelenskyy and Trump clashed during a meeting in the Oval Office on February 28th, and international leaders met at the London Summit on March 2nd. To maintain analytical depth, this thesis excludes subsequent events such as the US-Ukraine ceasefire proposal and reinstatement of intelligence sharing on March 11th. Appendix A depicts the full timeline.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Paradigm

Firstly, the research design reflects on the philosophical paradigm through which this study is conducted. Reflection on one's philosophical worldview is essential, as the researcher's values and assumptions shape the method through which they conduct research (Creswell et al., 2007). This worldview encompasses both one's assumptions about reality (ontology) and how knowledge is

constructed (epistemology). This paper employs a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology.

Constructivism is an approach that asserts that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Honebein, 1996). Reality is constructed based on these personal experiences. Onuf (1989) was the first to introduce the term constructivism in International Relations theory. He contends that states are living in a “world of our making”, just as individuals are Onuf (1989, p.1).

Accordingly, this project adopts an interpretivist epistemology, which posits that researchers inevitably interpret reality through their own biases, particularly in the realms of human and social sciences (Hammersley, 2013). This paradigm assumes that there are multiple constructed realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Everyone interprets information in a specific context. Thus, research must aim to understand context and acknowledge the researcher’s own predispositions. Interpretivism necessitates using qualitative research methods to help explain the social world.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Building on this ontology and epistemology, this study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how *China Daily* constructs discourse surrounding Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations. This study adheres to Foucault’s (1972) definition of discourse: a structured system of statements that determine what can be said, thought, and known within a particular historical period. Discourse is not just language or speech but an organised way of constructing reality through knowledge and power. Knowledge and power are deeply intertwined as discourse constructs ‘truth’ rather than merely describing it. Institutions use discourse to establish authority and control by defining what is ‘true’ and marginalising alternative ways of knowing. This poststructuralist theory challenged traditional ways of understanding history, truth, and knowledge by asserting that these are constructed rather than universal.

Discourse analysis is especially relevant in examining modern-day conflicts, as the expansion of communication media has given rise to the rapid growth of (mis)information (Tao & Peng, 2023). Tao and Peng argue that information has become a force that can determine victory in war. As such, it has become essential to reveal how information is transmitted through different media ecosystems during war and how ideological cultures are embedded within them.

Discourse analysis encompasses a range of interdisciplinary approaches. Within discourse analysis, CDA is a cross-disciplinary approach outlined in the 1990s (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). CDA differs from other discourse analysis methods as it not only describes and interprets discourse in context but also explains why and how discourse functions. It elaborates on the role of language in society and the view that standpoints, including the researcher’s, are never neutral but embedded in

context. The term 'critical' here refers to the act of being sceptical, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflexive, and through these processes, exposing structures of power relations and ideologies.

While CDA encompasses various approaches, this study employs Fairclough's (1989) dialectical-relational approach to CDA. Fairclough draws from Foucault's theory on discourse and emphasises the interconnectedness of discourse and social structures. He argues that discourse simultaneously shapes and is shaped by social structures, institutions, and power relations. For example, news reflects existing societal beliefs but can also reshape public opinion.

Fairclough (1989) highlights a clear CDA method through three dimensions of analysis: 1) description of the text, 2) interpretation of interaction with background processes, and 3) explanation of how the discourse relates to power and ideology in the social context. As depicted in Figure 1, these dimensions interact with and influence one another.

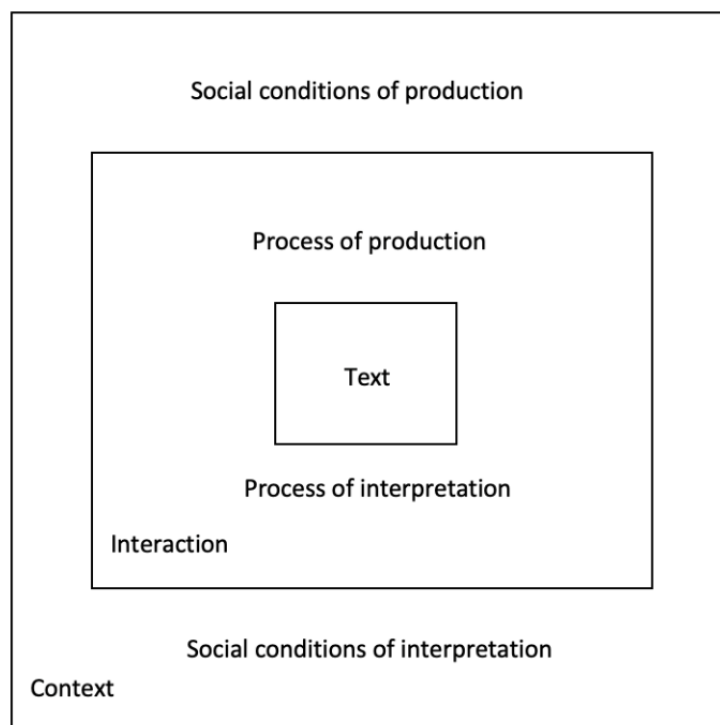


Figure 1: Discourse as text, interaction, and context (Fairclough, 1989).

Text

The core of CDA is textual analysis, also known as description. During this step, the analyst reads the text closely and describes its formal properties. This is guided by ten questions on vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure (see Appendix C). Three central terms in these questions are 'experiential', 'relational', and 'expressive'.

Experiential values reference the text producer's experience of the natural or social world, their knowledge, and beliefs. For example, the researcher analyses whether vocabulary uses ideologically contested terms, rewording, overwording, or ideologically significant meaning relations (such as synonymies, hyponymies, antonymies, or hyperboles) between words. Grammatically, the researcher analyses whether there is obfuscation of agency, causality, or responsibility in the text, for example, through passive or active voice. The researcher must question whether the grammatical structure of the text shifts around actions, events, and attributions. As a result, the researcher can investigate the text producer's experience of reality.

Relational values refer to the expression of social relationships. The researcher analyses how a text's choice of language depends on and helps create social relationships between participants. For vocabulary, the researcher examines whether there are euphemisms, meaning that the text avoids specific negative values, and whether words are markedly formal or informal, indicating a level of concern for 'face', respect for status, and position. For grammar, the researcher analyses the modes, modality, and pronouns. A systematic asymmetry in mode (declarative, grammatical question, or imperative) is relevant as it reflects participant relations. In a declarative mode, the author is a giver of information and the addressee a receiver. In an imperative mode, the author is able to issue a command to the addressee. In a grammatical question, the author is asking the addressee for information that they can provide. Additionally, modality indicates power relations between participants, such as the granting of permission. Modality is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs like may, might, must, should, and ought, but also by various other formal features, including adverbs and tense. Lastly, pronouns, such as 'we' and 'you', can indicate who the participants are.

Expressive values indicate the producer's evaluation of the bit of reality they relate to: their social identity. In vocabulary, negative and positive evaluations are depicted by the adjectives and verbs chosen. Grammatically, modal verbs can indicate expressive modality; for example, 'may' is associated with possibility and permission, and 'must' is associated with certainty and obligation.

The remaining questions pertain to other signals of the text producer's ideological perspective. For example, metaphors can indicate ideological attachments as they represent one experience in terms of another. Logical connectors between sentences can showcase assumed causal and consequential relations. Sentence links can indicate whether one clause is subordinate to the other, often indicating that their information is presupposed. Lastly, larger-scale textual structures can identify patterns of meaning, ideology, and power within the text. For example, ordering in newspaper articles is often based on importance or newsworthiness, with the headline and first paragraph giving the perceived gist of the story. By tracing this, the analyst can discover what the producer finds most important.

The only question altered for this study is question 9, “*What interactional conventions are used?*”, which inquires whether one participant controls the conversation. This question involves analysing turn-taking, interruption, topic control, and formulation. However, this primarily relates to dialogue and is thus less relevant to media analysis. Instead, the researcher analyses power distribution through the textual space given to varying perspectives.

Interaction

The second step of CDA involves interpreting the interaction between the text and background processes. This step examines both the production and interpretation process. Production refers to how the text is produced and distributed. Who is the author and the editorial staff, what is the producer's general political position, and are they affiliated with other organisations? Is there any information on the production expenditures and general finances of the paper? Lastly, what genre is the source: a reader's letter, a commentary, a news item, or an interview? Establishing this background information helps assess what genre-specific mechanism the text deploys or ignores to convey its message. The process of interpretation refers to how the text will be consumed: who is the target audience, through what medium will they interpret the text, and is this the same medium as the analyst's? The 'Data Collection' section elaborates on this.

Context

The final step of CDA involves explaining how the discourse relates to power and ideology within the social context. This step situates the text within the broader social and cultural context. It examines 1) how these structures shape the text and 2) how the text can influence these structures through the cumulative effect of discourse on the reader. To analyse the discourse's relation to context, the author must first indicate what textual elements have an ideological character and then analyse how this discourse is positioned in relation to contextual struggles. The researcher analyses whether the discourse sustains or transforms existing power relations. Together, these analyses give a comprehensive overview of how the discourse relates to the broader context within which it functions. In this study, the analysis will elucidate how *China Daily's* discourse sustains or transforms existing power relations surrounding the Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations. This is discussed in the 'Discussion' section.

3.3. Data Collection

This study relies on primary source data from the newspaper *China Daily: European Edition*, hereinafter referred to as *China Daily*. These *China Daily* articles are collected through the online tool *NexisUni*. This tool enables the researcher to use comprehensive search criteria. Appendix B illustrates the data collection in *NexisUni*. Firstly, data collection was limited to sources from *China Daily*:

European Edition, as this would enable an analysis of communication aimed at a European and European-oriented audience. Secondly, search terms related to Ukraine, Russia, conflict, and peace negotiations were used. Third, the date range of articles was set to January 1st 2025, to March 7th 2025. Overall, 39 sources were found through this data collection method. After checking for duplicates and scanning the content of the articles, all 39 sources were included. Appendix D lists the final sources, referred to as CD1, CD2, etc.

This section also elaborates on the data's production and interpretation process, as this is necessary for Fairclough's (1989) second step of CDA: interpreting the interaction of text with background processes. *China Daily: European Edition*, also named *China Daily Europe*, was established in 2010 in London and is part of the larger *China Daily* news corporation (China Chamber of Commerce UK, n.d.). *China Daily* is an English-language newspaper owned by the Central Propaganda Office of the CCP, with headquarters and principal editorial office in Beijing (Thussu et al., 2017). The newspaper's finances are closely tied to and supported by the Chinese state. The European Edition covers national and international topics, politics, business, culture, and society. The genres are news reports and commentaries. China Daily (2012) states that the European Edition aims to provide a nuanced analysis of events related to China for European "policy makers, academics, businesspeople and government officials" (p. 2). To expand *China Daily's* reach, complimentary copies are available at the European Parliament, the British Foreign Office, European universities, hotels, and airports. In 2012, the European Edition was available for free in 140 European educational institutions.

The interpretation process of readers might differ from that of the researcher. *China Daily Europe* publishes a daily and weekly newspaper, as well as online articles (China Chamber of Commerce UK, n.d.). European Edition articles are sometimes published on other *China Daily* variants as well. The articles used in this study are published online but might have also been published in physical copies or other *China Daily* editions. Additionally, the layout in *NexisUni* might differ from the original format as it excludes images and font type. Thus, the researcher's analysis is purely dependent on the article's vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data is analysed through Fairclough's (1989) CDA. This project uses deductive coding via the coding software Atlas.ti. The codes are based on Fairclough's ten steps of textual analysis. Appendix E indicates the names and the number of codes. After individually analysing all articles, the researcher examined the broader themes and narratives that emerge from these patterns. Additionally, based on the literature review, descriptive terms of the conflict, such as "crisis", "conflict", and "war", were counted to allow for a statistical comparison.

3.5. Limitations

This methodology has two central limitations. Firstly, a common pitfall of discourse analysis is to claim that it shows what people think or believe (Schneider, 2013). Discourse analysis reveals how specific actors construct an argument, the kind of statements they attempt to establish as self-evident and true, and how this argument fits into broader social practices. However, it does not reflect what these actors truly think. Thus, this paper is also unable to draw any definitive conclusions on what *China Daily* editors think, let alone Chinese governmental actors. Similarly, as discourse analysis focuses on the text's content, the analysis is unable to state with certainty how this impacts audience members.

Secondly, authoritarian media discourse analysis is often framed in a Western-centric securitisation lens (Zhang et al., 2024). Looking for enemies and fearing propaganda threats can create blind spots in the precise analysis and understanding of authoritarian broadcasting styles and strategies. By acknowledging this limitation and maintaining a critical mindset, this study aims to avoid the pitfalls of securitisation-driven analysis. Overall, it is important for the analyst to maintain self-consciousness to avoid importing untheorized assumptions about society. Explanations are based on theory rather than assumptions.

4. Analysis

4.1. Vocabulary

Description of Conflict

This section first evaluates how *China Daily*'s vocabulary constructs the conflict. The discursive construction of the conflict implies who is to blame for the conflict, who should give more concessions in the negotiations, and on what topics the negotiations should focus. The lexical choices in *China Daily* articles construct the Russia-Ukraine conflict in a notably depoliticised manner. The articles downplay Russian aggression while emphasising broader humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical instability.

Figure 3 shows the frequency of terms used to describe the conflict. The term "conflict" was used most often (110), followed closely by the term "crisis" (84), and then "war" (12). The euphemisms "special military operation", "issue", and "geopolitical competition [between Russia and the West]" were all also used to describe the conflict once. The statistics only include direct references to the situation in Ukraine by the author of the article themselves. For example, "war" does not include references to "trade war", "proxy war", or a potential "nuclear war" or "World War Three". Additionally, special and military "operations" within the conflict are not counted as they are used to describe specific military operations, not the entire war. However, the descriptions of such operations

do grant insight into the use of language. For example, “Russian advances within Ukraine's borders expanded significantly” (CD29, para. 6), “hostilities” (CD21, para. 4), or the metaphor “tide turning against Ukraine” (CD29, para. 6) are euphemisms for invasion, annexation, aggression or occupation. The text employs neutral verbs that describe a process rather than an act. Explicit condemnations like “illegal”, “unjustified”, “invasion” or “attack” were absent.

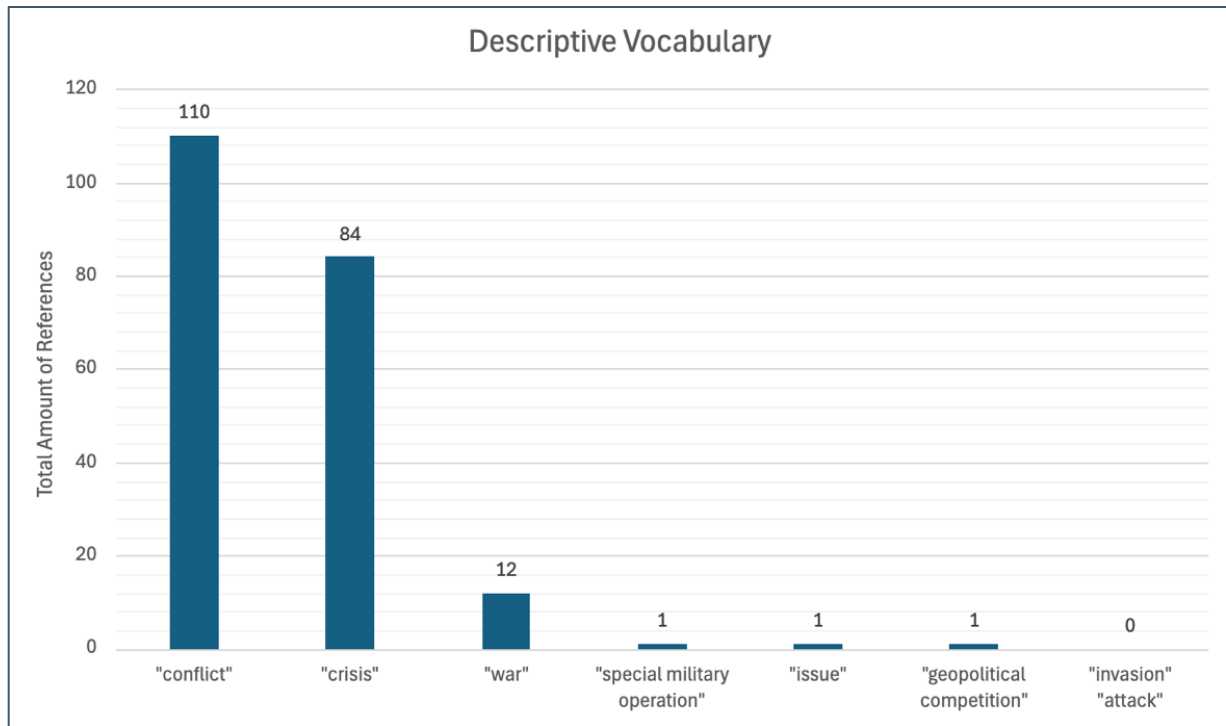


Figure 3: Descriptive Vocabulary of Russia-Ukraine War [Own Work].

Additionally, rhetorical strategies such as overwording, synonyms, and hyperboles reinforce a discourse focused not on Russian culpability but on the global and humanitarian consequences of the conflict. For example, “reshaped”, “undermined”, and “wrecked” (CD2, para. 5) are synonyms used to describe the effect of the conflict on European security. CD29 also uses overwording to describe the entire world in 2024 as unstable due to the conflict. Additionally, *China Daily* uses overwording to describe the death, destruction, and displacement caused by the war (e.g. CD9; CD11). Most descriptions focus on the global human and economic costs. This humanitarian crisis is discussed in a general sense, without a specific focus on one country or a comparison of losses. Furthermore, some texts use overwording for the amount of global economic damage caused (e.g. CD9; CD11; CD16). Again, the texts do not focus on a specific country. Overwording and hyperboles such as “unrelenting continuation” (CD29, para. 3) highlight the conflict's longevity and, thus, the continuation of economic, human, and global costs. Consequently, the conflict is framed as a negative phenomenon with ongoing high costs for the entire international community.

Need for Peace Through Diplomacy and Multilateralism

The vocabulary indicates a strong focus on peace, negotiations and diplomacy. Several texts employ overwording and synonymy to discuss the importance of diplomacy. For example, there is a need for “dialogue” (CD11, para. 2), “compromise” (CD33, para.5), and “a balanced, effective, and sustainable security framework” (CD9, para. 10) for “long-term peace and stability in Europe” (CD9, para. 10). Diplomacy is described as the “quieter yet more effective path” (CD33, para. 5) and the need for it is “abundantly clear” (CD13, para. 13). Throughout the texts, these needs and goals are reiterated. Metaphors such as the “art of the deal” and “art of compromise” (CD33, para. 5) position diplomacy as a skilful and creative process through. CD38 describes the task of mediating between the US, Europe and Ukraine as “squaring a circle” (para. 17), in other words, an impossible task. CD21 describes the conflict as a “Gordian knot” (para.10), meaning that it is an intricate problem, unsolvable in its own terms. This metaphor is often used in the context of cutting a Gordian knot, implying that someone or something needs to cut through the conflict. There is also a recurring metaphor of ‘getting the ball rolling’ on peace negotiations. CD3 states that “such diplomatic engagement [between the US and Russia in Riyadh] is critical to get the ball of peace talks rolling” (para.12), implying that negotiations will accelerate after being given an initial push. This metaphor recurs several times in the article. CD14 states that metaphorically “the window for peace is opening” (para. 9), yet simultaneously, CD30 states there is “no peace in sight” (para.2). This all indicates that *China Daily* constructs diplomacy and negotiations as difficult, necessary and not yet happening.

China Daily constructs Western actors as neither achieving nor striving towards peace negotiations. CD13 states that the author “asked European Commission officials probably a dozen times why they don't use diplomacy to help end the conflict instead of supplying arms to Ukraine” (para. 2). A dozen times is likely a hyperbole, emphasising that Western actors do not listen to Chinese sources. Statements such as “common sense is rare to find in Washington and Brussels” (CD6, para. 33) and “even a Chinese Journalist knows that” (CD13, para. 27) satirically criticise Western actors for not realising they must negotiate with Russia and reach a peaceful resolution.

China Daily constructs multilateral peace negotiations as the solution to the conflict. For example, Chinese proverbs of “sharing weal and woe together like passengers in the same boat” and the need to be “inspired by this spirit of global solidarity” (CD29, para. 11) emphasise shared destiny and interdependence. This supports multilateral perspectives for states to unite, show solidarity, and cooperate. Antonymy creates an ideological contrast between multilateralism as the positive and unilateralism as the negative. For example, in CD29 (para. 10), multilateralism is associated with solidarity, respect, openness, and mutual benefit, whereas unilateralism is associated with

protectionism and populism. Likewise, CD15 contrasts “dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, win-win rather than zero-sum relations” (para. 5).

Lastly, the articles use various vocabulary tools to emphasise that military and economic solutions are unviable, unjust, and ineffective. Western military aid to Ukraine is described as “reckless” (CD16, para. 14), “dangerous gimmicks” (CD16, para.1), and “dangerous assumption that time and resources will eventually compel Russia to retreat” (CD11, para. 3). *China Daily* describes economic sanctions as “politically motivated obstruction” (CD28, para. 11), “not in the least reasonable or warranted” (CD24, para. 4), and “illegal unilateral sanctions” (CD24, para. 6). The texts emphasise China’s self-described “legitimate right” to economic relations with Russia (CD21, para. 9). This discursive construction primarily focuses on sanctions affecting the Chinese economy rather than Russian economy. By concentrating on Chinese costs and benefits, it seems unlikely that *China Daily*’s criticism of economic solutions is based on peace ideologies.

US’s Role in Peace Negotiations

To some extent, *China Daily* constructs the US’s, specifically the Trump administration’s, role in peace negotiations positively. Joe Biden’s administration was solely described through negative vocabulary such as “arrogance”, “mistaken,” and “naïve thinking” (CD8, para. 7-14). Contrarily, Trump is described as a “realist” who “respects”, “understands”, and “helps end conflict” (CD8, para. 17). In the first month of Trump’s presidency, *China Daily* expresses hopeful optimism, stating that China will be “closely monitoring” the incoming administration (CD30, para. 2). Trump’s first month of office is described as “earthshaking”, implying that his administration has clear power to change the status quo China Daily (CD17, para. 2). After the Riyadh summit, *China Daily* articles repeatedly clarify that China “welcomes” talks (CD7, para. 2), “supports all efforts conducive to peace” (CD36, para. 15), and negotiations between Russia and the US mark “a major step forward” (CD9, para. 3). The texts emphasise that resuming negotiations is vital.

However, the US’s method of negotiations is abundantly criticised as weak and performative. CD3 states that the conflict is “not just a quick-fix deal” (para.12), criticising US-Russia negotiations for excluding European actors and, thus, only aiming to solve the issue temporarily. The US-Russia negotiations in Riyadh are described as a “spectacle” (CD33, para. 4) and “raising eyebrows” (CD22, para. 3), indicating that the negotiations were performative rather than constructive, and others, including *China Daily*, reacted with surprise or disapproval. The US is described as “unpredictable and potentially aggressive” (CD2, para. 12), “lazy and largely ignorant” (CD8, para. 2), and a “hegemonic [...] self-serving [...] renewed challenge to multilateralism and global governance systems” (CD29, para. 4). Metaphorically, the US is described as a “rogue cowboy” (CD2, para.15): unpredictable and lawless. This shift in vocabulary occurs first on February 18th, the day of the US-Russia Summit in Riyadh.

The vocabulary highlights that the US excludes European states from negotiations and constructs this as negative. Europe is needed for “a balanced, effective and sustainable security framework” (CD1, para. 6). For example, CD23 frames France’s, the UK’s, Germany’s, and Turkey’s involvement positively. Within peace resolutions, providing a peacekeeping force is described as “the heavy lifting” (CD38, para. 6), meaning that European countries will be doing the most challenging part. Moreover, *China Daily* criticises Trump’s political attacks on Ukraine. The Oval Office meeting is described as a “diplomatic blitz on Ukraine” (CD12, para. 2) and metaphorically “turning negotiations into reality TV” (CD33, para. 6), thereby undermining the chances of constructive dialogue. Terms such as “exclusion” (CD23, para. 12) imply that the US deliberately marginalised Europe. Although resumed negotiations are encouraged, US negotiations and exclusion of Europe are described as erratic and self-interested.

Europe’s Role in the Negotiations

The vocabulary indicates a clear power relation between the US and Europe. Terminology such as “[the US] brushed aside” (CD27, para. 12), “dismissed” (CD4, para. 13) and “informs” Europe (CD2, para. 2) constructs the US as dominant over Europe. The US “can persuade Europe and Ukraine to accept the outcome [of negotiations]” (CD10, para. 9) implies manipulation or coercion, rather than partnership. In contrast, vocabulary such as “Ukraine attempted to address” the US (CD38, para. 7) constructs Europe and Ukraine as powerless and submissive to the US. Europe is metaphorically described as “accustomed to [...] the warm arms of the US” (CD19, para.20), “shackled to US priorities” (CD11, para.7), and “blindly following the US’ lead on Ukraine” (CD2, para.4). In other words, Europe is dependent on US policy and does not reflect critically on this.

Resultingly, *China Daily* encourages European actors to question their power relation to the US. Europe, Ukraine and other US allies are provoked through metaphors of infantilization and death. The texts describe European nations as being “left at the kids’ table” (CD10, para. 5) and “no more than a pawn on the US’ chessboard” (CD22, para. 5), meaning that Europe is not included in the important discussions and is dispensable in the game of the US. European countries are warned that “those not at the [negotiation] table were going to be on the menu” (CD3, para. 4) and “the [Trump] administration will not hesitate to throw the US’ allies, let alone Ukraine as a non-ally, under the bus” (CD17, para.5). In other words, US allies are at risk of betrayal and death. *China Daily* urges Europe to metaphorically “cast off the shackles [...] and take accountability” (CD36, para. 13), referring to decoupling from the US. Additionally, hyperboles such as “finally” indicate that the author has been waiting a long time for Europe to detach from the US (CD6, para. 16).

China's Role in the Negotiations

China Daily constructs the Chinese state as a neutral mediator that seeks peace through diplomacy. Throughout the articles, overwording vocabulary constructs China as a stabilising, peaceful, cooperative, rules-based, and multilateral force. The articles state that China's goal is "balanced development, peaceful coexistence and overall stability" (CD15, para. 8) through "fair, lasting and binding peace agreement acceptable to all parties concerned" (CD1, para. 2). *China Daily* uses positively associated terms, hyperboles, and synonyms to describe China's role in the conflict. The Chinese state is described as "just and objective" (CD24, para. 5), "balanced" (CD1, para. 3), "impartial" (CD39, para. 17), "constructive" (CD34, para. 15), "responsible" (CD19, para. 27), and "peace-loving" (CD21, para. 6). These adjectives depict the Chinese state as a benevolent, fair, and neutral peace mediator. Moreover, China is framed as an "active" mediator (e.g. CD32, para. 2; CD34, para. 12). This is a synonym, as mediating entails being active, and thus linguistically emphasises China's mediation efforts. Furthermore, China is described as "the blueprint" (CD15, para. 5) and "helping engineer a political resolution" (CD36, para. 15), implying active and purposeful manufacturing of diplomatic solutions. Through synonymy, rewording, and overwording, *China Daily* consistently frames China as the neutral, benevolent, and proactive mediator.

Furthermore, *China Daily's* vocabulary emphasises that China has been undertaking these actions persistently. Vocabulary such as "consistent" (CD3, para. 5), "since the start" (CD9, para. 3), "continue to" (CD34, para. 15), "always" (CD24, para. 5), and "persistent" (CD21, para. 8) construct China's mediation efforts as consistent and reliable. China's peace efforts are constructed as a clear, dependable, and long-term stance.

Regarding peace efforts, *China Daily* also constructs a contrast between negative actions and Chinese state actions. For example, "China does not do anything to add fuel to the flames" (CD24, para.8) implies that others do heighten the conflict. Countries are also warned not to metaphorically "resort to the law of the jungle" (CD15, para. 7), contrasting this with Chinese rule-based, multilateral, and diplomatic approaches. Additionally, Western sanctioning of Russia and sending of weapons to Ukraine is called a "far cry from what China has been doing for the peaceful settlement of the conflict" (CD24, para. 8). Overall, this constructs a survivalist anarchic world that contrasts with China's rule-based advocacy.

Although Chinese actions to resolve the conflict are described positively, they lack clarity. For example, *China Daily* states that China and Russia "engage in strategic communication" (CD34, para. 13) and China's 12-point proposal is praised as "objective, fair and pragmatic" (CD9, para. 5). However, these terms do not clarify what China and Russia discuss, how this is strategic or why China's proposal is fair. In the articles, Chinese state actors encourage "peace talks at an appropriate time" and respect

for “territorial integrity of all countries” (CD7, para. 1). However, this does not clarify when peace talks are appropriate or whose territorial integrity is talked about specifically.

Russia’s Role in the Negotiations

Lastly, the vocabulary evaluates Russia’s role in the negotiations positively. Descriptions of Russia as “committed to addressing the root causes of the Ukraine crisis and seeking a lasting, fair and sustainable peace solution” (CD34, para. 14) use overwording and synonymy to emphasise Russia’s positive commitment. Hyperboles such as Putin being ready for negotiations at “any time” (CD30, para. 8) construct the leader as considerate and open.

China Daily emphasises Russia’s security concerns. The texts construct NATO-US expansionism as the core cause of the conflict (e.g. CD6; CD13; CD21). For example, “Biden refused to heed Putin’s red lines [NATO extending to Ukraine and Georgia], leading to the conflict” is a euphemism for invading Ukraine. Additionally, metaphors that the US “engineered” the crisis (CD9, para. 6) suggest that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is actively and purposefully created by the US. Resultingly, the texts justify Russia’s security concerns and actions. Describing the conflict metaphorically as a “geopolitical puzzle, with a dual-track dilemma” (CD22, para. 2), meaning that the conflict is difficult to solve due to a clash between US hegemony and Russia’s survival instincts, also justifies Russia’s position. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov emphasises that “the US must take the first step toward resuming dialogue and respect Russia’s legitimate interests” (CD29, para. 6). Additionally, *China Daily* states that the US “blithely ignored Russia’s legitimate security interests and warnings” (CD6, para.18) and that Trump “rightly respects Russia’s power” (CD8, para. 16). Other actions or actors are barely ever judged with vocabulary such as “just”, “right” or “legal”. By constructing Russia’s security concerns as legitimate, this also justifies Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and gives the federation more power in negotiations.

4.2. Grammar

Experiential Grammar

First, this section analyses the experiential values of *China Daily’s* grammar, meaning whether there is any obfuscation of agency, causality or responsibility in the text. Grammatical structure and active versus passive sentences can highlight or obfuscate causality and agency. Generally, the articles employ the active voice, resulting in shorter, stronger, and more direct sentences with clear agency.

Active Agency

In the active sentences, certain actors are more often present, highlighting their agency in specific topics. China and Russia are often only mentioned as agents in active voice when highlighting positive statements or developments. Most of these positive active sentences focus on the Chinese state’s agency in peace negotiations and diplomacy. For example, China’s agency is clear in “actively

promoting peace talks” (CD15, para 9), “launched [...] Friends for Peace” (CD21, para.7), “is willing to act on the demands of the parties involved” (CD14, para. 10), and “will continue to play a constructive role in facilitating peace talks and promote a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis” (CD34, para. 15). All these sentences attribute clear positive agency to the PRC.

Russian state agency is also clear in positively associated sentences. For example, Russia “seeks not merely a ceasefire but lasting peace” (CD29, para. 7), “agreed to work on a path toward ending the conflict and improving bilateral ties [with the US]” (CD10, para. 3), and “expressed appreciation for China's efforts in actively promoting a peaceful resolution” (CD34, para. 12). Additionally, other actors’ agency is sometimes mystified to emphasise Russian agency in positive actions. For example, “Russia and relevant parties make positive efforts to defuse the Ukraine crisis” (CD34, para. 4) and “positive efforts made by Russia and relevant parties to resolve the crisis” (CD21, para. 7) only name Russia as an actor, ignoring other parties involved in diffusing the crisis. This leads to Russia’s agency being clear, but others’ positive involvement being moved to the background.

The US, Ukraine, and European states are significantly less often the subject in active sentences. Sometimes, positive agency of Western actors is highlighted, especially that of US President Trump. For example, “The Trump administration [...] is telling the truth about the fundamental causes of this war” (CD18, para. 14) indicates that Trump is the actor in a positively associated verb: telling the truth. However, most examples of clear Western agency are presented in a negative context, highlighting blame and hypocrisy. For example, the US “refused to heed Putin's red lines, leading to the conflict” (CD8, para. 14) is an active sentence with clear agency, attributing direct blame for the Ukraine conflict to US decisions. The “West” is attributed clear agency in prolonging the conflict through “economic coercion targeting Russia and continued [...] military assistance” (CD24, para. 7), “wrongly accusing China of enabling Russia's military operations” (CD21, para. 9) and aiming to “surround Russia” (CD18, para. 14) and “overthrow the Putin government” (CD2, para. 6). Europe and Ukraine are primarily positioned as a passive recipient of US-Russia dynamics. Two of the only sentences in which Ukraine has active agency are “Zelensky has threatened further attacks on military installations in Russia” and “[Ukrainian drones] attack residential buildings” (CD30, para. 10-12). This positions Ukraine as an active agent of attacks and threats.

Unclear Agency

The *China Daily* articles often obscure agency. For example, “Sincere friendship with Russia hailed” (CD34, para. 1), “The US-Russia talks were also expected to pave the way for a possible meeting” (CD7, para. 6), and “The US' move is widely interpreted as an attempt to "unilaterally" negotiate” (CD5, para. 4) all exclude agency. The texts do not answer who hails, expects, or interprets.

Some obscuration of agency, for example, by using passive voice, aim to hide negatively associated agency. For example, “enlarging the occupied territories” (CD29, para. 6) avoids explicitly stating that Russia is the actor who occupied these territories. Similarly, many passive phrases obscure which agent excluded Europe from negotiations. For example, “excluding Kyiv and European allies” (CD12, para.3), “European leaders [...] being sidelined” (CD10, para. 4), and “have been left at “the kids' table”” (CD10, para. 5) all obscure which actor is responsible for this. Likely, these quotes refer to the US, neglecting the roles of others in these decisions, but grammatically, these actions are agentless.

Additionally, passive sentences and lack of agency are used to imply judgment. For example, “Trump's previous claim that he could bring peace to Ukraine within 24 hours has now been exposed as political posturing rather than a viable plan” (CD33, para. 3) frames Trump’s claim negatively but avoids direct confrontation by using the passive voice. By excluding the source of criticism, the sentence creates the illusion of an objective revelation, as though the truth of the claim’s invalidity has self-evidently emerged. Similarly, “hopes that the window of opportunity [...] to bring an end to the conflict will not be squandered” (CD36, para. 15) and criticism of “a certain Western country which calls for peace but does everything in private to pursue bloc confrontation” (CD32, para. 7) do not specify who might squander the possibility of peace or pursue bloc formation but imply that this is the US. Thus, these sentences avoid directly criticising the US.

China Daily also obstructs agency by frequently using nominalisations and inanimate subjects as agents. Nominalisations are verbs turned into nouns which abstract and depersonalise agency. For example, “The unrelenting continuation of the Ukraine crisis” (CD29, para. 6) frames the continuation as an abstract process rather than a direct action with responsible agents. The action is thus presented as processes unfolding ‘by itself’. Inanimate agents also obscure agency. For example, “the Ukraine crisis continuing” (CD3, para. 4) personifies the crisis, positioning it as the actor rather than the effect of actions. This construction frames the crisis as self-sustaining, obscures the agents perpetuating the conflict, and neglects attributing responsibility. Similarly, “a pivotal moment arose” (CD34, para.3) and “the Ukraine crisis [...] further accelerated” (CD39, para. 3) avoid identifying human actors, suggesting that the event emerged spontaneously rather than resulting from deliberate actions or decisions. There is no direct critique of Russia’s invasion, explicit attribution of aggression, or the conflict’s effects. Additionally, regarding resolutions to the conflict, “negotiations have been ongoing” (CD26, para. 2) and “the conflict showed no signs of de-escalation” (CD29, para. 7) give agency to the negotiations and the conflict resolving itself. However, negotiations do not sustain themselves, nor do conflicts de-escalate or persist without actors driving those outcomes. By using inanimate agents

and nominalisations, *China Daily* frames the conflict as a natural phenomenon, rather than the result of specific actions by identifiable agents.

Lastly, collective and abstract agents are frequently used to deflect and generalise agency. For example, “The Ukraine crisis [...] exacerbated by external influences and geopolitical considerations” (CD21, para. 1), “the fallout from the two sides' fractious entrenching of positions” (CD36, para. 12), and “all countries should respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity” (CD14, para. 5) do not clarify which agents undertake these actions. Thus, these phrases remove clarity and responsibility, making it difficult to assess who is responsible for specific actions.

Relational Grammar

Grammatical features analyse relational values through sentence mode, modality, and pronouns. Firstly, the articles predominantly employ the declarative mode, positioning the author as an analyst offering facts and interpretation. The articles report on the current situation and the actions of others. Their primary focus is to explain rather than mobilise or persuade. Examples include “China welcomes” (CD7, para. 2), “Starmer said (CD7, para. 17), and “this reveals” (CD22, para. 3). Even hypothetical situations such as “Europe [...] potentially steering toward greater autonomy” (CD12, para. 4) are stated in the declarative mode. Opinions and contested information are also stated in declarative mode. For example, “Europe is losing its strategic voice and its interests are becoming irrelevant in global diplomacy” (CD22, para. 3), “the US [...] intended to weaken Russia and keep European countries bound to NATO” (CD22, para. 3), and “The US' idea was to expand NATO eastward” (CD8, para. 13) are all declarative. By embedding interpretation within factual structures, the articles legitimise particular ideological stances while minimising space for alternative viewpoints.

In contrast, imperatives and deontic modal constructions such as “must,” “should be,” and “demands” appear sporadically and are never directed at the reader. Instead, they are directed towards the abstract international community or external actors, which further distances the writer's voice from overt ideological involvement. For instance, statements such as “countries must work together” (CD22, para. 11) or “must recognise that the era of unipolarity is over” (CD11, para. 5) suggest normative expectations for multipolar governance but place responsibility onto a broader collective. This technique constructs the author not as a partisan agent but as a commentator articulating widely shared global imperatives.

Pronoun usage further contributes to this distancing effect. First- and second-person pronouns such as “I,” “we,” and “you” are rare, limiting clear identification of in-groups and out-groups. When “we” is used, it is typically quoted by Western figures, for example, “We [the US] are just escalating this war” (CD30, para. 7), or “big increases in arms spending will come from our [British] pockets” (CD16, para. 13). These uses assign culpability to Western governments. Rare cases, such as CD8 (para.

4 & 16), refer to an inclusive universal “we” of global observers. In general, the persistent third-person reference to actors and institutions reinforces an impersonal, ‘expert’ stance, aligning with the genre conventions of state-affiliated media.

Expressive Grammar

Expressive modality is primarily realised through modal auxiliary verbs, which reveal that *China Daily* encourages multipolar negotiations, hedges EU actions, and affirms China’s continuous support for a diplomatic settlement. For example, the articles employ various directive modalities (e.g., “should,” “must,” “need to”) which emphasise urgent necessity, particularly regarding peace negotiations. For example, the imperatives “all parties [...] should participate in the peace talks” (CD3, para. 13), “[negotiations] should be viewed as a positive development” (CD3, para. 11), and “all sides will need to make compromises” (CD38, para. 2) urge actors to negotiate and compromise. Specifically, directive modalities advocate for working together through multipolar systems. For example, the directive modalities “the international community must act collectively” (CD29, para. 2), “must recognise that the era of unipolarity is over” (CD11, para. 5), and “should recognise this new multipolar reality” (CD38, para. 3) urge individual states and the international community to cooperate multilaterally on the Ukraine conflict as well as broader geopolitical governance.

Most sentences are written with high epistemic certainty. There is little use of modal verbs expressing uncertainty. Where uncertainty is present, it is used to predict and hedge EU actions. For example, it “might be better” for the EU to be defensive towards the US (CD5, para. 6), political divisions and economic concerns in Europe “may hinder their ability to resolve the crisis” (CD19, para. 23), and Brussels “could” revoke Russia sanctions for resumed energy supply (CD11, para. 6).

Furthermore, the uses of present perfect and future modal constructions express China’s involvement as consistent, rational, and future-oriented. For example, “[China] has been calling for a political settlement” (CD9, para. 2), “China’s position [...] has always been that the earlier talks start, the sooner peace will arrive” (CD3, para. 11), and “has stayed in communication with relevant parties” (CD20, para. 8) all emphasise that China’s peace efforts are not only currently ongoing but have been so for a long time. Moreover, the modal verb “will” indicates China’s continuing commitment to peace in the future. For example, the phrases “China will always stand firmly on the side of peace” (CD20, para. 9), “will continue to play a constructive role in facilitating peace talks” (CD34, para. 15), and “will continue to play a constructive role in supporting a political settlement” (CD17, para. 14) express that China’s commitment to peace negotiations will continue to persist. In contrast, counterfactual constructions such as “a conflict which could have been resolved through diplomatic means” (CD22, para. 3) retrospectively assign blame to other actors, suggesting that peaceful alternatives were feasible but ignored, without overtly stating who is at fault.

Sentence Links

Cohesion is created throughout the *China Daily* articles through repetition, connectors, and references. This section will focus on two aspects of sentence linkages: causal mechanisms and subordinated clauses. These sentence links not only maintain narrative flow, they also naturalise certain assumptions and privilege particular causal logics.

Causality

Sentence connectors such as “therefore,” “meanwhile,” and “as a result” are frequently deployed to construct causal mechanisms, framing certain knowledge and connections as rational, necessary, or self-evident.

Firstly, connectors reinforce the belief that peace through diplomacy is necessary. For example, CD19 (para. 2) states that “against this [longevity of the war] backdrop”, negotiations and giving up on absolute victory are important. Similarly, after highlighting that prolonged conflicts tend to escalate, CD3 (para.8) states that “So, it should be to the relief of the world that both sides [...] are now willing to end the conflict at the negotiating table”. Several causal mechanisms also underline that this peace should be achieved without military aid and security guarantees to Ukraine, for example, by using “instead of” to construct a contrasting dilemma between military aid and peace (CD13, para. 13).

Secondly, connectors indicate a positive causal mechanism between European involvement in the negotiations and sustainable peace. For example, CD1 states that European participation is necessary “Because the conflict unfolded on European soil” and “in order to establish a balanced, effective and sustainable security framework to ensure long-term stability in the region” (para. 6). Additionally, “So that a fair, lasting, binding and mutually acceptable agreement is forthcoming, [...] all parties and stakeholders should participate in the peace talks process” (CD3, para. 13) indicates a direct correlation between all parties being included and a fair agreement being reached.

Thirdly, connectors construct the PRC’s diplomatic efforts positively. For example, CD32 (para. 6) states that “Thanks to China's mediation, even Iran and Saudi Arabia [...] made peace and restored diplomatic relations”, highlighting the PRC’s success in mediating complex negotiations. This structure positions China as the primary cause of peace. In general, causal mechanisms obscure complexity and construct China as the logical solution to international instability.

Subordination

Subordinated clauses can indicate which statements are presupposed as a fundamental truth. The links between clauses within a sentence can indicate whether these are subordinate to the main clause. A subordinate clause is a part of a sentence that cannot stand alone and is often supported by the context of the main clause.

This section will illustrate five examples of subordinated clauses indicating presupposed information. First, in CD22 (para.3), “By turning the conflict into a proxy war” is the subordinate clause and “the US [...] intended to weaken Russia and keep European countries bound to NATO” is the main clause. Thus, the conflict being a proxy war is likely presupposed factual information by the author. Interestingly, such presupposed information is also not further elaborated on. Second, in CD12 (para.4), “As a peace promoter” is the subordinate clause and “China supports all efforts for peace” is the main clause, meaning that China being a peace promoter is the presupposed context. Third, in CD8 (para.14), “Biden refused to heed Putin's red lines” is the main clause and “leading to the conflict” is the subordinated clause. Here, the presupposed information is that the conflict is a direct consequence of American actions. Fourth, in CD22 (para. 4), “A conflict which could have been resolved through diplomatic means now threatens to reshape the entire European security framework” is the main clause and “as the US wants to use the conflict to reshape transatlantic relations” is the subordinated clause and presupposed context. This presupposed truth explains or justifies the main clause: that the reshaping of the European security framework isn’t just a byproduct of war but strategically driven by the US. Lastly, in CD16 (para. 2), “which only prolongs the conflict” is the subordinated clause, presupposing that sending arms to Ukraine prolongs the conflict. These subordinated clauses indicate that the author deems the following statements as unrefuted truths: the conflict is a proxy war, China is a peace promoter, the US caused the conflict, the US wants to use the conflict to reshape transatlantic relations, and sending arms to Ukraine only prolongs the conflict.

4.3. Textual Structure

Control of Conversation

In media articles, control of the conversation is indicated by the author using more textual space or quotes on a specific perspective. This can illustrate the distribution of power in the text. The analysis of *China Daily's* power distribution led to three main conclusions.

Firstly, *China Daily* focuses on Chinese state discourse. Most articles are based on Chinese state information, perspectives and quotes, giving these perspectives the most power. For example, CD24’s central claim is that the Chinese state and Chinese companies should be allowed to continue economic and trade cooperation with Russia. This article does not include any outside opinions countering the Chinese perspective.

Secondly, some articles focus on Russia’s perspective on the conflict. Although other sources are often mentioned, they receive significantly less space. For example, there are several quotes in CD4 (2025) from different Russian officials that are not or barely countered. Additionally, CD27 give voice to multiple actors via quotations, but the sequence privileges Russian actions first, followed by shorter European or Ukrainian responses. CD30 also includes quotes from various Russian

perspectives and utilises a quote from Trump to criticise Ukraine. Only at the end of the text is there a quote from Zelensky, stating that they will continue to attack, but not elaborating on their reason for doing so.

Lastly, although Ukraine is given little space and thus little power to counter Russian perspectives, it does receive the power to counter US statements. For example, in CD23 (para. 13-14), Trump criticises Zelensky for avoiding elections. However, Zelensky is immediately quoted after this, effectively countering the accusation. In CD17, the US and Ukraine also get a similar amount of space in the text. This could reflect support for Ukraine's position. Yet, coupled with the lack of power distributed to Ukrainian positions vis-à-vis China or Russia, it seems more likely that Ukraine is only given power to counter US statements.

Title & Structure

This section analyses how the articles' larger-scale structures, such as sectioning, the order of arguments, and the use of titles, construct the Ukraine conflict. Firstly, the titles and introductions of the *China Daily* articles are primarily centered around four topics: 1) advocacy for peace and negotiation in the Ukraine conflict with a strong emphasis on China's positive role as a mediator and promoter of peace and security, 2) calls for inclusive, multipolar approaches to diplomacy without US dominance, 3) criticism of sanctions and politicised trade measures, and 4) affirmation of China-Russia ties and broader international cooperation. According to Fairclough (1989), these topics are likely the most "important" or "newsworthy" positions.

Secondly, many articles' internal structure embeds discussions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict within broader geopolitical and economic analyses. Rather than treating the war as a stand-alone crisis, the conflict is often framed as a symptom of systemic dysfunction, particularly the failure of US-led global governance. For example, CD14 begins with general reflections on multilateralism before referencing Ukraine and Palestine as case studies of global instability. Then, China is positioned in these conflicts as a constructive, neutral party, supporting dialogue. CD33 also decentres the battlefield and, instead, reframes the conflict as a negative example of diplomacy. Relatedly, CD39 portrays the conflict as an intensifier of pre-existing Eurasian dependencies and fragmentation.

Thirdly, multiple articles structurally criticise American dominance and enhance China's international image. For example, CD8 employs a problem-solution structure: first diagnosing U.S. arrogance and flawed policy, then tracing its historical roots, and finally proposing a solution centred on diplomacy and arms control. Here, the Ukraine war functions as one piece within a broader critique of U.S. hegemonic decline. Similarly, CD29 also uses the Ukraine conflict to criticise US unilateralism. The text prioritises diagnosing global disorder first and only advocates for cooperation last. He first introduces global instability, details regional crises such as Ukraine, highlights the dangers of U.S.

unilateralism, and concludes with a normative call for collective action inspired by Chinese philosophy. Additionally, CD15's structure emphasises China's role as a global stabiliser, only mentioning Ukraine as part of a broader discussion on multilateralism. The article applies China's Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence to the disparate diplomatic arenas of Ukraine, the G20, Gaza, and the Belt and Road Initiative before situating these efforts within the larger context of multilateralism versus unilateralism. Overall, these structural patterns reflect a deliberate editorial strategy to reframe the Ukraine conflict not as an isolated crisis, but as a manifestation of deeper geopolitical currents. The conflict is situated within a broader critique of Western power, a call for multilateralism, and a narrative that highlights China's stabilising role in global affairs.

Authoritative Sources

Lastly, this section analyses how *China Daily* uses sources to substantiate arguments, establish authority, and justify statements. All the articles use a substantial number of sources and quotations. Some of these sources are used to confer authority and substantiate the author's arguments. These are often formal institutional sources such as state officials, foreign ministers, or Western organisations. For example, "Armin Papperger, CEO of Rheinmetall, Germany's largest defence contractor, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, as reported by the Financial Times" (CD10, para. 5) conveys objectivity by referencing technocratic, professional, and international authority. This authority is often rhetorically enhanced through positive overwording. For example, CD17 (para. 10) states:

"as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointed out when speaking to the Chinese media on Saturday, after returning from his visits to the United Kingdom and Ireland and his chairing of a high-level meeting of the United Nations Security Council, and attendance at the Munich Security Conference and the G20 foreign ministers' meeting [...]"

By highlighting that the Foreign Minister visited Western countries, chaired high-level meetings, and attended exclusive events, the quote enhances the authoritative status of this source.

Furthermore, many of these authoritative sources are vague and omit clear agency. For example, CD26 references "sources with knowledge of the matter" (para. 1), CD16 cites "experts" (para. 1), and CD30 cites "many" (para. 7). Yet, they never elaborate on who those sources are. In some cases, sources appear to be strategically selected to reproduce China-aligned discourses, despite lacking conventional authority. In CD16, "Keith Bennett, a senior analyst of international relations in London" (para. 6) criticised British aid to Ukraine as unacceptable. The entire article is built on the referencing of this source as proof. However, this source is the founder of Friends of Socialist China and has no other clear geopolitical experience or authority. Resultingly, the use of this source seems biased towards a China-friendly perspective.

5. Discussion

The discussion section embodies Fairclough's (1989) third level of analysis: context. Based on Fairclough's theory, *China Daily's* discourse both influences and is influenced by social ideology and power relations. As the CCP's Central Propaganda Department owns the newspaper, the CCP likely influences the text, embedding it in their power structures and social ideologies. Discourse conveys these structures to the reader and has the power to impact the reader's perception of reality. As the target audience of *China Daily* is European officials, intellectuals, and policymakers, these influences could impact European policymaking. Resultingly, the CCP's discursive construction through *China Daily Europe* is not merely about peace; it is about power, positioning, and long-term global influence.

This thesis draws five main conclusions about *China Daily's* discursive construction of Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations and what this implies about the CCP's social ideology and power in the conflict. The first three conclusions are largely expected based on the existing academic literature: the CCP's discursive construction through *China Daily* 1) reinforces the CCP's image as a neutral, benevolent, and peaceful mediator, 2) subtly legitimises Russia, and 3) delegitimises Western actions, especially those of the US. However, the last two conclusions add to previous literature. The fourth conclusion is that *China Daily* selectively adopts certain Russian narratives while discarding others, supporting Russia without fully compromising its image abroad. Lastly, through *China Daily*, the CCP likely attempts to weaken transatlantic unity by emphasising European overdependence on the US.

First and foremost, *China Daily* constructs the CCP as a neutral and benevolent peace facilitator. The articles consistently praise the CCP for its efforts to mediate and promote peace. While the agency of some actors is obscured, the CCP is regularly commended for its peace facilitation efforts, with no mention of negative Chinese agency. Additionally, this praise for the CCP is strengthened by constructing negotiations as difficult but necessary to undertake quickly. *China Daily* emphasises the need for quick and lasting peace through dialogue, diplomacy, and multilateralism. This linguistic framing supports the CCP's official narrative of China as a neutral and stabilising force in international affairs. Besides praising Chinese state actors, *China Daily* also attributes the most significant amount of discursive power to the Chinese state. Information, perspectives, and quotes from or in line with the CCP's perspective occupy the majority of the space in the articles and hold the most discursive power. This constructs the PRC as a powerful actor in international relations, diplomacy, and Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations. These findings align with previous analyses of the CCP's self-portrayal and of internationally oriented media. Moreover, specific recommendations for a resolution, apart from including Europe, remain vague, which aligns with Gabuev's (2023) and Singh's (2024) criticism of China's 12-point peace proposal as scattered.

China Daily seeks to position itself as a neutral observer in the conflict. For example, the articles primarily use the declarative mode, focusing on facts and interpretation. The articles also use some imperatives, but these are directed at the international community rather than the reader specifically. Similarly, little to no personal pronouns are used, indicating that *China Daily* aims to detach itself from the developments. *China Daily's* self-construction as a neutral observer mirrors PRC policy statements and official communication that construct the state as a neutral actor without a significant stake in the conflict.

Second, in a similar way but to a far lesser extent than China, *China Daily* also constructs the Russian Federation as a powerful and positive actor in peace negotiations. Following China, most information, perspectives, and quotes are from Russian-affiliated sources. An example of positive construction is that the articles omit negative Russian agency, such as invading Ukraine, causing humanitarian destruction, and slowing peace negotiations. Whereas Russia's security concerns are described as "legitimate", the invasion is not deemed "illegitimate" or even labelled an "invasion". Only the positive role of Russia in peace negotiations is highlighted. Russia is portrayed as an open and cooperative actor in talks. Furthermore, *China Daily* linguistically constructs the conflict as inevitable rather than the effect of Russia's actions. Through metaphors, the conflict and negotiations are framed as natural phenomena or engineered games. Using inanimate objects as actors constructs the conflict as unfolding by itself. Terms like 'invasion' or 'attack' are not used, and terms like 'conflict' or 'crisis' are used much more often than 'war'. *China Daily* constructs the conflict as an inevitable process, part of a larger systemic geopolitical and economic context, thereby avoiding direct condemnation of Russia. This subtly legitimises Russia's actions. These findings are in line with Stent's (2023) conclusion that the CCP avoids condemning Russia's actions and Ohle's (2024) criticism of China's 12-point peace proposal for overlooking Ukrainian security concerns and overemphasising Russian foreign policy interests and concepts. The war being referred to as a 'conflict' or 'crisis' also supports Breeze & Novoa-Jaso's (2024) conclusion that the term 'war' is seldom used. Breeze & Novoa-Jaso (2024) argue that this is because a 'conflict' or 'crisis' can be resolved, whereas a 'war' can be won or lost.

Third, *China Daily* subtly delegitimises Western actions, especially those of the US. Western states have the lowest levels of power and positive agency in the articles. They are mainly attributed negative agency, for example, for starting the war, not pursuing diplomatic resolutions and continuing the war through military aid and economic sanctions. The conflict is constructed as an engineered game, purposefully created by the US, driven by its expansionism and unilateral order. Western military and economic solutions to the conflict are framed in a highly negative light. Military aid is framed as prolonging the conflict, and sanctions are constructed as illegal and mutually unbeneficial.

These findings align with the CCP's official communication, which urges de-escalation through political and diplomatic solutions rather than military or economic means (Düben & Wang-Kaeding, 2024).

Although the articles expressed careful optimism about Trump's presidency compared to Biden's, Trump's approach to the conflict is also criticised after starting negotiations in Riyadh. This could be due to Ukraine's and Europe's exclusion from the negotiations, which is widely criticised in the texts. However, it could also be connected to the broader context of US-China tariffs and geopolitical tensions.

Moreover, Europe and Ukraine have particularly little power in *China Daily's* discourse, except when their power is used to counter US opinions. These findings are similar to Repnikova's (2022) analysis that show that Chinese media mentions Ukrainian destruction and suffering, but Russian sources and arguments mostly override these perspectives. However, it is interesting that *China Daily* does give Ukrainian actors the power to challenge negative narratives when these are from the US.

Whereas these previous three conclusions essentially affirm prior research and expectations, the fourth and fifth conclusions are currently under-researched. The fourth conclusion is that, whereas *China Daily* legitimises Russian interests, it simultaneously limits Russian discursive power. As mentioned in the literature review, China and Russia have agreed to mirror each other's official media narratives (Drinhausen & Solonina, 2020). Resultingly, one might expect the power distribution and construction to favour Russia even more. Although the *China Daily* articles echo some Russian state narratives, such as blaming US and NATO expansionism for the war, numerous other Russian narratives are not reflected in the articles. For example, *China Daily* does not construct narratives of 'de-Nazification', Western Russophobia, Ukrainian corruption, Zelensky being a dictator, or the conflict being a 'special military operation'. An article even rebuts Trump's claim that Zelensky is a dictator, and European inclusion in the negotiations is encouraged. The articles did not employ contested ideological terminology, such as "invasion," "liberation," or "attack," and avoided using the term "war." Despite Russia's and China's close alignment, China does not fully reproduce Russian narratives, selectively adopting certain narratives while discarding others. This gives the newspaper and the Chinese state more discursive flexibility to change their stance later. It also enables *China Daily* to support Russia without fully compromising China's image abroad.

Lastly, the CCP's discursive framing through *China Daily* encourages European inclusion in the negotiations and independence from the US. *China Daily's* main criticism of Trump's negotiations was that they excluded Europe and Ukraine. Although the texts give Ukraine little discursive power to counter Russian perspectives, Ukrainian actors do receive this to counter statements from the US. For example, Ukraine is given the discursive power to emphasise that it wants peace, needs to be in the negotiations, and is not a dictatorship. *China Daily's* emphasis on European exclusion could reflect

China's desire for multilateral resolutions. However, this can also be interpreted as a selective strategy to criticise American peace efforts and to encourage European decoupling from the US. The vocabulary and grammar construct Europe as overly dependent on and inferior to the US. Metaphors infantilise Europe and threaten European leaders that the US will abandon and even kill them. China's emphasis on European involvement in peace negotiations can be interpreted as a geopolitical strategy aimed at weakening transatlantic unity and encouraging European 'derisking' from the US. Especially in the background of rising US tariffs, European derisking from the US would have positive benefits for China's political, economic, and military relations as the EU would reinstate previous ties with China.

6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question: *How does China Daily discursively construct the Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations?* By applying Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis model to 39 *China Daily Europe* articles, this study concludes that the CCP's discursive framing through *China Daily* crafts an image of neutrality that masks strategic interests. First, *China Daily* reinforces the CCP's self-image as a neutral, benevolent, and stabilising global mediator. Second, Russia is legitimised as a rational power defending its security interests. Third, Western actors, particularly the US, are framed as obstructive, hegemonic, and self-serving. Fourth, *China Daily* does not fully reproduce Russian propaganda; instead, it selectively adopts certain narratives. Lastly, the EU is portrayed as subordinate to American interests and is encouraged to adopt a more autonomous role in peacebuilding and broader geopolitics.

The CCP's discursive framing, through *China Daily*, has several implications for China's ideological position and perception of power in the conflict. By focusing on the European Edition, this thesis highlights how China tailors its messaging for European elites. First, *China Daily's* discursive framing of the conflict naturalises a multilateral and cooperative geopolitical order, with China playing a central role. Through ideological assumptions, such as the legitimacy of Russian security concerns, the inefficacy of Western-led solutions, and the necessity of Chinese mediation, *China Daily* contributes to a narrative pursuing multipolar and cooperative global governance. Second, *China Daily's* limited adoption of Russian narratives gives the state discursive flexibility and preserves China's international image as a neutral mediator, particularly among its Western audiences. Third, emphasising European overdependence on the US could aim to weaken transatlantic unity, encourage European 'derisking' from the US, and closer ties to China.

This analysis builds upon previous discourse analyses of Chinese media coverage during earlier phases of the war, shedding light on how Chinese state-controlled international media construct the peace negotiations. Given the scope of this thesis, several avenues for future research emerge. Firstly,

this study encourages comparative research. Comparing Russian, Chinese, and European media could reveal the differences and similarities in narrative constructions among these states. Similarly, a comparative study between *China Daily's* European Edition and its domestic or American editions could reveal how *China Daily's* narratives are adapted for different geopolitical audiences. Secondly, this thesis encourages multimodal analysis. Including images, cartoons, and infographics could provide a more comprehensive overview of how meaning is constructed beyond text. Lastly, applying reception theory or audience analysis could explore how European policymakers and readers interpret or internalise these narratives. This would help bridge the gap between discourse production and its real-world influence.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Simplified Timeline 01/01/2025 - 07/03/2025

(Walker, 2025).

Date	Event
20/01	Donald Trump is sworn in as President of the US.
12/02	Presidents Trump and Putin hold a “lengthy and highly productive” phone call in which they agreed to begin negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. Trump later calls President Zelenskyy. US Defence Secretary Hegseth states at a NATO Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting that NATO accession and restoring pre-2014 borders are unrealistic objectives for Ukraine. He states that the US expects Europe to provide more financial and military assistance to Ukraine while the US focuses on China and its own security. No U.S. troops will be deployed as peacekeepers to Ukraine, and any peacekeeping force should not be under NATO command.
13/02	NATO defence ministers meet in Brussels, with their talks focusing on increasing defence budgets and continuing support for Ukraine. Speaking at the end of the meeting, Pete Hegseth says “everything is on the table” to bring peace to Ukraine and suggests reducing the number of American troops in Europe could be part of any deal.
14/02	Vice President Vance delivers speech at Munich Security Conference which criticizes Europe and does not address European concerns about the Ukraine conflict or transatlantic ties.
15/02	US envoy J. K. Kellog says that European countries would not be directly involved in U.S. talks with Russia and Ukraine.
18/02	US-Russia summit in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, to develop a framework for peace negotiations. the US and Russia agree to explore mutual opportunities to end the Ukraine war. President Zelenskyy says Ukraine will not accept the results of talks on how to end the war with Russia that are held “behind Ukraine’s back”.
25/02	US votes against UNSC resolution condemning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.
28/02	President Zelenskyy visits President Trump at the White House. The two leaders clash during a televised meeting in the Oval Office, with Trump telling Zelenskyy he needs to be more thankful and that Zelenskyy is “gambling with World War Three”. After the meeting ends, Trump posts on his Truth Social platform that he has

	“determined that President Zelenskyy is not ready for peace.” A scheduled press conference is later cancelled.
02/03	Keir Starmer hosts 18 world leaders at a summit at Lancaster House in London to discuss a new plan for peace in Ukraine. Those in attendance include: French president Emmanuel Macron; German chancellor Olaf Scholz; former Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau; Spanish prime minister Pedro Sánchez; Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni; and Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission. Following the summit, Starmer announces a four-point plan to work with Zelenskyy to end the war and defend Ukraine from Russia. Starmer says “we are at a crossroads in history today” and announces that the UK, France and other countries will step up their efforts in a “coalition of the willing”.
03/03	US halts all military aid to Ukraine.
05/03	US halts intelligence sharing with Ukraine.

Appendix B: Data Collection Nexis Uni.

Source name:	China Daily European Edition
Search terms:	Ukrain* AND Russia* AND (Conflict OR Crisis OR War OR Invasion OR Operation) AND (negotiation* OR "peace talk*")
Date published:	01/01/2025 - 07/03/2025
Amount of search results:	39
Final amount after duplicate removal and scanning:	39

Appendix C: Textual Analysis Questions (Fairclough, 1989).

Vocabulary

1. What experiential values do words have?
 - a. What classification schemes are drawn upon?
 - b. Are there words which are ideologically contested?
 - c. Is there rewording or overwording?
2. What relational values do words have?
 - a. Are there euphemistic expressions?
 - b. Are there markedly formal or informal words?
3. What expressive values do words have?
4. What metaphors are used?

Grammar

5. What experiential values do grammatical features have?
 - a. What types of process and participant predominate?
 - b. Is agency unclear?
 - c. Are processes what they seem?
 - d. Are nominalizations used?
 - e. Are sentences active or passive?
 - f. Are sentences positive or negative?
6. What relational values do grammatical features have?
 - a. What modes (declarative, grammatical question, imperative) are used?
 - b. Are there important features of relational modality?
 - c. Are the pronouns we and you used, and if so, how?
7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?
 - a. Are there important features of expressive modality?
8. How are (simple) sentences linked together?
 - a. What logical connectors are used?
 - b. Are complex sentences characterized by coordination or/ subordination?
 - c. What means are used for referring inside and outside the text?

Textual Structures

9. What interactional conventions are used?
 - a. Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others?
10. What larger-scale structures does the text have?

Appendix D: China Daily Data Analysis Sources.

Abbreviation	Author	Date	Title
CD1	Jia, Z.	February 17, 2025.	China backs all efforts to achieve peace, FM says.
CD2	Sieff, M.	February 17, 2025.	US bid to end Ukraine crisis may hit bumps.
CD3	China Daily Editorial.	February 18, 2025.	All relevant parties and stakeholders must be included in the Ukraine peace process.
CD4	Shea, J.	February 18, 2025.	Europe at 'security turning point' over Ukraine.
CD5	Zhang, J.	February 18, 2025.	EU looks to get on front foot after 'friendly' push.
CD6	Brüning, H.	February 19, 2025.	Chinese top diplomat gives West pragmatic, erudite advice.
CD7	Weihua, C.	February 19, 2025.	China welcomes US-Russia talks on Ukraine.
CD8	Sachs, J. D.	February 19, 2025.	US-China ties could improve under realistic Trump.
CD9	China Daily Editorial.	February 20, 2025.	China supports all efforts dedicated to peace.
CD10	Ran, Y. & Qi, R.	February 20, 2025.	Key exclusions in talks expose divide.
CD11	Ying, X.	February 20, 2025.	pragmatic path needed to bring peace to the Ukraine conflict.
CD12	China Daily Editorial.	February 21, 2025.	Europe seeks voice in Ukraine talks amid US diplomatic blitz.
CD13	Weihua, C.	February 21, 2025.	Even a Chinese journalist knows the road map to peace in Ukraine.
CD14	Desheng, C.	February 22, 2025.	G20 urged to uphold peace and security.
CD15	China Daily Editorial.	February 23, 2025.	Staunch upholder of peace and security.

CD16	Yi, X.	February 24, 2025	UK's aid to Kyiv decried as 'dangerous gimmicks'.
CD17	China Daily Editorial.	February 24, 2025.	Window of peace should not be squandered.
CD18	Weili, H. & Xu, Y.	February 24, 2025.	US stance on Ukraine sees dramatic shift.
CD19	Ying, F.	February 24, 2025.	MSC mirrors EU's diversified diplomacy needs.
CD20	Desheng, C.	February 25, 2025.	China, Russia reaffirm strong ties.
CD21	China Daily Editorial.	February 25, 2025.	UNSC vote welcome weather vane showing winds of change blowing through crisis.
CD22	Shangkun, W. & Ying, Z.	February 25, 2025.	Europe struggles in US-Russia standoff.
CD23	Powell, J.	February 25, 2025.	National leaders gather in Kyiv to highlight continued support.
CD24	China Daily Editorial.	February 26, 2025.	Politicizing trade with sanctions is blinkered, futile and self-harming.
CD25	Zhouxiang, Z.	February 26, 2025.	Merz shows the way forward for Europe.
CD26	Qi, R.	February 27, 2025.	Ukraine minerals deal soon, but no security guarantees.
CD27	Qi, R.	February 28, 2025.	Deal details vague, but Zelensky's visit to US confirmed.
CD28	China Daily Editorial.	February 5, 2025.	Cooperation a winning proposition for all.
CD29	Feng, Z.	January 16, 2025.	Solidarity can steady the ship.
CD30	Qi, R.	January 2, 2025.	Uncertainty clouds conclusion to conflict.
CD31	Palit, A.	January 22, 2025.	RCEP an FTA with 'low ambition' but high potential.
CD32	Xiyue, W.	January 22, 2025.	Resolving regional conflicts as a true force in the pursuit of peace.
CD33	Gosset, D.	March 1, 2025	How not to conduct diplomacy: Lessons from a White House dispute.

CD34	Desheng, C.	March 1, 2025.	Sincere friendship with Russia hailed.
CD35	Jianna, L.	March 2, 2025.	French expert on White House argument: Diplomacy not a reality TV show.
CD36	China Daily Editorial.	March 3, 2025.	Europe should get own house in order.
CD37	Weili, H.	March 3, 2025.	Different approach to Ukraine emerges between Europe, US.
CD38	Gale, E. & Wanyin, Z.	March 4, 2025.	Europe urged to recognize 'multipolar reality' in Ukraine peace push.
CD39	Xiaoxing, D.	March 7, 2025.	Fragmented and restructuring.

Appendix E: Atlas.ti Codes.

Vocabulary:

Grammar: "we" 10

Grammar: "you" 3

Grammar: (absence of) agency 37

Grammar: active/passive sentences 45

Grammar: modality (e.g.may/should/ 64

Grammar: modes: declarative/ gram 28

Grammar: positive/negative sentenc 14

Grammar: sentence connection 76

Grammar:

Vocab: (in)formality 26

Vocab: antonymy 5

Vocab: euphemisms 9

Vocab: experiential 38

Vocab: expressive 52

Vocab: hyperbole 12

Vocab: hyponymy 4

Vocab: metaphors 64

Vocab: overwording 25

Vocab: synonymy 7

Textual Structure:

Textual structures: ordering of text 30